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THE ROLE OF RELIGION ON YOUTHS IN RELATION TO THEIR SOCIAL LIFE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study focused basically on Religion, Youth and Relations; there have been many questions about whether Religion is the cause of youth violence, social vices and disunity in Nigeria. Our country is facing a great increase in social vices, corruption and internet fraud committed by our younger ones. This paper sought to reveal and expound the role played by religion on individuals in relation to the social life of the youths in Nigeria. The study qualitatively explores a descriptive design. Data for the study was collected through a review of related and relevant materials. The finding reveals that religion played a positive role in the lives of youth who obeyed and listened to laws and regulations by instilling in them good values and moral standards to face their social lives. It also found that a lack of adherence to stipulated norms of rights and wrongs promulgated by parents, communities and religious organizations resulted in an increase in social vices, violence and internet fraud. The article recommends, among others, that parents should have quality time for their children from cradle to adult. The church and Religious organizations should re-strategize.

Keywords: Religions, Relations and Youth social lives.

Introduction

Religion plays a very important role in the history of man because it has occupied a central place in the life of human beings. Religion has been with man for thousands of years and has become a social institution as it involves patterns of beliefs and behaviours that help a society meet its basic needs. Ayo (2011) is of the view that the role religion plays in the formation of a positive attitudes among youths needed for national development varies significantly from one country to another. Religion is a powerful universal phenomenon that has permitted so many individuals and countries. It has to do with the supernatural. Mbiti (1969 in Benson 2011) posits that God is the explanation of man's origin and sustenance; it is as if God exists for the sake of man.

It was through religion that our forefathers in Nigeria stopped the killing of twins and banished people into the evil forest. Awolalu (2008) contends that religion creates a great impact on human behaviour and, in most cases, transforms primitive and hostile behaviour into refined and more acceptable attitudes compatible with human cohabitation. It is a relationship and a unified system of beliefs and practices moulding the lives of its followers in a positive way. This relationship develops into a reality that fashioned humans to behave morally, and it bears good fruits, but when there is no relationship, it brings out ugly fruits.

Religion can be manipulated by humans, and as such, its value and morals are watered, and the produce is not so palatable or spoiled. Again, when people decide to avoid religion because of laws and rules of religion, it seems they want to be free from family, community and societal laws. These can result in lawlessness among those people, and crime will become rife. Nigeria is a religiously pluralistic nation, yet there are many vices

committed by its citizens, especially the youth, ranging from cybercrime, kidnapping, robbery, and all forms of social vices to easy and fast ways of making money. Youths are the product of their upbringing and the availability of their religious options. The more the youths become godly with their character and value morals in dealing with one another and the people around them, the more our nation, Nigeria, becomes a better place to live in.

The Concept of Religion and its Importance

The word religion is derived from the Latin word “*religare*”, where “*re*” means back and “*ligare*” means “to the origin.” Thus, religion means – going back to our origins. Dayal (2018), was of the view that this very meaning unfolds the essentiality of multiple religions. Since the origin and upbringing of different groups of people take place in different geographies, environments, social situations and other variables, the world witnesses a multiplicity of religions, from major religions to folk religions and totem worship. Religion is a belief in the supernatural beings. Awolalu (2008) opines that religion has to do with the belief in a supernatural being that is invisible, which always creates a great impact on human behaviour.

Harry (2006), established that religion gives meaning to life and serves as an instrument for promoting social solidarity, value consensus, harmony and tolerance in the society. It is a common set of beliefs held by different individuals available within a society. Eliade (2010) inferred that religion is a unified system of belief and practices that unites one single moral community called a church, which is an ultimate non-material fact and has a “dynamogenic” quality. He maintained that to live in a community, morals and values are essential in the formation of conscience. He argues that it has the capacity not only to dominate individuals but also to elevate them above ordinary abilities and capacities. Eliade further maintains that religion is the most substantial bond of humanity, the fear of the unexplainable phenomena of the universe, and some superstitious beliefs that are complementary to entering into a bond or pact with unknown forces.

Religion is a way of life and a necessary aspect of human life which regulates one’s way of life. It helps to build and ground the morality and spiritual aspects of life. It makes one appreciate the Creator and seek ways of moderating our actions in order for one to have a peaceful co-existence and seek salvation. It involves the relationship between two parties: the supernatural and the natural. Denton (2006) agreed that religion is a fixed relationship between human and non-human entities, such as the sacred, supernatural, self-existent, absolute, or simply God. This relationship is for the purpose of security and communion, which gives meaning to life and harmony in society.

James (2010) is of the view that it is a relative system of beliefs, symbols and practices that addresses the nature of existence and in which communion with others and otherness is lived as if it both takes in and spiritually transcends socially- grounded ontologies of time, space, embodiment and knowing. Morreall (in Chikodi, 2021), opines that religion is seen as a socio- cultural system of designated behaviours and practices, morals, worldviews, texts, sanctified places, prophecies, ethics or organization that relates humanity to supernatural, transcendental or spiritual elements. Nongbri (in Chikodi, 2021) states that religion is a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations that seem uniquely realistic. Religion, in its wholeness, gives meaning to life and serves as an avenue of promoting unity.

According to Dopamu (2005), religion is a factor of civilization and knowledge, its seed everywhere have been known to contain such potent elements. From ancient time till date, religion has remained the source of unity among societies. It could provide moral values that may hold a nation together to become strong and united. It is a vital element that can be harnessed for fostering solidarity and unity. It can supply answers to many question such as the existence of God, the sufferings and pains people go through and so on. It could provide moral values and principles, thereby enriching individuals, society and the nation. Denton (2006), suggests that religion may inspire people to develop great ideas as courage, endurance, love and sense of kinship. It could be a part of societal and national development and a foundation for morals and beliefs which helps to shape and determine what people see as right and wrong.

Throughout history, religion has played an important role in influencing various societies. Religious beliefs have been embedded in legal systems, social status, economics, sexuality and politics in ancient and modern societies. It has had impact on the way people think, eat, act, see things especially in our country Nigeria which is known for our multiculturalism and diverseness. Religion could have positive effects on both our physical and mental health, our self-esteem, anxiety, and stress and can protect against depression, the use of drugs and alcoholism.

Idowu (2002), suggests that religion can effectively provide an understanding of certain occurrence that affects man and his environment, especially some of the trials and tribulations being experienced by Nigerians. Since religion has taken the upper hand in the lives of people, it will inculcate in the individuals the right attitude, which would eradicate crime such as corruption, dishonesty, cheating, and killing, which has eaten the nation. When these positive attitudes and aptitudes are developed among people, they will be manifested in their families, social groups and other works of life. No moral progress and spiritual attainment is possible without religion, it helps to unfold all that is best in man, it inspires him, guides him, directs him and lifts him to a height.

The Youth and Religion

According to the standard global definition, youth is not a range of ages but is defined by a diversity of culturally defined social processes that mark the transition from child to adult. Youth, according to the United Nations, is best understood as a period of transition from dependence of Childhood to adulthood. Youths are those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years. Different Countries have thus different definitions of youths and their age differences: Ethiopia Youth age is 15-29, Kenya is 18-34, Uganda is 12-30, Malaysia 15-40, Ghana, Cameroon and Zimbabwe are 15 – 35, and likewise so many other nations have their age limit for the youth. However, the Africa Youth Charter recognizes youths as people between 15-35 years while the United Nations define youth as persons between the ages of 15-24.

Nigeria is not left out; the age range for youth in Nigeria according to the New Youth Policy of 2019 is 18-29 years. The Nigeria National Youth Policy of 2009 defined youth as people between 18-35 years. Later the policy was reviewed in 2019 which made the age limit of the Nigerian youth to be between 18-29 years. In religious involvement, youths seek a sense of belonging and positive relationships with peers and adults in a religious community and also a connection with God and higher powers, which provides a sense of

purpose and meaning. Youths of the modern age want a God of quick action, and there will be no delay in answering the request placed at His altar.

They are not seeking a religion entrenched in dogma and strict rules. They are not interested in debates about who is right and wrong but seek a spiritual path that allows them to explore, question and grow. Parents no longer have time to nurture and supervise their children. Religion plays a very important role in shaping society. All religions have one basic ideology in that they strive to make society a better place to live. Iyypanda (2020) posits that religion teaches that there is always an ultimate religious institution's response to the changing youth dynamics and its impacts on the youth world view is a reward for the good people in society and also punishment for the bad people. Quite a large number of people in society believe in religion, and they practice good ethics. However, there is a disconnect in this alliance, as many youths seem to be resisting religious teachings.

According to Donahue & Benson (1995), religion acts as a resiliency, a buffer against negative environmental influences such as poverty and discrimination leading to negative consequences such as depression and delinquency. Since many youths suffer lots of depression, religious intuitions play a very positive role in managing youth's depression. Donahue and Benson further affirm that major religious belief systems contain prohibitions against substance use, promiscuity, violence and stealing, which may provide deterrence to the youths who may wish to engage in such risky behaviours even when circumstance pushes them to do so. Youths who internalize these values (religious values) are less likely to engage in risk behaviours even when circumstances motivate them.

Religion has a particularly strong effect on individual-level behaviour in communities. Sullivan & Araminin (2019) believe that religion has particularly strong effects on individual-level behaviour in communities with a high proportion of residents attending religious services regularly, presumably because religion adds legitimacy to the community level as well as individual-level prohibitions against risky behaviours. In as much as young people may adopt religious belief systems because of the personal benefits that religion and spirituality offer them, most of the youths have failed to see the benefit of religion in their lives, and they see prohibitions by religious institutions as a hindrance to their happiness and exploration. Sullivan & Araminin further suggest that in religious involvement, youth seek a sense of belonging and positive relationship with peers and adults in a religious community and also a connection with God, which provides a sense of meaning and purpose. Psalm 119:9 "How can the youth remain sinless? By obeying the word of the Lord."

Iyypanda (2020), is of the view that religious influence on youth begins from the families as effective parenting determines the kind of society that will develop when the parented children become adult citizens. Parents lead their children to religion. They are taught good and evil, dos and don'ts, moral ethics, religious beliefs, and so on. Family as a small church is the first people responsible for the wellbeing of the youth from cradle. Proverbs 2:6, 'Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it. While many youths learn about religion in their homes and communities, some might be more incline not to pay attention to religion and live their lives as such. Religious practices influence and affect the whole human being, therefore youths who participate in it may experience greater happiness, greater purpose, joy and forgiveness.

Youths are the backbone of any family, community, society and religion because they determine the future of that family, community, society and the religion. For this reason, special care and attention is being demanded from all to support them. The role of youth is simple to renew, refresh and maintain the current and future status of the society and the church.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study shows the role of religion on youths' social life. Religion is such a set of beliefs taken to be absolute for the understanding of man's life and duty which unites and develops the society. It must be observed that religion is very important in the life of humans especially the youth. Religion can be used as a tool or means of promoting youth's social life. The importance of religion is so obvious, and it has benefited many individuals, communities and the nation.

Youths who obey the norms of the family and society with good values imparted to them by their parents and a positive mindset will be able to think, analyze, set goals, plan their lives and help others to do so. Conditions that promote youth mentality and social life are programmed and built into the programme of the family, the community and the church because the moral upbringing of a child starts from home through school. It is when a child who turns into a youth is nurtured that social life will be appreciated.

According to Idakpo (2019), a principal area in religious education that can help empower youth is the area of character promotion, which has become a deepening concern in society. Young people require personal and social skills to function confidently and competently with themselves, with people and the wider community. Wakiaga (2019) demonstrates how human capital in the youth was a factor that contributed to an economic revolution in East Asia when he asserts that East Asia has always been used as an outstanding example of rapid economic progress into industrialization in what is commonly referred to as The East Asian Miracle.

Religion ideally serves multiple functions, it gives meaning and purpose to life, reinforce social unity and stability, promotes psychological, social and physical well-being, provides powerful motivation to act and work positively on social change and is an integral part of social development. On the other hand, youths are expected to advance the current technology, religion, education, politics, maintain the culture and develop projects.

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