

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION, ETHICAL ORIENTATION AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Nigeria is a multi-religious society with three main religious traditions that have outstanding ethical values. However, the country is bedeviled with so many ethical problems that have implications on national development. Therefore, this study examines the interface between religious education and ethical orientation with a view to utilize the ethical values in the three main religious traditions as a basis to address the problems of national development in Nigeria. Data for this study were gathered through observations, news media, text books, and journal articles, and subjected to content, constructive, and critical methods of analysis. This paper avows that Christians, Muslims, and African traditional religious worshippers in Nigeria may disagree on the nature of God, or religious rituals, but they all agree on certain universally acclaimed ethical values, which can be utilized to inculcate moral values in the life of citizens to address issues of national development. Therefore, there is the need to harness and harmonize the ethical values in Nigerian tripartite religious heritage to form an ethical basis for national orientation in order to facilitate all-inclusive development agenda in the country.

Keywords: Religious Education, Ethical Orientation, Ethical Values, National Development

Introduction

There is no gainsaying that education plays a vital role in national development of any country because it is usually regarded as an important instrument for social, political, economic and moral transformation of the modern society. It is the most crucial determinant of citizens' productivity that leads to national development in contemporary times. However, the level of development of a nation is dependent on the kind and quality of education given to its citizens. In a nation state such as Nigeria where corruption and all kinds of social vices and unethical practices have eaten deep into the moral fabric of the society, religious education which has a rich ethical content is very much needed to address all the moral problems that are currently affecting the quality of life in the country. There is no doubt that religious education has a strong foundation for the

development of formidable ethical system, which can be utilize to inculcate moral values such as, social solidarity, social justice, patriotism, nationalism, honesty, integrity, truthfulness, good neighborliness, public peace and social order for the advancement of all-inclusive development (Azuakor 146; Atoi and Babale 242). It is imperative to state that the aforementioned moral values are parts and parcel of the religious values of the three major religions in Nigeria (Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion). Niculescu and Norel are of the view that religious values belong to the set of values transmitted through the educational process as a complex whole (339). The Nigerian society needs a formidable ethical system that will resonate with the values of our tripartite religious heritage at this crucial time of the country's national life to instigate all-encompassing development.

Therefore, this study examines the interface between religious education and ethical orientation with a view to utilize the ethical values of the Nigerian tripartite religious heritage for the advancement of national development in Nigeria. Data for this study was gathered through observations, news media, text books, and journal articles, and subjected to content, constructive, and critical methods of analysis. For proper analysis and discussion of all the issues involved in this essay, the remaining parts of this paper are divided into five main sub-headings, which include; The Concept of Education and Religious Education, The Concept of Ethics and Ethical Orientation, Understanding Development and National Development, Interfacing Religious Education, Ethical Orientation and National Development in Nigeria, and Conclusion.

The Concept of Education and Religious Education

The English word “education” is obtained from two different Latin terms “educare” which means to train or to mold, and “educere” meaning to lead out (craft cited in Bass and Good 162; Zitinski 86; Atoi 17). Historically, the concept of education was given serious attention in ancient Greek philosophy. The three greatest ancient Greek philosophers of the golden age; Socrates, Plato and Aristotle have explained the concept of education in the following ways. Socrates says “Education implies the bringing out of the thoughts of widespread legitimacy which are idle within the intellect of each man.” For Plato, “Education is the capacity to feel pleasure and torment at the correct minute. It creates within the body and within the soul of the understudy all the excellence and all the flawlessness which he is able of.” According to Aristotle, “Education is the creation of a sound intellect in a sound body. It creates man's workforce, particularly his intellect so that he may be able to appreciate the consideration of preeminent truth, goodness, and magnificence of which idealize joy consists (Jubaer and Hoque 139).

In contemporary times, various scholars have defined education in different ways to broaden the etymological underpinning of the concept. Some of these scholars are Okafor, who defines education as a process of accumulation through which the individual is helped to attain the development of his potentialities, and their maximum activation when necessary according to right reason and to achieve thereby his perfect self-

fulfillment (5). Anibueze says education is the training which is given by suitable habits to the first instincts of virtue in children when pleasure and pain are rightly implanted in non-rational souls (121). Ofoefuna asserts that education is the transmission of an inheritance, a culture and a creed. It implies tradition, good and bad, and a system of unfolding which enables man to become aware of himself as a being which has been described as spirit, mind and body. Ukele delineates education as a process by which people are acclimatized to the culture into which they are born in order that they may advance it (cited in Osita 15). Harold is of the view that education should mean the training of individual mind with the view to helping such to maintain personal independence. It is a life-long process aimed at benefiting the entire personality, and leading to a richer life so that men can appreciate the riches of the past and live creatively in the present and future (cited in Patrick and Ncha 167). Oshita contends that education constitutes an indispensable aspect of the social realities of a nation; it involves all aspects of the society from the material conditions to the cognitive and psychological states of the individual, with a view to promoting knowledge (15).

Education is the society's contrivance for transmitting to its younger generation the totality of the way of life (Azuakor 146). The relevance of education in the society cannot be overemphasized. As a matter of fact, education provides a foundation upon which the economic and social wellbeing of the society is built. It illuminates a person's mind and thinking, and develops human personality, thoughts, and social skills. It also prepares people for life experiences; make them have special status in the society. Education polishes human mind, reinforces thoughts, and strengthens character and behaviors towards other people. It equally facilitates quality life among people of any age group, cast, creed, region and religion (Agrawal cited in Atoi18). Moreover, the strength, security and wellbeing of an individual and the entire nation rest squarely on the quality of education the citizens received (Ajah 265). It is imperative to note that educational process is the entire process of social life by means of which individuals and social groups learn to develop consciously within, and for the benefit of the national and international communities, the whole of their personal capacities, attitudes, aptitudes and knowledge (UNESCO cited in Abdelfattah 1). Education has a vital role in generating a happy life. Citing Noddings, Oruç maintains that a good society is the one which has access to the resources providing objective happiness, and which has an education system encouraging its members to appreciate and search for all possible means to advance the level of happiness (203).

Religious education on the other hand, has been delineated in various ways by different scholars. According to Oruç, religious education is generally defined as the process of behavioral changing in the religious behavior of an individual. In this light, religious education directs human instincts in the appropriate direction. It deals with religion

showing up belief instinct of human being, surveys the person from birth to death in the particular system. Everyone has these innate instincts and, if they were not directed to the appropriate conditions, this may present a dangerous situation in both personal and social fields (204). In another dimension, Itulua-Abumre defines religious education as a lesson, instruction or coaching of a specific religion (73). Similarly, Ajah delineates religious education as the teaching of a particular religion and its varied aspects, such as its beliefs, doctrines, rituals, customs, rites, and personal roles, which entails that religious education is the process by which any religious body indoctrinates and trains its members especially the young ones in its beliefs and practices (265). For Ezeanya, religious education is mainly concerned with instilling the sense of the sacred in man, and reminding him that human life has a *terminus ad quem* (point of arrival), and a *terminus a quo* (point of departure) (146).

It is imperative to state at this juncture that religious education has, primarily, a moral role. Scholars such as Ene and Barna have argued that moral codes are products of the divine reality. According to them, moral codes are revealed to human beings by deity. Religious education is important from a cultural point of view because it transcends human nature through culture. Everything worthy of admiration created in human culture owes to a great extent to religious traditions. Socially, religious education represents the formation of an individual in community, but also for the community. Along their entire life, individuals strive to practice religious virtues in view of eventually achieving socio-religious felicity. Religious education is a human-specific act, consciously pursued by an educator, on the grounds of some principles and aided by specific means and methods, being, at the same time, supported by love, trust and freedom. The aim of the education through religion is to mould the students' religious and moral character (Ene and Barna 31).

The Concept of Ethics and Ethical Orientation

Etymologically, the term ethics is derived from the Greek word *ethos* which means custom or character. It is a branch of philosophy which deals with the rightness and wrongness of human actions and inactions in the society. Ethics is about the concept of the good person, the good life and the good society. Different scholars have given various definitions of ethics at different times. According to Uduigwomen, ethics is the regulations of the behavior or conduct of man as it affects the overall wellbeing of the state or society which he lives (236). Ozumba asserts that ethics has to do with judgments as to the rightness or wrongness, virtuousness or viciousness, desirability or undesirability, approval or disapproval of our actions (4). Blackburn says ethics is the study of the concepts involved in practical reasoning, such as, good, right, duty, obligation, virtue, freedom, rationality, and choice (126). For Kalusi, ethics refers to the codes that guides or regulate behaviors within individuals or corporations. He maintains that when we talk of the ethics of the teaching profession, or of the medical profession, we are talking about the codes that regulate the behavior and conduct of teachers and doctors (15). One common feature that is found in the definition of ethics by all the scholars cited above is the fact that ethics is a discipline that regulates human conduct or behavior in the

society. It then means that ethics plays a vital role in distinguishing bad and good behaviors in the human society. Having understood the term ethics, let us shift our attention to ethical orientation which is one of the main concepts in this essay.

Okoh, Amah and Olori define 'ethical' as a concept relating to beliefs about what is morally right and wrong; and 'orientation' as 'the particular preferences, tendencies, beliefs or opinion that a person has. Hence, they define ethical orientation "as an individual's moral philosophy which describes the beliefs of the individual in valuing concepts such as good and bad, right and wrong, justice, and virtue" (95). According to Namagembe and Ntayi, ethical orientation involves being aware of different possible lines of action and the potential effect of this action on other people (57). Citing Sullivan, Johari et al maintain that ethical orientation is an individual's internal tendency towards one perspective either teleology or deontology. The differences in ethical orientation can result in disagreements about what is ethical, and the situation in which a person should be sensitive about the ethical judgments made by an individual (134). Quoting Jones et al, Uyar and Ozer argue that ethical orientation represents basic orientations such as utilitarianism, justice and honesty, duty and responsibilities, cultural recognition, and self-interest, utilized by the individual in ethical decision-making (10024). Citing Forsyth, Helmy posits that there are two dimensions of ethical orientation, namely idealism and relativism. He maintains that idealism is a concept that refers to things which individuals do to produce the right result as reality and vice versa, against wrong actions which result in bad consequences. Helmy adds that individuals who hold this concept have a firm belief in the prevailing universal moral law (51). Ethical relativism is the position that there are no absolute morals, hence, wrongs and rights are not absolute (Okoh, Amah and Olori 98).

Uyar and Ozer observe that ethical orientation has four dimensions, which include; ethical justice, ethical deontology, ethical teleology and ethical relativism. Citing several scholars, Uyar and Ozer explain the aforementioned four dimensions of ethical orientation thus:

Justice orientation refer to an individual who is just in his ethical decisions, and making decisions by paying attention to concepts such as honesty, rightness and equity. Deontological or contractualist orientation expresses behaviors in compliance with the universal principles, rules of law, individual duties and responsibilities, un-written rules and obligations and making ethical decisions accordingly. Relativism, which constitutes the third dimension of ethical orientation, underlines that perception of ethical decisions and behaviors might differ among individuals, families, societies, cultures and conventions. A decision regarded as ethical by one society can be considered as non-ethical by another society or culture. The fourth dimension of ethical orientation is teleological orientation. In this orientation, ethical decision is made by considering the amount of individual and/or social benefit to be obtained as a result of the decision. According to this orientation, a decision is regarded to be ethical if it increases the long-term self-interest of an individual (10024).

It is imperative to note that the level of ethical awareness of individuals having justice, deontological and teleological orientations is higher than those having relativist orientations. The reason is that relativism rejects absolute moral values in directing human conduct or behavior (Hardi, Rizqa and Nor 123).

Understanding Development and National Development

The term development has been defined by different people in various ways depending on the context in which the word is used and the scholarly orientation of the person who is giving such definition. The concept of development has been extensively explored with a view to realize economic growth. However, economic development must translate into social development (Atoi 50). There is disagreement among some scholars as to whether development is basically an economic concept. While Rabie (7) argues that development is basically an economic concept, Lawal and Oluwatoyin (2) contend that development is not only an economic issue, but also involves both socio-economic and political issues, and pervades all aspects of societal life. In this case, development is explicated to capture all facets of human life. These include socio-cultural, political, economic, education, security, food, health and the spiritual wellbeing of individuals in the society. From the foregoing, development implies enhanced quality of life, equity and justice, as it takes into consideration the wellbeing, growth and advancement of individuals within the society (Adeboye and Ajilore 64). On his part, Akarowhe says that development is a reduction in unemployment, inequality and poverty for a given nation (2). Citing Nwana, Obi observes that development is the harnessing of available resources by a people for the realization of their major objectives, solving their major articulated problem without deliberately creating new problem situations (63).

According to Umeanolue, development describes a process through which the potentials of a nation are enhanced until it reaches its stable position. It is a process of allowing people to meet their own aspirations. The sharpening of human abilities and the productive organization of nation's mentality are of utmost importance for development because the agents and beneficiaries of development are human beings in a given society (141). The transformation of the society and the emergence of new social, political, cultural and economic organizations are critical indicators of development (Nwanegbo and Odigbo 287). Emphasis on development in recent studies has shifted from industrial and economic development as the determining factors in societal transformation to the social dimension. Economic growth may bring material gain to the people, but development is much about enrichment of the lives of all the people in the society. Socio-political transformation is an outcome of development in a given society. Socio-political transformation has to do with changes taking place in the socio-political system of a given nation and moral consciousness is a key factor in such transformation (Atoi 51).

National development on the other hand is a vital issue in contemporary economic, social, political, cultural, and ethical discourse. It has always engaged the attention of citizens and government at various levels of national life. It is a multiple process through which a nation may attain growth, change and stability in all facets of existence (Umeanolue 142).

According to Lawal and Oluwatoyin, national development refers to the overall development or a collective socio-economic, political and religious advancement of a country or nation (2). Citing Ajaegbu, Emoghene and Okolie observe that national development is the ability of a country or countries to improve the social welfare of the people by providing security and social amenities which include quality education, portable water, transportation infrastructure, medical care, employment, among others (31).

Interfacing Religious Education, Ethical Orientation and National Development in Nigeria

It is obvious that the Nigerian state is in dire need of national development, especially in this present democratic dispensation. As such, Nigeria needs to explore the internal mechanism of its diversity to pursue a development agenda that will embrace every nook and cranny of the federation. The diverse religious belief systems in the Nigerian state ought to serve as a blessing to the country and not a curse. Although, the three major religious traditions in Nigeria; that is, Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion disagree on a number of religious dogmas, but they also agree on so many moral or ethical values. Christians, Muslims, and African traditional religious worshippers may not agree on the nature of God, or on religious rituals and teachings, but they all tend to agree about ethical issues and moral principles. In fact, when it comes to religious ethics or morality, Christianity, Islam, and African traditional religion are amazingly consistent in their teachings about right and wrong conducts. There is a parallelism between the principles that the aforementioned religions set forth and the universal principles of morality. While Christianity, Islam and African traditional religion put forth moral principles such as, peace, love, tolerance, justice and honesty, morality, likewise, embraces these principles universally. Religion is the most fundamental of the social establishments that is necessary to internalize the concepts of 'morality' and 'conscience' (Oruç 206-207; Atoi, Sadiku and Kume 121; Atoi and Babale 242). There is no doubt that Nigeria will experience uncommon and unprecedented national development when the ethical values in the three main religious traditions in the country are sincerely harness and harmonized to form a basis for ethical orientation, which could be called 'Nigerian tripartite religious ethical orientation' to address issues of national life. The ethical values in Nigerian tripartite religious heritage have the capacity to change the negative attitude of the citizens into positive one, which could translate to development in every facet of national life in Nigeria.

Citing Oladosu, Emoghene and Okolie observe that the challenges of national development in Nigeria include intolerance, misconceptions, inadequate grasp of religious matters, fanaticism, extremism, violence, suicide bombing, insecurity, injustice and corruption. Others are ignorance, bad leadership and bad governance, which are inimical to the growth and progress of a country. When these are added to several instances of youth misinformation, disorientation and other forms of misguided exposures and experiences, the challenges of national development in Nigeria assume such an awful proportion that seems to defy any kind of antidote (31). However, the

aforementioned social vices and unethical practices can be adequately addressed when the ethical values in the three main religious traditions in Nigeria are properly taught through religious education. Unbiased and objective religious education has within its parameters virtue that helps for an ordered and guided outlook to life, which facilitates the overall development of a nation. This was agreed upon by Moore who argues that the purpose of religious education in our era of multi-religious democracy is to foster the skills, value interest, and confidence in religious adherents, to be able to participate as active moral agents in the conscious moral reproduction of society (n.p). Moore's argument is that religious education not only helps individuals to know their religious tenets, but also help them participate as moral agents and reproductive elements of ethical norms that sharpen the values of the society. Religious education has an active role to play in forming religious and moral values, because every religion constitutes a value system which leads to changes in the life of individuals in the society. Religious values guide many behaviors of people and determine the direction of life that such individuals follow (Oruç 204-205).

It is an obvious fact that religious education is a necessary channel for inculcating ethical or moral values, wise counsel and good manners in the life of the people. Fundamentally, ethical or moral values are sourced from religious values, scriptures, traditions, culture, human conscience and experiences, among others. The most effective way to make religious beliefs meaningful in a community is to develop an educational philosophy which puts the values of religions within that community into practice. In this way, there will be a reciprocal relationship between the concepts of religion and education (Oruç196). Everyone is affected by the educational activities seen in families, schools, and religious worship centers. Such educational activities transfer ideas, values and culture to individual members of the community from generation to generation. Religious Education that will lead to national development should be primarily focused on teaching citizens the need for good political leadership, parental responsibility, right attitude to wealth, dignity of labor, individual responsibility, dignity and sanctity of human life, humility, loyalty, equality of all people, the common good of all persons, patriotism, social justice and fairness, civic responsibility and obedience to constituted authorities. Others include the ideals of social solidarity, nationalism, honesty, truthfulness, good neighborliness, and public peace. It is important to state that every human being is born with an in-built natural goodness, but this quickly becomes contaminated whenever society, driven by hubris and pride, departs from the natural moral order (Oruç 201-202; Atoi and Babale 242). Howbeit, when properly cultivated and guided through religious education, the in-built natural goodness in human beings can be fan into flame to instigate good conduct which will eventually result to development in the society.

Existing as independent nation state since 1960 and blessed with a tripartite religious heritage with strong ethical values, one would expect that Nigeria being the most populous Black Country in the world will be the most morally upright and developed country in Africa and by extension the world, but opposite is the case. The reason why

Nigeria has not been able to live up to expectation is so simple, the country has not been able to developed a religious education template basically channel towards the moral development of the citizens. Instead of developing a religious education template that would be geared towards the teaching of sound moral principles such as, sincerity, patriotism, honesty, trustworthiness, commitment to work, transparency, accountability, discipline, probity, dedication, equity, cooperation, among others, most religious leaders are busy teaching fanaticism, intolerance, extremism, and disunity. This attitude of religious leaders has resulted to distorted national orientation among many citizens, especially the youths, and it has continued to serve as the bedrock for incessant crises that has undermine national development in Nigeria. Moreover, the attitude of some religious leaders in Nigeria has resulted to the increase of moral depreciation and decadence to such extent that the country has become a nation lacking in moral compass and thermometer. Religious leaders that are supposed to represent the moral conscience of the society have failed in their responsibility and the entire country is now in a state of moral perplexity (Udofia 78-79; Atoi 14; Atoi, Sadiku and Kume 121; Atoi 102-104).

Lamenting the magnitude of corruption in the Nigerian society and how it has eroded the values of honesty and truth which are needed for development, a former Nigerian Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Maitama Sule argued that Nigerians had abandoned long cherished norms and values that defined Nigeria as a people. According to him, the values of honesty and truth have been broken and they no longer pay. They have become meaningless, especially in areas of security, morality in society and corruption in politics as against what it was before (Cited in Gberevbie 31). The corruption cases in the ministry of humanitarian affairs and poverty alleviation under the leadership of a Christian woman in the present administration and a Muslim woman in the immediate past regime is a clear testament to the fact that moral bankruptcy and depreciation of ethical values has assumed a worrisome dimension in Nigeria. It is imperative to reiterate that Nigeria is in dire need of ethical values system that resonates with our daily life experiences and this can be found in the religious education based on the tripartite religious values of the Nigerian society. Indeed, religious education anchored on the ethical teachings of the main religions in Nigeria will definitely establish a value system that has the capacity to facilitate development in every facet of human life.

Conclusion

This paper has carefully examined the interface between religious education and ethical orientation in the context of national development in Nigeria. It established the fact that the three main religious traditions in Nigeria have very strong ties to ethical values and fundamental principles of public morality. The scriptural texts, dogmatic beliefs, and oral traditions of the major religions in Nigeria are replete with instructions on how people ought to live morally upright life. Indeed, Nigerian tripartite religious heritage has so much to say about morality or ethical value orientations in the society. Religious education anchored on the ethical values in Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion will certainly facilitate development in different areas of human life. In order to experience the anticipated national development, the leaders of the aforementioned

religious traditions in Nigeria should utilize the ethical values in their religions to admonish adherents on the need for them to eschew any act or behavior that will undermine all-inclusive development of the country. The government should have an honest collaboration with the leaders of the three main religions in Nigeria to harness and harmonize the ethical values and moral principles in their religious beliefs to form an ethical basis for national orientations through which the citizens can be educated on the needs to exhibit moral values in public life in order to facilitate development agenda in the country. Finally, the Nigerian University Commission should make religious education and ethical orientation one of the general studies courses for all undergraduate programs to promote the teaching of ethical value orientation among university students who are regarded as the leaders of tomorrow.

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