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THE CHEMISTRY OF RELIGION IN HUMAN SOCIETY

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Abstract

Religion is a means by which people relate or commune with the Supreme Being. It is a collection of cultural systems, belief systems, and views that establish symbols that relate man to some supernatural or inanimate objects that are revered and worshipped through ritual practices. All over the world, religion is practised in various forms. For the reverence accorded to the Supreme Being, adherents of a religion strive to live a life of chastity and be found worthy to serve the Supreme Being. Religion plays a major role in character formation as it refines and directs character towards perfection. A truly religious society is a transparent and ideal society that attracts visible development. Religious scholars are of the view that religion plays a key role in producing moral and honest individuals that direct production and development. They also possess the notion that religion is essential for building a just, ideal, egalitarian, crime- and corruption-free society that is necessary for peaceful coexistence and rapid development. Furthermore, religion makes serious contributions to agriculture, health care delivery, businesses, education and the transfer of skills for self-reliance. For religion to continue to make a positive impact on society, the adherents must be mostly concerned with the original objective of religion, which is salvation for mankind, rather than advocating for materialism.

Keywords: Morality, integrity, society, coexistence, Christianity, religion, symbols, belief.

Introduction

Religion is one of the earliest important institutions of human society. It has, like other social institutions such as family, marriage and kinship, become part of human existence. From the origin of man, religion has exerted a lot of influence on human life and society. No aspect of human life and society has been spared of the far-reaching influence of religion. Religion can be described as institutionalized systems of beliefs, symbols, values and practices that provide a group of people with solutions to their questions of ultimate being and acceptable mode of relationship with the ultimate being. It can also be seen as a set of rituals, rationalized by myth, which mobilizes supernatural powers for the purpose of achieving or preventing transformations of state in man and nature. According to Ezeonyemelu (2021), religion is a complex of culturally prescribed practices, based on premises about the existence and nature of superhuman powers, whether personal or impersonal, which seek to help practitioners gain access to and communicate or align themselves with the powers, in hopes of realizing human goods and avoiding bad things. Religion is a system of social unity commonly understood as a group of beliefs or attitudes concerning an object, person, unseen or imaginary being, or system of thought considered to be supernatural, sacred, divine or highest truth, and the moral codes, practices, values, institutions, and rituals associated with such belief or system of thought (Ekpendu, Audu, & Ekpendu, 2016).

Religion comprises of systems of attitudes, beliefs and symbols which are based on faith and the assumption that certain kinds of social relations are scared or morally

imperative and it has a structure of activities governed or influenced by these systems (Fordham, 2016). The conducts of adherents of certain religion are guided by these established systems given rise to acceptable mode of worship and social inter-relationship.

It is not debatable that religion is the undisputable foundation of morality. It is the root through which morality is watered, nourished and bred. Morality not rooted in religion may be shallow waiting for a slightest gush of the wind to collapse (Ezeanya, 2020). The widespread and deeply ingrained notion that religion is a precondition for morality is still relevant in contemporary society as it is promoted by scholars who insists that morality is impossible without belief in God and that declining moral standards are at least partly attributable to the rise of secularism and decline of unadulterated religion (Iwuagwu, 2018). In other words, morality has divine origin; either God created man with moral sensibility or man acquired the knowledge of good and evil, right and wrong from lessons learnt from religious teachings. Religion is instrumental in the formation of a good conscience which promotes the practice of justice, moral probity and integrity in the society.

This paper examines the definitions and meaning of religion as adduced by some scholars, common features of religion, functions of religion and the society. It finally utilizes the metaphorical meaning of chemistry to examine the positive impact of religion on the society.

Religion: Meaning and types

As a matter of fact, no consensus definition on religion has been arrived by theologians or those saddled with religious matters. Hence, subjective definitions have been adduced by various scholars based on their perspectives of the subject. First, from etymological point of view, religion is derived from its Latin root word, '*religare*' meaning to bind together (Iwuagwu, 2018). Religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things which unite into one single moral community (such Christianity, Islam, etc), all those who adhere to it (Taheri, 2016). It is a system of practices, symbols and imaginary social relations concerned with establishing and maintaining a form of consciousness in which reality is constructed and perceived in relation to ideals.

Religion is purely a human activity and it is an inevitable aspect of human life. Its essence is the belief in the existence of divine supernatural being who is omnipotent and omnipresent and worthy of reverence and worship. Adherents of a religion expectedly have doctrines, values, myths and practices which guide their conducts to their accepted supreme being and inform their relationships to their members and other members of the society. They actively participate in and are often enjoined to perform devotional or contemplative practices such as prayers, meditation or particular rituals. Hence, such adherents are bound together by the common beliefs and practices, sustained by faith. The practice of certain rituals is a common occurrence in religion. Rituals usually consist of observance according to a prescribed manner of certain actions designed to establish liaison between the performing individuals and the supernatural power. A set of symbols invoking feelings of reverence or awe which are linked to rituals practiced by a community of believers may be in use in some religions. It includes a complex of emotion, feelings and attitudes towards mysteries and perplexities of life. Some common types of religion include Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Shintoism and Taoism. Some others are Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Bahal, Jainism, Confucianism, Shinto e.t.c. (Fernández, 2017). Religion,

irrespective of the type has common features which may include but not limited to the following:

i. Belief in Supernatural Power

Religious adherents believe in the existence of supernatural being who controls what happens to man including life and death, but whom man has no control over. The supernatural being is seen as omnipresent and omnipotent. While there may be a coincidence of beliefs in some aspects of religious objects, variations in beliefs can occur among different religions. For instance, some monotheist religions believe in one Supreme Being who is in control of the universe and an intermediary or intermediaries through whom the Supreme Being can be reached. Polytheist religions believe in more than one Supreme Being who controls the universe and determines the faith of individuals.

ii. Symbols

Most of the religions have symbols or emblems from which they are identified. These symbols may be represented in banners in places of worship or any place that identifies with the religion. For instance, the Christian religion has the symbol of cross which represents the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, the intermediary of the Supreme God. Islam has a symbol of crescent moon and a star which is a symbol that is associated with the Ottoman Empire. Places of worship of this religion is identified with this symbol. The Star of David identifies Judaism which is a symbol of Hebrew cultures. The Hinduism religion is identified with the mantra "Om" written in the Indian syllabary devánagari (ॐ), considered the primordial sound and basis of divine songs (Ryan & Harvey, 2015).

iii. Adjustment in Relation to Supernatural Power

Adherents of a religion manifest reverence to the supernatural power they believe in. Programmes of worship geared towards reverence of the supernatural being are usually put in place to guide the conducts of believers. These may be in form of creed, doctrines and belief systems which may be enshrined in the holy book. Violation of the systems or objects of beliefs is frowned upon and may be viewed in bad light.

iv. Belief in Some Sacred Things

The belief in the supernatural being by religious bodies gives rise to reverence which the Supreme Being and things associated with it are accorded. The Supreme Being and things associated with it are regarded as sacred. Doctrine which is a belief system of a religion determines the teaching and shapes the behaviour of people who adopt that religion. It is on the basis of this that some acts are regarded as righteous while some others are regarded as sinful. On the contrary, things not associated with the Supreme Being are regarded as profane. Sacrilege and blasphemy are some common terms associated with improper treatment or reference to the Supreme Being or things associated with it (sacred things). Sacrilege and blasphemy with reference to Supreme Being or things surrounding it is perceived as a grave offence and attracts condemnation by the religious adherents.

v. Holy Books/Procedure of Worship

Various religious groups have documents in which their beliefs are enshrined. These documents are called holy books. For examples, the holy book for Christians is the Bible.

For Hinduism, it is Shruti and Smiriti, for Judaism, it is Torah and for Buddhism, it is stories about the life of Buddha Gautama. Each religious group has a system of worship which the adherents adopt in reaching out to the Supreme Being. The spiritual guide or director of a religious group is usually conversant with the procedure of worship of his religion.

vi. Place of Worship

Religious groups have places of worship where the followers converge to praise and reverence the Supreme Being. In the Jewish religion (Judaism), the place of worship is the synagogue, whose characteristic position indicates that there are Jewish practitioners in the immediate surroundings. For the Christian religion, the temples range from small churches to large cathedrals and culturally it is a symbol of refuge. For followers of the Islamic faith, the places of worship are called mosques and also serve to carry out social events. To guide the morals as the scriptures or the prophets prescribe, these beliefs are directed by a spiritual guide. In Christianity, the pastor or priest plays this role, Judaism has rabbis and Hinduism has gurus.

vii. Life after Death/ Necessity of Salvation

One of the bases of religiosity in some cases, is the belief in life after death. It is believed that after death, people will be segregated based on their deeds while alive. Thus, the place assigned will depend on compliance with religious statutes, teachings and the moral standards of the practitioner. For instance, Christian religion speaks of a place to go after death known as paradise for those who live a virtuous life and hell for followers who lived contrary to the teachings of their religion. Eastern religions like Hinduism and Buddhism, on the other hand, believe in the concept of reincarnation. Thus, the man can return to life in different forms, which will occur according to his behaviour in a past life. In some religions the term "karma" is used which is the force that controls the destiny of life; good karma or bad karma will influence the quality of future life (Ryan & Harvey, 2015).

Functions of Religion

1. Close the gap between hope and reality: Adherents to religious groups focus on their faith after death and strive to guide their conducts in certain direction to achieve a desired end. This hope for a desirable end shapes the morality of the adherents.
2. Make virtue out of social necessity: When necessary, religion encourages and requires individuals to make sacrifice for others or surrender their ego where the functioning of society conflicts with the functioning of the individuals.
3. Support and console individuals and groups: In times of needs, religion requires her members to provide succor in various forms to reduce the burden of an unfortunate member. Members usually identify with their members as the occasion demands so as to give them a sense of belonging.
4. Enhance social stability and social norms through the creation of authoritative sources of opinion regarding moral matters.
5. Promote social change: It is important that when religion is in conflict with the prevailing social order, social change should be promoted through social criticism and prophecy.

6. Provide a source of personal identity in pluralistic societies afflicted with anomie. In pluralistic society with conflicting behaviours of people, people should focus on the Supreme Being as a source of identity.
7. Facilitate personal growth and maturation, as they are conceptualized by the religion: Religion provides spiritual growth and maturation to members who are steadfast in the beliefs and doctrines
8. Adjust individuals to the life cycle of changing social status: Religion bequeaths members with spirit of tolerance and selflessness, trying to cope with unpalatable circumstance in good faith.
9. Reduce conflict in stratified societies: Religion helps to rationalize social, political and economic inequalities and in this way, it helps to reduce conflict in stratified societies.

From the foregoing, it is important to acknowledge that without religion, the society would be in a state of chaos and might be heading for self-destruction. It needs not be overemphasized that religion is a veritable tool for setting values, norms and standard for the adherents in relation to worship of the supreme being and attitude to fellow human beings. Often practitioners of a religion hope to overcome misfortune and receive blessings from Supreme Being, as well as deliverance from any form of evil. This conception is a reminder to the practitioners that all that are good must be included in their way of living, while the immoral act must be avoided or excluded from their lives. Though values, norms and standard vary from religion to religion, all religions are positive about the reverence and worship of the Supreme Being and relationships with human beings. For instance, all religions frown at the killing of human beings and subjugation of human beings and treat them as offence against the Supreme Being and man. So, as a social institution, religion plays an important role in the society as it imparts on beliefs and shapes patterns of behaviour of individuals.

Society

Society is the aggregate of people living together in an ordered community. It is a group of individuals involved in persistent social interaction or a large social group sharing the same spatial or social territory, typically subject to the same political authority and dominant cultural expectations. A society is characterized by a unique pattern of social relationship among a group of people who share peculiar cultural heritage, language, tradition and institutions. A society constructs patterns of behaviour by deeming certain actions or concepts acceptable or unacceptable. These patterns of behaviour within a given society are known as societal norms. The societal norms are elaborated in ethics which is the study of morality including what is right and wrong, good and evil, in human conduct. Telling the truth, keeping agreements, paying the debts, honoring our parents and respecting the lives and properties of others are all in the domain of ethics (Iwuagwu, 2018). Societies and their norms may undergo gradual and perpetual changes.

The government is a body in which all the powers of the state (society) are vested. In this respect therefore, the government has various responsibilities on behalf of the society which it has to provide for its citizens in the society. These responsibilities may differ from one government to another because of the different policies and legislations which these governments follow. However, there are responsibilities which all governments irrespective of location and culture provide for its citizens.

Rosen (2015) notes that the responsibilities of a government are divided into two: those which the government must provide to its citizens, and those which the government may provide for its citizens. Responsibilities which the government has to provide to its citizens as enumerated by Adeyemo (2002) include:

- i. Defending the country from intrusion or attacks by foreign nations or states.
- ii. Protecting the people against natural calamities such as droughts, floods, earthquakes, avalanches and contagious diseases.
- ii. Protecting human rights.
- iv. Safeguarding freedoms such as life, liberty and property.
- v. Facilitating the means to resolve disputes among individuals and the government by using the justice system.
- vi. Provision of amenities which make life easier and better.
- vii. Contributing to the growth and development of the society.

The government ensures that it fulfills these responsibilities to its citizens exclusively by itself without any assistance from the society (Rosen, 2015). As stated earlier, there are responsibilities which the government may provide to its citizens. However, there are responsibilities for which the government requires participation of the society for their success. They include protection from non-transmittable diseases, education, and development of infrastructure and alienation of poverty (Rosen, 2015). The implementation and success of these programmes requires active participation of the society. This is because it is the society who knows their own problems and needs, thus they can work towards their alleviation. The government only assists in these operations, either through provision of funds, skilled manpower or the necessary machinery and equipment (Rosen, 2015).

The aforementioned responsibilities ensure the maintenance of peace and security, protection of rights and freedom of individuals, high rates of literacy within the society, development of infrastructure, better health care and poverty alienation (Bullard, 2018). Since it can protect its territories and citizens, the government also maintains good international relations and gains respect from other nations.

Chemistry

Chemistry is the science that deals with the properties, composition and structure of substances, the transformations they undergo and the energy that is released or absorbed during these processes. Chemistry is concerned with the properties of atoms and the laws governing their combinations and how the knowledge of these properties can be used to achieve specific purposes. It is the study of matter, its composition, properties and transformation as well as energy change that accompanies the transformation. In chemistry, physical and chemical changes occur leading to breaking of old bonds and formation of new ones in order to yield new products. In the process of breaking old bonds and formation of new ones, energy is absorbed or released.

Metaphorically, the term chemistry denotes (i) a strong attraction, understanding, attachment or sympathy that exists between two or more persons which leads to positive outcome. (ii) Chemistry is an interaction or cordial relationship between two or more people working together especially when such interaction or relationship is harmonious and productive. In this paper, metaphorical meaning of chemistry is adopted.

Impact of Religion on Society

Religion remains a key player in human society. Afolabi (2015) noted that religion is an interactive force in a society because it has the power to shape collective beliefs. It is collectively seen as the main source of human ethics and morality, as most religions are concerned with ideas and practices which indicate which action is regarded as good or bad, right or wrong (Ezeonwumelu, 2021). The lives of most people are generally regulated by spiritual values and moral principles which only religion can effectively provide. Under normal condition, a religious society is synonymous with moral rectitude and regarded as a moral society. Moral societies are societies with rules which are agreements or understandings about what is permitted and what is not, about what is right or wrong.

Moral values are essential common tenets that form human relationships in the society as contained in the Ten Commandments of the Christian holy book and they have a religious base. In our society, moral values refers to good virtues such as respect for elders, general hospitality, respect for constituted authorities and obedience to law of the land, honesty, integrity, justice to fellow human beings, dedication to service and duty, honesty and love (Ezeonwumelu, 2021). Consequently, where religion is found wanting, morality is found wanting too, where God is not worshipped, the moral virtue of kindness, justice, truth which are the great hinges that determine the morality of the society will not be practiced because the motivating force which resist the evil passions of men or push them to do good would be found wanting (Akinfenwa, Fagbamila, & Abdulganiyu, 2014).

According to Rue (2015), religion is not about God, it is about us. It is about manipulating our mind so that we can think, feel and act in ways that are good and right for us and the society at large. It should be remembered that only few items of the Christian ten commandments highlighted the desired human relationship with God while the rest were devoted for desired human to human relationship, confirming that religion serves the purpose of guiding man in social relationship for his own benefits.

Religion admonishes its adherents to be heroes of faith or saints by living exemplary moral lives as outlined in the sacred books like the Bible, Koran etc. These moral codes, precepts, statutes, ordinances and commandments contained in the sacred books if fully embraced and practiced will make its adherents living saints, heroes of faith and morally impeccable in character.

For a given society to make any headway in justice, health, stability, truth and so on, religious tenets and practices are to be highly revered. Religion is the instrument that forms a good conscience in the mind of the people, promotes the practice of tolerance, patience in hardship, and dependent on God in times of trials and tribulations, justice in the midst of injustice and so on. A good religious man who does all these sincerely can never be found wanting in morality. Religious instruction and belief remain today the life blood of society's moral ethos. Not only does religion teach moral virtues, but it wheels them into action. Religion teaches the society not to lie or kill and equally to respect the life and freedom of others as you would like yours to be respected, and this contributes to a more peaceful, stable and charitable society.

So ethics or codes of conduct become necessary because people are living in an interacting human society where divided choices or desires are made. If man is left alone to act according to his dictates, there is bound to be conflict and conflict breeds anarchy. Therefore, in national development, religion will continually appeal to the conscience of members to pursue peace and avoid conflict. By so doing, the society will be a place where

people will live in harmony. Foreigners can freely come in without any fear of being kidnapped. Nigeria will be a country where every tourist will like to visit and such people will also come with their investments.

According to Agha (2013), no society can live without morals. He argues that morality comprises of those standards of conduct which the reasonable man approves. Conceptually religion provides believers a guideline about life and the life-after and thus provides much needed incentives for indulging in productive activities during lifetime. Religions can be seen as a promoter of growth as they direct people towards honesty, discipline, hard work, education, thriftiness and abstinence from harmful activities. In view of the above, one can say that religion plays the role of moving the nation forward by bringing the citizens together to plan for the good of the nation. Nigeria cannot develop on itself unless the citizens come together to develop it. Each of the religious groups has contributed significantly to the evangelization of Nigerians. The religious training and the principles have been the core instrument in the nation building.

Religion can bring about sustainable political development through the inculcation of high sense of duty, morality, selfless service, respect for human lives, public accountability, love of one's neighbour, sense of humanity, abhorrence of violence. Religion can contribute to national integration, political mobilization, reformation of ethnic identity, nationalism, peaceful co-existence, economic social and political development (Afolabi, 2015). In agreement to the above, Marshall (2010) submits that virtues inherent from the political education of these religions have effected some changes and hence helped in the development of our nation.

The impact of religion on socio-ethical behaviour of the people cannot be denied as some people become very charitable, abstain from bribery and corruption, abstain from adultery, stealing, cheating their employees or embezzle from their employers because of their religious affiliation. Such people of high moral integrity cannot renege on their promises and are ready to forgive injuries.

Neither can we deny the appeal to reason that holds that one who believes in God and sincerely accepts and practices the moral teachings as contained in the sacred books of his religion will be most likely to have respect for other people than those who have no religious affiliation. A good religious person will surely be better than a non-religious person. Wilson warned that it is folly to suppose that morality can be maintained without religion and predicted mass breakdown in morality in the West if the religious underpinnings of moral propriety were forgotten, noting that religion waned, when the rationalistic forces inherent in Puritanism acquired autonomy of their religious origins, so the sense of moral probity waned (Jackson, 2019).

A US National Survey reported that frequent worship attendance predicted lower scores on a dishonesty scale that assessed, for example, self-serving lies, tax cheating and failing to report damaging a parked car. It also reported that cities with high percentage of church attendance record low crime rate; in some districts, where more than nine in ten people are church members, you can more readily leave your car unlocked than in some other districts where fewer than a third are (Iwuagwu, 2018). The same survey affirms that the most benevolent people who contribute to charitable causes are those who are involved in religious activity; that the highest rate of volunteerism are by the religious people and that the most delinquent crimes are committed by youngsters who have low level of religious commitment.

Not only that religion breeds morality which is useful in positive character formation of individuals and in achieving a harmonious and peaceful coexistence among the people in a just and egalitarian society, it also makes tangible contributions in the development of the society. No area is the impact of religion felt more than in the area of educational sector. Religious groups have played active roles in national growth through the provision of schools. Religious groups have built schools to take care of educational needs of people at all levels of learning. Nursery, primary, secondary and tertiary institutions are all covered in the fleet of schools provided by religious organizations. Not only that religious groups build schools which provide qualitative education for the youths, they provide employment to people, thus helping to reduce unemployment rate of the society. For the quality of education provided by schools built by religious organizations as well as inculcation of moral rectitude in their students, some governments have begun giving back the schools they once took away from the missionaries.

Religious groups have been doing their best to see that the society is a better place to live in. They have been providing people with good health care services. For example, Christian missions including Catholic, Anglican, Salvation Army, Methodist, etc have their hospitals dotting the landscape of this country (Jerome, 2010). These hospitals help to preserve lives, pay taxes to the government and again help to reduce unemployment rate in the society.

Religious groups also contribute in no small measure in the development of the society by improving on the food security of the society. Some of them have farm settlements where crops are grown. They also establish fish ponds for fish production. In this way, they help put food on the table of our teeming population.

Religious groups engage in small scale enterprises such as soap making, cream and shoe making, tailoring, etc (Agha, 2013). They also assist in providing vocational skills to youths to help them become self-reliant. Thus, they contribute their quota in alleviating poverty.

Some religious bodies contribute to the development of the society by encouraging engagement in production. Some Christian and Islamic groups have evolved economic principles of interest-free loan to help develop the society. In this way, the youths can borrow from them and knowing fully well that the burden will not be too much for them. This encourages increase in food production and business ventures.

Conclusion

The role of religion as a tool for social control and development cannot be overemphasized. Religion reinforces and mirrors acceptable standards while directing faithfuls towards earning a place reserved for the righteous after death. Self-discipline and piety are prerequisites for serving God; effort and work, temperance and moderation, dignity and awareness are integral conditions of self-discipline. Through sermons and teachings that are located in the premises of the need for moral rectitude, religion has laid emphasis on the need for abstaining from evil, injustice and corruption for peaceful co-existence in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society through emphasis on tolerance and fairness. No single social institution makes more effort than religion in building a crime-free society. If politicians should participate in religious activities to awaken their conscience, they may garner sufficient moral rectitude to insist on the right things at all times and thus direct the resources of people to better the lot of the people. Furthermore, religion has made noticeable

contributions towards the development of the society. It mobilizes the factors of production especially capital for productive ventures and at the same time helps to create enabling environment for social and economic development.

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