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Contemporary Limitations to Religious Solution to Social Problems

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ABSTRACT

Religion has contributed immensely to solving some of the social problems. The aim of this paper is to situate social problems within the context of other variables like human nature, plurality of cultures, and diversity in hermeneutics of societal values. This will help those interested in social problems to come to terms with the difficulties involved in defining or describing these deviances. In addition, cultural differences, political pressures, and plurality of values weaken the therapeutic strength of religion as it attends to social problems. Finally, this paper argues that religion as a social capital can reduce the menace of social problems if its institutions can be trusted by the people in the society.

Key Words: Human Nature, Religious Values, Social Capital, Social Problems, and Culture

INTRODUCTION

Any discourse concerning social problems should take seriously variables such as societal changes, cultural and religious values as well as human nature. This is because social problems are the consequences of how human beings respond to what each historical epoch defines as values that guide and direct social interactions in the society. Religion precisely as one of the realities that shapes the attitude of human beings has a lot to with regard to abating the menace of social problems in the society. This paper will examine various understanding of human nature, religion and the society. It will

adumbrate on the meaning of social problems and the absurdities involved. This paper will respond to how religion interacts with social problems as well as the difficulties it faces as it attempts to resolve these issues. Finally, it will examine the limitations that contemporary plural society poses to how religion solves social problems.

The Question of Human Nature

There are many responses to questions that concern the meaning of human nature. Some of these are: philosophical, anthropological, sociological, scientific, historical, social evolutionary, religious, etc. Each of them gives a perspectival approach to the meaning of human nature and its implication towards a better understanding of human existence, purpose of life, the society, and future of humanity. Thus, hermeneutics of human nature demands an interdisciplinary approach to this subject. This is in view of arriving at a comprehensive, though inexhaustive, interpretation of human nature. Since society is man writ large, a profound knowledge of human nature in its precariousness will aid a proper understanding and ordering of the society.

First, philosophical approach to human nature is not monolithic. Each philosophical school paints a particular picture of human nature. The essentialist and existentialist schools are the foundational building blocks for philosophical approaches to human nature. The essentialist school on human nature generally presupposes an ontological and/or theistic basis for understanding humankind. Contemporary response to essentialist approach to human nature is closely related to the scholastic philosophical traditions. In most essentialist views, humankind is 'born' in a particular way and it is this 'given by birth' that determines human nature (Secada, 2000:56). *Simili modo*, Aarsbergen-Ligtvoet, argues that all humans share in an unchangeable nature, yet not all essentialists are in agreement concerning what this foundational constituent is (2006: 68). However, the good thing about the essentialist understanding of human nature is that: according to this worldview, there is a normative template through which human behaviour could be interpreted. Based on this presupposition, common approaches to resolving social problems are possible across cultural boundaries.

On the other hand, existentialist approach to the meaning of human nature is quite different. For this world view, humankind's nature is basically determined and defined by existence and/or existential realities. Consequently, men and women are products of their existence. For instance, existentialists following Jean Paul Sartre are of the opinion that there is no

human nature *per se*. According to them, human nature is the handwork of the human condition. This means that human nature is determined by social conditions and other variables of nature rather than a foundational cause like essence or a 'given by birth' (Midgley, 2002: 5). In this way, there is nothing really universal about human nature. Culture, context, situation, societal values, etc. are factors that determine human nature. Therefore, cross-cultural approach to resolving social issues is problematic.

Another philosophical approach to the question of human nature lays emphasis on the difference between humans and other primates. Here, it is argued that that which differentiates humankind from other animals remains self-consciousness. The dynamics of auto-consciousness is more than seeing oneself in a mirror. It is the ability to know that one knows, think about thought, and in one word: auto-consciousness. Hence, for some philosophers, power of self-consciousness distinguishes human nature from the nature of other primates (Kainz, 2007:12). Therefore, as self-conscious beings, men and women are responsible for their actions in the society; they have moral obligations towards themselves and other members of human community.

Secondly, anthropological views on human nature, to an extent, reflect an existentialist approach to this question. Aarsbergen-Ligtvoet writes that anthropologists consider human nature to be what the society makes it since humans are social beings. Men and women are social beings there are always part of culture and social groups constantly in interrelationship of one kind or the other (66). Humankind precisely as social beings shape their lives and that of others around them. Hence anthropologically human interactions in the society remain a continuous negotiation of existence not towards a perfect but better society.

Thirdly, genetics and behavioural sciences are examples of scientific approach to human nature. These approaches suggest that human genes and natural environment condition a lot in human life. The genetic program is a very complex biological process that shows how chemical interactions in human beings influence human interactions and behaviours. However, Bearer argues that human behaviours over generations drive genetic mutations that in turn shape the changes in the society (2004: 171). Thus it is a two way dynamics: genetics and behavioural mutation simultaneously determine human nature. In addition, Pilnick (2002: 18) explains biological determinism as another scientific approach to understanding human nature. She states that human lives and actions are the fruits of biochemical properties embedded in cells that make up the human person. Biological determinism is a reductionist approach to human nature because it sees the cellular components of human biology as the sole decider and interpreter of

human persons. The limitation of scientific approach to human nature is its inability to account for the non-corporal dimension of the human persons. However, this approach complements other non-scientific hermeneutics on human nature.

Fourthly, religious approach to human nature is as rich as human experiences of the divine or supernatural. Semitic traditions that have shaped Judaism, Christianity, and Islamic religious experiences hold that humankind was created by a Transcendent being called God. And that human beings are not self-existent, they depend upon the Creator. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam affirm the fallen state of humanity and its dependence on the Creator (Ward, 1998: 3-4). Following the Christian tradition, Mueller avers that the malfunctioning and decline of the social order is caused by the wounds that original sin has inflicted upon human nature. Therefore, dysfunctional dynamics in the society could be traced to a fundamentally moral and religious nature of societal disorganization: sin at the origin (1984: 13). But Aarsbergen-Ligtvoet indicates that Isaiah Berlin, a social anthropologist, rejects the idea that humankind is wounded by original sin and that they can be perfect (77).

The above views when taken together will give an interdisciplinary approach to the study of human nature. This remains a holistic way through which one can arrive at an understanding this subject. This approach means that what various disciplines say about human nature should be considered. Even though it might be difficult to reconcile all these views, paying attention to what other disciplines say about human nature and what constitutes it will enrich the hermeneutics on the human beings as well as social interactions that define the society.

Deviance in whatever shape is part of human nature. Deviance is the fact of life because now and then one finds that certain individual or corporate actions violate the norms of the society. Each society deals with deviance by making rules and regulations that direct almost all spheres of human life. Again, where there are rules there is deviance because human beings do not always behave correctly. Every form of deviance threatens social cohesion of any organized system; it weakens the social bonds and disintegrates organized social activity. Cohen intimates that since the human persons do not always keep to the norms of the society because of various reasons and circumstances, deviance must be contained for the sake of the common good (1966: 11). Human behaviours that are considered to be deviant fall short of what the society holds as acceptable according to normative rules. Consequently, it is the society that defines deviancy.

Cultural pluralism is a given in contemporary society. Since plurality of culture defines contemporary human existence and actions, ethical pluralism is part and parcel of the dynamics of the society. Therefore, societal norms are equally influenced by the waves of cultural pluralism. With this, what is considered to be deviant in one cultural milieu might be considered otherwise in another. Henslin avers that even though deviance generally means the infraction of societal norms, cultural diversity makes the discourse on what constitutes deviance a very complex one. He mentions an example: 'Making a huge profit on a business deal is one example. Americans who do this are admired, Like Donald Trump, they may even write a book about it. In China, however, until recently, this same act was a crime called profiteering. Anyone who was found guilty was hung in a public square as a lesson to all' (2006: I34). This example highlights the need for cross-cultural ethics and values in view of creating a society wherein dialogue on values is possible towards a fair treatment of all.

In view of sustaining social order, the society enacts laws, punishes those who violate rules and rewards those who are exemplary in contributing to the social cohesion and stability of human family. Since the tendency towards deviance is in human nature, the society as a social institution remains indispensable for the future of the human family because its authority reduces the burden that social problems weigh on collective wellbeing of the people.

Society as Social Relationships

Human beings are social animals. The formation of society mirrors the social instinct in human beings to meet the demands of inter-relationship among members of each community. These inter-relationships take time to mature and evolve based on functional relationships among the members of the community. The integration of these relationships determines the future of the community. Given that human beings are self-seeking creatures as manifested in their pursuit of individual interests, they display this characteristic attitude and at times to the detriment of others in the community. Hence, without this organization, called society, humans would be wolves to themselves as described in the Hobbesian state of nature. It is in the society, that humans affirm their needs for others as social beings. Thus, one can say that: without the society it is difficult to discover the meaning of the human person as a relational being. Based on the foregoing, Goldschmidt describes society as organization of human beings in view of balancing off the pull of individual self-interests that threaten social harmony (1960: 219).

Civil society and its contemporary metamorphosis are closely connected to the classical (Greek) understanding of society and inter-relationships within it. In classical understanding of social relationship, the readiness to subject one's private interests freely to those of the city (was) is critical to the formation of an enduring civil society. According to Ehrenberg, the control of individual's self-interests is crucial to the existence of any society; consequently, a strong effective leadership is needed in view of counteracting the centrifugal force of harmful diversity that works against the unity and stability of the civil society. This recognition of central leadership role founded on culturally influenced ethical principles highlight the importance of institutions for the survival of civil society (1999: 7). Therefore, for the ordering of any society, the value system of the community must take seriously the ends of these complex interrelationships that constitute the society.

With the globalization of everything, the global civil society is genealogically vast. It can be considered as the constellation of many institutions all over the world in view of arriving at a new world order of interrelationship and interdependency. Global civil society is the product of post-global wars and conflicts that have taught humanity the necessity of functioning global institutions for the future of human society. In the global civil society, social actions are govern by unwritten and written rules that enable members of this world community to understand that many things are possible; yet not everything goes (Keane, 2003:10-11). One of the difficulties with the emerging global civil society is the particularity of cultures that make up these new communities. Since this paper is concerned with social issues, the pluralism in the emerging global civil society – which harbours many cultures and meanings – highlights the possibilities of conflicts in inter-cultural hermeneutics that shape societal values (14). This calls for cross-cultural dialogues in view of 'speaking' with agreeable value language despite cultural diversities.

As an alternative hermeneutics of the society, global civil society is a coalition of Non-Governmental, International Governmental and Non-Governmental Organizations concerned with challenging undemocratic and debilitating practices of unregulated globalization by those who control the political and economic dynamics of the world (Taylor, 2004: 2). Again, the question of ethical values and that which should be obtainable stand at the centre of the emerging global civil society. However, the plurality of cultures brings to bear the complexity of making things work in this emerging world order. Can religion facilitate this dialogue among cultures through its system of values?

Religious Values

Religion as a symbolic articulation of encounter with the sacred is part of human reality. This is partly because of human transcendence - the intrinsic desire for 'moreness' in human beings. Religion is also necessitated by humankind's desire to interpret his/her existence. Thus, as human encounter with the supernatural remains a means of interpreting existence through systems of beliefs and practices, humans begin to have control over their lives. This encounter with the divine is instrumental to promoting human wellbeing, personal satisfaction, social cohesion, certain world views and social control. Nevertheless, the dysfunctional aspect of religion is also a historical fact as evident in the retardation of social changes because it conceals the humanness of some cultural situations (Henslin, 405-6).The long silence of religion on slave trade and gender inequality overtly condoned in the past easily comes to mind.

The power of religion over human existence is so strong. The presence of the Omnipresent One pervades all human actions and interactions. Be it within the traditional ethnic religions or the world belief systems, the impact of religion on individuals and the community is so imperative that certain ways of doing things are defined by religious attitudes. Ter Borg and Van Henten describe the power of religion over people as follows:

> Religious convictions are the mold in which people shape their ideas about their social positions. The measure to which one gets what one deserves or not is often measured in religious terms. Religious arguments are proffered about the need and nature of the actions that are about to be taken. Because of its religious nature, the argumentation often assumes a supernatural aura of inevitability. In addition, religion has an ideological function: certain aspects of reality are emphasized at the expense of others (2010:7).

These convictions shaped by creeds and other sacred texts mold the system of values that define the rules of engagement and interactions in private forum and the public sphere. Religious institutions have a lot of influence upon the life of individuals in the society. Through their value systems, they contribute to the formation of peoples in virtues habit like honesty, truthfulness, compassion, etc. Hence, the participation of religious persons in social life of the society has enormous social consequences: orders are followed, rules are kept, crime rates are reduced and wellbeing is guaranteed. Religion as concretely expressed in world religions means that plurality of

religious belief systems will facilitate the multivalent impact of its power over the society.

Plurality underscores the conditionality of values that each religious system promotes. The difficulty with conditionality of values within a pluralistic context is that there is no overriding value that would take precedence over other values – there exist only relative values! Thus in a pluralistic setting, it is difficult to arrive at the establishment of an authoritative religious system that determines scale of values for the society (Kekes, 1993: 20). Nevertheless religion is a social capital that enhances better relationships in the society.

Religion as a Social Capital

Social capital can be described as an aspect of social relations that enables members of the society to collaborate for the common good of all. It is an instrumental capacity because through it other social benefits for the wellbeing of the society are possible. Social capital is one of the benefits of associational life. Trust is one of the benefits of social capital within the society. Trust is built, with time, through associational life wherein every member of the society remains convinced that being truthful and honest is an important behavioural attitude that sustains fair transaction. There is no gainsaying that without trust, relationships in the society comes to nothing. Therefore, social capital, for example trust, is productive and end oriented and it generates other goods (Smidt, 2003: 5).

Some of the elements of social capital are: obligations, norms, sanctions, and supports. Concerning *social obligation*, in the generation of social capital all the members of the society are conscious of the fact that everyone is expected to make sacrifices in view of fulfilling anticipated or expected obligations. For instance, given that the maintenance of social amenities is for the common good and that the mainstay of this social commitment is funds generated from taxes; everyone should pay taxes regularly. *Norms and sanctions* are necessary means for checking defaulters who do not feel obliged to meet the demands of the society but wants to benefit from the common good. Prescriptive norms and corrective sanctions enable members of the society to eschew selfishness for collective good. *Social support* is the means through which societal institutions facilitate actions for collective interest. For example paying taxes to provide social amenities and constraining others from going against common good by sanctioning those who default on their social obligations (Coleman, 1990: 311-13). The following elements can be applied to religion as a social capital.

Religion is a huge social capital for the development of the society. This dimension of social life should foster good relationships and peaceful co-existence among members of the believing community and outsiders. Since the associational life of those who share the same belief is geared towards the perfection of love among themselves and non-believers, religion has a depository of social capital that can transform the society if properly harnessed. With religious obligations founded on doctrine and practice; norms and sanctions are explained as the demands of organised religion. In this regard, religious institutions as instruments of social capital are indispensable for the stability and growth of the society. Through its institutions, religion instills the fear of the sacred in the life of its adherents. This respect for the divine and the promise it holds encourages virtuous living that remains a huge social capital of religion. When this capital is properly utilized, it can remedy the adverse effects of social problems.

Social Problems: A Description or Definition?

A family helping a ward struggling with drug addiction knows what that means: the anxieties, embarrassment, and havoc associated with this menace. The scourge of hunger does need an encyclopaedia for this to be put into words. These are two examples of social problems. Social problems destabilize the dynamics of relationship in the family and the society at large because of the harm they inflict on those directly and indirectly concerned. The following are other types of social problems: abortion, inequality, AIDS, alcoholism, juvenile delinquency, prostitution, child abuse, pornography, corruption, murder, police brutality, poverty, population pressure, crime, xenophobia, racial discrimination, dictatorship, tribal discrimination, spouse abuse, divorce, suicide, unemployment, stress, environmental degradation, ethnic conflict, gambling, vandalism, violence, incest, pre-marital sex, adultery, human rights violation, war, capital punishment, etc.

Beeghley defines social problem as:

> a harmful condition identified by a significant number of people and recognized politically as needing improvement. According to this definition, social problems have three aspects that should be discussed. (1) An objective part shows the extent of harm. (2) A subjective component indicates that a harmful condition has been identified and political debate ensued. And (3) an optimistic aspect suggests that people believe the condition can be improved (1999: 5).

According to the above definition, *it is the society that determines what constitutes a social problem or not*. This means that social problems are contingent upon the value system of the society and they are as well historically conditioned. This historicity equally conditions values systems of the society. For example, street hawking by underage children in the 1980s Nigerian society was not considered child abuse. But in present-day Nigeria, historical conditions have changed the redefinition of child rights that prohibits such commerce hence rendering it a deviant action in the society.

Furthermore, the above definition mentions that social problems can be described as *historically conditioned behaviours that are considered undesirable and harmful by the society.* These social conditions constitute a problem to the society because they threaten the life and future of those who make up this social community especially in relation to health and social welfare. In one way or the other, social problems hurt inter-relationships in the society based on what members of the community accept as correct or incorrect. For example, corruption hurts equitable redistribution of wealth, adultery harms the stability of family life, drug abuse wrecks the life of those involved and that of their loved ones, incest abuses the proper expression of sexual relationship etc.

Social problems have social roots: These are problems rooted in the quality of social interactions among the members of the society (Rwomire, 2001:5). Hence, it is to be solved by collective effort of all members of the society. An individual cannot solve a social problem by herself or himself. For example, Nigerians clamour for the eradication of corruption in all spheres of life. They yearn for the newly elected President Mohammadu Buhari to fix the social system wrecked by corruption. But they need to be aware that since corruption is a social problem that hurts the social order, they are to search for a collective way of sanitizing the system for the president alone cannot solve the problem of corruption.

Social problems affect a significant percentage of the society: The assessment of what constitutes a significant percentage of society is always difficult to determine. Xenophobia is a case in point. For example, the social problem of xenophobia in South Africa directly affected a small percentage of non-South Africans. Yet, the ripples of its effect spread all through South Africa. In this case, a significant number of those outside South Africa used their political weal to draw attention to violent discrimination meted against other members of the society because of their 'otherness.'

Social problems are perceived by the society as conditions that are redeemable through collective effort: In the social psychic of the people, social problems are caused by breakdown of order by some members of the society. Hence, there is this social optimism that where there is reorientation of values and enforcement of order the harm caused by social problems could be managed or reduced. This means that issues that do not directly originate from the society are not considered social problems.

Natural disasters are not social problems: This is because social relationships or interactions within the society are not the direct cause of natural disaster. For example, an earthquake is not a social problem because violent subterranean movements are outside the control of human beings. Nevertheless, made-made environmental disasters can hardly be defined as 'natural disaster' in the strict sense of the word. This opens up the discourse on how environmental degradation, climate change and social problems are connected.

Social problems are also caused by the failure of social institutions to provide amenities such as food, health care, education, or law and order to a greater number of the population (Rwomire, 2001: 5). Therefore, social problems are the consequences of uncontrolled deviant behaviours in the society. Thus, social institutions in the society have to enact laws that will guarantee an effective control of those who do not behave according to regulations of the community.

Complexities in Understanding Social Problems

Some complexities in understanding social problems are as follows: differences in culture, the political power of the few (hegemony), and problem of pluralism.

Cultural differences and social problems **are closely related:** This is because cultural differences affect how people understand social values and social problems. For this reason, certain descriptions of social issues are contextual. In contemporary culture, there is no one *spirit*; there are many *spirits* making their voices heard in the public square. Kane symbolical describes contemporary era as a Tower of Babel wherein so much fuse have been made about points of view as being historically and culturally conditioned; realities are seen from particular perspectives (1994: 1). Under this condition, what constitutes a social problem in one area might not be

necessarily so in another cultural milieu. For instance, on January 7, 2014, the then Nigerian President Dr. Goodluck Jonathan signed into law Same Sex Marriage (Prohibiton) Act. Iheyen (online source) argues that this legal document criminalizes same-sex relationships because according to Section 45(a) of the Nigerian Constitution, these acts are injurious to public morality that threatens traditional understanding of family and sexual activity. On 26 June, 2015, the Supreme Court in the US ruled that gay marriage is legal nationwide. In delivering the verdict, Justice Anthony Kennedy (online source) wrote that "the plaintiffs (the gay community) asked for equal dignity in the eyes of the law. The Constitution grants them that right." For the Nigerian cultural context same-sex relationship is a moral wreck to the society hence a social problem; but in the US, it is right of citizens. This is just an example of complexities in understanding social problems wherein different cultural contexts define one social reality in dissimilar ways.

***Social problems and the political power of the few*:** The political power of the few can determine how social problems are viewed. Tatalovich, Smith, and Bobic (1994:2) write that morality policies are founded in personal belief system on core values concerning race, gender, sexuality, and religion. The politics of morality policy is more evident in a plural society with little consensus over certain core values. Hence, Mooney (2001: 4) avers that morality policy "reflects values on which there exists no overwhelming consensus in a polity." The political power of the few, in the West, is undoubtedly driving the discourse on human sexuality. Through its lobby groups and political alignments, societal values are undergoing redefinition and legality are given to them through the court. With this political might, values are redefined and what constitute social issues is renegotiated especially sexually related ones. The complexity of meaning as regards social values is complicated by the interests of the powerful few!

Pluralism and social problems: Pluralism when carefully resolved enriches realities from different perspectives especially when there is a foundational approach to the subject being discussed. However, when there is no basic understanding of a particular subject, realities are viewed from the binoculars of cultural pluralism which purports that diverse social, moral, political or cultural conceptions are equally legitimate on their own terms (Sandler and Townley, 2005:4). Therefore, where values are viewed differently and at the same time legitimate, conception of social problems by many groups within a pluralistic society is bereft of a wider consensus on what constitutes norms and deviance. Within this context, the description of social problems is

blurred by fault lines of relativism of all sorts. These aforementioned complexities in describing or defining social problems question the social capital of religion and its power to 'heal' the wounds of social problems. Thus, the question still remains: can religion resolve social problems?

How Religion Solves Social Problems

In the foregoing discussion, the plurality of meaning as regards human nature has been surveyed. The force of religion and its social capital were examined. The descriptive meaning and definition of social problems have been attended to. Nonetheless, the complexities bordering on common understanding of social problems came to the fore. This section will examine how religion solves social problems.

In the first place, with the help of religious socialization, religion stands out as an agency of transformation. Religion as agent of socialization is powerful if it is being trusted and also value connected (Sherkat, 2003: 151). This means that religion to an extent 'earns' its transformative power when solving social problems is concerned. It can do this by being trust-worthy instrument that transmits values that are capable of changing lives. In view of this, witnessing to the values that religion stands for necessarily demands the formation of concrete structures of change. For example, in the Victorian England, the social vice of drunkenness was pervasive. This vice destabilized many homes and the social effects of it were felt by the society here and there. Olsen explains how the clergy initiated the Temperance Movement to curb many vices with Teetotal Society attending to drunkenness. This evangelical and non-denominational initiative helped those affected: they were encouraged to imbibe the virtue of self-control, to drink tea rather than alcoholic drinks and some who lost their jobs were provided with another. At the end of the day, some families were saved because husbands, wives, and children who collaborated with Temperance Movement programme were given a new hope (1989: 239-240). There are many Non-Governmental Organizations set up religious bodies for the purpose of reversing the damaging effects of social problems in the society.

Religious education is another means through which religious institutions form the social imagination of people by moulding their characters. There is a close connection between social understanding and character formation (education). Religious education has the potential of helping pupils and students to acquire moral values and this process is equally known as socialization. In the process, they develop their identity as persons with a particular religious orientation. Through this orientation, they

encourage themselves in the campus or schools towards living exemplary life and in attracting others to their fold they can save some people from falling into any of the social vices and problems. Hence, religious education serves corrective platforms for and preventive measures to social problems. Arthur argues in the same vein by stating that religion plays a substantial part in character formation since it places emphasis on the dignity of human beings; again most of the schools educate their wards on 'the golden rule' - a norming norm that cut across the religions (2002: 148).

Finally, hierocratic domination is an aspect of religion. Hall points that this control has a way of shaping the life of its adherents or followers and thus serving as means of social control (2003:369). This is partly because religion promises its adherents 'salvation' from certain realities that bother them – this worldly or other-worldly. For instance, the commitment to a religious conviction which holds that righteousness exalts a nation can go a long way to impacting a positive change in the society. When this commitment is sustained by institutional encouragements it can reduce the magnitude of social problem like corruption.

Hierocratic domination is not monolithic, it differs according to religious organizations. It is important to note that hierocratic domination should not degenerate into fear mongering mechanism that spreads violence, limits human freedom, and promotes torture in the name of religion. When this happens, religion itself will backslide into an agent of social problem like terrorism. Religion is an important agent of socialization because of its intrinsic power towards the transformation of human persons that constitute the society. Since most societies of the world are found in secular states, religion will play a tangential and crucial role towards reducing the menace of social problems.

CONCLUSION

This paper exposes the complexities and limitations that are related to contemporary understanding of social problems. It brings out the historical condition that undergirds any attempt to define or describe social problems. This work asserts that it is the society that defines social problems, thus when each society changes its scales of values its perception of deviancy changes. This reality constitutes a problem for cross-cultural engagements on some social problems. Another important contribution of this paper to scholarship is that any discourse on social problems should take seriously the understanding of human nature from interdisciplinary perspective. This is

because it enables a wide-range hermeneutics of humankind and a comprehensive view of how social problems can be treated.

Finally, in spite of the limitations posed by cultural differences, political pressures, and pluralistic views on values, religion will ever remain crucial to solving social problems. The reason being that religion is an agent of socialization, transformation, and integration. However, in order to achieve its goals as regards 'healing' the wounds of social problems, religion must be credible, its institution must be trustworthy and its social works must be differentiated from mere philanthropy.

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