RELIGIOUS AND MORAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA
A COMPLEMENTING SEARCH FOR DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Scholars, mostly of the Western climate, have argued that institutions of learning should teach morality without reference to religion. This is based on the perspectives that religion is irrelevant to the development of virtue, moral judgment, and the search for moral truth. Thus, educators should ignore religious accounts of morality and the secular worldview that pervades modern education, therefore, rendering religion suspect. This conveys the idea that religion is irrelevant to morality. This work analytically and critically argues that, although moral education and religious instructions are two different concepts with a diversity of content or meaning, both have a role to play in national and personal developments. It advocates for the employment of both moral education and religious instruction, based on the fact that the African's relationship with religion differs. However, when religious instructions conflict, recourse should be made to proper application of reason – moral education – in order to engender personal and national development.

Keywords: Religious Education, Moral Education, Complementing, Pluralistic Society, Development.

Introduction

Education remains one of the most ancient concerns of mankind which has refused to lend itself to a definite definition. However, it can be understood as those experiences that the society intentionally fosters among its members in the expectation that under the guidance and control of selected social agencies it norms, values, purposes and organizations will be moulded, organized and stabilized. The entire process of handing over values for conduct in society makes it uncontroversial to posit that education is unavoidably a moral enterprise. Indeed, schools teach morality in a number of ways, both implicitly and explicitly. In this regard, Nord and Haynes (2017) aver that:

> Schools have a moral ethos embodied in rules, rewards and punishments, dress codes, honor codes, student government, relationships, styles of teaching, extracurricular emphases, art, and in

the kinds of respect accorded students and teachers. Schools convey to children what is expected of them, what is normal, what is right and wrong. It is often claimed that values are *caught* rather than *taught*; through their ethos, schools socialize children into patterns of moral behavior. (p. 1).

This becomes even more evident if one takes a closer look at the corpus of literature used in the process of learning. A cursory glance reveals that these textbooks and courses often address moral questions and take moral positions. Literature, according to Nord and Haynes (2017), inevitably explores moral issues, and writers take positions on those issues. In teaching history, we initiate students into particular cultural traditions and identities. Although economics courses and texts typically avoid overt moral language and claim to be "value free," their accounts of human nature, decision making, and the economic world have moral implications, as we have experienced. The overall shape of the curriculum is morally loaded by virtue of what it requires. Thus, schools have the obligation to foster in their students personal and civic virtues such as integrity, courage, responsibility, diligence, service, and respect for the dignity of all persons. And as communities of virtue, schools must model, teach, celebrate, expect and continually practice responsibility, hard work, honesty, and kindness. Education, in this sense, therefore becomes a moral enterprise in which educators and institutions need to re-engage the hearts, minds, and hands of students in forming their own characters, helping them `to know the good, love the good, and do the good.

This understanding, not withstanding, religion is one of the factors that have affected education in different parts of the world. In Nigeria, for instance, the missionaries established a number of schools and each denomination gave religion a significant place in the curriculum. In northern Nigeria where Islam is predominant, it is infused into the education of Muslims. In a country like Nigeria, where religion seem to have taken the centre stage in major decisions, avenues have emerged

when questions are beginning to arise as to the defining differential similarities of religious instructions and moral education.

Religious Instruction/Religious Education

Religious instruction is another name for religious education. Thus, religious instruction also means religious education. The concept, religious instruction, points to religious faith; it is a form of life, primarily a practice rather than a set of idea; thus, giving importance to the word "instruction" which suggests a showing of how to do something. For instance, one may speak of a table tennis instruction class, where the learner is taught how to play table tennis. In this case, the instructor himself must be skilled himself in order that he might be able to give the right instruction.

Indoctrination is not the point in religious instruction since it does not suggest that a person could not do otherwise. It is an instruction that could be given in schools in a planned and systematic manner. It could be given by parents at home or elsewhere, it could also be given by religious leaders, in churches, mosques, shrines, temples, synagogues, etc. This could take place directly, that is, when the child is included in a particular religious practice and thus communicating dispositions, attitudes, beliefs, etc., (Felderhof, 2017). It is direct when it is given within a 'class' atmosphere.

The concept instruction comes with a couple of reservations, thus making religious education as a concept to be more favourable and accommodating. The term, instruction, sometimes seems to ignore or bypass reflection. It suggests that religious education is about saying how a thing is done without further questioning, a form of indoctrination- a kind of being too directive. Obviously, this is at odds with the ethos of our prevailing liberal education. However, religious instruction does not go without being reflective and self-critical about life and practice. This explains why a religious teacher can teach the students to love their neighbour, and out of reflection, the student asks, 'And who is my neighbour?' (Felderhof, 2017)

Moral Education and Objectives

Two very significant concepts are involved here: Morality and education. They shall first be understood differently and then together. Morality concerns human behaviour, and relates to the ability to distinguish between what is right and wrong, the goodness and badness of human behaviour, good character, right and proper conduct (Lawal 2006). There are different types of morality, and thus, we can talk about African morality, which consists in a couple of dos and don'ts closely tied to religion; social morality, which involves the relationship between a man and other persons in the society, thus concerning the relationship between the society and the individual; closed morality, which is a morality enclosed by the horizon of the society where an individual lives; open morality, which goes beyond the family, tribe, national interests, etc.

Education, etymologically, is derived from the Latin words: *educare* which means 'to bring up', 'to rear', 'to guide', 'to direct'. From the foregoing, education becomes the process of bringing up children by the adults of the society; *educere*- which means 'to draw out', 'to lead out', 'to raise up', 'to bring up', 'rear a child'. From this root, education for Adeyemi and Adeyinka (2002), becomes the "slow and skillful process of extracting the latent potentialities of comprehension and dedication, in contradiction with indoctrination" (p. 225). Although the concept education, as observed by Balogun (2008) has been exposed to different and sometimes contradictory interpretations, generally it can be understood as a process of development of the natured and nurtured potentialities of an individual to help him or her fit into the society, in which he or she is a full-fledged member. It is an activity of transmission and a fundamental factor of social change. As a wide frontier, it embraces not just the deliberate processes of school and college, but also the in-deliberate and accidental experiences that a person encounters. Thus, education is not conterminous with schools and colleges. It is rather a process that continues throughout life: it is a process, a system, an enterprise, a discipline and a way of life.

From the foregoing, oral education can be defined as the process of guiding the character development of an individual in the society in order for the individual to be able to do what is right and just. It involves teaching standards of right or wrong, and also concerns itself with the establishment of principles of right or wrong as well as their application to individual life. Education, by contrast, requires critical distance from tradition, exposure to alternatives, informed and reflective deliberation about how to think and live. Nord and Haynes (2017) observe that moral education have two different tasks:

> We will argue that "moral education" is an umbrella term for two quite different tasks and approaches. The first, which might better be called moral "socialization" or "training," is the task of nurturing in children those virtues and values that make them good people. Of course, good people can make bad judgments; it's often not easy to know what is morally right. The second task of moral education is to provide students with the intellectual resources that enable them to make informed and responsible judgments about difficult matters of moral importance. Both are proper and important tasks of schools—and both cut across the curriculum. (p. 2).

The objectives of moral education include:

1. To ensure the survival of society. Thus, for any society to exist, its members must share a number of *moral virtues*. If these are lacking, then the future of the society would be put in a balance. Basic virtues like honesty, responsibility, and respect for one another's wellbeing are necessary for society's survival.
2. To ensure peaceful coexistence in a pluralistic society. In a society where people are from various backgrounds, it is necessary to nurture those *civic virtues and values* that are part of our constitutional tradition.
3. For the restoration and promotion of human dignity. We must acknowledge responsibility for protecting one another's rights; we

must debate our differences in a civil manner; we must keep informed.

4. Moral education also helps us to act in conformity with the rational nature of the human person.

Thus, to be morally educated, one must have some understanding of the moral frameworks civilization provides for making sense of the moral dimension of life. This is very important as morality is not intellectually free-floating, a matter of arbitrary choices and merely personal values. It is bound up with our place in a community or tradition, our understanding of nature and human nature, our convictions about the afterlife, our experiences of the sacred, our assumptions about what the mind can know, and our understanding of what makes life meaningful.

Moral Education and Religious Instruction in a Pluralistic Society

Nigeria is a pluralistic society. And by this it means that Nigeria is a society that is composed of diverse people, shaped by diverse environments, cultures, religions, and thus a people with a diversity of ideas. The people believe in all kinds of different things and thus, each must tolerate the other's beliefs even when they do not match their own. Just like the plural form of a word means that "there is more than one of something", pluralistic ideas are about embracing more than one group of people, ideas, or religions. A pluralistic society accepts many different sorts of people, from different races, orientations, cultures, and religions. Failure to recognize this plurality would lead society into a situation of perpetual conflict.

Nigeria, with a population of over 182 million in 2015 (World Population Prospectus, 2015), is nearly equally divided between *Christianity* and *Islam*, though the exact ratio is uncertain. There is also a growing population of non-religious Nigerians who accounted for about 5 percent if Nigerian population. The majority of Nigerian Muslims are Sunni and are concentrated in the northern region of the country, while Christians dominate in the south. The Pew Forum in a 2010 report compared reports from several sources (Wikipedia 2017). The 1963 Nigerian census found that 36% of the population was Christian, 38% Muslim, and 26% other;

the 2008 MEASURE Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) found 53% Muslim, 45% Christian, and 2% other; the 2008 Afrobarometer poll found 50% Christian, 49% Muslim, and 1% other; Pew's own survey found 52% Muslim, 46% Christian, and 1% other (Pew Forum 2010, *Global Christianity 2015, Future of the World Muslim Population, 2011*). These reports indicate the religious pluralism in Nigeria.

The two major religions, Islam and Christianity, have two different instructional materials. While the Christian religion depends on the Christian scripture, the Islamic religion depends majorly on the Qur'an. The differences in instructional materials is bound to bring about clashes and disagreements. This explains the worries of concerned Nigerians on the recent merger of Christian Religious Studies and Islamic Religious Studies as one subject in our secondary schools. The possibility of such a scenario has led to the perspective that religious instruction should be stopped, especially in schools. In a situation of this kind, does it mean that religious instructions should be abrogated? If it is abrogated what consequences would it have on personal and national development? In fact, the conventional wisdom, especially in the western world, is that we can teach morality without reference to religion. This is based on some perspectives that hold that religion is irrelevant to the development of virtue, moral judgment, and the search for moral truth. Thus, educators ignore religious accounts of morality and the secular worldview that pervades modern education renders religion suspect. This, therefore, conveys the idea that religion is irrelevant to morality.

While this might work out easily in the west, it is not without consequences in Africa. To remove religious instructions entirely from school curriculum would create a vacuum in the heart of the African. The Nigerian has a profound sense of the sacred and mystery. Thus, it is difficult to separate other dimensions of the life of the Nigerian from his or her personal inclinations to the divine. Mbiti (1969) writing about the African and religion, puts this succinctly:

> Wherever the African is, there is his religion. He carries it to the fields where he is sowing seeds or harvesting new crop, he takes it

with him to a beer parlour or to attend a funeral ceremony; and if he is educated, he takes religion with him to the examination room at school or in the university; if he is a politician, he takes it to the house of parliament. (p. 2).

In the contention of Njoku (2004), this is such that:

The African man (woman) had many taboos to observe, and many daily rituals to perform, either to appease the community or the divinities. If he was not an indirect or unconscious slave of the dominant conscious, he held perpetual allegiance to one divinity or another. If he was 'free' with men, he was not free with nature or his environment. Suppose community and environment allow him to live his life with fewer burdens, he would still have to pay the debts owed by his past ancestors. (p. 57).

However, while the religious instructions occupy a fundamental place in the life of the average Nigeria, we must be careful at those times when our religious perspectives conflict with that of the other. At a point like this, if the nation must survive, we should be able to sacrifice our differences on the altar of national unity. This is exactly where moral education comes in, that is, the proper application of reason. Moral education should be based on what we all agree to be the value we should all pursue for the survival of the nation, a value that goes beyond our religious values. However, everyone's values should be taught to enhance a better understanding of the other. When we agree with each other we teach the importance and rightness of those consensus values. When we disagree, we teach *about* the alternatives and withhold judgment.

Conclusion

Religion and morality are not synonymous, but two different concepts. Morality does not depend upon religion although for some this is an almost automatic assumption (*Rachels and Rachels 2011*). Thus, *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, posits that religion and morality are to be defined differently and have no definitional connections with each other. Conceptually and in principle, morality and a religious value system are two

distinct kinds of value systems or action guides. (*Childress and Macquarrie1986). This notwithstanding, i*t is fairly evident that morality and religion are not conceptually interchangeable, they are nonetheless, related. The status of religious education in Nigerian schools is described with discussion of relationships between religious and moral education in general. Moral education classes in our schools should not be used as a platform for sectional or religious/denominational education. The moral educator should employ only those religious elements that are ecumenical in nature.

It is the duty of religious education teachers to ensure that religious education effectively inculcates in school children the necessary moral standard for which the subject is best suited (Orebanjo, 1974). This is very important as there is hardly any religious thought that does not leave behind a moral lesson. The relationship between religion and morality is further grounded by the fact that many people's moral convictions are often grounded in religious traditions. And in fact, a factor that gives morality strong grounding its religious grounds. This explains why teachers and students in the higher grades discuss controversial moral issues—abortion, sexuality, and social justice, for example—they must include religious perspectives on them in the discussion. Historically, religions have provided the categories, the narratives, the worldviews that provided the deep justifications for morality. Thus, while morality provides what needs to be done and what needs not to be done, religion provides grounding for such a moral belief. For instance, the scripture is relevant for moral education, as the studies of the Bible (or any religious text), helps students to encounter a vocabulary and framework for thinking about morality and the human condition. Morality is at the heart of all religion, and one important reason for studying religion is to acquire some sense of the answers that have been given to the fundamental existential questions of life. Teachers and texts cannot endorse religious answers to those questions, but they can and should expose students to them fairly as part of a good liberal and moral education. This paper, therefore, advocates for the employment of both moral education and religious instruction. It is therefore very

important to note that when different religious instructions (especially Christianity and Islam) conflict, recourse should be made to moral education – practical reason, in this way, their defining differential similarities would be complemented for development. This paper submits that religious education should be morally and rationally grounded in order to engender national unity and development.

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