

# THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN RELIGION AND MORALITY/MORAL EDUCATION: IMPLICATION FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

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## **Abstract**

The relationship between religion and morality or moral education is contentious. Some persons believe that morality and moral education are founded on religion. This paper discovered that religious principles are different from that of morality. That the focus of religion is God with the ultimate matter of an issue beyond the ordinary human existence. However, it believes that belief systems, systems of morals and law have linked up somehow with the concepts of religion and morality /moral education. The paper however posits that systems of values and morality in Africa have been linked up with religion to the extent that everyone sees Africa as they see religion, take moral principles as the same with the principles of indigenous African cultic and religious laws. It has been discovered that no logical and empirical relationships really exist between religion and morality. But that the real dilemma was experienced when religious education was taught as moral education. This study believes that the religious approach to morality is inadequate to address the moral problems in a pluralistic society. It finally calls for the teaching of moral principles instead of religious ones. That moral autonomy and rational morality in systematic moral education be considered in Africa.

## **Introduction**

The concepts of religion and morality are not without controversy based on their incompatibility. The relationship between religion and morality is contentious. It has been a common knowledge that morality or moral education is founded on religion. In the wake of state take-over of schools in Nigeria for instance, the contention on the relationship between religion and moral education was intensified. People argue that the reason for the moral decadence (crisis) in Nigeria and elsewhere in African countries has been the product/result of state control of schools. That the school controlled by the church/mission have high moral standards and hence good academic excellence. Okere (1983:56), unequivocally maintained that: .

Religion is not only relevant but also absolutely necessary for moral education to have content, direction and effectiveness. All those people are grossly mistaken who think they can separate religions or denominational indoctrination from pure moral systems that would be a common denominator of morality, valid for all and acceptable to all.

The argument has been totally supported by the claim that morality rests on religion, which defined the purpose, of human existence as sanctioned by God the Creator. It is therefore deduced that religion can inform all about man's purpose, which will in turn, be a guiding principle of his conduct. The paper has two issues to address. First is the issue of logicity or empirical controversy between religion and morality/moral education. Second, to make a case for moral education.

## **Religion and Morality**

Religion in the word of Cicero "religare" means, "to bind", or "to join". Religion is the link between man and God. A sum total of man's relationship with God. Okere (1983:54) stated that:

Religion caters especially for the spiritual side of man. By the spiritual side of man, I mean the area beyond food and drink and material needs; the area where we can ask for the meaning of life; the area where we can look death and evil in the face, and see beyond them.

To support the etymological meaning, Okereed(1983), further maintained that it is of ultimate meaning of man's life, his whence and wherefore. The subject matter of religion is man's innermost being. Religion is not a region or an aspect of man's existence. The concept of religion as Okere has shown is focussed on God - the ultimate matter of an issue beyond the ordinary human existence. It looks beyond death and evil. Then if this is true of religion perhaps, morality and moral education cannot have the same focus with it.

But the complex nature of religion has since depended on its coverage, that is, covering belief systems, systems of morals, ritual and laws. This nature has given religion a link with morality and moral education. But very importantly, the system of morals which religion emphasizes so much is closely linked up with rituals that cannot be accepted by every tribe. This quickly points to an apparent distinction between religion and moral education/morality. This would demand an explanation of the concept of morality.

Morality from the original Latin word "mores" corresponds to the Greek word "ethos". Morality, therefore, simply means the theory of what is right or wrong in human conduct or action. Morality that calls for moral education becomes necessary because man is said to be moral animal and being of natural dignity. So morality or human code of conduct becomes imperative for the individual and the society.

Morality simply put, is a value system translated in an action for effective human relationship or association.

Moral education is needful for the identification, definition/clarification and orientation of values and systems of values. For this purpose, moral education becomes part of education or the aim of education. It is not untrue that religious education equally needed moral uprightness within a set of people and place. This is limited to as far as the religion could permit. Moral education on its own, is universal; product of a general norm and basically rational and promoting justice. The highlight continues to reveal apparent confusion in the concepts and application of religion and moral education. Confusions emerge from the views that morality without God's authority cannot be possible and morality without sanction from the concept of life after death will not be effective. I will address these issues from the African practices.

### **The Dilemma of Religious and Moral Practice in Africa**

First, religion in Africa is seen as same as cultures which supposes to give meaning-to morality. This belief actually brought in the confusion experienced in religious belief in Africa. Akama (2001), maintained that any non-western cultures are based on a religion or a religious outlook. He further, mentioned that in Africa, for instance, the whole structures of village are so intimately interwoven with religious views. Consequently, one cannot understand fully the traditional African philosophy and vision of life without the spiritual and supernatural dimension. So the systems of values and morality in Africa have been muddle up to the extent that everyone sees Africa as they see religion. It implies that if religious tenet is bad, then the Africans are equally bad, if it has good system of values, it will be applicable to our actions. Whatever changes that take place in the people's religion ultimately affect their identity.

For instance, when Christianity came into Africa it was considered not only as a religion but also as a culture and therefore, a total way of life of the people. J. M. Kosemani, argued in favour of religiousless moral education and how it should be considered in Africa.

In this, an attempt is made to examine the possibility of moral education based not on religion but on public criteria. It is my view that as a result of the ... nature of our society, religion should be placed in its traditional position. That, it should be treated as a private social institution and morality should be based on public principles, (Kosemani 1990: 36).

In the view of Kosemani, as quoted, religion should play its traditional function while moral education should be allowed to take its normal course focussing on public principles. If this view is considered worthwhile the dilemma would have been in a way resolved. In subscribing to Kosemani and many others on the same view, it would be ideal for Africans to look at the significant difference between religion and moral education and strive to upgrade the moral education curriculum. This may not only end having an enviable curriculum but also, the raising of moral agents- the teachers who must be role models and fundamental moral agents.

Second, the religious principles are the same with the principles of indigenous African cultic and civic laws. What the religious cult approved of that is practiced, and what it condemns is equally condemned as illegal (civic). In this wise, a set of duties formulated" as branch of religious (cultic) cum public (civic) law sanctioned by stated punishment and penalties (Wotogbe-weneka, 2001). In the main, laws are made for guiding human conducts with the supreme beings, the various African divinities, spirits

and ancestors. In the process, deities such as Ifa and Orinlase of the Yorubas Amadioha, Ozuzu in Ozuzu Etche and York-Obolo in Andoni in Nigeria amongst too many others, are worshiped in the name of being moral.

The arrival of other religions such as Christianity and Islam in African Countries makes the whole matter controversial. The Christian religious tenet forbids the worship of deities or idols so also Islam. The implication of this is apparent clashes and crises among the various religions. It may be unjust, unethical and ordinarily irrational for religion to be used as sources of morality or content of moral education. According to Gwamna (1996:58):

Africans believe that God manifests Himself in various places and they consider such places sacred because they provide direct access to human encounter with the divine.

This belief leads to the building of shrines for idols, just as the Christians and Moslems build churches and mosques respectively. What one needs to show here in religious dilemma is apparent diversity in all its ramifications both in belief systems, values and value systems. Obviously to say the least, religion should be separated from morality and moral education. The religious practice in controlling human association, relationships and that of named God are variously practiced and some of them quite abominable and horrible.

### **The Dilemma of Moral Education**

#### **a) Logical Relationship Between Religion and Morality**

It is true that religions have some sort of moral content, which actually give rise to the confusion. However (his is insignificant. To Adewole (1990:75), this does not mean that all moral codes must have some sort of religious foundation such that without religious beliefs one will necessarily lack morality. Also, to subscribe to Adewole's view, one would notice that moral judgement is valid without necessarily depending on religious claims. It is logically not correct to claim that strong affiliation exists, when rules of morality and religious statements are not always compatible.

It is believed that there is no logical consistency between the facts of religion and that of morality or moral education. For instance, to religion one is meant to believe in God or gods without rational examination but simply exercise faith while in morality or moral education, one is meant to know how to take a rational decision or becomes critical in decision making. The moral virtues, values and actions are subjected to critical examination. This rational or critical approach cannot be the same in religious matters. The connection between the rules of morality and religious statements becomes illogical in most cases.

#### **(b) Empirical Relationship Between Religion and Morality**

There is lack of empirical evidences to show the effectiveness of moral education and religion in Africa. According to Adewole (1990:75).

The interesting thing, however, is that the available evidence does not seem to suggest that membership of Christian or Moslem congregation is conducive to higher standard of conduct than that of unbelievers.

He referred to researches carried out in Great Britain that showed no empirical relationship between religion and morality. Okere (1983), admitted that there is no empirical relationship between religion and morality, remarking that it "does not mean that all those who profess religion are good nor that all good people profess a religion. Another fact here is the issue of religious diversity. If the religion is traditional religion the fact of accepted moral codes might be illusive because some of the traditional religions are immoral, cultivating unacceptable activities, fetish and cultic in their general features. It is partly because of this fact that religion and morality or moral education should be separated and the independent functions identified. Really, there is a link between religion and morality/moral education as noted in other subjects/disciplines such as Physics and Mathematics, Biology and Health Science, et cetera but this may not mean that they are functionally and conceptually the same.

#### **(c) The real Dilemma: Africa for Religious Education or Moral Education?**

There seemed to be confusion on which principles should actually guide human behaviour: religion or moral education? The dilemma is expressed in national dailies quoted below:

Looking at the life our nation today (sic), we see that multitudes of our youths are being sent to prison for crimes without being taught how to avoid these crimes. If religious education were effectively taught in our schools, the vices

among the youth would decline (Nigerian Tribune, January 19, 1983 p 12).

Also, commenting on the moral decadence in Nigeria another communist says:

Ethical re-orientation and public morality must be integrated firmly in the fabric of our society... Nigerians must determine their preference, and enforce the laws.(Nigerian Tribune, January 19, 1983 p 12).

These views express moral dilemma in Nigeria as well as Africa. The first view is pointing to religion while the second points to moral education. The facts of the matter are that:

1. No country in Africa has less than two religions. For instance, Nigeria has three main religions namely:
  - (a) Traditional religion (the oldest)
  - (b) Christian religion and
  - (c) Islamic religion
2. The religions are with different basic principles (Tenets).
3. Conflicts of interest are imminent in religious based morality
4. Confusion ensued as religious and non-religious members are in conflicts.

Again, ethical re-orientation and public morality must be integrated into the fabric of our society. Africans determining their value preferences and internalization of values should do this. Akinpelu (1982:5), explicitly pointed out that:

Traditional thinking about the foundations of morality is refreshingly non-supernaturalist... what is morally good is what befits a human being, it is what is decent for man what brings dignity, respect, contentment, prosperity, joy to man and his community.

In agreement to Akinpelu's view, Kosemani (1990:37), opined that "The religious approach to morality in my view .offers an inadequate solution to our moral problems because it does not take the complex nature of society into account. To a particular religious body it might provide moral guide to its members but not to the entire society

Okoro (2002:330), unequivocally maintained that:

The major problem of religious morality in the African context, is that instead of working for the universal love of humanity, irrespective of religious affiliation, much energy is expended on "conversion", attack on each other's religion, interdenominational conflicts, sectarian squabbles, condemnation of unbelievers", condemnation of African culture and tradition.

Perhaps, different from what Ogunyiriofo Okoro had in mind, it is the belief of this paper that conflicts is part of religious belief because different religions have different beliefs, doctrines, faith and different concepts of God or gods and culture /traditions. So, it is obvious that religious morality cannot be universal and religious affiliation may be completely impossible in the presence of different religions as they exist in Africa. Therefore, it should be difficult for religious morality to form the basis of national morality or moral education neither can Religious Education function as Moral Education. In total support of this view, Chukwunta (1983:110), pointed at the inflexibility and parochialism in our dealing with people, the very antithesis of peaceful coexistence in a heterogeneous world of multifarious beliefs<sup>1</sup>. There is a high level of intolerance in matters of religion, particularly in the developing nations.

Akinpelu (1983:47), referring to Christian religion observes that:

Intolerance is inherent in Orthodox religious beliefs - there must be the goats and the sheep, those destined for hell and those bound for heaven, the saved and the lost souls, etc, etc, etc. Now, we have already enough of intolerance in the intellectual, social, political and economic life of this country to add an intensified and frenzied religious fanaticism.

Probably, one of the greatest problems of religion is its intolerance of rational criticism. This seems understandable as said earlier on, since religion is based on dogma, faith and belief. Its subscription to spiritual essence and injunctions to the believers are absolute and final. The belief in rituals is supposed to be a personalized or societal spiritual relationship with one's conceived

Supreme Being. This is not the same with the aim of moral education.

To Frankena (1973:6), "Morality is largely social in its origins". The social and public morality calls for social dynamism, while religion emphasizes indoctrination, absolute principles and static society. Very importantly, there is something wrong with morality with sanction. It suggests apparent lack of internalization of the particular rule and freedom on the part of the person concerned.

### **Towards a Dynamic Moral Education**

Morality and autonomy in moral education imply exercising free choice within social constraints, which determine the mode of life in any society. The basic component of moral development is the understanding and application of the moral values. The understanding of course leads to voluntary submission of the moral agent to the rules and regulations that give morality its essence and hence its authority.

Just like others, Kosemani (1990:39), believed that it has to be accepted that some of the most important principles which produce a morally upright person are not taught in the formal school system. Ryle (1972:28), claimed that no one can set morality for home work... our values must shine through our actions. This claim agrees with African traditional education where everybody is a teacher just for the child to imitate.

Ryle (1972:435), further maintained that:

Though, we do indeed learn our standards of conduct, we do not have to learn them in any set lessons conducted by any appointed pundits, we learn them from every man in the home, in the street, in the playground and in the market place.

Actually, by teaching morality anywhere and at any time traditional methods of teaching and traditional Africa values may have a lot to contribute to moral education but there may be no forum for the child to build the rational manner for character development and hence, lack of intellectual prowess.

### **Rational Morality**

The concept of rational morality should be the basis for moral education. This approach will help the Africans emphasize the development of autonomous type of character that follows rules in a rational way. Rationality in this case, implies a discriminating power that applies rules intelligently considering differences in circumstances. The ability to revise these rules from place to place and time to time in the light of constant changes in situations and the knowledge of the consequences of the application of such rules, norms and regulations are the basis of rationality in moral education.

The principles of rational morality and the usefulness of fundamental moral principles as bases for moral education depend on the fact that the child can always relate them to different circumstances as they arise. The citizens can determine whether particular lines of action conform to these moral principles or not.

These moral principles must be taught to the African children. The African moral teaching method (model & imitation) should be combined with Kohlberg moral Dilemma approach and the public Issues Programmes of Oliver and Eisenberg. This combination will create a revolution in moral education. Woodhouse (1982:34), in line with this suggested that only when the child is encouraged to think about these issues (moral values) in an environment that stimulates discussion and critical thinking, will he become an autonomous moral agent. Rational autonomy and rational morality (Moral dynamism) demand an environment for intellectual stimulation for the selection of moral values.

### **Moral Autonomy**

Autonomy is an aim in moral education. To be freed from moral indoctrination, as an adult, requires one to develop personal autonomy, which is the principal aim of all endeavour in moral education. The essence of autonomy is the formation of one's own independent rational judgement on the basis of general criteria, which are further subjected to reassessment or reflection. In order to achieve this, moral philosophers believe that the aim of moral education is to teach the youths how to indulge in moral reasoning and make rational decisions about moral issues. For this moral autonomy, the development, of the ability for autonomous thinking, choice of moral values and numerous moral matters become imperative. Religion or religious education cannot in anyway achieve these aims of education that border on public principles.

## Conclusion

I wish to subscribe to Bereiter (1973:16), view that:

We look to education to solve social problems by changing people. It does not work well and, in general problem of human behaviour are better dealt with by changing the incentives according to which people act. There are times when a whole population might need to be changed... such changes, however, would require a great deal more than schooling. They would require over-hauling virtually every aspect of societal functioning.

The problem may not be lack of understanding but that of will power and capacity to carry out necessary over-hauling of societal ethics and its pedagogy. A true and basic issue in moral education should be set up by totally over-hauling the old system. This system of over-hauling may go beyond ordinary schooling to a level involving a systematic planning/setup. The content of moral education should be spelt out with a combination of methods and set goals to curb the existing moral crisis in Africa. The African child must be called to moral order and taught how to address such issues. The approach to moral education should be to inculcate in children the social and attitudinal skills that will not only enable them have a grasp of the point of each of the fundamental moral principles but to as well, act in accordance to rules. There is no empirical proof of the relationship between religion and morality. Morality is logically independent of religion and, therefore, moral education is not synonymous with religious education.

They should be allowed to function independently giving the appropriate place to thrive for the building of the society - Africa. The reasons are first, morality based on religious beliefs inculcated from childhood might be abandoned in adult life if a loss of faith occurs. Second, religious morality must necessarily be an authoritarian one since acceptance of such moral principles must be based on the command of God or gods. This must hinder the development of man as a truly rational and autonomous moral agent. Third, for countries that have constitutional separation between church and state, the link between morality and religion may result in conflict of interest, which may work against the teaching of morals in public school system. As said earlier, a complete and independent modern moral education should be anchored on to address the present moral crisis experienced in the whole of Africa and beyond.

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