AN APPRAISAL OF THE ROLE OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) IN PROPAGATION OF RELIGIOUS MESSAGES IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

It is heart-warming to assert that 21st century has witnessed unprecedented breakthroughs in information and communication technology. Thus, this astronomical breakthrough has brought unhindered privileges and accessibilities to virtually all the countries where information technology is entrenched. Evidently, technology has linked societies with global information and it makes it possible for capital to shift instantly across borders. Thus, this technological engagement has reduced the world to one 'global village'. Equally, religion is not indifferent to this global advancement. Within the province of religion, information and communication technology has graciously and tremendously helped to reduce religious messages to a sizeable level whereby human beings do not need to travel many kilometres and distances to deliver religious messages. In the same vein, this information and communication technology has also created a gamut of religious problems like human indignity, un-chastity, terrorism and immorality. Again, it has also brought many miseries at its wake. The result is the emergence of a hedonistic culture, sensuality and promiscuity. This paper adopted historical and analytical approach. However, the paper concludes by advocating that efforts should be made to equally promote morality, spirituality and human development.

KEYWORDS: Globalization, Information and Communication Technology, *Magun*, Religion, *Tesho*.

INTRODUCTION

It is cheering to note that 21st century has witnessed unprecedented and unquantifiable breakthroughs as well as transformations in Information and Communication Technology as a result of globalization. Globalization refers to the phenomenon whereby people, countries, businesses and other groups around the global relate without difficulty. Globalization is multi-dimensional, with social, political, religious and economic implication (Nnamani, 2003: 16). Today, global world has created a gamut of technological developments and engagements that have thus reduced the world to one "global village." Without equivocation, religion is global and spatially rooted. The development of Information Technology has tremendously affected religion globally. Therefore, the main thrust of this paper is to look at religion and Information and Communication Technology, and to appraise the dualistic implications of religion in the age of

technology.

RELIGION: AN OVERVIEW

In all ages, religion has come to grips with the existence of all human endeavours. Religion at all times plays pivotal role in shaping the thought, perception, approach, feeling and history of humankind. Thus, religion embraces all aspects of life and it represents wholeness of all existence and as well is life itself. Apparently, religion is the keystone or cornerstone of the people's lives and cultures. Religion is far more than a believing way of life in the African context, where a distinction or separation is not made between religion and other areas of human existence. It serves the aim of building and maintaining human society. Dopamu (2005, .1) is apposite when he states that there is no known society without the existence of religion. In line with the above position of Dopamu, Abe, (2004: 3) argues that religion is the provenance and consummation of all things. According to him, "in the beginning, it was religion; and in the end it shall be religion." In fact, religion has explained the world and human understanding of it.

Kenny (2002,4) aptly describes Religion "as any system which relates men to ultimate values, whether God or something else and which embodies a creed, a code and a cult."In another development, Keqley, (2002, 4) distinguishes three basic features of religion as belief, feeling and action. It is imperative to note that what is pivotal to religion is belief in God or gods, the nature and destiny of the meaning of history and the end. On the basis of this, we come to appreciate the fact that religion does not only command loyalty but also gives its adherents something they are glad to live for and if need be, die for…In the same vein, Ejiofor (1974, 63) also attests to the fact that:

> Religion is the complex of beliefs and behaviour of men in the supernatural sphere and realities and in the dynamic linkage of supernatural with the natural… Religion is one major drive behind human behaviour. Religion has had an important disciplinary effect on the whole social order in any given civilization.

The above shows that religion is a very deep factor in the lives of men. In point of fact, religion identifies itself with the first instinct for self-preservation. "Men take off from religion, men march along with religion and they arrive at religion with a minute-to-minute phenomenon."Ejiofor (6) further buttresses that religion is:

> The pride of the mind, the strength of the will, the relish of human emotions, coveted object of delicate sentimentality…In short, it is the comprehensive resume of man's spiritual, rational and corporate existence.

These above definitions reveal certain essential elements as relating to Religion in Nigeria. Thus, the concept of God, gods, relationship of man to ultimate values, a creed, a code, a cult, belief, action, feeling, super sensible world, law and social order, the relish of

human emotions, and the pride of the mind are indispensable to religion in Nigeria. Perhaps, in all things, Africans are religious.(Idowu, 1996, 1).

As sensitive as religion is, it is worth living for, a pride of place for people as they subsequently derive satisfaction from it as well as sense of security. In Nigeria, there is the practice of triadic religions of African Religion (Afrel), Islam and Christianity. Thus, the history of African Religion or Indigenous Religion is as old as the people themselves. It is a religion handed down by our forebears from yore, and it is orally transmitted from one generation to another. It does not possess sacred scriptures, yet, it is thus written in memory of the very world we live and transmit orally as the occasion demands. This is not proselytizing religion, nor does it have a drive for membership, yet it is tolerant, it accommodates and remains autochthonous. Therefore, we are born into it, live in it and die in it. (Awolalu and Dopamu, 2005, 6).Commenting on the overview of African Religion, Dopamu (2005, 3) has this to say:

> This is clearly seen in African Religion (Afrel), which encompasses all aspects of life. Africans do not know how to live without religion. They celebrate life religiously and they never embark on anything without bringing in religion. Thus at birth, marriage, death, warfare, healing, the foundation of any project, planting, harvesting, enthronement of chiefs and kings and other areas of human endeavour, Afrel plays important roles.

Islam and Christianity are the proselytizing religions, which had been imported into Nigeria. Thus, Islam was introduced into Nigeria in the 11th century by the Timbuktu traders who had contact or encounter with the Northerners. Interestingly therefore, Nigeria is secular and pluralistic state without any particular religion being a state religion. There is no gainsaying the fact that Nigeria is a country of diverse cultures, traditions and beliefs. But of the entire diverse elements, religion has proved to be most sensitive agent of legality in the society. It is this fact about religion that has made it an instrument of legality, unifying factor as well as social mechanism for national development. Of a truth, the tenets of religion provide individuals with shared values, roles and incumbents, altruism and responsibilities. Religion as a way of life is aimed at transformation of individual life. This individual life is a means of microcosmic structure in the overall macrocosmic structure of the society. Apart from this, "each of the patterns of life and practice presupposes a structure of shared beliefs. When the credibility of central religious beliefs is questioned other aspects of religion are also challenged."(Dopamu 2005,3). Tersely therefore, religion is recognised as a channel for human and national development as well as legal instrument. Idowu (4) becomes apposite when he states that religion is the keynote of the people's lives:

> Religion forms the foundation and all-governing principle of life for them. As far as they are concerned, the full responsibility of all the affairs of life belongs to the Deity; their own part in the matter is to do as they are ordered through the priests and diviners whom they believe to be interpreters of the will of the deity. Through all the circumstances of life, through all its changing scenes, its joys and troubles, it is the

Deity who is in control.

Without fuss, Religion has all-governing principles of life and infuses discipline and social order. Thus, religion is a cord that binds people together in order to promote social cohesion and communal well-being. As the rule of law is machinery set in place to guide the conduct of the people likewise religion is both social and legal mechanism for harmonious living and co-existence. Besides, religion is a divine law or mechanism that regulates human conduct and as well institutionalises social norms in human society. Religion has the knack of bringing people together where they can experience presently what it means to live the full human life. It is also a major instrument of transforming any human society into a community that acts justly. To this end, Religion becomes the law of life, pathway to God-realization, absolute value truth, living power, justice, and morality.

INFORMATAION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY: AN ACCOUNT

To start with, ICT means Information and Communication Technology. Thus, Information and Communication Technology describes the ability to handle, process and disseminate information with the aid of electronic devices. Skifo (1990, 7) states that ICT is the involvement to process information by creating privileges to handle text, organise, retrieve, store and analyse information with the help of machines. Ekireghwo (1994, 19) goes beyond the definition given by Skifo. He avers that:

> Information and Communication technology is not an old wine in a new bottle. It is a field of human knowledge that is made up of three technologies: Computing, micro-electronic and telecommunication and how these technologies are used to collect, store, process and distribute any form of information by electronic means.(7)

Hanmaikyuur (2009) describes information and communication technology as "an equipment of interconnected system or sub-system that is used in automatic acquisition, storage, manipulation, management, movement, control, display, switching, interchange, transmission or reception of data or information. The term information technology includes computers, ancillary equipment, software, firmware and similar producers.

It is incontestable that information is power in the age of science and technology. Indeed, the 21st century has witnessed astronomical and phenomenal changes as have not been known in the concise period of time in human race. Today, the world over has created so many technological advancements and engagements that have drastically reduced the world to one "global village", "and all the inhabitants-white and black, Easterner and Westerner, Gentile and Jew, Catholic and Protestant, Muslim and Hindu-now belong to   one great world house"(Ehusani,.5). Carnoy (2005) has argued that today's massive movement of capital depends on information communication and knowledge in the global markets, and because knowledge is portable it lends itself easily to globalisation. For the developing world, the university is central to the process of knowledge production and dissemination. However, it has adopted a social re-constructivist model in which teacher education is now the sole

mandate of universities, including those in South Africa. No doubt, this Information and Communication Technology finds expression in Computer, Telephones, Video Recorders, Digital Television, Internet, Digital Library, Satellite, among others. In the same vein, Obute (23) takes a look at the technical means of processing and communicating information. They include Radio, television, satellite receiver for broadcasting information; Optical disks (CD/DVD) Magnetic disks (floppy disks, hard disks) for storing information; Mobile phones, Microphones, speakers for communicating through voice; DIAD: Delivery information and Acquisition Device is used to provide proof of delivering in parcel distribution companies; Scanner, Barcode reader, digital camera for capturing images; Computer hardware for accepting instructions; System software and application software for data processing; Computer network/ internet for sharing resources and services and fingerprint biometric system, face biometrics, palm print biometric system, and handwriting recognition system for personal identification. These tools provide better personal authentication than the password and signature based security, which may be stolen, forgotten and forged. The internet is evolving a new universe upon which to build sorts of new products, services, strategies and organizations, the internet has eliminated many technical, geographical cost and gender barriers hitherto obstructing the global flow of information.

Ohmae (2005) opines that technology has linked societies with global information and it makes it possible for capital to shift instantly across borders. It has allowed managers and actors to become more flexible and respond more quickly to consumer preferences. He further buttresses that technology has sped up the internationalisation of production and the dispersion of manufacturing to newly industrialized countries, increased capital mobility, and cheaper transnational communications. Furthermore, producers can supply markets with new products, and process lifetimes have shortened. However, Wade (2002) argues that information and communication technologies are being oversold as a solution to higher efficiency of corporate and public organizations and to stronger responsiveness of government to citizen-customers. Again, Wade (2002) posits that efforts to bridge the digital divide may cause developing countries to depend on the west. Less developed countries need more representation in the standard-setting bodies. Additionally, current attempts do not address issues of sustainability, such as computer servicing and training.

Wade (2002) addresses several common beliefs regarding information and communication technologies. First, the digital divide is a major un-equalizing force in the world economy. Second, supplying more information and communication technologies to developing countries will solve un-equalization. Third, information and communication will overcome infrastructural obstacles of developing countries. Fourth, normal cost/benefit analysis cannot be applied to information and communication technologies. Fifth, the high failure rate of information and communication technologies projects is a reflection of the need for more training. Wade (2002) disagrees with these beliefs, positing that the digital divide is actually a reflection of the income division. He also disagrees that the spread of computers will cause efficiency gains in firms and public administrations, or lower transaction costs. Wade (444) believes that organization inefficiencies will override potential benefits. Not only that, the addition of information and communication technologies in developing countries that do not have the capacity to maintain them will create a new 'e-dependence'.

In another development, with the help of information and communication technology, there is the advancement in communication that has made the exchange of goods and services much easier. By way of satellite communication, it is absolutely possible to arrange a debate "between the Russian Politburo and the United States congress, moderated by a Lagos-based journalist, and watched by some billion people in several countries simultaneously." (Ehusani, 13).Perhaps the latest and by far the most intriguing in the history of technological achievement is computer. In this, "Brave New World" has finally struck the machine that can travel at the speed of light. The super computer is said to be capable of performing two billion calculations per second, and this speed can be further increased to almost infinity. The digital library programme makes it possible for any person knowledgeable to trace any book or article in a computerized library within a minute (Ehusani 1991).

RELIGIOUS INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY IN NIGERIA

It is pertinent to note that religion as earlier observed is not indifferent to the interdependence as regards the social change occasioned by the development in technology. The development of technology has tremendously affected religion globally (Alamu, 2009:,86). Esposito and Watson, (33) rightly posit that religion is also global and spatially rooted; but in particular it has non-economic values and norms to sustain; and its interrelation are thus of justice, humanness, peace and ecological integrity. Worthy of note is the fact that human and environmental developments are the goals of technological development. In modernity, civil society is certainly the space in which religion can breathe more easily and through which it can best subscribe to the development of different order (Alamu, 2004,58).Essentially, religious tenets are universal and globally appealing.

Dibuss Tande (2011), who painstakingly explores information and communication technology in South Africa states that in the age of information and communication technology, it is difficult to run a business without using this technology for communication and marketing. Websites about one's business are nowadays a common tool for marketing and also financially accessible for small businesses. Similarly, one needs to be connected to the internet if one wants to reach a wider base of customers.

It is worth asserting that Nigeria is also part of the "one global village" as a result of its transnational reach. Nigeria is not bereft of the various information and communication technologies and she is not also devoid of religion. Religion to Nigerians is life and wholeness of existence to the people. As religion is global, information technology has played great and inalienable role in bringing services to the doorstep of the privileged ones through Internet, newspaper, and publishing houses, Television station, website and among others (Alamu,2004: 59). Apart from the above, the initiators of the information system mean well and good to the generality of the people. Since information is everything, it has exposed believers of religions to good cultural diffusion.

Amongst the Indigenous or African religious adherents, ICT as expressed in Digital Television has promoted African values and heritages such as culture of *bubuzuela* during the World Cup in South Africa 2010, festivals, taboos and metaphysics. In recent times, film

industries in Nigeria popularly named "Nollywood" have produced films to stem the tide of criminality, rape, kidnapping, adultery and fornication. For instance, in Yoruba home video, the use of "*Magun*"(don't mount or climb) and *Tesho* is deliberately viewed to keep promiscuous people away from premature death. Again, good morals are being promoted through this medium. Ifa corpus as well as message is being disseminated through Television, Radio and Internet. Afrelists today as depicted by Dopamu (16) have sense of global sharing of live and let's live, because the present situation in the world today is the discussion of the relevance of religion to development and the human good. To him, the various religions of the world must converse as equals about their beliefs if religious belief is to contribute to the peace and survival of our fractured and precarious universe.

In South Africa today, Parker (2007) asserts that Telemedicine, Tele Ultrasound and fixed-network connectivity have been introduced into health institutions throughout the provinces of South Africa. Telemedicine aims to reduce the number of patient referral from smaller hospitals and community health centres to the larger hospitals, by giving the medical staff the necessary support they need. This will also be of a great benefit to patient who will not need to travel great distances, but will be able to obtain the necessary treatment in their own hospital. King Edward VIII and Edendale hospitals have been selected in KwaZulu-Natal as receive sites. Dialogue and images are sent via ISDN lines from send sites to the receive site where a diagnosis can be done. This is the ideal for emergency situations.

Tele Ultrasound gadgets have been installed in seven hospitals. All the equipment have been installed at the hospitals and training has been carried. And effort is being made now to install Tele-ophthalmology for 'fight for sight' (ICT: South Africa,www.entrepreneurs toolkit.org/Retrieved on the 13th November,2013). In addition, the Department of Communications of South Africa earmarked information and communication technology development for World Cup 2010. In fact, Telkom and Sentech were tasked with the responsibilities of installing outsourcing various projects for the World fiesta. This improved connectivity was targeted towards leaving a 'lasting legacy' after the event.

With the help of communication gadgets such as microphones, religious messages can be effectively preached in Mosques and churches without much ado. Likewise, religious preachers who have the know-how and access to computers, telephones, CDS and Internet can have their messages and teachings disseminated globally. Most of the religious centres have their programmes related in the Television and Internet. Again, religious messages can be down loaded into CD, VCD, DVD-Digital Video Diskette, IPod, IPad, Andriod, and Twitters. This is usually done in order to bring religious messages to those who are spiritually thirsty. Not only that, these are used by religious missionaries to present religious films to people in the remote areas where religious messages are needed to capture the people's mind. Even, prayers can be offered through GSM or twitters to any one from any part of the globe.

Furthermore, a complete text of the Qu'ran and the Bible can be down loaded and made available in a disc. At times, memory card is used in handsets today to download the Qu'ran and the Bible for convenience. Also, religious songs, hymns, and messages can be downloaded from the net to handsets and played on the computer by applying the appropriate software. Moreso, a handful of religious bodies like churches and Mosques possess sophisticated printing Press where their programmes, handbills, posters and tracts are printed for easy accessibility and

dissemination. Of a truth, many Christian bodies have taken this medium to disseminate the gospel message to millions of people globally.

Ryerson (2000:4) observes positively that as for our Christian faith in scientific technology, we strive to maintain balance between commitment and openness, firmness and flexibility, continuity and change, and memory and receptivity. Therefore, the Christians of the world must discover the commonalities among the world's religions, as well as the differences, so that we can all build on the commonalities and intelligently discuss the possibility of creating societies of tolerable and approximate justice. In addition, his views can swallow both human and technological imperfections and thus engage in a global enlightenment on spirituality and morality, an improved means to an unimproved end about the very nature of human civilization.

As earlier indicated, despite Ryerson's positive optimism as regards information and communication technology in the global world, little did he know that information and communication technology has also brought many miseries at its wake? Alamu (2009: 90) argues elsewhere that global religion of which Christianity is involved is marked by the embarrassing contrast between the spectacular scientific and technological achievements on the one hand, and a shameful degradation of the human person and spirituality on the other. As a result, we erect global structures where communication thrives and communion is non-existent. In essence, information and communication technology does not respect human integrity and it is void of morality.

No less offensive to human dignity is the amount of pornographic and sleazy materials traded on television, telephone, radio and newspapers. These materials thus magnify sensuality and promiscuity, berate fatherhood and motherhood, encourage all kinds of experimentation in sexual conduct, and render absurd the traditional ideas of chastity and virginity. The result is the emergence of a hedonistic culture, which not only commercialises the human body, but also normalises some otherwise disgraceful sexual perversions.(Alamu,2009: 7). At times, television runs programmes that are dangerous and detrimental to human psyche. Viewing television at times would make one to see indecent dressing like topless, bottomless, and half-nude wears, even after the fashion of many Nigerian television news-casters, actors or actresses in soap operas. Besides, it is obvious today that these indecent dressings are found in the churches and at wedding ceremonies. Not only that, blue and sexual movies are shown in many channels of our television.

In the submission of Wade (444), less developed countries are disadvantaged by lack of income, skill, infrastructure, and in terms of standards and rules that are part of the international system. As a result of this, western suppliers have a disproportionate advantage.

THE WAY FORWARD

Flowing from the foregoing, it is imperative to note that urgent steps need to be taken in order to stem the tide of the negative impacts of information and communication technology in Nigeria in particular and the world all over. As a matter of urgency, parents should discourage their children from watching unprofitable and irreligious programmes. Parents, religious organizations and government must be alive to their responsibilities in moulding their children and African youth in the way of God. Also, parents should discourage their children from

wearing indecent dressing in the society.

The teaching of religious education must be embraced by all schools, so that sound and moral instructions can be passed on to generations. Here, it must be emphasized that religious education is crucial to all users of information and communication technology. Under globalization, educational policies and pedagogies should be enacted in order to attain professional standard in the educational environments. The ascendancy of educational policies in our institutions can be facilitated by the same information and communication technology, as well as cultural fragmentation manifested in the emergence of local identities and nationalism. According to Altbach et.al, (2009) globalization is a key reality in the 21st century and has profoundly influenced higher education. Indeed, education is a crucial arena in which globalising processes modulate material and territorial place, space, cultures, identities and relationships (Singh et.al, 2005). As Mandani (2007: 132) states "there is no part of Africa that is the same as anywhere else because every part has its specificity. "Teachers must adopt innovative and sustainable models for information and communication technology development. While not downplaying the merits of such initiatives, the teachers should rise up to the challenges of teaching the new forms of information and communication technologies in order to sustain a fair global alliance and co-existence. Chinnammai (2005) points out, through the globalizing information and communication technology of higher education and in particular teacher education, knowledge transfer from the western countries into developing countries is intended to improve the skills and capabilities of the people receiving it, but may also shape the behaviour, perception, outlooks, and values of the recipients. The key feature of information and communication technologies is the permeability of borders not only for goods, services and capital, but also for knowledge, popular culture and people.

In the same vein, both the school and religious groups should properly educate the youth on the world of ICT so that morals can be disseminated. This alone can assist develop the nation and technological world. Added to this is the role the government ought to play in this regard. On the part of the government, she should sternly warn the broadcasting stations to scrutinize their programmes such as home video materials. Aluko (1970: 22) becomes apposite when he asserts that

> The mass media should produce decent programmes that are designed to promote high sense of morality in the society. They should abstain from bringing into public awareness immoral and indecent films, catalogues, songs, programmes etc, which could be regarded as ill-wind that blows nobody any good.

CONCLUSION

The above excursion has succinctly revealed that information and communication technology has brought many good in its wake. Likewise, we have seen the adverse effects it has caused human society. By and large, we discovered that the most poignant problem of modern life has not only lost its significance but also what is best in humaneness and morality. In spite of the purported grandeur information and communication technology claims, there are many flaws,

immoralities and imperfections. It is advocated therefore that information and communication technology in contemporary times should promote morality, spirituality and human development other than corruption, criminality and human degradation in the already confused world of insecurity. In addition, there should be intellectual rebirth, a reawakening of the mind and a change in consciousness. It calls for a rethinking and rewriting of history, thereby creating a sense of self-worth and a renewed sense of urgency. (Dzvimbo and Moloi, 2013,12-13). To this end, we have to remind religious leaders and teachers of various institutions of higher learning that they have to repackage, rework and reconstruct transformative and pedagogic policies that would enable intergenerational engagements with emerging imperatives. In this way, the curriculum will be oriented towards transformative and religious education that ensure citizens and students to engage in a whole-of- society transformation, in continuity with values of community total well-being through technology and information.

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