

RELIGION AND SOCIETY

Edited by G.S.Chukwuemeka

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Religion and Society

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ISBN: **978-978-59293-9-3**

Printed and designed by DEBBICHUKS Printing and Computer Services, Stadium/Ogume Road, Kwale, Delta State

DEDICATION

I dedicate this book to the Holy Trinity.

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CHAPTER TWO

THE BENEFITS OF RELIGION IN THE SOCIETY

By

Anure Kyaatsa Joseph

Introduction

The question of how the idea of religion came into existence has been around for some time now. Researchers traced it back to the birth of spirituality in ancient times by examining archaeological records such as symbols of human burials, artefacts, etc. An example is the people at the Blombos cave that carves out geometric designs into pieces of ochre dating about 100000 years back (Uk Essays, 2018; Henning, 1898; Morale & Hovey, 2004). Charles Darwin was not surprised when men began to actively engage in religious practices after the facilities of imagination, curiosity and wonder. Darwin believed that religion is simply a by-product of the workings of the mind. In the past, subjects of this related to the study of the origin were a task exclusively undertaken by theologians whose conclusions seemed somewhat unreliable because of their predisposition to being biased.

Regardless of how religion came about and contrary to other peoples' beliefs about it, plays a very crucial role in the society. The practice of religion may have its downfalls or weaknesses, in the grand scheme of things, it has helped society more than it has destroyed it. The practice of religion has not only provided society with answers, but it promotes social, physical and psychological health.

The role of religion in society has been accepted in Britain where religion permeates culture, mediated structures and influences party affiliation, voting behaviour and pressure group formation. Religion influences the distribution of wealth and placing values on commodities through placing religious values on them (Martin, 1967; Usman, 1987).

Religion, as a phenomenon, was thought to have been without a meaningful role in human society. Religion was thought of as a dying phenomenon and was socially irrelevant to the people, relationships, and institutions. It was thought to have been a powerless factor in respect of Social Structures and Cultures. However, the role of religion in society has come to be accepted by both Sociologists and non-Sociologists alike (Winter, 1968). It is a pervasive and powerful factor in society. political sociologists have argued that religion permeates culture and mediates social structures.

Because it is a powerful factor, religion has been manipulated and misused by the adherents for achieving social goals which are far removed from religious goals. Politicians use religion to achieve electoral gain. The situation in Nigeria currently where the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) decides to go on a Muslim-

Muslim Presidential ticket is causing some unsettled uproar in the political landscape of the country. The Christians are viewing it as a direct plot to Islamise Nigeria. Fanaticism has always been the cause of religious aggression and hostility in society.

Culturally, all the material and immaterial elements that are found in society are elements of culture. Culture provides ready-made structures-patterns and methods of doing things by individuals and groups of people. It increases efficiency and effectiveness by providing incentives, employing rewards and also a means of restraint through a system of punishment. However, culture creates problems through its rigid patterns, regularities, divisions, world-views, prejudice, suspicion, distrust, hatred, narrow-mindedness and rigidity in thoughts and deeds (Culotta, 2009). For these reasons, culture needs gradual change in order to drop out-of-use elements to acquire new elements that new times make available in society. Religion as an element of culture influences other elements in its interaction with them.

Religion in all cultures has contributed to the origin and development of arts, poetry, music, dance, drama, and all the visual arts. These are religious symbols. These aspects of religious symbols need to be filmed, photographed, and sound-recorded. Scharf (1970 p.10). This is a link between a religious experience and an aesthetic experience. Religion has contributed to the development of education in general and knowledge in particular (Leuba, 1909). Religious beliefs and practices are the universal features of human society. Apart from prayer, worship and sacrifice; men have thought deeply

about their own religious beliefs and practices, and have developed studies called theology, philosophy of religion, history of religion, comparative religion, Sociology of religion, Psychology of religion, religious Ethics, Biblical Studies, African Traditional Religion (ATR) etc. These disciplines have exerted moral, educational and material aspects of culture. The material aspects can be seen in shrines, mosques and churches, etc.

In Nigeria for example, religion has influenced the Nigerian culture in the area of marriage, training of children and feeding behaviour. While African Traditional Religion (ATR), does not limit the number of wives one man can marry; Islam recommends four wives for one man while Christianity recommends only one wife for one man. The training of children goes along religious lines, hence we have two systems of religious education: Christian Religious Studies (CRS), and Islamic Religious Studies (IRS).

Religion could be described as the base of morality (Abogunrin, 1986). Unfortunately, it has not been proved scientifically that the more religious a person becomes, the more moral that person will also be. On the contrary, experience suggests that many religious people are not morally upright. There are “secular humanists” also-people who want to uphold human relationships, without allowing upright lives without the assistance of religion, however, what the humanists regard as socially desirable behaviours are the values established by religion. The concern of religion for the neighbour establishes a social bond. It is this social bond that generates the values and ethos discussed here.

During the ancient period, the Greeks led the way in the creation of ethical terms that are still in vogue today. The Bible and Rabbinical literature have shown that ethics is the bank of Judaism, as a religion. This claim is supported by the prophet's attack against social injustice and advocating for the administration of social justice in Israel. African Traditional Religion (ATR) does not recognize a division between secular life and a religious life. It does not recognize a division between religion and morality (Abogunrin, 1986; Shin, 1980). A moral life is enforced by prohibitions, covenants, and taboos. Judaism does not accept the social aspect of life of its members (Abogunrin, 1986). The prophets preached Justice, but not in Israel. Islam does not separate religion from morality. ATR separates religion and morality as well as religion and society. The issues of religion and ethics made it difficult for Islam to accept science. The Bible is a word of God and a source of ethics and theology for Christians. Morality is an essential aspect of the structure of the Christian religion as envisaged in the Ten Commandments. Therefore, a social life is a basis for moral behaviour. Love can be legislated to prevent divorce in society.

The economic resources are influenced by religion on one hand and religion influences them on the other hand (Winter, 1968). The supplies of raw materials, goods, services, labour, money, etc. are influenced directly or indirectly by religion. Religion influences economic decisions, motivation, prices of goods, time and skill. Religion everywhere receives a large share of wealth in different ways, e.g. Offerings, pilgrimages, sacrifices, tithes and pledges towards the maintenance of places of worship and priesthood, etc.

The Greeks introduced the idea and practice of politics. They also introduced the theory and practice of democracy, political parties, objectives, principles, policies, purposes, etc. Religion influences politics in party affiliation, voting behaviours and pressure group formation. In religion, changes come through revelation, commission, and modernization.

All social institutions indeed exert domestic, economic and political influence on religion. These activities create the formation of common feelings that further generate common sentiments and fellowship among the worshippers of a particular religion. Religions institutions perform not only their religious activities, but they also discharge different types of activities related to social welfare, such as charitable welfare programmes and visits to hospitals, schools and orphanages. Religions institutions also run orphanages and collect money for poor people.

It cannot be denied that religion has an external form of social control (Chanjedu, 2015). The different activities of the people and their different spheres of social life are still influenced by religious rites and ceremonies. People generally express their religious feelings through rituals. The different occasions of social life such as birth, death and marriage, etc. witness the performance of religious rites. Similar activities are found in events related to economic life also. Religions rites are common practices during occasions in social life such as the inauguration of a new building, oath-taking, etc. A regular order of procedure is developed by religion in society, therefore, religion helps to control society. Religion helps to shape the character of an individual, thus it moulds social life. It

brings forth the sense of social value in the mind of people. In obeying the social laws to respect the elders and to show sympathy toward the feeling of others or discharging the social obligations faithfully. The role of religion is immense. Religion acts as a teacher. It also teaches fellow feelings among community members. It teaches that the man's love and service to the society will only be real if he loves and serves humanity. Religion act as an inspiring factor. It enforces uniformity of behaviour and strengthens social solidarity and acts as an instrument in stabilizing social order.

Religion not only guarantees value but also gives meaning to life. It is a discipline which touches the conscience and helps us to struggle with evil and sordidness, saves us from greed, lust and hatred, releases moral power and imparts courage in the enterprise of saving the world (Evans, 1985). Shanjedu (2015) summarises the benefits of religion in the society to include the following:

- 1 People get mental peace from religion.
- 2 Religion explains the causes and remedies of individual sufferings and as such, it consoles people in their junctures.
- 3 It inculcates social virtues in people like truth, honesty, love, discipline, tolerance etc.
- 4 Religion works as an instrument in converting animal qualities to human qualities.

5 Religions education teaches people how to promote social welfare.

6 Religion creates values among people and as such, it is a source of social cohesion.

7 Religion is an important instrument for the promotion of social solidarity.

8 Religions institutions help in controlling the behaviour of the undivided.

9 Religion works as an instrument of controlling the political system.

10 Religion works as an instrument of influence in the economic field.

11 Religion works as an effective means in strengthening self-confidence of people

Religion is a great proponent of the overall health of its adherents (morale & Hovey, 2014). It promotes physical health. Religion promotes emotional and social health. Extensive research results suggest that people who are part of a religious group are happier and less stressed than their non-religious counterparts. The factors that underlie these phenomena are many.

Considerable research has emerged over the past five decades that demonstrates the benefits of religion to society. The practice of religion promotes the well-being of individuals, families, and the community. Regular

attendance at religious activities is likened to healthy, stable family life, strong marriages, and well-behaved children (Arthur, 2003; John, David & George, 1991). Religious worship also leads to a reduction in the incidence of domestic abuse, crime, substance abuse and addiction (Jeffrey & Preston, 1987). The practice of religion can increase physical and mental health, longevity, and education. George Washington articulated the indispensability of the freedom of religious practice in his farewell address to the people of the United States of America; (James, 1907, p.213).

The practice of religion is a powerful antidote to many in the society's pressing social ills, many of which have reached historically high proportions. Yet, despite the societal benefits of religion, the expression of faith in the public square has faced many challenges. Social science research indicates that permitting and accommodating the free practice of religion is necessary to move society in a positive direction.

Conclusion.

Religion has, and still plays a crucial role in society. Not only does religion provide us with answers to controversial age-old questions, but it promotes social integration and support, Religion also promotes social health and ensures that good moral values are upheld. It gives people something to believe in, provides a sense of structure and typically offers a group of people to connect with over similar beliefs. The negative aspect of religion is tremendous in the society, it restricts the free thinking of human beings producing a sense of numbness in man and thereby making him insensible to the actual happenings of the world. It teaches people to live in the world of determinism and possibility.

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