

REVISITING RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND MORAL INSTRUCTION IN IGALA-LAND

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Introduction

The moral "Revisiting" as used in the title of this paper connotes that other words in the title such as religions, education and moral put together constitute a problem or a subject matter, which must have defied solution. Therefore, revisitation can be defined as a reassessment of an issue which has been previously studies. It is an attempt at capturing what has made moral debate a problem so far thereby focusing on relationship between religions education and moral instruction for identification of enduring solution.

This paper however diseases the factors that make moral decadence an insolvable problem, the essence of religion, the relationship between religion and morality and by implication, between religions education and moral instruction in Igala-land. The paper round up with conclusion.

The Problem Fo Moral Decadence

Moral decadence is described as the state of high level of morality. It connotes a situation whereby moral degeneration is in the increase.

The problem of moral decadence is at alarming rate in Igala-land as people; especially the youth get involved in drug addiction, examination malpractices cultism and prostitution. Moral instructors and Religions educators are worried about the persistence of moral bankruptcy among the youths and their concern is compounded by the confusion surrounding right instrument to use in developing acceptable moral standard in the youths.

However, certain factors are considered responsible for the problem of moral decadence in Igala-land. These factors are addressed below:

Environmental Factor

Quite a number of factors within the environment are seen responsible for the high increase of social laxity and moral decadence. Among these environment factors are:-

- i. The unconscious importation of foreign films and reckless management of the digital cables in homes from which, the Nigerian youths in general and Igala youths in particular get the idea of provocative dress style, showing half body, free movement and mingle of males and females without fear of the parents and violence of various descriptions. Parents and guardians were made to see and accept these scenarios as act of civilization thereby tag the engagement of the youths in these activities as normal events of the era, the effect of which is the uncontrollable degeneration of the morality which has prevailed in Igala-land. The youths in this part of the world have take to drinking of beers of all types, unnecessary casual sex, drug abuse, immoral dance and ladies dress half naked and appear men-like while boys appear women-like and deaf ears are paid to religions instructions as it is considered dogmatic, uncivilized and obsolete.
- ii. The Igala youths live in an interactive world where the environmental influence has a formidable toll on their behaviour. Their position in the society is akin to every part of the societal activities. Their performance is necessarily affected by the action and, or in action of another in the society. In essence, whatever traits of moral bankruptcy the youths in Igala-land may portray, the Adults and elders in Igala-land are critically found aiding and abetting them. For example, the ladies who engage in proposition across Igala-land and beyond are all accommodated by the well-to-do elders in the area in their various designated houses where customers meet them and they either use them when in need or certain percentage of money in return.

In addition, youths indulge themselves in social vices as thuggery and in turn become thieves and aimed rubbers are employed for the job by elders in Igala-land who feel they should assume certain political position using which ever means. Such youths where later become rubbers when arrested will still be bail through the back door with big money by the same elders. This is manifested as such youths continue to train other ones and hooligans are uncountable in Igala-land today.

Furthermore, the youths who are into drug trafficking in Igala-land today are recruited by the elders who possess enough capital to run the illegal business. Researches have shown that cultism is sponsored by the adults/elders outside the

tertiary institutions in Igala-land. The youths in the same vain cannot indulge in examination malpractices if someone highly placed officials of the examination ladies and or institutions do not serve as facilitator.

The case of the tertiary institutions cited in Igala-land is a bothering one especially in the area of nudity, especially among female students. Nudity is largely accountable for the high rate of rape.¹ So worrying that even those girls who are not in the higher institutions in the area like a life replicating these students, by dressing like these students. This allow these uncultured dress style extended to eh wider community in Igala-land, thereby creating problem of sexual harassment and guide willingness of both the guys and ladies in sexual intercourse without respect to either family or religion. Infact, no tertiary institution in the area has issued a blue print prescribing a standard code of dressing for both male and female students, the violation of which will be sanctioned. All of the persons at the hem of affairs of these tertiary institutions in this area and even beyond are adult elders.²

- iii. Lack of given proper attention to Shariah stipulation on certain grievous offences constitute another formidable factor responsible for moral decadence in Igala-land. Certain stipulations are meant to be enforced on certain offences in the Shariah (Islamic Law). Offences such as theft, adultery, fornication and so on have their punishment differently which are expected to serve as different o other in the Muslim world. In a true spirit of Shariah, popular Hadith of the prophet Muhammad (SAW) said as quoted by Bidmis:

“Should Fatimah the daughter of the Prophet commit theft, the prophet would amputate, here arm.”

(Saheeh Bakhari, Book of Hudud)

This stipulation as indicated in the above quoted Hadith would have applied by getting to the Shariah book all the influential persons who commit any punishable offence. The corporal punishment given for the offence of theft in this part of the world seems colloquial as they are against Shariah stipulation. Victims from poor, unpopular and common background are allowed being gun down and their bodies taken or shown away mercilessly. Victims from wealthy, popular and influential background are delayed is attending to them and later granted bail. The fact that some persons can be granted bail from offences encourages other individuals to still venture into theft. No wonder, records has shown that many of hoodlums in this part of the world are majorly from influential and popular family background. If the Shariah penal code is put into consideration, there would be no room for fowl play and shoring to death should not even the punishment for theft. Neglecting Shariah land in our society including Igala-land constitute any factor for moral decadence as rooms are created for bribery and corruption, the effect of which is the fact that people do and act according to whims and caprices. However, Shariah Law is a divine Law and needed not to be regate in our daily activities.

- iv. The philosophy of education as stated and implemented in Nigeria constitute another contributing factor to the problem of moral decadence in Igala-land and Nigeria at large. The Nigeria National Policy on education promotes reckless, ambition, fear of poverty and greed.³ The ambitions for money making is simulated by the policy which states that Nigerian Education must produce “a great and dynamic economy” and it is in the light of the goal that the National Universities Commission (NUC) executive Secretary declared thus:

“For us at NUC, we should be concerned as promoted by Honourable Minister of Education with matching national needs, current and projected labour market demands, changing vistats in the socio-economic profile of the country with students that are admitted into our universities and graduate output.”⁴

In the spirit of economic survival which is vigorously pursued at the length and breadth of our education system, the fear of poverty is raised as a convulsion that drives the youths in Igala-land and Nigerian youths at large to considering passing examination a matter of life and death. There is great ambition to be recognized in any of the prestigious discipline. Arising from the ambition and fear of failure is greed; which is an insatiable appetite for wealth. Money is the bottom line in all.

According to Plato, “all wars are made for the sale of getting money.”⁵ The issue at stake is that while the National policy on education raises ambition, fear and greed in the youths, as contained in both the philosophy and content of the nation’s education, no corresponding provision is made to foster acceptable moral instructions are only peripherally included to satisfy those who may care for such metaphysics in an area of “science, technology and information technology (IT).” The status of Religious/Moral Education as an elective at both JS and SS levels in our secondary schools, according o the 1998 National Policy on Education⁶ proves the point that it is an appendage not seen capable of contributing anything to the making of the personality of the Nigerian youths including Igala-land.

He factors highlighted above-both environmental and educational give the youth’s psyche in Igala-land and Nigeria at large its direction and motivation. These factors are the real moulders of the youth’s character. The religious or moral education in the scenario all yield very insignificant result.

The Perception Of Religion

The confusion surrounding the relationship between the Religious Education and Moral Instruction in Igala-land and Nigeria at large is traceable to the perception of religion by the educational planners who cannot see beyond the outlook of planned policies on Education in Nigeria. This is interpreted and executed by the representatives of the policies in the various Local Government in Igala-land. As a the time of the arrival of the white missionaries in Igala-land like other parts of Nigeria in the 19th century, they introduced what is now known as formal/western education, there in every aspect of life-religion inclusive had been secularized thoroughly according to conditions of the western world. The white missionaries were, their evangelical mission notwithstanding, strong believers in secularism which was (and still is) the administration of the economic, political and educational affairs of man free of religious influence. Secularization of religion, therefore, means non-inclusion of the religions socio-political, economic and educational indexes in human affairs. Religion in this sense is perceived as rituals conducted at certain intervals to communicate requests to God⁷. By so doing, it must be emphasized; the essence of religions is lost. This inherited religions culture from the missionaries is replicated in Nigeria.

In designing educational policy for the nation, the educationists included religions curriculum which was devoid of the essence of religion. The loss of the essence of religion has two implications, according to Bidmos; namely confusion on the part of the educationist intelligentsia and the effectiveness on the part of the religions moral maxims.

The first implication of the loss of the essence of religion is the confusion demonstrated by the inheritors of the Western concept of religion. The confusion is more pronounced in the practices of the acclaimed religions leaders who are supposedly advocates of religion but ironically antagonize religion in their practices. Bolaji Idowu who reached the Zenith in the hierarchy of the Methodist church of Nigeria and Zenith in his university career, for example, would preach the Gospel in the church on Sunday and Monday to Friday in the lecture room brand the same Gospel as imported religion whose mission was to replace the African Traditional Religion (AR). As far as Bolaji and his like minds are concerned, ATR is as good as Christianity if not better. The possible interpretation of the conflict exhibited by the intellectuals preaching Christianity in the church and antagonizing the same Christianity in the lecture room in the preference to AR is that such intellectuals must have discovered a loophole in Christianity which must be filled with some ATR provision.⁸ Bolaji Idowu argued thus:

“The main emphasis here is a total condemnation of the adoption of any foreign or imported religion by Africans: African must recover her sons; she must give the first and supreme position to her own God-given heritage, and be obedient to the teachings of her own god-appointed prophets.....African Traditional Religion must be the religion very African.”⁹

Fatuwa, a religious leader in Islamic education argues the same way thus:

“The position now is that the mission run schools have for the past one Hundred years produced, in some sense Baptists, Anglicans, Catholic, Methodists. While the few Muslim schools in competition with the Christians are now producing Muslim scholars. Without labouring the point, the most effective solution would be for all Nigerian schools to become secular and citizenship-oriented; for they have failed in the last One Hundred years to produce Nigerians and sooner all these schools direct their attention to this issue the better, but they cannot successfully do so until all the children are educated in Nigerian schools that are completely free from religious bias.”¹⁰

The feelings of both Bolaji Idowu and Fatuwa towards their religions of Christianity and Islam is self explanatory from their quotation above, as a result of the confusion of the secular policy when Islam and Christianity are treated as intruders by the very Church Ministers and Islamic title holders, it shows lack of grasp of the essence of the religion in question: the essence that must have been either expunged or watered down in the course of transmission. Certainly, there is nothing wrong in a Nigerian intellectual promoting African Traditional Religion (ATR) as an academic discipline. But it speaks louder in volume when the African Traditional Religion enterprise is sponsored by Imam or a Church Minister. It is obvious that such Imam and Church Minister have failed to appreciate the difference between Islam and Christianity as revealed monotheistic religions on the one hand and Africa Traditional Religion/secularism as human conjectures on the other hand.

In Islam, the authority is Allah's exclusive preserved right. To Him (SWT) belongs the sovereignty of Heaven and Earth. The human ruler governs in a representative capacity called Khalifah in Islam. As Khalifah, the human ruler governs using Allah's wisdom, message guidance and guidelines. In a secular settings, the human ruler is the alpha and omega. Allah is the object of worship to whom worship is directly conducted without any form of intermediary. Muhammad (SAW) for example, was a messenger of Allah and he lived as a humble worshiper of Allah. In African Traditional Religion, idols are the object of worship. Some AR advocates argue that idols are intermediaries between God and the worshipers. It is greatly emphasized here that the adoption of idols either as object of worship or as intermediaries is called Shirk (Polytheism) in Islam it is completely rejected.

In Christianity, who is the object of worship? Who is the intermediary between the worshiper and God? Does Jesus occupy the position in Christianity like that of idols in African Traditional Religion? Let us consider the following biblical injunctions. In Mathew 7 V 21, Jesus Christ reiterated that calling him master repeatedly would not earn anybody the kingdom of heaven but it is the doing the will of the father who is in heaven. Another biblical injunction said:

“If they do at all forget the Lord thy God and walk after other gods and serve them and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish.” Deuteronomy 9:18-19 what is the attitude of Christianity to the worship idols?

Common sense, Biblical and Quranic services show that idol worship cannot be reasonably called African. History has shown that the Persians, the Jews, the Arabs, the Romans, the Indians and people all over the world once upon a time worshipped idols in their primitive ages. So, idol worship is a universal phenomenon and not exclusively African.

From the discussion in the above two or three paragraphs, it is obvious that God instructed His mankind through His Prophets to worship none other than Him. From the difference between secularism/African Traditional Religion and the Religion (Islam and Christianity), if the pursuit of the promotion of secularism by the intellectual as it is, remains an acute impediment to the practice of Islam and Christianity with respect to moral instruction in Nigeria at large, Igala-land as a focus.

The second implication is that the religious Maxims may not thrive in a secular setting. There is a technicality involved. When secular principles and regulations are used to design and run the entire human institutions, the nature and enormity of the emerging moral problems will be alien to the religions culture and thereby render the religious moral Maxims ineffective. “A typical example is seen when alcoholic drinks of different brands are made lawful in a secular set up to be produced locally and imported in large quantities, the problems of road and domestic accident, rape, killing and violence of different kinds will become too formidable and difficult for religious moral Maxims to tackle. The kind of nudity that is permissible for women in a secular dispensation has its influence too on the adolescents” as well as adults sexual behaviours which usually translate into indiscriminate sexual relationship and in extreme cases to rapes. So, the ineffectiveness of religious moral Maxims in a secular setting cannot be justifiably blamed on religion.

Religion in the Islamic sense is a mechanism divinely designed for the purpose of civilizing man and keeping him in the state of purity in which he was created in the first instance. In the above definition, two words are instructive: “civilization and purity”.

According to Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, civilization means refinement of thought, manners or taste, a situation of urban comfort and purity as a state of being pure. The essence of religion is perceived correctly only through the first hand information obtained from the scriptures as against the second hand information packaged by the white missionaries who were at the same time believers in promoters and respecters of secularism. The essence of religion is presented in the holy Quran thus:

“...who so ever follow my guidance will not lose his way, nor fall into ministry. But whoever turns away from my message, verify for him is a life narrowed down.” (Q 20:124-125)

Conclusion

From the discussion so far, it is deduced that the controversy over the relationship between religion and morality is a manifestation of the confusion surrounding the essence of religion. In its original essence, religion is an instrument of making man decent, civilized and responsible. It follows that when religion is rightly perceived and rightly observed, the adherents will be morally upright and no exhibit unmoral behaviour that may need to be corrected through the instrumentality of moral instrument.

However, the youths in Igala-land and Nigeria at large must be assisted to clear two hurdles in their developmental processes and stages:

- i. The corruptive environment created through action of elders and
- ii. The dichotomy which was artificially and erroneously weaved between religion and morality.

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