

ETHICAL TRANSFORMATION AND VALUE REORIENTATION IN NIGERIA: A RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Ethical transformation and value reorientation have recently become the main focus or issue addressed by governmental agencies, institutions, organizations, individuals and non governmental agencies due to the decay in their values, ethics and morality in the society. This paper focuses on the state of moral decadence in the society. And refocuses the traditional values and ethics to recapitulate the standard maintain in the past. It also emphasizes ethical standard of religions such as Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion. It suggests measures through which the ethics and values of these religions could be rekindled and re enforced adequately to achieve the desired moral status in the society.

It is now a matter of common knowledge and experience that many of our Nigerian citizens worship money, wealth and all that money can buy. That Nigeria is presently going through moral vices is no longer news in any part of the globe. According to Uduigwomen (2006), the moral vices prevalent in our society includes fraud, kickback, "419", embezzlement of public funds, armed robbery, brazen corruption in high places, squander mania, exploitation, discrimination, inflated contracts, extortion of money from students, alcoholism, drug abuse, get rich – quick syndrome, Machiavellianism, looting of treasury, globe-trotting with tax payers money, political thuggery, nepotism, naira –counterfeiting, cultism, occultism, examination malpractice, general indiscipline and a host of other vices.

Omeregbe (1993), gave a vivid and clear picture of the moral situation in Nigeria when he said: “it is clear to all right thinking Nigerians that the basic problem of the nation is a moral one. It is therefore clear that the state of moral decadence has led to the continuous cry for ethical transformation and value re-orientation. Man in the twenty first century may be trying to alienate himself from an absolute being(God), through his developmental strides in the field of physics, nuclear capabilities, space exploitations, biodiversities, and science and technology which are actually the root cause of evil or vices in the society.

Religion encompasses ethics, values and morality and all this aspect of religion have from time immemorial have been found to safe guard society. This is because man is essentially a religious being, naturally and remarkably endowed with moral sense and the capacity for ethical reflections (Iwe ,2008). If he is well guided through the moral and ethical sanctions found in religion.

Ethics is intrinsically related to morality and is also related to religion. Religion is products of people’s culture and as such influenced by the respective cultures in which they are found. Thus it is this relativity in culture that is transmitted to ethics in terms of its application in the divergent situations or setting. With proper inculcation of the ethical values in religion, the society becomes balance in terms of values and human uprightness.

Conceptual Framework

For clarity, some concepts within the write up will be considered, such as, ethics, ethical transformation, value and value reorientation.

Ethics

Ethics is a code or set of principles by which men live. It is the role which guides the action of men in the society. Barclay (1972) refers to it as “the science of behavior”. Again, Larcey (1976) defines ethics as “the study of whether there are any values each and every person should pursue, whether there is a set of virtues as a code of principles of conduct for everyone and what these are if they do exist”. In the same vein, Uduigwomen (2006), defines ethics as being synonymous with moral, both connoting customs, habits and accepted ways of behavior of an individual or a community.

More so, ethics is the principles of right and wrong that are accepted by an individual or a social group, “ the puritan ethics”, it is also a system of principles governing morality and acceptable conduct(word net web Princeton . edu. /per/.web wn). Ethics is further describe in connection with moral philosophy, that is , it is a branch of philosophy which seeks to address questions about morality, that is, about concepts such as good and bad, right and wrong, justice, and virtue (en. Wikipedia.org./wik/ethic).

Finally, ethics is a principle of right and wrong behavior guiding or representative of, specific culture, society or group. It is the morality of an action (en.wiktionary. org./wiki-ethic).

Transformation

Transformation is the act of qualitative change. It is also the act or an instance of transforming. The state of being transformed.(wordnetweb-princeton.edu/perl/webwn-definition in context).

Ethical Transformation

Ethical transformation would therefore mean the ability to transform the decayed moral standard in the society.

Values

Uduigwomen (2006), expatiating on values asserted that whether we are aware of it or not, we are constantly involved in valuation and making value judgments in our everyday life. For Denga(1983), values represent reasons, beliefs, convictions or virtues that guide people's actions. Uduigwomen further posits that values are also philosophical considerations which help an individual personally to judge how reasonable, truthful and appropriate his actions and relationship with others. In the words of Akinpelu (1981), values primarily refer to those objects which we cherish, appreciate, desire, want or need.

Values may be social, religious, moral, spiritual, aesthetic, political, economical, technological, materials and so on, depending on the discipline an individual finds himself.

Reorientation

According to Hornby (1974) reorientation is to do something again. It is also to make anew.

Value Reorientation

This is the ability to bring back the good values of old back into existence. It could also be the efforts made towards re-enacting the good values and the ability to inculcate these values on the individual or members of a society.

Ethical Values in the Three Main Religions in Nigeria

This section address issues on ethical values in the three main religions in Nigeria, these are Christian, Islam and African traditional religion.

Christian Ethical Value

In spite of the multiplicity of doctrines which are prevalent within Christianity, it is still possible to construct homogenous doctrines which can be tacked Christian ethics. Popkin and stroll have identified three main streams of ethical thought which can be called "Christian ethics". These include: the pastoral Christian ethics. This refers to certain moral views of some early Christians sect, their views are said to develop out of Judaism and Persian mystical religions. This type of Christian ethics emphasizes the Ten Commandments, rites and the moral teaching of Jesus Christ. This type of Christian ethics is so called because it has little or nothing to do with abstract speculations.

The second type of Christian ethics according to Popkin and Stroll(11969) is called “church ethics” it came into existence after the roman catholic church developed into an institution , socially and politically. However, this type of Christian ethics underwent some changes during the times of Saint Augustine and superseded by those of Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century. Therefore, never stood the taste of time. This shift was a shift from neo-platonism to aristotelianism.

The third type of Christian ethics proposed by Popkin and Stroll is the protestant ethics which developed out of the reformation. Many of the ethical doctrines of Catholicism as expressed by St. Thomas Aquinas were rejected by the Protestants. Ironically, there were many variations in ethical doctrine among the different protestant sects.

It must be mentioned that in spite of the variations in the moral doctrines of then different sects within Christianity, there exist certain pervasive traits which serve to distinguish Christianity from other religions and also by which we are justified in using the term “Christian ethics” as a single and distinct doctrine. Some of these common traits are the belief in the existence of God, the belief in the humanity and divinity of Christ and “the other worldly idea of a final judgment culminating in salvation of perdition”(Randell and Bucher, 1971).

The teachings of Christ as contained in the gospels, the apostles and certain ethical prescriptions of the old testament such as the Decalogue (ten commandment) are assumed to constitute a moral code. Iwe (2003), also proposed that Christian ethics contains that the central tenet of Christian ethics is that “the good life for man consists in the love of God and that this good life can be attained by behaving in accordance with God’s precepts. Therefore, disordered love leads to disordered individual as well as disordered community. Iwe has also portrayed love as the preeminent, supreme and indispensable ethical role of the New Testament.

Central to Christian ethics is the notion of conscience. It is conscience that helps the Christian to differentiate the good from the bad, the right from wrong . Another central element of Christian ethics is faith in God which enables man’s soul to be converted. These Christian ethical values help to mold the individual and enables human becomes morally upright individual in the society.

Islamic Ethical Values

It is said that the moral ideas of ancient Arabs and largely influenced the origin and development of Islamic ethics. Before the advent of Mohammedan poetry, moral knowledge was prevalent such as warning against pride and threatening of divine wrath or vengeance were occasionally informed. It is from the above, Mohammed emerged as a reformer and revivalist of morals (Uduigwomen, 2006).

Mohammed urged personal belief and personal morality. To achieve personal morality, the Quran emphasizes the need of repentance, conversion and the possession of a good heart and a changed spirit. Therefore, the Islamic ethical values are well embedded in the teachings of Mohammed which are found within the Islamic text “the quran”.

The central of Islamic ethics is the love of Allah which are mostly profess by the suffites who are found to be men if impeccable moral conduct. Also, the brethren off purity held that man must show the deepest love and respect for Allah in order to win freedom from sensual passion here, and hereafter the ascent to the eternal light. Therefore, the love for Allah, centralize the Islamic religion which serves as the determining factor which enable man to live an upright life.

Islamic ethical values also maintain that man is born originally good and pure, unlike Christian religion where man is originally born with sin. Therefore, this perfection or sinlessness can only be marred by bad actions and unbelief heart. However, man can regain his original individual perfection if he consciously recognizes Allah's oneness and constantly submits to his will. Islam claims that the human nature is inclined both to do good and act ethically, and to disobey god or act immorally. In view of Islam, therefore, man is neither fallen nor saved because he is not fallen he does not need a savior.

It rather holds that since the human soul is the spirit of god himself, man is created to assimilate more and more of god's attributes morality, therefore consist in the effort to develop and preserve these attributes and values. The best man is he who is best in conduct and the most perfect believer is a man of good conduct. The aim of all morality is "help one another in righteousness and virtue. But help not one another in sin and transgression" (Ekarika, 1987).

According to Omoregbe (1993) Islamic ethics is centered on god – consciousness and universal brotherhood. As creatures of god, the all knowing and all seeing, god sees and knows what human beings to serve him and lead morally upright lives before him.

From the foregoing, it is clearly seen that Islamic ethical values is centered on the love of Allah , which it and it alone can lead man to righteous living and achievement of perfection in the society. If this is jealously followed, the society and in fact the world will be without vices.

Ethical Values of African Traditional Religion

From the above heading, efforts are made to highlight ethical issues in relation to African traditional religion projected from the basic tenets or belief, attitudes, taboos, rites, rituals and ceremonies of the religion. Since the religion has no written document, the doctrine of the religion is basically written in the heart or minds of its practitioners. Mbiti (1992) asserted that there are no sacred scripture. The religion is written not on paper but in the people's hearts, minds, oral history, ritual and religious personages like priest, rainmakers, officiating elders and even kings. Therefore, when these sources are observed, we have a good knowledge of African religious ethics as could be derived from their basic religious tenet.

Thus, from the frame work of beliefs, rituals and rites of African traditional religion, we can identify certain ethical principles. These principles include honesty, justice, chastity, love, respect, for human life, integrity, self- discipline, humility, patience, industry, and brotherliness. Ndukka and Iheoma (1983) group those ethical values into two: the vertical ones, that is those that characterizes our relationship with

the divine, God or gods, and the horizontal one that is, those characterizing our relationship with fellow human beings. God is acknowledged as the final guardian of the moral code of law and order. Morality is believed to flow from God and God's nature demands an appropriate response from his creatures. Since in African traditional religion, there is belief in life after death, god's interest in morality does not end in this life as it is believed by some west African societies that God will make a final judgment after death (Uduigwomen, 2006).

The sense of right and wrong is part of human nature and a part of African religion and the religion teaches that God demands that man should do that which is right. Therefore, to do that which is right is man's obligation to God, hence signifies that African traditional religion is not far from other religion in terms of ethical values.

Ethical Transformation and Value Re-orientation in Nigeria

Nigeria is in a state of moral crisis, the level of moral crisis is very high so that every field of human endeavor is plague with vices which are reflections of an even deeper malaise, namely, the lack of commitment to a viable moral base and the consequent lack of moral integrity. This lack of moral integrity is reflected in various forms of misdemeanor, such as rampant fraud, stealing, robbing, nepotism, forgery, examination malpractices and corruption which is fast becoming entrenched in Nigerian public life.

Writing on the state of moral education in Nigeria Ndukka (1975), asserted that the result of the weakening of traditional belief and costumes has disintegrated the moral values in the country. The advent of western education in Nigeria persuaded the indigenes to abandon their religious beliefs in favor of western values because they seemed too convenient and since they provided an easy escape from stringent demands of the indigenous moral codes. Therefore the collapse of the traditional values destroyed the moral education inherited through African Traditional system in Nigeria.

The state of moral decadent is so deplorable that government at all time has been searching for measurable ways of curbing these vices. The Nigerian government has put in place a lot of efforts to orientate Nigerians to imbibe the culture of virtue and to shorn immoral acts. Different government administration has over time come out with different strategies to curb crime in the society. Example, in the Buhari administration there was the introduction of War against Indiscipline (WAI) to change the immoral attitude of Nigerians for better. Again, the administration of Obasanjo saw the introduction of Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) to check corruption in Nigeria. Other agencies created by the Nigerian government to ensure ethical and moral values in Nigeria are Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) whose emphasis are on restoring the good moral values inherent in traditional society. With the slogan (morally or ethically bribery is wrong) this agency tries to inculcate moral value on the Nigerian citizens. Sadly enough most these policies made by the Nigerian government are still altered by the custodian of power and authorities in Nigeria.

Nigerian government has also set up what is known as SERVECOM that is an agency that deal with ethical and moral values in relation to how services should be

discharged in governmental offices to customers, workers attitude to work, and also to check corrupt practices in among civil servant and public servant. The police, army, military, and paramilitary are not left out in the fight against corrupt practices in Nigeria.

However, the efforts of these government agencies may yield one or more dividends, the effects of these agencies disappear as soon as government changes hands. More so, all the various stringent penalties put in place for offenders do not change the perpetrators of these vices from committing these immoral crimes. Example is the importation of illegal weapon of war and ammunitions by an Arab merchant base in Nigeria who refuses to disclose the identity of those who requested those weapons. Another example is the continuous and incessant religious crisis in Jos Plateau state as well as incessant burning of fuel pipe lines in the Niger Delta. Also, the first October 2010 Abuja bomb blast.

Against the back drop, religion is the strongest and well institutionalize measures that can be used to achieve the desired moral statuesque in the Nigerian society. Ethics is intrinsically related to morality and is also related to religion. Religion is products of people's culture and as such influenced by the respective cultures in which they are found. Culture only differs from one area to another, hence its relativity. Thus, it is this relativity in culture that is transmitted to ethics in terms of its application in the divergent situations or setting (Uduigwomen, 2006). In this vein, we say that religion as part of culture can be transmitted to transform and re-orientate the moral and ethical value in Nigeria.

Furthermore, ideas they say are powerful instrument that can influence human behavior and shape human society. Religion is basically fill with ideas and doctrines which are often gotten from divine power and authority, there is no doubt that if these ethical principles inherent in religion are translated by religious leaders into political and moral instructions, it could go a long way in reducing to the barest minimum vices that hamper the progress of this great country Nigeria., while at the same time maximizing moral rectitude social justice , accountability, peaceful co-existence and the rule of law.

Religion and morality interacts, therefore can influence the behavior of individuals involve in religious activities. In the words of idowu (1977) morality is the fruit of religion that is God created man and implanted in him a sense of right and wrong. The sense of right and wrong is part of human nature. God demands that man should do that which is right. Thus, to do that which is right, is man's obligation to God. It is in this vein, this paper propagates the use of religion to inculcate and actualize the desired moral statuesque which other governmental agencies can not achieve.

In the light of the above, Ughorojeh, (2008) lamented that while all successive governments have taken time and care to identify and condemn the evil corruption plaguing the nation (Nigeria) not much efforts has been made to combat it. He therefore, opined that the legal approach is not enough, but the government as a matter of urgency should integrate religion as complement to the fight against corruption. Good example is what prophet T.B. Joshua of the synagogue church of all nation many

crime offenders have frequently gone there to repent of their evil ways because of the power of the holy spirit.

Religion is expected to stabilize the country as it places much emphasis on morality. It is regarded as vanguard for propagating morals. The ability of an individual to behave in a way that shows self-respect and stay calm, even in a very difficult situation is regarded as dignity and this could be apparently found in religion. This is why Karl Marx described religion as the opium of the masses.

Religion is a changing factor in every facet of human life. It is highly needed in a decadent contemporary Nigerian society. Every religion has moral principles, which are meant to guide human conduct or behaviour, therefore, it is the goal of religion to ensure that all adherent are morally upright. The role of religion in terms of transformation, reformation or reorientation can never be over emphasized. Onwuka (2008), opined that religion has enough teachings, which and when strictly adhered to will make life meaningful and our country will experience peaceful co-existence and rapid development.

Ughorejeh (2008) asserts that the nature of religion is such that it is capable of meeting the demands and challenges of governance as the people are regarded as the people of God. More so, African are notoriously religious people, meaning that Nigerians are not left out and almost every one claims allegiance to one religion or the other. Therefore, the religiosity of Nigerians is capable of making contributions in the setting of new standards, morals and ethics to clean our society of the present social ills.

Conclusion

Religion has been at all times seen as a unifying force in the society, a means of social solidarity, social participation and social motivation. Therefore, all religion should vigorously emphasize its basic tenets and most seriously make greater efforts at inculcating these tenets and beliefs in its adherents to effectively transform the society.

If religious doctrines and tenets permeate all facet of human life and people are morally discipline through religion, there is no doubt that there will be peace and progress in the society. Hence, ethical transformation and value reorientation through religion is the most adequate and sustainable means of achieving ethical and moral reformation in Nigeria.

Suggestions

1. Religion functions for social solidarity, participation, and motivation which help to foster unity and environmental upliftment. Therefore, all religions should encourage conspicuous ethical and moral ordinance, and denounce sycophancy attitude towards those who embezzle wealth from the wrong source.
2. Religious leaders should learn to teach their adherent that religion demands they should live and lead by example. Religious materialism should totally be devoid from religious practices as practice by most of these new generation

churches, as this will inspire people to be greedy and aspire for material wealth in spite of their resources.

3. The fear of God should be the major theme of every religion in Nigeria. Religious leaders should be actively involved in the electoral process to ensure only suitable candidate are sworn into office, this will help to put people of reputable character in offices and the end result will be ethical and morally guided citizens.

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