

Religious and Moral Nihilism in Friedrich Nietzsche and the Nigerian Situation

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Abstract

A critical look at moral and religious decadence in Nigeria reveals a sharp contrast to her *National Pledge* where all keep promising to be faithful, loyal, and honest as well as upholding her honour and glory and calling on God to help them in keeping these promises. This presents Nigeria as a religious and morally sound nation. However, there is serious moral decadence in both religious and secular institutions in Nigeria such that Nigeria is numbered one of the most corrupt countries in the world. It has become a situation where almost all Nigerians want to rule or acquire wealth by hook or by crook. Interestingly, Nietzsche in his book, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and other works interprets this moral decadence as the death of God and calls for abandonment of traditional religious morality. He refers to this as the *trans-valuation of values*, that is, a complete transformation of traditional moral values. He sees the traditional morality as it was taught by Christianity as not only useless but harmful to mankind. Nietzsche calls it, *Slave morality*. He feels that it is his mission to destroy such morality and replace it with a more positive morality that encourages the growth of man through the development of his best instincts, a morality of power, strength, ambition, struggle, ruthlessness, etc. As *God is dead*, for him therefore, mankind is now free, for man has now been liberated from *slave morality* through which God was destroying him. To look into these notions of religious and moral *nihilism*, from the Latin word *nihil* meaning *nothingness*, this work adapted the qualitative research design where data were sourced from books, journals, periodicals, internet and the Holy Bible. The work employed both expository and analytic methods to carry this out. The expository method was employed to establish Nietzsche's concept of religious and moral nihilism and the analytic method was employed to advance the effects of his position on contemporary Nigerian religious society. The work discussed the meaning of nihilism, Nietzsche's profile, his religious nihilism such as the death of God and Anti-Christ and moved to his moral nihilism and its implication on contemporary Nigerian religious society.

By analyzing moral and religious nihilism, the writers found out that there has been a decline in traditional religious moral values among Nigerians in this contemporary era. The writers thus established that both religious and secular institutions should be re-oriented on the need for morality and also the need for genuine religious practices that can nip the evils of corruption, exploitation, extortion and deceit in the bud.

Introduction

This work is focused on religious and moral decay in contemporary Nigerian society in reference to religious and moral nihilism in the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche. In our Nigerian contemporary society, there has been a serious moral decay in both religious and secular institutions. Down the stages of the history of philosophy, the modern philosophy of consciousness, attention has been directed to the mastery of the natural world. This is a period whose character of rational optimism was diametrically opposed to tradition and authority upon which stood the veracity and logic of primitive religion. It has been a period oriented to the practical. The possession of and ownership of the real. With Kant, the practical reason is already being understood as will. Schopenhauer took up this indication from Kant and conceived reality as will and idea. He opines that the world is a meaningless and purposeless existence or will to live. Nietzsche, however, finally accepts the fundamental notion of Schopenhauer that the will is the principle of existence, but he conceives this will not merely as the will to live, but as the will for power.

In our Nigerian contemporary society, there has been a serious moral decay in both religious and secular institutions. Religion itself is used as a means of deceit, exploitation and extortion where certain “men of God” always emphasize miracles, prophecy and prosperity to the detriment of morality and extort money and goods from ignorant congregation in the name of tithing and seed sowing. Many religious leaders in Nigeria now negate some of the religious moral virtues such as honesty, justice, humility, poverty of mind or spirit, generosity, etc. and take to life of affluence thereby competing with secular leaders for wealth to the detriment of the poor congregation. There are more than five hundred different Christian denominations and thousands of mosques in Nigeria, yet Nigeria is one of the most corrupt countries in the world. Nigeria, since after her independence is being ruled by religious people, either Christians or Muslims, yet the country is moving from grace to grass. Almost everybody wants to rule by hook or by crook with a view to amassing the country’s resources to the detriment of the poor masses. The fear of God is no longer in the hearts of most of Nigerians and the religious virtues such as honesty, humility, justice, and the like are relegated to the background. These have taken us back to the Europe of Nietzsche’s days where God was no longer at the centre of the once religious and pious people and as such his declaration of God’s death was in disguise the death of religious morality. We live in an era where people are more concerned with power, pleasure, prosperity, wealth and connection than character formation. An era that swallows Hobbesian theory of ‘man being

wolf to man' hook, line, and sinker. The era that does not see anything wrong with Machiavellian principle of might is right, and the Darwinian evolutionism of survival of the fittest. Thus, honesty is disregarded, indolence is extolled, probity is derided, and ostentation is paraded. Hence, there is apparent disregard of the rule of law. The evils of deceit, exploitation, extortion, bribery and corruption are committed with celebration in both secular and religious institutions, therefore there is gross level of disorder and the Nigerian society is heading to doom. This work therefore seeks to address the annihilation of religious and moral virtues in contemporary Nigerian society.

Brief Profile of Friedrich Nietzsche

Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, who openly announced that *God is dead* was born on October 15, 1844 at Bocken in the province of Saxony. He was the son and grandson of Lutheran ministers. He was named after the reigning king of Prussia (Stumpf, 378). His father died when Friedrich was four or five years old and he grew up under the care of his mother Fran Nietzsche and his sister, Elizabeth. At the age of fourteen, he was sent to the famous Pforta School where he studied classics, religion and German literature. In 1864, he went to the University of Bonn and studied theology. But having lost his faith in Christian religion in 1865 he abandoned theological studies, left Bonn and went to Leipzig where he studied philology. Here, also he came upon Schopenhauer's works, *The World as Will and Idea*, which had an influence on him and confirmed his atheistic standpoint. He was also influenced by the Wagnerian music he came in contact with. His outstanding intelligence merited him the appointment as a lecturer at the age of twenty, and later at the age of twenty-four, he was yet appointed to the chair of classical philology at the university of Basal. He was at this school until heath forced him to resign his professorship in 1879. It was during this period that he came close to a relationship with Wagner but they later separated. From 1880 to 1889, he lived life of solitude. He surprisingly became insane in 1889 and remained in that state of mental and physical paralysis until his death on August 25, 1900 at the of fifty-five. Nietzsche was a prolific writer and wrote extensively even while ill. His major works include: *The Birth of Tragedy*, which he wrote in 1872. Between the periods of 1873 to 1876, he published the *Untimely Meditations* and *Human, All-to-Human*. Then, again between the periods of 1881 to 1887, he wrote these five books: *The Dawn*, *The Gay Science*, *thus spoke Zarathusthra*, *Beyond Good and Evil* and *Genealogy of Morals*. In 1888, he yet produced these books: *The Case of Wagner*, *Twilight of Idols*, *Anti-Christ*, *Ecce Homo*, *Nietzsche contra Wagner* and uncompleted work, *The revaluation of all Values (The Will to Power)*.

The Meaning of Nihilism

The term "nihilism" comes from the Latin word "Nihil" meaning "Nothingness". The new Webster dictionary defines nihilism as, "... All attitude rejecting philosophical or ethical principles" (678). It further describes historical nihilism as, "the doctrine or programme of a nineteenth century and twentieth century Russian revolutionary group which rejected all forms of tradition and authoritarianism in

politics, religion, morality and art". The name "nihilism" first appeared in Ivan Turgenerou's novel, namely, *Father and Son*. One character in the book says that, "A nihilist is a man who does not bow before any authority; who does not take any principle of faith; whatever reverences that principle of faith may be enshrined in..." (Collins, 329). Nihilism consists in the dogmatic tendency to deny not only the existence of God but also the permanence of reality. One can therefore say nothing that is absolutely true of anything since, no claim to truth has authentic or objective foundations. A classical exponent of nihilism in its intellectual aspect is Gorgias in Plato's dialogue of that name, in contrast with the earlier philosopher, Protagoras, who held that "man is the measure of all things" (Protagoras, 319a). That truth is relative to persons and circumstances, Gorgias taught that there could be no truths at all. Furthermore, nihilism involves a denial of all higher and objective values. In Western Europe, nihilism meant a denial of objective truth and values. Furthermore, nihilism is a way of thinking and a psychological condition that arises as a direct consequence of the suspicion that there is really no external or internal moral authority. So, Nietzsche became a nihilist when he attacked accepted values. He held the view that the interpretation, which Christianity bequeathed to Europe, was a life-negating pessimism. Nihilism takes either a passive or an active form. Passive nihilism underscores the absence of values and purposelessness of existence. Active nihilism seeks to destroy that which it no longer believes. This was the form that Nietzsche undertook and prophesied.

Nietzsche's Conception of Nihilism

What does nihilism mean for Nietzsche? He answers thus: "... that the highest values devaluated themselves" (*The Will*, 9). Nihilism is understood as a historical event and he interprets the event as the devaluing of the highest values. It is not in any way simply a phenomenon of decay; rather nihilism, as the fundamental event of western history, is simultaneously and above all the intrinsic law of that history. Nietzsche recognizes that despite the devaluations, the world itself remains and above all becomes valueless and presses inevitably towards a new positing of values.

After the former values have become unsustainable the new positing of value changes, in respect to these former values, into a revaluing of all values (Heidegger, 67). The negation of the values comes out of the affirmation of the new positing of values. This explains Nietzsche's contention that there is no compromise with the former value; the absolute negation belongs within the affirmation of the positing of new value. In order to provide a foundation for the new positing of value as a countermovement, Nietzsche even designates the new positing of values as *Nihilism*: "... that nihilism through which the devaluing to a new positing of values that is alone definitive, complete and consummates itself" (*The Will*, 7). This definitive phase of nihilism is called *completed*, that is, *Classical Nihilism*. Heidegger, commenting on the meaning of nihilism as Nietzsche had, made us to believe that he understands nihilism thus: "The devaluation of the highest value up to now..." (Heidegger, 67). He also takes an affirmative stand towards nihilism in the sense of *revaluing of all previous values*. Consequently, the name 'nihilism'

remains ambiguous. Considering it in two of its extreme forms, it always has primarily double meaning. First, it designates the mere devaluing of the highest value up to now, while on the other hand, it also means at the same time the unconditional counter-movement to devaluation.

However, if the highest values have devalued themselves, that is, if God in the sense of the Christian God has disappeared from his authoritative position in the suprasensible world, then his authoritative place itself is still always preserved even though it appears as that which is no more. But this empty place demands to be occupied by a new and to have God now vanished from it replaced by something else (*The Will*, 9). New ideals are then set up, this setting up according to Nietzsche happens through doctrines of world happiness, through socialism and Wagnerian music. With this, there is thus the establishment of what Nietzsche calls *incomplete nihilism*. It comes therefore to prevail. Nietzsche says this about it, "Incomplete nihilism, its forms: we live in the midst of it. Attempts to escape nihilism without revaluing our values so far, they produce the opposite; make the problem more acute" (18).

It is now clear that Nietzsche has presented us with two levels of nihilism, namely, Complete and Incomplete nihilism. From this presentation and according to his own interpretation, nihilism is throughout the history in which it is a question of values- the establishing of values, the devaluing of values, and the revaluing of values differently from the old and eliminated ones. In the final analysis, nihilism means the overthrow of the decadent Christian civilization of Europe. At the same time, it will also clear way for the trans-valuation of values, for the emergence of a higher type of man, *Übermensch*.

Nietzsches' Religious Nihilism

Nietzsche has negative conception on Christian religion. According to him, religion has debased the concept, *Man*. It has put man into fear and thus man has lost the love of man, reverence for man, and confidence in man, indeed the will to power. This is nihilism. Its consequence is that everything good, great, and true is superhuman and is bestowed only through the act of grace. Christianity is a religion and Nietzsche conceives it as thus: "... Nihilistic religion that is appropriate to people grown old and tame" (*The Will*, 97). Christianity is never a historical reality. It represents the misuse of words when some elements of debasement, which is a symbol of manifestation of decay as Christian churches, Christian faith, and Christian life, label themselves the holy name *Christianity*. In fact, Christ denied everything that is today called Christianity according to Nietzsche. He further gives a new interpretation of Christ's death on the cross. It has been only a sign of how one ought to behave in relation to the authorities and laws of this world. It is a lesson for us that one should not defend himself even in the face of danger. Nietzsche regards Christianity holistically as a corrupt religion that was built on principles that are themselves deceptive. In his words:

I regard Christianity as the most fatal seductive lie that has yet existed, as the great unholy lie: I draw after growth and sprouting of its ideal from beneath of every form of disguise, I reject every compromise position with respect to it. I force war against it (117).

It is obvious that Nietzsche totally rejects Christianity and everything associated with it. He accused Christianity of destroying all the truth by which men had lived in the pagan classical times. Tragic truth as lived and understood before Socrates was undermined by Christian mythology. This period of antiquity is blamed for preparing the way for the conquest of Christianity. Socrates and Plato are accomplices and at the fulfillment of their work, Christianity counteracted pagan truth with its venom. Nietzsche, puts it thus:

... Such myths as a triune God, moral world-order, sin, grace, redemption, immortality, resurrection, hell, heaven thoroughly destroyed the appeal of paganism for the masses...(51).

Christianity developed an effective way of announcing and spreading its doctrines. We can credit Christianity for promoting lies and hypnotizing men even to the extent of believing in it. Christianity reduced reason, science and philosophy. It praised God as its promulgator and demand that this should be accepted with gratitude and humility. Nevertheless, it preached equality of every type of person before God.

... Christianity shrewdly nurtured the resentments of the mighty. She attracted outcasts and failures of every sort by persuading them that they were their equals before God and the redeemer of any other man... (52).

Christianity as a movement makes the weak, the ignorant and the foolish feel on top of the world. Her doctrine is characterized by paradoxes such as life through death, honour through humiliation, mastery through slavery. Christianity is in fact a religion against the noble and the strong.

Christianity, according to Nietzsche is a movement aimed at conquering the strong; discouraging the noble, exploiting the miseries of men, eroding their self-assurance, poisoning their natural instinct, rendering them sick and weak until their will to power is reversed and turned against them (*The Will*, 124). It has waged war against the highest type of man. It has taken the strong as a type of an outcast. In reverse, it has taken the side of everything weak and made them ideal out of opposition to the preservative instinct of strong life. It has taught men to feel the supreme values of intellectuality as sinful, misleading and temptations.

In Christianity, there is no relationship between religion and morality with nature. In other words, Christianity is anti-natural and full of imaginations or unrealizable ideas. Nothing but imaginary causes (God, soul, ego, spirit, free will): Nothing but imaginary effects (sin, redemption, grace, punishment, forgiveness of

sins)... an imaginary teleology, the kingdom of God, the last judgment, eternal life (*Anti-Christ*, 135).

Furthermore, the idea Christians have about God is the worst havoc and corrupt ideas about God today on earth. For example, they regard God as, "... God of the sick, God as spider, God as spirit, it even represents the low-water mark in the descending development of God's type" (138). God degenerated to the contradiction to life instead of being a transfiguration and eternal. In God there is the declaration of hostility towards life and nature. "... But we find that which has been revered as God not godlike but pitiable, absurd, harmful, not merely an error but an error against life" (173).

Moreover, Christianity instead of enhancing and developing the state, society and nature becomes an abolition of them. This is because it forbids oath, wars, courts of justice, self-defense as made manifest in Christ's exemplary life. It presupposes a narrow, remote, completely non-political society. In a Christian state, politics is a piece of imprudence, a lie and treats the 'God of hosts' as if he were a chief of staff. The papacy is not capable of carrying Christian politics. So a Christian would be anybody who abides by the above with regard to the state. Whoever says today: I will not be a soldier, I care nothing for the courts, I shall not claim the services of the Police, I will do nothing that may disturb the peace within me: and if I must suffer on that account; nothing will serve better to maintain my peace than suffering – will be a Christian (*The Will*, 125).

Nietzsche also attacked the priests and theologians since they are Christians. He regarded them as liars. Since lies are part and parcel of the theory of every priesthood, according to him, lies are permitted in their midst as means to a final end. It was in this lie that priests invented a God who rewards and punishes. He therefore regards them as his enemies and developed a kind of pity for them. "I pity these priests, they go against my taste... they seemed to me as marked men and prisoners. He whom they call redeemer has cast them into bondage..." (29).

At the end of the whole attack, he pronounced his judgment on Christianity. "I condemn Christianity; I bring against the Christian church the most terrible charge any prosecutor has ever uttered" (96). He threatened to inscribe this eternal accusation against Christianity everywhere there are walls with letters that will make even the blind see. He perennially condemns Christian.

Anti-Christ

It is beyond a shadow of doubt that Nietzsche is anti-Christ because he rejects everything in connection with Christ. He hates Christ because, according to him, he undermines man and has led him astray, even to the point of self-destruction. He said these of Christ, "I do not like at all anything about that Jesus of Nazareth... He put many ideas into the heads of little people, as if their modest virtues were of any consequence..." (*Anti-Christ*, 122). In his attack on Christ, he is found in the paradox of uncertainty. In one place, he conceives Christ as the only Christian that ever existed and on the other, Christ is not the founder of Christian religion since what he has labeled Christianity today is the very opposite of his life: "What did Christ deny? Everything that is today called Christian" (98).

He was against Christ because according to him, Christ advocated a type of life that is full of the symptoms of decadence. Jesus did not bring new knowledge or new faith, he only fashioned in himself a new way of life. For Nietzsche, the message of Jesus when he used the words *Light or Life* referred merely to the inner world, nature and reality. This led him to conclude that Christ was anti-realist.

In the same vein, Nietzsche also criticized Christ's humility. He wanted Christ to be a man with great power. So when he saw the opposite, he regarded it as weakness. For instance, Jesus should have retaliated, resisted and fought back the injuries- calumny, mockery, bearing of the cross meted on him, but he suffered, entreated and rather loved those who punished him and did evil to him. Thus, Nietzsche could not comprehend how one cannot defend himself, grow angry or even resist the evil one. Jesus therefore paid dearly for it, "... This bringer of glad tidings, died as he lived, as he taught not to redeem mankind but to demonstrate how one ought to live" (*The Will*, 24, 162). And the death was even a shameful one "the fate of the evangel was determined by the death, he hung on the cross... a shameful death" (162).

The Death of God

It is true that from Descartes, modern philosophy has emphasized the primacy of the self. The ego is prior to any other existent and this is embedded in consciousness. So all that modern philosophy had to offer man was the total rejection of any other existent prior to man and such eliminated God. Some of the culprits include Feuerbach, Karl Marx, Jean-Paul Sartre and Nietzsche.

Nietzsche believes that, it is the belief in God that hinders the potentialities of man towards this actualization of the subject. The death of God will therefore mean the reassurance of man's energy and freedom, which will now be geared towards this realization of the subject. God stands in the way of the will to power. He is also antithesis to any thesis. More still, Nietzsche, a philosopher of the future and a prophet of nihilism, based on the decline of the belief on the Christian God, hence proclaimed the death of God, *God is dead*. In his book, *The Gay Science*, a madman makes this proclamation. The madman lit a lantern and ran to market place, and cried incessantly; "... I seek God, I seek God!" (95). As many of those who do not believe in God were standing there, he provoked laughter. He was cajoled and mocked: Why did he get lost? Is he afraid of us? Or is he hiding? But the madman decided to tell them where God was: "God is dead. God remains dead, and we have killed him. All of us are his murderers." (96). He continues:

We have killed him – you and I. Do we not hear anything yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we not smell anything yet of God's decomposition? God remains dead (*The Will*, 125).

The madman could not understand the reason behind the killing of God and was bewildered. To show his annoyance, he threw his lantern on the ground and it broke and he went away. To mourn God therefore, he entered diverse churches

and intoned his *requiem aeternam Deo*. When he was called for explanations, he asked: "What are churches now if they are not the tombs and sepulchers of God?" (*The Gay Science*, 96). Nonetheless, he was of the opinion that man killed God to free himself from nihilism-nothingness. Man had to take this noble and head blowing task to murder God and make himself God, ... God could not die a natural death. In order that the world, for so long darkened by this vast shadow, might at last emerge into the light, man had to take upon himself the impossible crime... (Borne, 8).

Supposing we ask this question, "Did God ever exist?" Nietzsche's answer is 'No', because He would be one if there was and it is only an illusion proceeding from man's weakness and inability to transcend himself. A mere fabrication of weak Christians to manipulate men's mind and turn them towards the beyond: "The concept God was invented as the counter concept to life: everything harmful, poisonous, slanderous, all deadly hostility to life..." (*Ecce Homo*, 932).

But with death of God, he thought he has been able to deliver humanity from the corruption of God. He has ended the prehistoric period of nihilism and opened a new era. Consequently, this liberation from nihilism ushers man to his destiny-auto transcendence. With the death of God, morality and religion have no foundation.

Nietzsche's Moral Nihilism

Nietzsche's critique on morality has to do with moral absolutism—morality as the highest principle or the metaphysical foundations of morality (*The Will*, 149). He prides himself in being an exception to the rule among his philosophical predecessors and contemporaries, in recognizing how very problematic moralities actually are in a variety of basic respects. He considers himself to differ from them in taking morality to *be* a problem to be critically investigated, rather than something to be embraced and vindicated more or less as it is received. According to Nietzsche, philosophers have concerned themselves with morality very extensively, and in some cases have made bold to establish a "science of morals" (*Beyond Good*, 186). In Nietzsche's view, however, what these philosophers had wanted to do was to supply a *rational foundation* for morality. For him, this morality itself, which actually was only the morality of their environment, their class, their church, the spirit of their time, their climate and part of the world, was accepted as "given," as absolute, and as the highest principle. However, Nietzsche was emphatic in his insistence that there are no absolute morals. For him, moral judgment is an illusion and there are, altogether, no moral facts. Put differently, he takes as his chief proposition that "there are no moral phenomena, but rather, only a moral interpretation of certain phenomena" (*The Will*, 149). This means for Nietzsche that morality is a question of interpretation and not an absolute principle or originating from a supernatural source. This represents his attack on the ontological status of morals – an attack on the metaphysical foundations of morality.

Furthermore, Nietzsche remarks that philosophers lack the intellectual integrity to recognize morality for what they are, and have often failed to see that a faith in morals is not a proof of morality. Nietzsche's point of departure is the observation that, both at the present time and throughout human history, what he calls moral prejudices of one sort or another have prevailed, finding expression in sentiments,

valuations, attitudes, beliefs, convictions and the disposition to pass judgments concerning various qualities, tendencies, actions and intentions. Certain actions are commended, encouraged, or prescribed, while others are condemned, discouraged, or proscribed. This is sometimes done by means of precepts, laying down laws, duties, rights and obligations, and sometimes takes the form of the erection of ideals and their negative counterparts, expressing conceptions of the sort of person one ought or ought not to be.

Morality is regarded by Nietzsche as specie of valuations, which commonly find articulation and expression in precepts prescribing and proscribing various courses of conduct and advocating or condemning certain possible types or traits of human beings, and which are reflected in attitudes their adherents have and assessments they are disposed to make with respect to such matters. Thus, he speaks of "*moral valuations*," "*moral laws*," "*moral sentiments*" and "*moral judgments*." He employs these notions descriptively and noncommittally, to refer to instances of things of this sort, which have acquired currency among human beings at different times and places, rather than to affirm their content. He does not reserve the term "*moral*" (and related expressions) to cases of principles, the soundness and binding character of which he is prepared to endorse, like the practice of many philosophers for whom the only proper use of such language is in connection with what they take to be "*true morality*" or "*absolute morality*." Rather, he refrains from placing upon it any such honorific restrictions; applies it wherever he considers historical or conventional justification or analytical reasons for doing so, and adopts an "extra-moral" standpoint with respect to all that it thus designates.

Nietzsche, furthermore, traces morality generally as the work of immorality. By this, he means that the origin of moral values is the work of immoral affects and considerations and that for moral values to gain domination, they require the assistance of a variety of immoral forces and affects. The term, "immoral," in these and other remarks, to this effect, is to be understood primarily in the sense of "non-moral" or "extra-moral," and secondarily in the sense of being contrary to principles associated with (what is commonly accepted as) morality.

My purpose is to demonstrate how everything praised as moral is identical in essence with everything immoral and was made possible, as in every development of morality, with immoral means and for immoral ends (155).

In this connection, he seeks to establish that the application of moral distinctions is invariably conditioned by perspective and interpretation, rather than dictated by insight into the existence and nature of moral absolutes or irreducible and unconditioned moral truths. This is in line with his perspectivism, which approaches morality as a question of interpretation or perspectives and not an absolute or irreducible moral truth. It represents an attack on to logical status of morals, which is an attack on the metaphysical foundations of morality.

Nietzsche also argues that the nature of moralities with respect to their justifiability is hopeless. This is, because, in his view, they not only cannot stand *in the absence* of another- worldly, religious or metaphysical grounding and sanctioning, but also cannot be defended *by reference* to any such set of beliefs,

since the latter do not survive critical examination. Thus, he maintains that the whole of European morality is a part of what must now collapse, with the recognition that the belief in the Christian God is “unbelievable” and needs to be abandoned; for the former was built upon this faith and propped up by it (*The Gay*, 199). In Nietzsche’s estimation, “when one gives up the Christian faith, one pulls the right to Christian morality out from under one’s feet, which stands and falls with faith in God” (Schacht, 443). This is, because, for Nietzsche, a morality of this sort no longer has any sanction after it has tried to escape into some “*beyond*,” and this “*beyond*” is discovered to be a fiction. He holds that the attempt to get along with a morality without religious background, or without comparable metaphysical underpinnings, is an exercise in futility, which necessarily leads to nihilism (the will to nothingness or the devaluation of the highest values) – at least in the absence of a radical reorientation of one’s entire approach to normative and evaluative matters along naturalistic lines (*The Will*, 16). “*Naïveté!*” Nietzsche exclaims, “as if morality could survive when the *God* who sanctions it is missing!” For him, the “*beyond*” is absolutely necessary if faith in morality is to be maintained. According to him, “a morality from the perspective of which life, nature, and history are ‘not moral’ can be defended only on the condition that one is prepared to *affirm another world* than the world of life, nature, and history” (*The Gay*, 200). In his view, once the erroneousness of supposing any such “other world” to exist is recognized, no morality of this sort can be saved. Nietzsche did not stop at the critique of morality but extended it to philosophers.

Nietzsche’s Religious and Moral Nihilism and the Nigerian Situation: An Evaluation

Nietzsche’s concept of Religious and Moral Nihilism appears to be a prophecy which is being fulfilled in the contemporary Nigerian society. His declaration of God’s death and the end to traditional religious moral virtues is exactly what is happening in Nigeria today. Nigeria, like the former Europe of the Middle Ages was once a religious country but with the advent of civilization where almost all villages have learned people to the level of Doctorate or Professorship, Nigeria has sunk deep into the abyss of immorality. It true as Rousseau once observed that, “Since learned men began to appear among us, good men have disappeared” (313). Religious morality is now replaced with educational morality where people believe human knowledge more than religious truth. However, Nietzsche’s bold position can help Nigerian masses in some way.

In the first place, at the level of politics, the dynamic power of Nietzsche’s integrity could ginger the people of Nigeria to question our corrupt politicians who posit themselves as the ‘highest order,’ ‘highest authority,’ ‘sacred cows,’ or the ‘untouchables’ in the society. Furthermore, those politicians, who make false promises to their people only to get elected into esteemed political positions and abandon their people, will no longer have it like business as usual. This is because *integrity*, which is truthfulness and the courage to question, when fully imbibed, will energize the lily-livered and the downtrodden to stand up for their rights in the society, when they are being trampled upon or abused. They will be able to stand

their ground and question those systems and principles in the society that encourage corrupt practices.

It will also stimulate those who are ignorant of their religious beliefs to stand up and question some of the new doctrines which some *Men of God* have introduced and which end up in exploitation and extortion of their money and property which make them poorer while those *men of God* and their family members live in affluence. The fear of the unquestionable will be taken away from them.

The two dominant religions in Nigeria are Christianity and Islam and each of them forbids hoarding or accumulation of wealth as well as embezzlement of public funds to the detriment of others. Both the Holy Bible and the Holy Quran forbid such acts. Jesus, the founder of Christianity forbids that when he asks the rich young man to go and sell all that has and give the money to the poor (Matt. 19:21) and in *The Parable of the Rich Fool* (Luke 12:16-21). The prophet, Mohammed who founded Islam (as quoted by Fernandez), says:

A man's true wealth hereafter, is the good he does in this world to his fellow man. When he dies, people will say, 'What property has he left behind him?' But the angels will ask, 'What good deeds has he sent before him?' (Fernandez, 32).

Nigerians should therefore take their National Pledge seriously and move heaven and earth to do away with the evils of deceit, exploitation, extortion, embezzlement of public funds as well as bribery and corruption so as to debunk the view of Nietzsche that *God is dead*.

Conclusion

This work has made serious attempt to discuss Nietzsche's religious and moral nihilism based on Nigerian situation. It has brought up the strengths and weaknesses of his position and how it has affected Nigerian religious society. It is therefore wise if Nigerian masses weigh Nietzsche's view to see to it in the areas which it is beneficial to them and the areas which it is not beneficial in order to apply it appropriately. By so doing, Nigerian masses should follow the criteria of Plato and Aristotle. The former sees government by the learned (philosophers) as the best while the latter sees best laws as the best form of governing. So, when the two views are put together, the best people with the best laws, Nigeria will surely come out of the abyss of corruption.

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