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MORAL EDUCATION AND THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The main purpose of this paper is to examine moral education and the role of religion in Nigeria. The fact of the logical distinction between religion and morality is taken in some circles as implying and even requiring a necessary conflict between their respective aims and objectives. Consequently, it has been proposed that moral Education must be kept completely separate from religious education. such separation, it, has been argued, is necessary in order to ensure among other things, the development of truly rational and autonomous moral agents. It is however, argued that although morality is logically independent of religion, certain religious beliefs and practices provide strong psychological incentive which may be effectively employed in the service of moral educational. This paper recommends, among others things, that the different organs of the Government should do the needful in this regard. Workshop, seminars, - conferences e.t.c, should be organized in this regard to raise the consciousness of our people towards critical ethical intelligence.

Introduction

Religion and moral education historically have been closely associated with morality and religious leaders from ancient times to the present have always been regarded as custodian of public morality. Nearly all the major religions of the world have explicit moral codes interwoven with religious beliefs and practices. In Judaism, the religion of ancient Israel good moral conduct was govern ultimate justification as our explicit command of God who has absolute dominion over his chosen people.

However, what is new and peculiar to our age is the widespread tendency to use the fact of the logical distinction between religion and morality to argue for the complete

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separation of moral education from religious education. A number of arguments have been put forward in support of this view. First it is speculated that a morality based on religious beliefs inculcated from childhood might be abandoned in adult life and when a loss of faith occurs.

Secondly, it is alleged that a religious morality must necessarily be an authoritarian morality since the reason for accepting the moral principle based on religion must be that they are communicated by God. It is further argued that as a consequence, a religious based moral education will hinder the development of truly rational and automous moral agents.

Also, in those countries which have a constitutional separation between church and state, the presumed link between morality and religion is mistakenly used as an argument against the teaching of morals in the public school system. And finally, it is feared that failure to distinguish moral education from religious instruction may led some teachers, especially in the secondary school level into confusing the aims of moral education with their evangelistic and sectarian interests. Some teachers, especially in the secondary school level into confusing the aims of moral education with their evangelistic and sectarian interests.

DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

Moral Ethics

The philosophic study of the nature of good, virtue, right and other morally relevant terms. In western culture, reflection on the nature of morality begin in ancient Greece with the sophists in the fifth century B.C. The Greeks were aware of the different moral customs of other peoples, as well as of differences existing between the Greek city - states. The awareness of diversity among customs led them to consider whether any moral practices could be regarded as better than others. Is there any possibility of disputing the correctness to opposing moral beliefs? The sophists generally were moral skeptics because their professional posture precluded an absolutist position. They were basically teachers who sometimes advertised their talents by claiming that they could teach one to demonstrate the moral acceptability of any cause what so ever. The teaching of success, in argument or life was their main aim. One of the philosophical articulations of this aim is "Justice is the interest of the stronger" or "might equals right.

ETHIC MORAL

In philosophy, the science of moral values and duties; the study of ideal human character and human conduct and the consequences of it. Moral developed when men began to study the motives behind their actions and the results of them. Since the time of Socrates

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in ancient Greece, philosophers have derived many ethical systems. Theories center around several questions.

1. How do individuals get knowledge of good and evil?
2. What is good (in the moral sense) and what is the highest good (Summum bonum) of human conduct?

There are three main theories about how man gets his knowledge of good and evil;

- Empiricism insists that conscience, the power to tell right from wrong, develops through experience in living and doing.
- Rationalism holds that man can rely on his reason in making judgments on what is good and evil.
- Intuitionism is the theory that conscience is an innate, or in born faculty that gives man an immediate knowledge of right and wrong.

Moral conduct must have some sanction, but not all people agree on what this sanction should be. Many people believe that the sanction is religious.

Religious people believe they must follow the commands of God, but usually accept these commands as interpreted by some church. The sanction is political when the state is recognized as the authority that decides what the citizens should do or not do accept is binding the moral code of their society in order to retain the support and acceptance of their neighbours.

RELIGION

Religion is faith and practices involving the relationship between mankind and what it regards as sacred. Religion almost includes the belief in the supernatural and a code of ethical behaviour. Scholars find it difficult to frame a definition of religion that will include every religion past and present. Many believe that the idea of supernatural is universal to religion and should, therefore, be a part of its definition. Others reject this view points.

Religion may be a private set of beliefs of only one person, or it may be a shared set of beliefs of many. Religion is often practiced within a formal organization. Religion at an early stage of development often overlaps with the practice of magic, which involves not only the worship of supernatural forces, but also the attempt to control them.

Religion has much in common with philosophy, since both deal with such ultimate questions as the nature of the universe. Religion, however unlike philosophy, normally requires that a person accept a certain body of beliefs and follow certain rituals and practices

MORALITY AND EDUCATION

The issue of education in public Vs. Religious schools is very broad, and there are many important components that one should analyze when exploring the topic. One of these

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parts is the sub-issue of morality education in the different types of schools, just as there are many topics related to the overall subject of public and parochial schools, there are many issues connected to the general idea of morality education in these schools as well. These sub-issues include theories relating to moral development, the connection between religion and morality and the connection between morality and education. A comparison between morality in public versus parochial school students, an exploration of the teaching of morality in different areas or population groups in the United States and a cross cultural analysis of the teaching of morality in different countries across the world are also important to the understanding of morality in education as a whole.

THEORIES OF MORAL DEVELOPMENT

HOW CAN MORALITY BE JUDGED?

One view of morality is based on Kohlberg's is framework of moral reasoning. According to Kohlberg "moral judgments may be defined as judgments of value, as social judgments and as judgment that oblige an individual to take action (Glover, 1997). There are three types of reasoners in Kohlberg's theory pre-conventional, conventional and post conventional. Pre conventional reasoners reason according to the self perspective, in that they either ignore or fail to understand social norms, and consequently do not use them in their reasoning process. Conventional reasoners do not use these social rules and norms to guide their moral reasoning. Lastly, post-conventional reasoners appreciate social rules but do not explicitly follow them when making moral decisions. Indeed, they use the principle behind the social norm to direct their behaviour.

Piaget also had a theory of moral development is based on stages. The first stage is called heteronomous morality. In this stage children believe that rules are constant and that breaking them results in automatic punishment. Additionally, a behaviour that has negative consequences will be judged as bad and as deserving of punishment even if the intentions behind the action were good. (Slavin, 2006). The second stage of morality called antonomous morality, developed after age 10 or 12: in this stage, children base their moral judgements on the intention behind the act and not just whether there were positive or negative consequences to follow the act. Children understand that rules are made by man and that punishment is not inevitable (Slavin, 2006) Carol Gilligan presents another theory of morality which based on a criticism of Kohlberg work which focus primarily on boys. In Gilligan's theory, boys' sense of morality is based on a sense of justice and people's individual rights. On the other hand, girls moral reasoning is based on issues of caring and an individual's responsibility for other people (Slavin, 2006).

How can these various theories be applied to real life learning situations. They can be used for morality education. One interpretation of the purpose of moral education that moral education should guide the students to build up the correct outlooks of the world, life and

evaluation, consistently improve their socialistic consciousness so as to lay a solid foundation for them to become a rising generation having loft ideas, moral integrity, knowledge and culture, and observing disciplines.

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN EDUCATION, MORALITY AND RELIGION

Education and religion have a strong connection as many issues relate to both. Religion has always had a strong influence on people's social and political issues. Education is also a hotly debated issues in politics today, especially as it related to issues such as how to teach creation versus evolution. (Deckman, 2002) People must decide whether or not their needs are being met by and if their values are appropriately being transmitted by their local public school, or whether or more religious education fits their needs better.

From the perspective of religious leaders, there is a connection between morality and education and whether to teach religion in our schools. Morality is necessary so children can learn to respect, values and take care of themselves and others. In a world where sort-term gratification is pressed upon children by their peers, the media, and many adults, to raise a young person without a basic value system is to cast him or her adrift"

While the teaching of values has traditionally taken place in the home, church or synagogue, as well as in schools recently, society nas[1] become reluctant to teach values in public schools as many are afraid that specific religious views will be presented. However most core values are the same in all major religious, the constitution and the bill of rights. Therefore, if should be possible of transmit these hared values without emphasizing one religion in particular.

However, according to atheism, there is no link between moral behaviour and religious behaviour. Therefore, according to this view, it is inappropriate to teach children about religious and moral behaviour without also presenting the possibility of morality that is not associated with religion. Children should be taught to think about morality and the reasons for behaving in an ethical manner according to common sense, not just religious law or tradition.

Kohlberg also believed that morality and religion are unrelated. In his opinion morality is based on justice and congestive thought, while religion has its foundation in revelations from a religious leader (Glover, 1997) there is clearly mush dissent regarding whether or not morality and religion are explicitly connected. In either case, proponents for either side of the argument would agree that character education is necessary in schools today. However, the question is morality education more successful in public or parochial school.

MORALITY IN PAROCHIAL VS. PUBLIC SCHOOLS

In terms of the teaching of morality, the difference between a public school and private religious school is one key area to examine. Many people see an explicit connection

between religion and morality, as most religions have specific values and laws outlined to dictate moral behaviour. Logically, it would follow that religious student, or students, in parochial schools would have higher levels of morality. Is this assumption correct?

According to studies done comparing the moral reasoning abilities of children, parochial school students did in fact score higher on measures of morality. One study compared catholic and Jewish parochial school students to public school students and found that the catholic students matured earlier in terms of their ability to see a moral distinction of intention from out come of action as compared to public school students. (Boehin, 1963). Additionally, "Jewish parochial students showed stronger empathy with an injured peer than any other group and were more peer related and more independent of adult authority apparently because of this empathy (Boehm 1963). This distinctions in the level of moral reasoning of the different groups of students implies that different religion and types of schools do in fact have different methods of teaching and have different content and values that are presented as well.

However, while to have a more developed sense of morality other studies show less conclusive results describing their effect. For instance, "parochial school students scored significantly higher on depression, hostility and dysphoria, and significantly lower on positive affect and overall positive mood" (Lubin and Terre, 1992). Salvation and wisdom were two personal values that Roman Catholic adolescents ranked more commonly that their public-school counter parts while the public-school students, who had significantly higher scores for positives affect, ranked having a comfortable life and pleasure more often than did parochial schools' students (Lubin and Terre, 1992).

The difference in values seemingly contributed to the Differences in affect between the two groups of adolescents. There are many potential reasons that could explain these findings. One reason could be that children raised in Roman Catholic homes might have been exposed to more guilt and anxiety producing beliefs and experiences while growing up. This is sometimes thought of as typical Catholic households (Lubin and Terre 1992).

There is conflicting evidence to this point, however, that shows that religious students have higher self esteem. Self esteem is an important part of schooling because it is related to scholastic achievement, dropout rates, delinquency, early sexual activity and substance abuse problems (Bagley and Mallick, 1997) many of these behaviours are also connected to morality. Many people would consider substance abuse problems and decisions regarding sexual activity to be associated with one's view of moral and appropriate behaviour. Therefore, It can be seen that self esteem and morality are connected as well. Additionally, it has been found that catholic students in public school have greater educational aspirations for themselves. Besides, participation in church activities in addition to family and community involvement lead to higher motivation that results in better reading skills (Regnerus, 2000) Hence, this "reinforces the motion that churches

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serve as networks that operate as agents of socialization into traditional means of achievement" (Regnerus,2002) The connection between religion and education in this instance is therefore clear.

VARIATIONS IN MORAL ATTITUDES AROUND THE WORLD

Issues of passing along moral values to children are different in various places around the world. The diverse cultures and variety of religions that people practice around the world practice have the potentials to shape people's views regarding many values, an important one being the transmission of morality to one's children. It has been well established by multitude studies that people combine their moral judgment with their cultural ideologies when making decision regarding important issues. (Rest, Thomas, of Bebeau, 1999) Thus helps to explains why there may be such different conceptions of or methods of teaching morality in different parts of the world.

In Israel, for example, there is a visible divide between the rreligious and observant Jewish community and the secular ccommunity. This separation can be seen in the homogeneity of neighbourhoods, and is also evident in the school system. Parents in religious families choose to send their children to public religious schools, while secular families opt for public schools with no religiouss focus (Schwartzwald and Leslau 1992). The difference between ese schools is not only in the material that is taught but also in the Lies that are exposed.

Analyzing the way in which morality is transmitted to Muslim dents in Kuwait provides a new, unique view. The specific standing is in correspondences with the "philosophy of life in the Greed that says "life is a gift or a trust from God who alone he ultimate right and authority to continue or terminate it" (Al-Ansan, 2002). As a results religious Muslims rate this statement most highly on a list of moral standards. This view is consistent with stage 4: Law and order orientation, in Pigoet's is view of morality. This stage belongs in the conventional level of morality, in which as Slavin explains, moral judgments are no longer based on a desire for social approval, violation of laws are not justifiable, and laws are followed explicitly. (Slavin, 2006) thus, it influences the way in which morality is taught in schools in Kuwait. This example clearly demonstrates "that moral reasoning is partially culturally bound" Al- Ansari, 2002)

Moral education in China takes a similar form to that in Japan. ^ is an essential part of education in schools and is taught in primary and secondary school with the teaching of other subjects, as well as in after school activities such as the young pioneers and the communist youth league. Family also plays an important role in terms of maintaining a positive social environment and influencing children. Additionally, there is a state created "code of conduct of primary School pupils" and a "code of conduct of secondary school students" these codes establish the basic stipulations for the behaviour of students.

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In the transmission of moral ideals, Japanese moral education is designed to instruct students in morality through every education activity in schools. This is accomplished through direct moral education, lesions in all academic subjects and all special activities as well (Ikemoto, 1996). In addition, there are three other ways in which the Japanese transmit a sense of morality to their students.

First students, actively participate in school work. This serves the purpose of establishing a positive a learning environment as well as teaching the students to understand the value of work. Secondly, students participate in activities with living things like animals and plants. The hope is that through these activities children will learn to respect and value life. Thirdly, students partaken in after school clubs in junior high and high school. This helps them to develop interpersonal skills such as cooperation, responsibility and courtesy as well as learn to adhere to rules.

These examples demonstrate varied ideas of what constitutes morality in different places bring up many important questions. Is there an impartial way to measures the development and presence of moral reasoning? Do different cultural ideals merely correspond to different levels of moral reasoning as outlined by western thinkers? Would the world benefit from a common criterion for morality, or because cultures are so diverse and unique. Perhaps each country would have its own code though.

From the fore going, it might well *be* said that one's education is not complete without a study of comparative religion or the history of religion and its relationship to the advancement of civilization. Its certainly may be said that the Bible is worthy of study for its literary and historic qualities, just as the Quoran has in built capability to shape the character of man.

RATIONALE

Human beings have always engaged in religious practices that need to be developed for an enhanced understanding of themselves and the environment. Every society has a culture: and cultural values have to be transmitted from one generation to the other. Religion and morals are important elements of any culture. It has always been perceiving that morality arises from religion and draws its content from same. The religious and moral education syllabus develops and informs the conscience of learners, and helps them to develop the skills and attitudes that will enable them to make sound moral choices.

Religious and moral education contributes to the development of individuals who are responsible citizens and make autonomous decisions. The young generation is challenged by the uncertainties of transformation such as moral decline, family breakdown, prevalence of corruption, dynamism of culture etc. hence our education system needs religious and moral base lest the nation lose direction.

In view of the above concerning the integration of religion and moral education into our educational curriculum, hereby make the following submissions about the positive contributions which religion make towards the promotion of the aims of moral education.

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CONCLUSION

First, if we understand religion as an expression of man's search for more meaningful and more perfect modes of existence, then we can reality appreciate the strong psychological incentives for moral conduct which religion can provide. Those religion which contain a belief in a next life usually lay great emphasis on the need to of living a good moral life in this world as an essential condition for admission into the happiness of the next life. A religion with such powerful psychological incentives for good moral behaviour endurably can become a useful vehicle for moral education.

Another important contribution religion can make to moral education is in respect of sanctions. The crucial role of sanctions in curbing human inclination to evil is generally recognized. Certain religious beliefs such as the belief in God who is omniscient and knows that secrets of our heart, ensure that religious sanctions are ineluctable. The belief that one cannot escape God's judgment even if one were to escape all of society's sanctions provides a healthy restrain from immoral behaviour. Hence our education base on religious principles becomes necessary.

Thirdly when religious imperatives coincide with moral norms, they confer on the moral norms a special binding force attracting greater allegiance. The compelling force of duties regarded as religious is such that when there is apparent conflict between religious duties and purely moral demands, the latter tend to give way to the former. A classical illustration of this is the biblical story of Abraham, the man of faith, who was willing to sacrifice his only son to God's command in obvious violation of the norms of rational morality.

Finally, religion may further the aims of moral education by providing ideals and models of moral behaviour. The heroes of the great religious of the world provide powerful models of moral conduct which the moral educator can exploit to considerable advantage. Believing certain things about God and his trusted messengers can and does influence the moral behaviour of the believer. For example, Christian are specifically urged to emulate God's moral perfection, "you therefore must be perfect as you father is perfect".

The objection is sometimes raised against the use by the classroom teacher of religious materials such as stories and models to support generally accepted moral values. The reason for the objection is that in a typical class comprised of students from different religious back grounds, the teacher run the risk of displaying bias in favour of his/ her own religion, a situation that could alienate some students, the practical objection must be addressed by the classroom teacher. The issue here is to act in a way that does not offend the sensibilities of those pupils/ students who may not subscribe to the particular religious faith from which the illustrations are taken, in believe however, that the moral educator can be free from the charge of bias in this respect if he /she routinely draws examples from a variety of religious faith.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Government should encourage and promote the teaching and learning of moral attitude and values in our educational institutions.
2. Educational institutions and religious institution should collaborate to have a better understanding of moral education in our society.
3. Moral education should be made compulsory in our school curriculum so as to provide a healthy restrain from immoral behaviour by providing ideas and models of moral behaviour.
4. The different organs of the Government should do the needful in this regards. Workshop, seminars, -conferences e.t.c, should be organized in this regard to raise the consciousness of our people towards critical ethical intelligence.

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