Christian Ethical Values for the Promotion of Morality and Realizing Sustainable Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

The nauseating trend in our contemporary Nigerian society is the heartbreaking rate of moral decadence. More worrisome is the deplorable situations of socioeconomic and political underdevelopment, in spite of its conspicuous and negative consequences. The main purpose of this paper is to examine the role of Christian religious ethics for the promotion of morality and realizing sustainable development in Nigeria. The paper addresses the following key concepts: Christian Ethics, Values, Morality and sustainable development. It finds out the causes, effects and strategies of elevating morality and attainment of sustainable development in Nigeria. The paper makes use of descriptive tools of analysis. Using the expository and deductive reasoning, the paper finds out that only religion and particularly Christian Religious Studies and education can use the ethical values in its kit to elevate morality and speeds up sustainable development in Nigeria. The paper finally concludes that Christian ethical values, if given careful consideration, ensure the acquisition of spiritual, civic, ethical and moral values as well as appropriate knowledge and skills needed for laying a solid foundation for lifelong learning and a guide for behavioural transformation and ethical orientation for sustainable development of Nigeria.

Keywords: Christian Ethics, Values, Morality and Sustainable Development

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Background to the Study
For any country to guarantee education for sustainable development, proper moral values must be sustained. Within the Nigerian body politics, there are ethical values enshrined in the Nigerian constitution. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria of 1989, in section 23, page 31, stated that "the national ethics shall be discipline, integrity, dignity of labour, social justice, religious tolerance, self-reliance and patriotism". The national ethics assert the relevance and the importance of morality to our cultural, social, economic, religious and political theories and practices. The national ethics are all moral principles which safeguard thoughts, behaviours, actions, and decision in various areas of our national life.

There are antisocial ills in Nigerian society that negate development. The negative attitudes namely: greed, bribery, corruption, dishonesty, crimes, religious intolerance, violence, insurgency, terrorism, kidnapping, disrespect to constituted authority, rule of law, election rigging, examination malpractices, certificate racketeering, cultism, armed banditry, prostitution, and moral decadence. There is general rapid decay of the overall values systems in Nigeria that calls for promotion of morality that will sustain self-development opportunities for the youths, (Onovughe & Mordi (2017). Nigeria cannot have sound developmental activities without prioritizing its national ethical values. The place of Christian ethical values in Nigeria is to be appreciated if it assists in promoting all aspects of national development. Eluu (2016) pointed out the role of religious ethical values that are of imperative necessity for development in Nigeria, today. This is to facilitate the building of a free democratic society, where people will be conscious and highly organized to participate, promote and defend their hard-earned democracy. If Christian ethical values are cherished and applied in the right dimension, then Nigeria will have a sound foundation or base for national development. Religion controls the laws, how we think and act, what we believe, what we value, and more. Therefore, the examination of the values system in Nigeria is worthwhile, because of its effects on character formation for sustainable development.

Conceptual Underpinnings
In attempting to discuss this topic beneficially, it will be pertinent to begin by clearly defining our terms with rigour and exactitude to avoid any possible misconceptions in the mind of the reader or listener. In order to provide the basis for this discussion, this paper will provide the definitions of Christian, ethical, values, morality and sustainable development. The understanding of such concepts would throw light on the understanding of a topic of this nature.

Christian: The word Christian etymologically comes from two Greek words "Christianos and Christos", meaning "follower of Christ" and "anointed one". It appeared three times in the New Testament Bible (Acts.11:26; 26:28, 1peter 4:16). The Bible tells us that "It was in Antioch that the followers of Jesus were first called "Christians". Gotan (2005) stated that a Christian is a follower of Jesus Christ, that is, one who believes and practices the tenets of the Christian faith as presented in the Bible. A Christian is one who is a follower of Jesus Christ, that is, a person who believes and practices the tenets of the Christian faith as presented in the Holy Scriptures. In other words, a Christian is a person who adheres to Christianity; a

monotheistic religion based on the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, who Christians believe is the Promised Messiah. Thus, a Christian is a social human person in whom God is present in grace through Jesus Christ, and whose whole life is shaped by that belief.

Values: Yahaya & Ayuba (2015) stated that values have several contextual meanings. Basically, they refer to worthiness, quality, importance and usefulness. Thus, values are those things we believe to be inwardly desirable or worthwhile. Religion is among the basic institutions and major force in influencing social behavior. Certain Christian ethical values are progressive to national development. Values represent broad ideas regarding what is desirable, correct and good, that most members of society share. They enable society members to make evaluations regarding what is proper and what is improper and reprehensible. Values, therefore, serve as a guide for socially acceptable behaviours. Values are matters of importance as distinct from more matters of fact. It can also be regarded as what an individual cherishes. What is valuable to A may not be valuable to B. Hence, value is subjective. Okpaga (2003) portrayed that values are the basis for the judgments people make as to what is desirable, correct and good, as well as undesirable incorrect and bad. In other words, values are issues regarded with esteem in the society. They are standards which serve as guide to what is acceptable to people.

Morality: Morality can be regarded as rightness or pureness of behaviour of an action while religion can be interpreted as belief in the existence of Supreme Being. It can be said that morality concerns itself with the norms of individual behaviour. It also deals with how we ought to behave in the society. Morality means a system of moral values against which human conduct is judged and ordered of a balanced living. Morality aims at moral decency in thought, behaviour and action. Morality is a theory of morals and obligations that concerns itself with what is right and what is wrong, good and bad, positive and negative, reward and punishment, praise and blame.

Ethics: Ozumba (2001) saw that the term 'ethics' comes from the Greek word '*ethos'* meaning norm or customary and it is equivalent to moral. It means a customary way of acting, contrasted with historical or anthropological way of acting. Ethics is the branch of philosophy known as moral philosophy or philosophical thinking about morality. It includes moral problems and moral judgments. The subject matter of ethics is nothing but human absolute end. Ethics is a discipline that studies morality. It is a theory of morals that deals with right and wrong thoughts or actions Ethics therefore deals with judgment as to the rightness or wrongness, virtuous or vicious, desirability or undesirability, approval or disapproval of our actions. Ethics signifies a general pattern or way of life. In another sense, ethics is used to signify a set of rules of conduct or moral code. Ethics is seen as an inquiry into the measuring of ethical terms and its relation to ways of life and rules of conduct. This sense relates to meta-ethics which is a branch of moral philosophy.

Christian Ethics: Christian ethics focuses mainly on Christian action and on the principles, derived from the Christian faith, by which to act. It is at the point of a multitude of decisions about what to do or what not to do - how to do right and how to avoid doing what a Christian

ought not to do - that the daily strains of living are most acute. Though there can be no exact blueprint by which to settle all these dilemmas, there is light to be seen from the Bible.

Development: Uche (2011) conceived the idea of development as relative, meaning different things to different people. However, what seems common in the different meanings of development is the striving towards national interest, a competitive economy, the quest for unity and greatness. Development is a reference to the act or process of growing, or causing something to grow or become larger or more advanced. Development refers to better ways of doing things or the quality and quantity of a living standard of people in a nation. Familusi (2017) pointed out that development refers to a model of progressive transition from a pre-modern or traditional society to a modern society. Development in this context means all the activities, strategies, creative and calculated experimentations that are rationally conceived, critically analyzed and thoroughly implemented for the smooth running of the society, for the good of man and sustainable growth of the social order.

Sustainable Development: Mordi (2015) said that sustainable development means the process of growth in individual and socio-economic levels of progress in a given society. Sustainable development is the efforts at improving the socio-economic and ecological status and at exploiting and processing the environment or natural resources for the purpose of improving the quality of human life in such a way that the needs of the future generations are not jeopardized.

Mohammed (2002) identified the indices of development that are prerequisites to Sustainable Development include among others the followings: improved standard of living in terms of availability of decent accommodation, improved nutritional standards, qualitative health care and education services to the majority, life expectancy which is mainly influenced by the standard of living, availability of health services, literacy level, income of the people and the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which is the total output of the economy.

The Sources/Origin of Morality
The origin of morality may be difficult to trace. The Nigerian national ethics are all moral principles which safeguard thoughts, behaviours, actions, and decision in various areas of our national life. The national ethics assert the relevance and the importance of morality to our cultural, social, economic, religious and political theories and practices.

The Constitution: The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria of 1989, in section 23, page 31, stated that "the national ethics shall be discipline, integrity, dignity of labour, social justice, religious tolerance, self-reliance and patriotism".

Religion is the Source of Morality: Apart from the constitution of Nigeria, religion is the source and embodiment of the moral principles. Moral principles can be derived directly from religious ideals. Therefore, religious beliefs and practices are full of moral and ethical values for national development in Nigeria. In religion, God is the source and embodiment of moral principles. It is worthy of note that God is the origin of morality considering the nature of

God himself. He is full of moral, He, therefore, expects moral uprightness from His creatures – including man. Man's conduct is not just a secular conduct, but a religious or divinely inspired conduct. His conduct is pledged as a duty to both God and man.

Since God is the origin of morality, then it is also logical for us to believe that the source of morality is basically located in the Holy Books of the two religions, Holy Bible and Quran. For this reason, it can be concluded that moral actions are derived from religion as a result of which the two cannot be separated. But to the traditional religion, morality arose from man's consciousness of belonging to the Supreme Being. The source of morality according to African religion is located in the Supreme Being, Divinities, Ancestors, societal customs and traditions. They are all regarded as the custodians of morality in African Religion.

Man is by Nature a Moral Being. Morality is as old as creation. Right from creation, according to Biblical accounts, man was given a code of conduct comprised of dos and don'ts which were believed would guide him to attain peace and eternal bliss. However, with the fall of man from grace, he also lost his grip on peace. Hence one can conclude that morality is as old as creation.

Though, values differ from one society to another due to cultural background. The moral value system, which prescribes honesty, hard work, perseverance, modesty and so on, has potency, if not relevance, in the modification of social behaviour. The articulation of the moral principles helps to raise the standard of public morality.

Moral Principles for the Formulation of National Ethics

National ethics means a body of moral values which guides and orders the morality of a national life. The Nigeria "national ethics shall be discipline, integrity, dignity of labour, social justice, religious tolerance, self reliance and patriotism" (1989 Constitution, 1992, p.3). These virtues are no longer attractive because they are seldom 'handsomely rewarded'; indeed their infringement is not effectively sanctioned to serve as deterrent to others as it was in the past. Moral issues in our contemporary society can be found both in religion and the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The moral principles that can be available for the formulation of Nigerian national ethics include:

1) Discipline: All educational institutions need to pay greater attention to discipline and character building. Good character is far more important than money. For children to inculcate the sense of discipline in their life they need to be adequately groomed to be morally sound up to the next succeeding generations. Parents should pay attention to what their children read, wear and watch. Parents must instil the fear of God in their children. It is often said that spare the rod and spoil the child. Many of parents do not discipline their children properly. This lack of parental responsibility let Nigerian children to become wayward.

2) Integrity: Integrity, simply put, is doing the right thing all the time, in the open and in secret. The way to a good successful national development is as long as we are having this moral attribute.

3) Dignity of Labour: No honest menial job is degrading. Hard work leads to success and nothing good comes easy. Paul the apostle said that he who does not work should not eat. This means there is no food for lazy man. All vocations are to carried out to the glory of God.
4) Social Justice: this has to do with fair judgement.
5) Religious Tolerance: This is the ability to be able to accommodate nonsense. It is an attribute that one forgoes and admits difference with ease for the purpose of peaceful and mutual coexistence in a pluralistic society.
6) Self-reliance: This is an attribute that warrants self dependency. It is an independent mind of not relying on external forces for a survival.
7) Patriotism: This is an attribute that makes one to be loyal to his own country. He is a dedicated and committed citizen whose love of his nation is paramount in his heart.

Strategies of Elevating Morality
The agents for articulating moral principles for national ethics include the family, religion, school, associations and civil service. The family generates and sustains children's morality. The school helps in widening the moral training of the child up to adulthood. The cultural, economic, political and professional associations help in inculcating moral values of the society. The civil service also helps in instilling moral consciousness and attitudes.

It is not unlikely that a man with good moral will not only have happiness within himself but will also have contentment. A person with good moral is not likely to be involved in cheating dishonesty, fraud, armed robbery, drug abuse disrespect for oneself, disrespect for authority, disrespect for colleagues or age mates, disrespect for elders as well as disrespect for other man's rights. Generally, Christians are expected to make their character worthy of emulation. To teach good moral in the school, the school should include in its curriculum moral and religious education (Ilori, 2002). In addition, parents should not only show good examples to their children, they should also in still moral and religious education in their children. Again, religious bodies should emphasize the religious virtues which are capable of promoting unity among the youths. Finally, it is the duty of the society as a whole not only to teach the youths its rules and regulations but also to provide for their needs.

Religion is a veritable tool in the inculcation of moral principles for citizens of a nation. In religion, moral principles are seen as the commands of God. Thus, man's moral behaviour is a duty to both God and man. This implies that man's moral conduct needs to be morally adequate as approved by God to man. Religion is an agent of direct moral education for the promotion of public morality. Religion is an effective tool in the moral training and spiritual upbringing of children and adults at school and in the society (Kwasau, 2013). Moral principles are required in politics and business transactions.

Christian Ethical Values for Sustainable Development
What constitutes Christian values is clearly spelt out by God through his prophets. These are found throughout the Holy Bible, itself. The following can be identified by Etuk & Nwagbara & Ering & Ushie (2009) as some Christian values to include:

1. Respect for human life. Exodus 20:30
2. Truthfulness. Exodus 23:1
3. Reverence for parents. Ephesians 6:1
4. Respect for the elders. Leviticus 19:32
5. Love for one's neighbour. Matthew 22:39, John 13:35, Galatians 5:14.
6. Sexual purity. 1st Corinthians 6:8, James 2:11, Exodus 20:16
7. Hospitality. Hebrew 13:2, 1st Peter 4: 9, Leviticus 19: 34
8. Peaceful living. Romans 12: 18, Hebrews 12: 14
9. Obedience to constituted authority. Romans 13:1, 1st peter 2:13.

The Christian ideals outlined above are just a few examples of Christian religious values. These values are numerous and cannot be exhausted in a paper of this nature. Guided by these values, a number of Christians have notably and positively impacted their societies. The pursuance of such Christian values as those of love for one another /charity and hospitality, Christian bodies in many countries including Nigeria have established such organizations as Motherless Babies' Homes and Orphanages, Home for the Aged, and similar institutions where needs of disadvantaged society members are catered for.

Effects of Ethical Values for Speedy Sustainable Development in Nigeria
Obilom (1989:15) stated that the aim of teaching religion is "to educate the Nigerian children both morally and intellectually, and instill in them the desire to be good citizens". The teaching of religion in schools gives impetus to values education that leads pupils to raise fundamentals questions relating to life and existence. Nigeria is on high gear on corruption, especially among those at the corridors of power. This poses a big challenge to both religion and religious education. If religious education must be relevant to the Nigerian nation, religious leaders must brace up to the expectations of their responsibility of providing moral guidelines and spiritual checks and balances.

Obiekea (2015) & Ayuba & Zakka (2007) identified among others the followings as to be the beneficial effects of religion for speedy sustainable development in Nigeria:

Religious education is a very potent tool for nation building. This is observably clear from the study of European history. From the period of the scholastics to the beginning of the 18th century, education and politics and other socio-cultural institutions of human endeavour were in the hands of the church.

Religious education also championed technology. As it was known then, monks wrote and copied the biblical manuscripts and other ancient writings with hands and preserved them. Religion equally promoted the art of painting, drawing and sculpturing and other artistic ingenuities that modern technology has not rivalled.

Also, *religion promotes and sustains development* through the media of its religious values and ethos, (Uche, 2011). It is a truism that religious values have permeated the social fabrics of the cultural life of the Nigerian people. In this way, it contributes to the dynamic belief systems which preserve the awe-inspiring aspects of Nigerian cultural heritage. The teachings of taboo by religious education and its use help integrate the Nigerian integrative value system.

Religious education promotes social norms that keep the society together and review social commitment to the socially desirable behaviour, which in the long run creates sustainable behaviour in Nigeria. It also compliments sustainable development by conscientizing Nigerians to act according to their filial obligation.

Religion was conceived and understood as a powerful instrument of social change and liberation, can still transform the most criminal of all men in various societies through the teachings of religious beliefs, values, morality and ethics. Nigerian men and women could become better citizens through religious education.

Religion is an instrument of social control. Religious education in Nigeria should encourage this through the activities and pastoral duties of priests and religious functionaries. Priests are instruments of social control through their pastoral care programmes, praying for members, counselling, pastoral visitation and other pastoral activities.

Religion is also an instrument of social order. Through the teaching and promotion of religious traditions, restrictions are made; prohibitions and peace drives are encouraged. In this way, law and order are maintained and these are essential ingredients for sustainable development. No country can develop under tension, disorder and chaos. By preaching peace and obedience to the law of the land, religious education promotes order which snow-balls into a favourable atmosphere for business to thrive. In this way, religious education helps to bring about sustainable development in Nigeria.

Religion enhances the establishment of new social institutions. The provision of social welfare like schools, hospitals, orphanages, and care for widows and the poor, old people's homes are all evidences of the usefulness of religious education in Nigeria. The Health Services, education, and Nigerians economy are jeopardized and adversely affected as a result of moral decadence) corruption etc. From this, it could be observed that all the identified indices of development could hardly be attained in an atmosphere of moral decadence and social vices.

Religion influences individual and societal development. Resources put together are ingredients of development. Their sustainability depends mostly on their effective utilization. Their under-utilization and misuse could be a great loss and catastrophic. Money, assets, technology, territory, and independence are examples of possessive resources. The point is that how these resources can be managed or even harnessed, is where moral decadence prevails. The highlight of this is that a pseudo development could only be attained in an atmosphere where religious education is used as an instrument of vendetta. According to Adedeji (1997), the level of human development could be measured by the Human Development Index (HDI), whose components are health, education, and income.

Religion serves as social glue that binds the different people in the society together.   Nigeria is a pluralistic society par excellence. Nigeria is made up of people with different ethnic groups, religions, traditions, norms, cultures, political organizations. The various people are brought together into one single whole through religion. This social cohesion by religion encourages unity in diversity, despite the plural nature of the Nigerian nation.

Religion fashions and polishes morality. Through the teaching of religions, children are encouraged to express their faith and to develop their talents and thus prepare themselves for useful living in society (FRN, 1992). In Nigeria, today, Religious education articulates vividly, functional ways of addressing the immoral dispositions of Nigerians and in this way, it would be able to address the moral decadence in the Nigerian society. On the moral front, religious functionaries served as both moral guides to kings and legal consultants. Bad and despotic kings were deposed and excommunicated by the prophets/priests to give a sigh of relief to the masses.

Religion encourages and strengthens education: The Christian Church encourages and promotes learning, built schools and learning centres where religious and secular education was taught. The classical and Greek philosophies of Plato, Aristotle and other oriental writers were promoted and preserved by the church. The writings of churchmen like St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Bonaventure, Albert the Great and a host of others are still relevant today.

Finally, *religion promotes peaceful coexistence in times of conflicts*: Religion teaches and fosters forgiveness, promotes truth, confidence and commitment among people. These moral values do not only promote peaceful coexistence but are instrumental to nation building and sustainable development in Nigeria, (Daudu (2005). In a complicated pluralistic society like Nigeria, human actions, conducts and behaviour could affect the wider society negatively. Christian ethical values are meant to create a good and harmonious society, where all citizens irrespective of race, tribe, religion, social and economic status should peacefully co-exist.

Eluu (2016) saw religion as an instrument for the development of spiritual, moral and mental growth of the pupils or students. In essence, religion imparts in children an understanding of the universe and the interpersonal relationship between human beings and the Supreme Being. It is a stabilizing factor in the individual personality. Religion trains the students morally and instills in them the desire to do good and be virtuous. This is also the trust of value education.

Conclusion
There are significant role religion plays in inculcating ethical values for development of Nigeria. Religion and particularly Christian religion plays a significant role in inculcating ethical values. Christian Religion values can be used to foster national development. In Nigeria, political, economic and social development can be promoted through religion. Certain Christian religious beliefs and practices are progressive to development. This is to say that Christianity makes citizens to be conscious of their duties that promote national unity, integration and civic awareness for the common good of all. It has spiritual and hygienic implications that breed people with sound moral and spiritual mind, as part and parcel of social living. However, the functional role of religion in Nigeria is so much overwhelming that the negative tendencies of some misguided religious practitioners could be overlooked. As a force to reckon with, religious education performs the role of social control, offers social services and teaches social coexistence, moral values and integration. Since all these are

ingredients for development, religious education by implication fosters sustainable development in Nigeria.

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