

ECONOMIC JUSTICE AND THE CHURCH'S SOCIAL TEACHING: A PANACEA FOR SOLVING ECONOMIC PROBLEMS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The continued economic challenges in Nigeria over decades have been a source of concern for many scholars as well as well meaning citizens of the country. As days go by, the challenges keep occurring in an increased dimension. Ways of getting this problem solved with its concomitant effects have not yielded much fruits. The current research presents a solution from economic justice and social teachings of the church as theories. The research using secondary source of data collection identified certain tenets of economic justice which are equally in tandem with the social teachings of the church. These include the principles of participative justice, distributive justice and social justice. The economic situations in Nigeria that are against economic justice and the social teaching of the church were discussed. These include imbalance in remuneration, injustice in recruitment process, unfavourable economic environment among others. The research concludes that where those at the helm of affairs as well as contributors to the economy embrace economic justice in line with the social teachings of the church, the economic challenges in Nigeria will reduce to barest minimum.

Keywords: Economy, Church, Economic justice, social teaching, Nigeria.

Introduction

Justice remains one value every human person expects in human relations in any sphere of human endeavour. The comfort of an individual in any given society or human organization is dependent largely on how the society or organization enhances justice be it political, social or economic justice. Every human person therefore calls for or wants or demands justice wittingly or unwittingly at one time or the other. The statement of Jesus when he mentioned “do unto others what you would like them do unto you” is an expression of justice. The golden rule is the hallmark of justice and any human society

where things are not normal, is witnessing one form of injustice or the other. Justice brings peace, joy, progress and holistic development in the society.

Nigeria as a nation has been bedeviled by series of developmental problems for many years. There are clear indications that majority of the citizens are finding life uneasy in the country. These are evidenced in series of economic quagmire being witnessed in Nigeria. Poverty rate is on the increase, infrastructural decay is on the rise. The resultant effect is that most Nigerians find it hard to survive in the country and hence the quest for travelling abroad. Where many especially young people travel abroad, the country witnesses brain drain. The situation is serious as it is becoming difficult for small scale businesses to thrive. A nation where people are seeking majorly to work in government establishments has a problem. It has been proved that what thrives the economy most is the private sector. In a situation where the cost of doing business is high, the end effect is the crippling of small scale industries and businesses. Nigeria as a country is in this dilemma.

One of the most glaring areas of disparity in the world over is on the economic aspect of justice. Economic justice remains a major aspect of justice because for man to effectively function in the society, satisfaction of his wants/needs remains of a pivotal importance. Economic justice presupposes that those who make up state have their due share of the economic resources and programmes in the state. It is pertinent to note that the paramount position of economic status of every individual as well as the society prompted the United Nations to position economic objective as the first in the Millenium Development Goals {MDGs}. Priority of the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger supposed that the world leaders were aware of the disparity in economic status of citizens. If such should be dealt with, justice should be promoted in all economic spheres of the state. Unfortunately, Nigeria was not among the nations that achieved this objective by 2015 deadline. This is a serious issue affecting the members of the country today.

It is against this backdrop that this work emphasizes more on economic justice and the social teaching of the Catholic Church. Using the duo as theoretical frameworks, this work holds that there are things the government should do as well as individuals in the state. With such sense of justice and practice by the leaders and the led, solution to economic problems in Nigeria if not eradicated will be reduced to lowest ebb.

Conceptual Clarifications

Economy: the term economy may be referred to as economic system consists of production, distribution or trade, and consumption of limited goods and services by different agents in a given geographical location. According to Wikipedia (2014), the economic agents could be individuals, businesses, organizations, or governments. Kenton

(2021) sees economy as the large set of inter-related production, consumption, and exchange activities that aid in determining how scarce resources are allocated. In this case, the production, consumption, and distribution of goods and services are used to fulfill the needs of those living and operating within the economy, which is equally referred to as economic system.

Justice: justice enjoys varied definitions from various scholars. There are many theories of justice such as utilitarian, liberal, libertarian, egalitarian and so on, these show that the concept justice has varied meanings. Whatever the meaning may be, the present work would not cumbersome this research with plethora of definitions. Wenz (2007) posits that

Justice increases when the benefits and burden of social cooperation are born more equally, except when moral considerations or other values justify greater inequality. This principle is uncontroversial because it basically restates the principle of the equal consideration of interests...which rests on the controversial claim that all human beings are of equal moral considerability. Unequal treatment of human beings (some reaping extra benefits or bearing extra burdens related to social cooperation) must therefore be justified, and such justification requires recourse to moral considerations or other values. (p. 58).

As a moral concept, the position of Wenz is acceptable by this work. This is so because justice has to do with equal treatment of all except with regards to situational ethics. Justice is viewed as giving to each what is due to each and each given to the other or the society what is due which determines what each person gets.

Economic Justice: Economic justice according to Business Dictionary (2014) refers to basic and well accepted principle of fairness where the consequences of official policies should be the equal allocation of benefits among participants in an economy. Hayes (2022) sees economic justice as a component of social justice. In that, there is a belief that creating more opportunities for all members of the society to earn viable wages will contribute to economic growth. As such, if citizens are able to provide for themselves and maintain stable discretionary income, they are more likely to spend their earnings on goods, which in turn drive the economy. According to Centre for Economic and Social Justice (2013)

Economic justice which touches the individual person as well as the social order encompasses the moral principle which guides us in designing our economic institutions. These institutions determine how each person earns a living, enters into contracts, exchanges goods and services with others and otherwise produces an independent material foundation for his or her economic sustenance. The

ultimate purpose of economic justice is to free each person to engage creatively in the unlimited work beyond economics, that of the mind and spirit. (p. 1).

The underlining factor in economic justice is the application of moral principles in economic processes. Global Justice Academy (2013) did not differ in the moral principles as it holds that economic justice has to do with ethics and values in the process of economy. According to the document

Economic justice is a term that encompasses both a set of values and the policies utilized to further those values. The obvious content of economic justice is the enhancement of the welfare of individuals, groups, and nations within national and international and intra-and-inter generational contexts. Yet economic justice is not merely a concept or an issue of distribution of resources, including endowments. It is a concept grounded in both ethics and resources and has powerful philosophical foundations, as well as cost-benefit analysis justifications. (p. 1).

The above understanding of economic justice is found worthy by the researcher for its emphasis on ethics and values as well as those involved in the process viz: individuals, groups, nations and so on. The welfare of every person is the concern of economic justice. Therefore, it means observation of moral principles, ethics and values in the economic processes whether as individuals, organizations or government.

Church's Social Teaching: The social teaching of the Catholic Church as the salt and light of the world is an area of the church's teaching that hinges on the welfare of the human person. Wikipedia (2021) sees it as an area of Catholic doctrine concerning matters of human dignity and the common good in society. Some ideas addressed in the teaching include oppression, the role of the state, subsidiarity, social organization, concern for social justice and issue of wealth distribution. In this, wealth distribution is in line with economic justice. Therefore, this work is focusing on economic justice and the teachings of the Catholic Church as regards acceptable economy.

The Principles of Economic Justice and the Church's Social Teaching as Theoretical Frameworks

In order to analyse economic justice, the researcher finds the principles of economic justice and the social teachings of the Church on economic justice as frameworks. The two are capable of positioning each individual, group or government on a better way of working towards economic justice. With proper understanding and application of the theories, economic justice is achieved.

The first principle is that of participative justice (input principle). Centre for Economic and Social Justice (2014) sees participative justice as how one makes input to the economic process in order to make a living. It requires equal opportunity in gaining access to private property in productive assets as well as equality of opportunities to engage in productive work. Though the principle of participation does not guarantee equal results, but requires that every person be guaranteed by the society's institutions equal human rights to make a productive capital (as an owner). This principle calls for everyone's participation in promoting economy. Both individuals and government must know that economic justice entails participation of the both.

The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (1965) sees participation as a part of economic justice. "Therefore, while taking into account the role every person concerned-owners, employers, management, and employees-and without weakening the necessary executive unity, the active participation of everybody in administration is to be encouraged" (n. 68). No one is to be denied the opportunity to contribute to economic sector likewise, individuals must do their work to earn a living. The Catechism of Catholic Church (2011) states that everyone has the right of economic initiatives. "Everyone should make legitimate use of his talents to contribute to the abundance that will benefit all and harvest the just fruits of his labour" (n. 2429). Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (2005) describes that work entails right to participate. Therefore, both the principle of economic justice and the Church's social teaching agreed on participation or input as part of justice.

Furthermore, there is principle of distributive justice. This aspect of justice holds that which helps to determine the just price, the just wage and just profit. It is based on the idea of to each "according to his contribution". Distributive justice follows participative justice and breaks down when all persons are not given equal opportunity to acquire and enjoy the fruits of income-producing property. Justice here entails that he who contributes more is given more in return while he who contributes less is given less and not otherwise. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (1965) stresses that exploitation must be avoided in distributive justice. Underpayment is an injustice. The document states

Remuneration for work should guarantee man the opportunity to provide a dignified livelihood for himself and his family on the material, social, cultural and spiritual level correspond to the role and the productivity of each, the relevant economic factors in his employment, and the common good. (n. 68).

Distributive justice recognizes that no one is treated better than others for equal works. It is equal work or contribution for equal pay. The Church recognizes this as justice and equity. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (2011) buttresses that "a just wage is the

legitimate fruit of work. To refuse or withhold it can be a grave injustice. In determining fair pay, both the needs and the contributions of each person must be taken into account” (n. 2434).

Another principle is social justice which is the feedback principle that detects distortions of the input and/or out-take principles and guides the corrections needed to restore a just and balanced economic order for all. Barriers to participation, monopoly as well as exploitation of others are violation to social justice. Social justice offers guidelines for controlling monopolies, building checks and balances within social institutions, and re-synchronizing distribution with participation. Social justice makes one to look beyond what is, to what ought to be, and continually repair and improve their systems for the good of every person. In the document of the Church, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (1965) holds that

To fulfill the requirements of justice and equity, every effort must be made to put an end soon as possible to the immense economic inequalities which exist in the world and increase from day to day, limited with individual and social discrimination, provided, of course that the rights of individuals and the character of each people are not disturbed. (n. 66).

Social justice promotes what ought to be as against what is. In all, social justice balances the participative and distributive justice. This, the Church promotes as basis for justice in economic sphere. Having also positioned the above theoretical framework, it is now imperative to examine economic justice in various issues as they concern economy. All analysis here is based on the principles of economic justice and the Church’s social stand on economic justice.

Issues on Economic Justice vis-à-vis Church’s Teaching

It becomes necessary to discuss what economic justice entails as it concerns various segments of the (Nigerian) economy with one’s lens on the established theoretical frameworks. For every economic institution to promote economic justice, it has to be a participative one. In that case, the growth of the economy is a contribution of all involved. It is injustice not to make any input or less input as expected of any person in any economic organization. This brings to the fore the equal obligation to work as a partaker in economic development. Whether in the private sector or public sector, it is grave injustice for one to demand improved economic base or criticize the existing economic situation without making any meaningful input. This further implies that unjustifiable idleness of any individual in a society is an injustice to economic status of the society. It then follows that individuals have to involve in activities that promote economic base of

the nation. This is essentially one of the major demands of economic justice approved also by the Church's Social teachings.

Economic justice is averse to any form of imbalance in remuneration of the contributors to the economy. Izuegbu (2022) holds that such practice where one receives less than he contributes is one of the reasons for industrial actions in Nigeria. The principle of equal remuneration for equal work remains the watch word here. The employers of labour to allow economic justice must not for any reason allow a particular individual to work more and receive less where another individual works less and receives more pay. Justice demands that the principle of to each according to his need and his contribution (output) must be followed in determining salary scale of workers. Allowing some individuals to work round the clock with infinitesimal pay is a disguise way of enslaving them against those who do less work and are given much. The distributive justice must observe each person's contribution to the total growth of the economy. There should be minimum wage as well as minimum productivity and that is justice.

Another important aspect in economic justice has to do with recruitment process. Economic justice promotes recruitment into positions on merit. It becomes injustice to employ people based on nepotism, tribalism, ethnicity, sectionalism and so on. Such move is capable of breeding corruption and enthroning mediocrity which becomes a clog in the wheel of economic development. Justice demands that while employing individuals who are the engine of the economy of any organization, sentiments must not for any reason arise if the organization means business. Receiving any gratification to get a job is a serious minus in economic justice scale. So, the growth of economy in most cases is determined by those who drive the economy and as such, recruitment process should follow due process and meritocracy.

Economic justice demands a conducive and favourable economic environment. In a market-based economy, it is the demand of justice that there should be an enabling environment for the economy to grow. The government as a matter of justice has to provide a good environment especially for private sectors to thrive. Unnecessary restrictions must be avoided to allow private sectors especially, small and medium scale industries. The government should not make the cost of running business to be so high to the detriment of the citizens of the state. In the private sectors, the environment must be conducive for a worker to give his/her best. It is injustice to demand much from the worker when the employer has failed to provide the needed environment for that. Justice in economic sector demands that one has to provide a good opportunity that would help drive the economy positively.

Furthermore, economic justice demands that what is produced is in line with expected standard. This is where quality control becomes necessary. What is produced must be in conformity with the standards set by lawful agencies. It is injustice to produce what is below the standard and yet posit it to be of standard. In the frameworks above, one sees that the idea of “what ought to be” if not applied has yielded injustice in the production process. Producing what is fake in the name of original remains a grave economic injustice to humanity. Economic justice demands that though the people may not be at the production point but the quality expected of the product is pursued.

Empowerment of the people by a legitimate authority (the government) is an economic justice. As earlier observed, where there is great number of unemployed persons especially where the government has failed to create opportunities for the people is not justifiable. Economic justice entails that the government should provide genuine empowerment programmes for the people to help drive the economy of their state. Any economic programme aimed at empowering the unemployed in the society is an economic justice done. The government has the duty to providing employment opportunities and empowerment is one of the ways to do so. When genuinely done, one can say that economic justice is done, but if neglected, it is a minus in the scale of economic justice.

Above all, decisions and policies in every sphere of economy must observe justice. It is an economic justice if policy-makers take cognizance of the workers when they make policies. It is economic justice when decisions and policies move towards promotion of the common good in the organization or sector or state. Any decision or policy that will help boost the economy for the good of all which may likely bring temporal hardship as the Catechism of the Catholic Church (2011) asserts has to be taken if so far as it will promote the common good in the near future. Such a move is not injustice but justice for it has a genuine purpose of driving the economy of the nation positively. However, whenever the economic decision fails to consider human person’s dignity and the benefit of others, such decision is unjust and therefore should not be promoted.

Factors against Economic Justice in Nigeria

Going by the tenets of economic justice and looking at Nigeria as a nation, there are various issues that posit that the country has not fully imbibed the demands of economic justice as contained in the social teachings of the Church. No doubt, Nigeria from her first republic has continued to make some economic policies for the country. Okeke (2010) observes that Nigeria has often been credited with developing some of the best policies in the world. However, he regrets that most often, the policies do not go beyond intentions as they do not translate into concrete deliverables to improve the quality of lives of citizenry. Soludo (2012) acknowledges that the first republic of Nigeria witnessed production-

oriented politics with agriculture as the major source of income. With the 1970s oil boom, the story changed from diversified economy to mono-economy. The Operation Feed the Nation (OPN) of 1976, the Shagari's Green Revolution were policies of the second republic that could not yield the desired results. Abdullahi (2012) reacting to Green Revolution programme asserts that "at the end of the programme there was nothing green" (p. 38). These programmes failed for lack of economic justice as contained in the social teaching of the Church.

Other programmes such as the Structural Adjustment Programme of General Babangida, Community Action Programme for Poverty Alleviation of 1996 and so on could not yield much results. The fourth republic witnessed programmes such as the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP); the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS); Vision 20:2020; YouWin; Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P); were all initiated and yet, the economy of the country still has much to be desired. Therefore, it is pertinent to discuss certain factors that work against economic justice in Nigeria.

The issues of ethnicity, tribalism and nepotism has been so serious in Nigeria that it affects virtually everything done in the country. Most of the economic programmes in Nigeria fail because merit is always sacrificed at the altar of the ethnic background of those to be at helm of such economic programme. Nzomiwu (1999) observes that tribalism poses a dangerous signal to Nigeria in all ramifications. He asserts that it develops to the level that crimes are covered up because a particular tribe is concerned and also, contributes to poverty of the nation. This situation is purely detrimental to the tenets of economic justice. One thing economic justice advocates is that merit should be the watchword when recruiting people into various positions to drive the economy. This has been seriously affected in Nigeria by tribalism and ethnicity in such a way that one experiences lopsided appointment where the appointed is even incapable of handling the position. This gives credence to Okpalike (2012) who affirms that tribal fraternity is stronger than national unity in Nigeria, sectional interest attracts more dependable and credible loyalty than it does to national programmes. This automatically is one major reason the country is in continuous economic crisis.

Economic justice holds the idea of just pay or remuneration for workers. This has to do with the welfare of the workforce. However, in Nigeria, it has become a recurrent issue that almost every year, a section of workers embarks on industrial action. Izuegbu (2022) observes that strike actions especially as it concerns the Academic Staff Union of University is almost a yearly occurrence. Such a situation hampers economic growth of any nation. The issues of owing salaries and allowances are against economic justice. In

Nigeria, many people are owed their entitlements even after retirements. This is a factor against economic justice in Nigeria.

It is expected under economic justice that the people should participate in the economic process of their country. This involves the individuals making efforts in engaging themselves in economic ventures capable of boosting the economic base of the country. However, this is not possible without adequate opportunities created for the people. The nation is still slugging in its power sector which if well fixed would provide opportunities for different levels of citizens to start up minimum businesses that would eventually boost the economy. Most of the roads are impassable making it difficult for people even in agrarian communities to see any need for production. One observes that the opportunity is not judiciously provided for participation. Nigeria has recorded a serious brain drain and this is as a result of having no opportunities. One thing is that, the government does not provide jobs to everyone but it is the duty of the government to provide opportunities for the citizens to embark on economic ventures. Adequate infrastructures are not provided and so economic justice is seriously affected in Nigeria by this.

The economic environment is another important factor. It has been observed that the cost of doing business in Nigeria is very high. The folding of different companies in Nigeria is as a result of high cost of doing business in Nigeria. This jeopardizes the economic growth of the country. It is expected that the country as a matter of justice should do everything to make economic environment conducive for businesses to thrive. Insecurity in the recent times has equally done a serious harm to the economic environment. One cannot expect investors in a place where security of life and property is not guaranteed. It is therefore a serious threat to economic justice when the environment is not economic friendly.

Way Out

It is clear that any nation that wants to become economically sound should embrace economic justice in line with the teachings of the Church. The people at leadership position should at all times pursue the common good not tribal good. Nigeria has great men and women capable building her economic base if given the opportunity. If the country can eschew tribalism and ethnicity and then go for competence and merit, the problem of the nation's problematic economic base will reduce. This is in tandem with the principles of economic justice and social teachings of the Church. No one gives what he has not and on that note, if the nations continue to be at the tribe instead of being at the nation for appointments of people to steer the economy, there cannot be headway. Common good is to be placed above sectional interest.

The government of the country should as a matter of responsibility embark on creating opportunities for the people. The major expectation of the government is to create ways for the people to follow and the economy would thrive. Basic infrastructures should be in place for the people. This is what economic justice implies. It is when these are put in place that the participatory aspect of economic justice would be worthwhile. Nigerians are highly talented, steady power supply, good roads, quality education are what are required for the economy to thrive.

Business friendly environment is not negotiable in building the economy of a state. There is urgent need to have a conducive economic environment with adequate security. This no doubt attracts investors for no nation is self-sufficient. If the cost of doing business is appreciably good, the people would come and invest. This will include the tax system of the nation. With a very conducive environment, justice is done and invariably, economy will get a boost.

Conscious efforts should be made to put a stop to recurrent industrial actions in Nigeria. This no doubt is a serious setback to economic advancement of the nation. It remains injustice for people to work and they are owed salaries and allowances. Izuegbu (2022) proffers solutions to such which include proper planning and budgeting by the government. One cannot expect economic stability in a country where things are not done rightly especially as it affects the workforce. The workforce drives the economy of the state. There should be sincerity between the labour and employers of labour in Nigeria as a way of making conscious effort in promoting Nigeria's economy.

Conclusion

At all times, in every age, the Church has continually acted as a mediator on social issues. The Church (the people of God) is not alien to the sufferings and yearnings of humankind. Among her teachings is that of justice in economic sphere which is in line with economic justice. It is imperative that going by the Church's social teaching on this subject, one could affirm that the solution to Nigeria's economic problem is widely contained in the teaching. Nigeria cannot thrive economically without adherence to participatory economy, principle of equal remuneration for equal work, just recruitment process, acceptable economic environment as well as opportunities for the people. Economic and social teaching of the Church have given a blueprint to any nation in dire desire for economic growth and development. Nations with clear economic advancement toured along this path to get to where they are. It is therefore a solution to Nigeria to work according to the tenets of economic justice. If this is done, there is every tendency the the nation's economy will bounce back and most of her social and economic problems reduced to lowest ebb.

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