



Religion and Public Morality in Nigeria

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Abstract

Religion is a phenomenon that cannot be separated from Public or Society, there is no society without religion which often determines the belief and lifestyle of people living in a society. Religion has also contributed greatly on the level of morality of people who live in a society, that is religion cannot be isolated from society. However, the writer observed that some people also live in a society without practicing any religion but only believe that God exist and they also have moral, these people are referring to as MORALIST, they believe that you don't need to be a religious adherent before you can have Moral, they as well believe that many hide under the Umbrella of Religion to do evil, projecting religion to be deceitful which is known as hypocrisy. The author generated data from existing literature and careful observation of positive influence of Religion on Public Morality. The writer discovered that some hard drug smugglers and some other evil perpetrators pretend to wear Alfa or Bishop Attire and hide hard drug underneath to deceive security personnel on the high way. Whereas, some religious adherents believe that it is the fear of God in that religion that will help your level of morality. The author therefore, concludes that religion has played a vital role on Public Morality through a society.

Keywords: Religion, Public, Morality, Religious Adherents, Society.

1. Background to the Study

Religion is the way of life of people, chosen by individual in assurance of living according to the ways of God. Religion helps to ensure that adherents live a holy and pure life. Hence adherents are expected to imbibe some values and virtues to promote peace within the society. There are three major religions in Nigeria ; African Traditional Religion, Islam and Christianity. The fundamental moral values of these three religions are in no wise similar in such as to refuse birth control devices, to reject abortion, not to divorce and remarry, patriotism, loyalty, truthfulness, honesty, trustworthiness, integrity, transparency, accountability, hard-work, diligence, righteousness, social justice, covenant-keeping, social solidarity, and others, as basic tents of their theological doctrines but many of these religion adherents are living contrarily against all these moral values.

However, Morality, on the other hand, as a concept in its etymological sense is referring to conduct, principles, rightness and correct ordering or living. Thus, we can define morality as the standard and principle that guide and judge human conducts. It guides human behavior in the sense that morality. Ethics is associated with morality and deals with matters of right and wrong. Ethics can also be conceived as set of moral principles or values dealing with what are considered good or bad, right or wrong. It is very important that the action of every individual of the society is conformed to the standard of morality that guides the community. This is because man is a social being, who cannot live a solitary life; therefore, his action has effects on the people of the society. If he does good thing the society will be peaceful and people will live in harmony, but if he does evil or wickedness, it will also have negative effect on the society.

Furthermore, The rule that guides human conduct is known as moral law and for a society to sustain perfect peace a proper moral value must be sustained. The antisocial ills like greed, bribery, corruption, dishonesty, crimes, religious intolerance, violence, insurgency, terrorism, kidnapping, disrespect to constituted authority, rule of law, election rigging, examination malpractices, certificate racketeering,



cultism, armed banditry, prostitution, will not bring growth and development to a society as it contrary to both religion doctrine and morality.

More so, Religion has contributed immensely to the growth and development of our communities and that is why the more Christians and Muslims increase on a daily basis we expect that morality will also increase, reverse is the case as immorality keeps spreading in the Public as most religion adherents only seek acquisition of titles and self-proclamations such as Bishop, Most Senior Apostle Dr; Founder Prophet Pastor Evangelist Dr and so on . However, this has negatively affected the impact of religion in the area of Public morality.

The paper will be concluded that if not for Religion Public Morality will not be established in the society and religion has a vital role to play in Morality, without Religion you can't be connected to a particular God which helps to receive the spirit of fairness and Justice without the Spirit of God it will be a bit difficult for one to display morality in the Public. If the bandits, Kidnappers, ritualists, corrupt politicians and those who are just religious but not true worshippers of God have the Spirit of God they wouldn't make others cry for them to laugh.

1.2 Clarification of Concepts

To expatiate on this topic expressly, there is need to define the three major concepts that are peculiar to this topic which includes: Religion, Public and Morality, these concepts will aid better understanding while reading this topic.

1.2.1 Religion

The term religion refers to faith in a divinely created order of the world, agreement with which is the means of salvation for a community and thus for each individual who has a role in that community. In this sense the term applies principally to such systems as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, which involve faith in a creed, obedience to a moral code set down in sacred Scriptures, and participation in common practices. In its most specific sense, the term refers to the way of life of a monastic or religious order (Richardson 1966, Encyclopedia Encarta 2005). For the purposes of this paper, the author is focusing on the Christian religion.

Religion consists of a system of beliefs and practices that admits a binding relation to a supernatural Being or beings. Religion entails man's relationship with a deity or divinity, with the human being as the inferior partner in the relationship, religion defines and shapes the moral values and characters of people in the community.

1.2.2 Public

According to Collins Dictionary, Public means relating to all the people in a community or country. According to Merriam Webster Dictionary Public means A place accessible or visible to the public, it means the people as a whole (POPULACE). It also means a group of people having common interest or characteristics, public is the group at which a particular activity or enterprise aims.

1.2.3 Morality

Morality can be defined as the standard of human conduct on rightness or pureness of behavior of an action or the effort of individual to guide one's conduct by reason of doing their best of giving equal consideration to the interests of all those affected by what one does. According to Collins Dictionary, Morality is the belief that some behavior is right and acceptable and that other behavior is wrong. Morality has to do with Man's Conscience which helps him to be conscious of his moral standard of human conduct to perform good that must be pursued or evil to be avoided. Morality aims at moral decency in thought, behavior and action.



1.3 Theoretical Framework

The framework of theories to support this study 'Religion and Public Morality in Nigeria' is based on the following theories which include:

1.3.1 The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

The theory of planned behavior (TPB) is a psychological theory that links beliefs to behavior. The theory maintains that three core components, namely, attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, together shape an individual's behavioral intentions. In turn, a tenet of TPB is that behavioral intention is the most proximal determinant of human social behavior. The theory was elaborated by Icek Ajzen for the purpose of improving the predictive power of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA). Ajzen's idea was to include perceived behavioral control in TPB [1]. Perceived behavior control was not a component of TRA. TPB has been applied to studies of the relations among beliefs, attitudes, behavioral intentions, and behaviors in various human domains. These domains include, but are not limited to, advertising, public relations, advertising campaigns, healthcare, sport management, and sustainability [2].

The theory of planned behavior (TPB) a cognitive theory by Azjen (1985) that proposes that an individual's decision to engage in a specific behavior such as gambling or stopping gambling can be predicated by their intention to engage in that behavior. 'Intentions are assumed to capture the motivational factors that influence a behavior; they are indications of how hard people are willing to try, of how much of an effort they are planning to exert, in order to perform the behavior. As a general rule, the stronger the intention to engage in a behavior, the more likely should be its performance' (Ajzen, 1991 p. 181). According to TPB intentions are determined by three variables:

- A. Personal attitudes - This is our personal attitude towards a particular behavior. It is the sum of all our knowledge, attitudes, prejudices positive and negative that we think of when we consider the behavior. For example, our individual attitude to smoking might include tobacco is relaxing and makes me feel good but it makes me cough in the morning, costs a lot of money and smells bad.
- B. Subjective norms - This considers how we view the ideas of other people about the specific behavior e.g., smoking. This could be the attitude of family and friends and colleagues to smoking. It is not what other people think but our perception of others' attitudes.
- C. Perceived behavioral control - This is the extent to which we believe we can control our behavior. This depends on our perception of internal factors such as our own ability and determination and external factors such as the resources and support available to us. The theory argues that our perception of behavioral control has two effects: It affects our intentions to behave in a certain way i.e., the more control we think we have over our behavior, the stronger our intention to perform the behavior. It also affects our behavior directly, if we perceive that we have a high level of control we will try harder and longer to succeed. The present view of perceived behavioral control, however, is most compatible with Bandura*s (1977, 1982) concept of perceived self-efficacy which is concerned with judgments of how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations (Bandura, 1982, p. 122).

According to the theory of planned behavior, perceived behavioral control, together with behavioral intention, can be used directly to predict behavioral achievement. The theory of planned behavior assumes that all behaviors are conscious, reasoned and planned however it does not consider the role of emotions such as sadness, frustration ... which can play an important role in influencing behavior.



2. Cognitive Theory

Cognitive theory is a theory of psychology that attempts to explain human behavior by understanding the thought processes. The assumption is that humans are logical beings who make the choices that are most sensible to them. "Information processing" is a commonly used description of the mental process, comparing the human mind to a computer. Todd Tremlin, the author of *Minds and Gods – The Cognitive Foundations of Religion*, answers in his book the questions of why people believe in supernatural beings and specifically, why they believe in particular beings. The answers Tremlin offered in his book indicate that gods are described not primarily as theological concepts or as social or cultural constructs but as the products of human cognition (Tremlin, 2006: 6). It is central to what comes into the body and what goes out – it interprets and interacts with the external world and it concerns the physical system and mental conceptions of our inner world. Minds and Gods are connected because supernatural beings as well as the religious system which they are part of are among the plethora of mental conceptions acquired, represented and transmitted by human brains. The cognitive science of religion holds for our understanding of human religiosity – man can only accommodate religious ideas which his brain can precipitate, and that religious concepts can easily become personally compelling (Tremlin, 2006: 6).

Tremlin's palpable solution to the question posed about human cognition is corroborated by Sharon Begley in his article, "Is God All in Our Heads?" in *Newsweek*, an International Newsmagazine. He writes that, "As a neurologist, he accepts that all we see, hear, feel, and think is mediated or created in the brain" (Begley, 2001: 3). He further said that it is not surprising to him that a religious experience is actually actively reflected in the brain. Contributing to the cognitive theory on why religions exist, Pascal Boyer says that:

There are several standard skeptical answers to the perennial question of why religions exist. They are said to provide explanations for natural phenomena, dreams, the origin of the world and the presence in it of human beings, or the existence of evil and suffering; they provide comfort in the face of suffering and death; they help to hold society together and give a basis for morality; or they are simply an expression of human gullibility and willingness to believe anything (Boyer, 2001: Retrieved November 22, 2008 from the World Wide Web: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki>).

At the heart of his explanation is the notion that religious beliefs arise from the *normal* functioning of the human mind. To account for this, he introduces the notion of "inference systems": that is, explanatory devices adapted to different sorts of events. These devices are called on to explain ordinary occurrences such as a tennis ball breaking a window, but Boyer's claim, which he develops at length with abundant citation of anthropological material, is that exactly the same principle underlies the generation of religious beliefs in invisible beings and hidden influences on events.

3. Rational Choice Theory

The theory defines rationality as "marked by consistent, goal-related activity", and it sees religion as essentially a rational response to human needs hence the title Rational Choice Theory. The rational choice theory has been applied to religions, among others by the sociologists Stark and Bainbridge, since World War one and two respectively. They see religions as systems of "compensators". Compensators are a body of language and practices that compensate for some physical lack or frustrated goal. Compensators can be categorized into specific compensators, that is, compensators for the failure to achieve specific goals, and general compensators, compensators for failure to achieve any goal. Stark and Bainbridge, define religion as a system of compensator that relies on the supernatural. They assert that only a supernatural compensator can explain death or the meaning of life ("Theory of Religion", 2004: CD-ROM).



Studies have revealed in modern times a trend in religious proliferation which has roots in the maturing of cults and sects into denominations. Stark and Bainbridge say that there are four models of cult formation: the Psychopathological Model, the Entrepreneurial Model, the Social Model and the Normal Revelations model (Stark and Bainbridge, 1996, “Google Books Questia Selected Preview”, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki>, retrieved November 22, 2008, 2.50 p.m.). Some religions are better described by one model than another, though all apply to differing degrees to all religions. The inclination to these models is one of the reasons for religious plurality, which is a trend in religious practices in modern times. Thus, the rational choice theory is noticed to be one of the trends responsible for religious proliferation.

4. The Theory of Religious Economy

The theory of religious economy is the application of rational choice theory as a theory of religion. The theory of religious economy argues that the economic model of supply and demand has a significant role in the development and success of organized religions (Muller, 1975: 35-46). A religious economy consists of a market (i.e., a demand for religion) and a supply of different religious organizations. This sees different religious organizations competing for followers in a religious economy, much like the way businesses compete for consumers in a commercial economy. Theorists assert that a true religious economy is the result of religious pluralism, giving the population a wider variety of choices in religion. Berger writes that:

The polarization of religion brought about by secularization and the concomitant loss of commonality and/or reality *ipso facto* leads to pluralistic situation. Hence the sociological and social-psychological characteristic of the pluralistic situation is that religion can no longer be imposed but must be marketed like a commodity (Berger, 1969: 138).

According to the theory, the more religions there are, the more likely the population is to be religious and hereby contradicting the secularization thesis. However, secularization can polarize religion and can also lead to pluralization, which in turn de-monopolizes religious structures. Revival is a phenomenon in religious parlance that is noticed as a trend which sustains religious groups.

5. Sensitivity Theory

This is a comprehensive, psychological theory of religion. The theory emphasizes that people are attracted to religions due to felt needs. It suggests that there are 16 basic propensities in man that influence the psychological appeal of religious behavior. These desires include: power, independence, curiosity, acceptance, order, saving, honor, idealism, social contact, family, status, vengeance, romance, eating, physical exercise, and tranquility. Steven Reiss, the author of this new theory says that:

These basic human needs – which include honor, idealism, curiosity and acceptance – can explain why certain people are attracted to religion; why *human beings*, God’s images express psychologically opposite qualities, and the relationship between personality and religious experiences. Reiss’ research suggests that the quest for independence is a key psychological desire that separates religious and non-religious people. In a study published in 2000, Reiss found that religious people expressed a strong desire for interdependence with others (mostly Christians), but those who are not religious, however, showed a stronger need to be self-reliant and independent. The study also showed that religious people valued honour more than non-religious people, which Reiss suggests as a reason many people embrace religion to show loyalty to parents and ancestors.



6. Phenomenological Approach to Religious Studies

This theory concerns the experiential aspect of religion, describing religious phenomena in terms consistent with the orientation of the worshippers. It views religion as being made up of different components, and studies these components across religious traditions so that people can understand them. The phenomenological approach to the study of religion owes its conceptualization and development, in a large part, to the following three scholars, Chantepie de la Saussaye, Kristensen, and van der Leeuw. Their perspectives throw light on this theory for a better understanding; however, details of their work are not the focus of our work. The term, phenomenon of religion is used to mean nothing than the investigation of the phenomena of religion on one hand, or it means the comparative study and the classification of different types of religious phenomena, on the other hand. There is little, if any, regard for specific phenomenological concepts, methods, or procedures of verification

7. Literature Review

7.1 Impart of Religion in Curbing Immorality in Nigeria

The whole Africans including Nigerians are always with strong mentality that Religious immorality cannot be cured whereas religious tool can cure immorality. Record even shows that many of the religious leaders are celebrating the immoral people because of the financial help they are getting from them. While little is to be mentioned of the religious leaders who are supposed to be the custodians of morality who are partaking in the sharing of the stolen money brought by immoral people. Thus, Nigerian religious leaders should rise up to the task of preaching morality to their followers; telling them that Religion and Morality are ways to cure immorality in the society, this will go a long way to influence them positively. The idea that each human life is imbued with value is one that is deeply rooted in the teachings of the major religions of the country. The religious adherents should not leave the work of preaching morality to religious leaders alone, the peer group should be involved, since Change starts from an individual to a home then from home to society, therefore individual behavioral change can help others also to live in morality. Religion inculcates moral discipline into individuals which will help in curbing immorality in the society through its role of inward conviction which will exert the strongest influences upon all citizens of the country. Family, religion, school, associations and civil service should be Public Morality advocate.

7.2 Moral Achievement Leads to a Peaceful Society

A society that lacks moral cannot be peaceful, individual cannot sleep with their two eyes closed, crimes will become norms of such society, abnormality will become normality, the development of such society cannot be achieved. Moral cannot be achieved without the help of religion; therefore, *religion promotes peaceful coexistence*, Religion teaches and fosters forgiveness, promotes truth, confidence and commitment among people. These moral values do not only promote peaceful coexistence but are instrumental to nation building and Sustainable development in Nigeria, (Daudu (2005). In a complicated pluralistic society like Nigeria, human actions, conducts and behavior could affect the wider society negatively. Christian ethical values are meant to create a good and harmonious society, where all citizens irrespective of race, tribe, religion, social and economic status should peacefully co-exist. Religion and Public Morality establish a peaceful country and not just a society. Discipline, Integrity, Dignity of Labor, Social Justice, Religious Tolerance, Self-reliance, Patriotism all these must be attained to achieve a Peaceful Society.

7.3 Morality is not an Option. it's an Essential.

Many people wrongly believe that Morality is an option and not essential, that's why only few people do good, right and justice. Living in morality is like sowing a seed which you will reap unaware therefore if you do good, goodness will surely follow you and if otherwise whatever you do will definitely come behind you. Sometimes, without you praying or doing charms, something will happen to you because



of your morality according to the law of gravity. If many people discover this, then they will realize that Morality should not be an option but essential.

7.4 The Interrelation of Morality and Religion

Morality until recently has been seen as a brainchild of religion and thus an essential part of religion from which it is inseparable. This assumption has even led some scholars to hold that there can be no morality without religion since morality is intrinsically a part of religion. It is therefore assumed that a religious person is essentially a moral person and that a moral life may not be possible without religion. Morality and religion are complimentary in establishing a better society. If they synergize their efforts the world will be a better place.

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

Having taken a critical look at religion and Public Morality in Nigeria, the paper observes and avers that there are significant roles religion play in inculcating moral values for development of Nigeria. Religion and particularly Christian religion play a significant role in inculcating Public Moral values. Christian Religion values can be used to foster national development. In Nigeria, Public Morality can be promoted through religion, that is to say Christianity helps citizens to be Public moral conscious in their life style and this will promote Peace, unity, love and respect in the country. Religion has contributed solely on issues of good conduct, discipline, loyalty, patriotism, accountability, transparency, social justice, covenant keeping and other positive values in their daily dealings. Being religious is not enough in practicing religion, there is much more to being a religious adherents, one must be a genuine and authentic commitment to righteousness, personal spiritual growth by reading the word of God and making it life style and personal praying to God, a commitment of humanity to doing right, discipline, truth, loyalty, honesty, integrity, probity, dedication, cooperation, and the basic family values of love, caring, selflessness, equity, sharing, generosity, steadfastness, commitment, tolerance, patience and so on.

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