

MAINSTREAMING TRADITIONAL AND CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS VALUES IN NATIONAL BUILDING

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Abstract

This paper explores the role of traditional and Christian religious values in nation-building. It argues that the principles and values of both traditional and Christianity need to be promoted in order to improve the socio-economic and political development of African nations. It begins by discussing the historical context of religion in Africa, and then goes on to consider the importance of traditional and Christian religious values within African societies today. It noted that these values have helped to shape and in the development of African nations, from their founding day till their present day. The paper then proceeds to consider how these values can be further mainstreamed within African societies in order to contribute to nation-building. The methodology used in this research is qualitative. The data was collected through primary and secondary sources. The paper concludes by highlighting the important roles of the religious groups in order to enhance the social cohesion that is necessary for nation building in Africa. It is believed that religious values from both tradition and Christian religions would make a great impact in nation-building in Africa.

Keywords: Mainstreaming, Traditional, Religious, Values, Nation, Building.

Introduction

This work is premised on the fact that there is a paradigm shift in principle and value in contemporary African societies. There is perceived abandonment of the traditional values at the advent of Christianity in African societies, to embrace Christian values considered to be better than African traditional values. The truth is that African traditional values share a lot in common with Christian values. It is because of the commonality in African traditional values and Christian values that the advent of Christianity into the African soil did not change the values of the people of Africa. Gehman (2013) was able to identify common interests between the traditional values of the Africans and those of Christians

The African society was devoid of nuisance in every ramification; be it activities which threatened personal relationships, immorality and insecurity. Such threats to the African society were urgently resolved in a traditional known method. This brought about peaceful co-existence experienced in traditional days. Such traditional values, which manifested in Christian values, helped Christianity to gain root on the African soil at the Advent and helped immensely in nation-building in Africa. This is against what Madu (1997) posited that man's value systems and attitudes are functions of his beliefs, which affect the core of his personality and generate conflicts among people of the same society. Christians have co-existed in the traditional society until now, when traditional values and Christian values are being jettisoned by the contemporary African society. The values desired in contemporary society are at variance with those of traditional and Christian values.

This work looks at the core value, training of the child, which is fundamental in inculcating the societal ideals, norms and values. Both African traditional society and Christianity see parenting as basic. This is so because a well-trained and nurtured child brings about a morally sound society; a society devoid of criminality, which threatens the socio-economic, political and religious life of the African society.

Research Methodology

This research made use of both primary and secondary sources of data collection. It is qualitative research. The primary source was an interview with a purposefully selected group of eight adults who were involved in the training of children. At the researchers' discretion, pseudonyms are used for the interviewees. The data from both the primary and secondary sources were descriptively analysed in this research.

Historical Context of Religion in Africa

The most difficult task for any religious scholar is to trace the origin of religion. Scholars of diverse disciplines have propounded different theories for the origin of religion, yet these theories could be seen as mere academic exercises. Watch Tower (1990) posited that:

During the thousands of years of mankind's history, man's search for God has led him down many pathways. The result has been the enormous diversity of religious expressions found worldwide, from the endless variety of Hinduism to the monotheism of Judaism, Islam and Christendom and to the oriental philosophies of Shinto, Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism. In the other vast regions, mankind has turned to animism, magic and spiritism. (Pg. 1).

Religion is a powerful phenomenon in human life, especially in Africa. Its origin, albeit controversial, can be tied to the origin of mankind. It is practiced by many, talked about by many and criticized by many. Religion is practiced by every language, colour, tribe, and gender. But can one imagine a world without religion? A world disconnected from its creator, the Supreme Being. A cosmos where human beings are completely unaware of the supernatural reality? A universe devoid of religious and spiritual significance? Springing into different strands and traditions, religion has impacted the history, political structure, economic policies and socio-cultural lives of several peoples of Africa.

It is on this premise that one could posit that it seems religion is epitomized and more pronounced among Africans. Mbiti (1969) has observed that "Religion is the strongest element in traditional African background, and exerts probably the greatest influence upon the thinking and living of the people concerned" (p.1). This is why he (Mbiti: 1969) categorically affirmed that: "Africans are notoriously religious" (p. 1). Other scholars have corroborated this assertion. While Kalu (1974) averred that Africans are "predominantly religious" (p.42), Ugwu (2014) posited that Africans are "obstinately religious" (p.12). The religious nature of the African worldview is seen in their inward and outward living. This religious perception has given space to attribute powers to forces beyond humans. Borokini et al (2014) argue that Africans believe in the existence of supernatural powers; divinities, ancestral spirits and demons. It is in view of this that Ikenga-Metuh (1987) propounded that Africans have intense belief in a spiritual world and trends in the world are determined by material and physical laws and forces, but more so by invisible powers and spiritual beings.

Mortal beings, having found themselves under the influence of the forces beyond them, needed ways to control them to live and survive. Proper nurturing of the child, therefore, became vital to having a well-ordered society to avoid incurring the wrath of these spiritual forces.

Nurturing of the Child: Traditional and Christian Perspectives

It is not an easy task to properly nurture a child in every society. In the African traditional society, the proper training of the child is paramount. Every machine is put in place to ensure that every child is properly nurtured to become useful not just to the individual, but to the community. Nwokolo (2014) posited that “parenting is one of the most rewarding and fulfilling responsibilities anyone can ever take on” (P. 126). In view of this, training of children for well ordered and developed community is not taking for granted. The parents who have the primary role in training the child know that it is indispensable. Opata (1998) averred that “parents have great regard for their children not only because such children would continue the family name and tradition but perhaps more importantly because such children would take care of them during their old age” (P.31). This assertion is not just about the interest of the parents in perpetuity family line, but more so to have a good family name. The family, therefore, inculcates moral values such as respect for elders, sincerity, hard work, etc., which will enable the child to fit into the community. This saves the family from shame and embarrassment from a deviant child. The child is also saved from calamity and punishment that follows immoral behaviour. Momo (personal communication, 23 April, 2025) intoned that in the traditional days, the training of the child was very important for the peaceful existence of the family and the community. He argued that it is in view of this that every machinery is put in place in training the child. In agreement with Momo, Ajuwa (personal communication: 02nd May, 2025) intoned that the training of children was a duty that must be carried out to safeguard the community and future generation.

The community at large does not just share with the parents in the role of nurturing the child, but has an enormous role to play. Okwueze (2003) intoned that the nuclear and extended family, elders, kindred, and age grade have roles to play in nurturing the child. The thought by Okwueze indicated that training the child is not the duty of the parents alone. It is on this premise that Okwueze (2004) averred that “whenever a child’s conduct falls below the accepted norm, any member of the family who observes this has a duty to take corrective measures against such a child without needing any prior permission of the biological parents” (P.243). It is expected of every adult in the family and the community to share in this responsibility of training the child (Mapa, Personal Communication: 02nd May, 2025). Consciously or unconsciously, members of the community are aware of this task. Mbiti (1969) argued that “the child is ...public property, it belongs to the entire community and is no longer the property of one person” (P. 113). Mbiti makes it clear that the child is the property of the community. As communal property, all hands are expected to be on deck to bring out the best in the child. Adibe (2009) then reveals that “every adult is a teacher of knowledge and morals. Every child is a community people. He is educated by every person to do good and avoid evil” (P.27). Eze (2012) posited that in training the child, “the basic cultural and traditional practices are not neglected” (P.73). These cultural and traditional practices are outlined by Okwueze (2003):

The children are taught to tell the truth, to form the habit of helping others, and to be hard-working, among other virtues. In the family, children are also taught to be respectful and hospitable to all relations, to other members of the society and even strangers (P. 69).

The essence of applying every available instrument in a traditional society is to inculcate in the child good moral values. Okwueze (2004) argues that “traditional societies had firm moral structures, which informed and ensured conformity to the accepted norms of these societies...” (P. 241). Neen (Personal Communication; 23rd April, 2025) affirmed that every adult member of the community had it as a duty to firmly train the children by inculcating in them good moral values and norms.

Furthermore, to achieve a morally sound society devoid of deviants, various groups that are involved in the maintenance of morals and values are seen to have carried out their responsibilities of nurturing and training the child. Everyone is not expected to be found wanting in this task of training the child. The society is believed to be devoid of societal ills only when it firmly inculcates in the child morals that can make the child morally sound. This, in turn, manifests in the society with morally sound society. The members of the society, on their part, manifest this in every sphere of their human endeavour. In this way, the society witnesses a peaceful and corruption-free society.

In Christianity, the Holy Scriptures, both the Old Testament and the New Testament, have given parents the responsibility to properly train their children. They are expected to do this beginning with themselves as set examples. Nwokolo (2014) argued that in the Old Testament, believers in Yahweh are expected to direct the whole personality, actions and motives towards the Lord and thus are obligated to inculcate the same into their children. Wolbe (2000) stated, therefore, “that the Israelite child is taught the *Torah* and *Shema* as soon as he knows how to speak” (P. 16). *Torah* is the law and *Shema* is the command in Deuteronomy 6:7, which in parental training should be repeated morning and evening. It is through this means that parents pass their lifestyle of faith to their children. To further prove the biblical approval for the command of God for the child to be properly trained, Nwokolo (2014) asserted that “it is interesting that the flow of these different times for teaching falls into the same literary pattern as Ps. 139:2-6 and Prov. 6:20-22. This emphasis on parental responsibility is repeated in Prov. 22:6” (P. 129). The scripture is very clear on this parental responsibility, which is a divine command, so as to mould the child into a useful personality for the well-being of society and the child as well.

The indispensability of the training of the child led some mainline churches, such as the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Church, to have sponsors besides the parents at the baptism of the child. Ishi (personal communication, 23rd April, 2025) said that the essence of having persons to sponsor the children at baptism is for them to help parents in training them properly. Oma (personal communication, 24th April, 2025) said, “You know, training the children is not easy. Training the child is the most difficult thing to do. It is because the parents cannot do it alone that some people are asked by the parents to help sponsor their children during baptism. The world is fast changing and the value of sound morality is being ignored and jettisoned by many people. In our church, to avoid this, children have sponsors at baptism”. Nwokolo (2014) posited that “a Christian perspective on values, standards and attitudes must be qualitatively different from that of contemporary society” (P. 137). It is on this premise that, combined deliberate and conscious efforts are made by the parents and the sponsors of the child at baptism to train the child by inculcating good morals in the child.

Mainstreaming Traditional and Christian Values in Nation Building

Nigeria is in need of good leaders who can develop our country. Achebe (1984) posited that leadership is the problem of Nigeria. The moral decadence is unimaginable. Diverse social vices in our contemporary society, such as armed robbery, kidnapping, terrorism, bribery, corruption, prostitution, modern money ritual known as yahoo boys, etc., are unprecedented and every aspect of the nation is affected. Odunze (2005) stated clearly the moral decadence in contemporary society, thus:

An incorrigible motor licensing official who refuses to give prompt attention to members of the public, except those who are 'wise' enough to know that they should first provide a torchlight (a euphemistic expression for bribery); a thieving government official who will not sign payment vouchers unless he is assured of a cool ten per cent kickback. A clerk or messenger who will not send a file to the appropriate officer unless a 'torchlight' is provided, or even a "big man" who will not employ any girl unless she first goes to bed with him. School children no longer place any premium on hard work since question papers can be bought and read in advance. Secondary school girls and female undergraduates practice prostitution in hotels and motels where they lie with men who are as old as their fathers (P. 7).

Ugwu (2002) also captured the moral decadence prevalent in the country with the following words: "Nigeria is undergoing an excruciating experience as a result of the spate of corruption and requires a pensive strategy to stamp it out" (P. 25).

The condition of moral decadence now is far worse than when Achebe (1983) stated that:

Keeping an average Nigerian from being corrupt is like keeping a goat from eating yams. Corruption in Nigeria has passed the alarming and entered the fatal state; Nigeria will die if we keep pretending that she is only slightly indisposed (P. 38).

It is not in doubt that the moral standard of the present age is at the lowest level. This needs decisive and prompt action. This work proposes a conscious effort for proper child training, where morality is inculcated in the child to do good and avoid evil. It is only leaders who are properly nurtured that will not be corrupt but seek the common good of the subjects.

The fundamental in building a morally sound nation is in the proper training of the child. Both the traditional and Christian values are veritable tools in the proper nurturing of the child. Gigi (Personal Communication; 24th April, 2025) and Akuta (Personal Communication; 02nd May, 2025) averred that the traditional value and Christian value should be streamlined in the module for nurturing and training of the child. They further argued that deliberate effort should be made in doing that because of the furthering of society.

Conclusion

Traditional and Christian religions share the value of proper training of the child in common. In both religions, conscious efforts are made to ensure that the child is trained. Every society that is true to itself needs a society that is devoid of deviants and criminality. Our society has degenerated so much in morality. This has affected every facet of society, which has marred development. It is therefore time for the traditional and Christian religious value of proper training of the child to be involved to ensure that future leaders are those who are morally sound. This is the sure way that the development of the nation will be guaranteed.

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