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Religion and Challenge of Societal Values

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Abstract:

The focus of this paper is on Religion and challenge of societal values. The paper contends that societal values are values that not only holds the society together, but also gives the society a sense of identity. The paper also argues that misplacement of values especially that which relegates to the background the sacredness of life due to quest for materialism are major problems bedeviling societal values. The paper posits that religion as the overarching model has helped to appeal man's conscience to recognized and respect the sacrality of humanity. The methodology adopted was secondary sources which include, books, articles/ journal and internets sources. The study adopts historical approach. With this, the researcher was able to trace the origin of and problems associated with societal values. Finding from the study reveal that misplacement of values is due to quest for materialism. The paper recommends that appropriate measures be put in place as punishment for those who violate the sacrality of humanity.

Keywords: Religion, value and societal values

1. Introduction

In the hierarchy of values, societal values seem to be the most outstanding. This is because societal values form an integral part of the society. Invariably, the society cannot exist or function effectively as a social group without these values. In this sense, societal values are the foundation or the social fabric that holds the society together and invigorates into them the strong sense of social solidarity and oneness. One notable example of societal values include respect for sanctity of human life which means that man is not only a sacred entity, but also hold in reputable esteem and as such the centre of divine creation.

Societal values especially with regards to sanctity of human life, people or individuals have no power or freedom to choose or make a choice. This is because the sanctity of life cannot be compromised or quantified with anything lesser than human lives. One major problem of bedeviling societal values include misplacement of values due to quest for materialism. Money has become an end in itself to an extent that people are butchered into parts for rituals in quest for money. People are now ranked by naira. No value is placed on human life. Encomiums are now poured on those that have the naira without minding to ask the source of such wealth. Therefore, the objective of this essay is to examine the role of religion in our society and to see how it has helped to appeal man's conscience to recognized the sanctity of human life.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

The importance of societal values in our society cannot be overemphasized. Societal values are the fabrics that holds the society together. Apart from this, societal values promote peaceful cohesion in our society. Despite this, vice is preferred to virtue. Money is seen as most valuable commodity than human life. It has become a common practice for people to kill their fellow human beings, mutilate human body for rituals in request for money. This is 'misplacement of values' in our society or the sale of moral conscience.

1.2. Aim of the Study

Two factors motivated the researcher's interests in pursuing this study. The first was to ascertain the origin of societal values which had been in existence in the primal African Society. The second was to examine the role of religion on our society as the overarching model in our society and to see how it has helped to appeal man's conscience to recognized the sanctity of human life.

1.3. Religion

Morrceall (2013) views religion as a social-cultural system of designated behaviours and practices, morals worldviews, text, sanctified places, prophecies, ethics or organizations that relates humanity to supernatural, transcendental, or spiritual elements. According to Nongbri (2013), religion is a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic. According to him, it is the entirety of the linguistic expressions, emotions and actions and signs that refers to a supernatural being or supernatural beings.

For James (2010) religion is a relatively-bounded systems 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 a spiritually transcends socially-grounded ontologies of time, space, embodiment. According to James, religion offers people the understanding of existence and provide rules and regulations which controls people behaviour as it is believed that to live a godly life according to one's religion is to carry out one's duty both to God and men. As he further noted, religion is characterized as a sound entity that is functional in the sense that it contributes to the maintenance of society of equilibrium.

2. Value

The term value is difficult to define because any definition of value will be unsatisfactory and incomplete at least to many people. Writing on this problem of definition, Agha (2003) summarized that this problem

..... is partly because it is difficult to tell what people value from the utterance or from what they do. Besides, values are objective and subjective; objective because values exist for all persons. Subjective because value judgments vary from one person to another and from age to age values we place on things or experience arise from its satisfaction of some desire and interest (p.66).

In this regard, in a nutshell value can be defined as the satisfaction of some interest. Values can be standards or principles by which human beings are influenced in their choice among the alternative courses of action, which they perceive as being open to them. Further, values may be defined as the highest ethical parameters, standards and criteria through which individuals, groups and societies order their goals, determine their choices and judge their conduct as these pertain to fundamental aspects of life, be they in the sphere of secular and religious affairs (Friday, 2010, p.43).

2.1. Types of Value

Universal Values. Universal values are values that are nearly unanimously agreed upon as to the importance of them. These include, peace, and human dignity. Next is instrumental values, instrumental values are values that can be used to set something else. In other words, the value is an instrument which allows one to get some other things. Examples of these would include progress (which allows leisure time), freedom (through which we can get dignity and/ or self-actualization), and knowledge (which helps us get economic prosperity).

Following closely is intrinsic values which have to do with something that has intrinsic worth simply because of what it is and not necessary what it will lead to or because of its acceptance. Some possible examples of intrinsic values would include beauty, artistic expression and happiness. We value them because they are an important aspect of life. In addition to this is a prerequisite value, prerequisite values are values that are necessary before you can get to some bigger goals. Some good examples of this type of value include safety (which is needed before people can even think about having anything else), Justice (which is needed before we move onto equality). Following this is paramount values, paramount values are the value which is above all other things. Some examples of this might include freedom (which many people have given up their lives for and see as essential to a decent life) or sanctity of life. In addition is operative values, operative values are the type of values which show the ways that we make judgment on how to live the rest of our lives. We use these values as guiding principles which tell us what is always right and wrong. These are things such as integrity, honesty, and loyalty (Friday, 2010, p.44).

As for the functions of values, it makes people focus on useful and important cultural objects. It directs and guides people to think positively and behave ideally. Values also serve as a guide to realize social roles. It serves as instruments of social control and restraint tools. It provides social solidarity (Fichter, 1999).

2.2. Origin of Societal Values

Social values have been in existence in the primal African society. To this end, several factors have been advanced to this regard. First is to keep social deviants and evil prone individuals in check so that the machinery of the society may run undisturbed to ensure cohesion and peaceful existence in the society (Onyeidu, 1996, p.27).

To make each other brother's keeper and to promote the common good of all have been attributed to the origin of societal values. Societal values emanate in order to maintain the social relationship between man his fellow man and between the spiritual, invisible realm and the physical, visible realms since the society cannot do without these two realms especially when it has to do with the place of man in the cosmology (Metuh, 1989, p.51)

Although, sanctions were used to ensure conformity to societal values. It could be positive or negative. Positive sanctions are used as a reward for honesty and to shower encomiums on those who had achieved feat through dint of hard work and honest means. While negative sanction has to do with ostracism or social boycott as a punishment for murderers, sorcerers, witches or wizards. Derogatory remarks are also used to discourage bad conduct that may cause social upheavals and discomfort (Okwueze, 2003, pp. 84-85).

2.3. Meaning of Societal Values

Society, generally is defined as a self-perpetuating group of humans broadly distinguished from other groups by mutual interest, participation in characteristics relationships, shared values and a common culture. In this regards, societal values simply are standards established by the society to regulate individual conduct, action and behavior; to promote a strong sense of social solidarity in order to maintain social decorum and make the society desirably habitual and accommodating for all. Furthermore, societal values are those things which the society cherishes and place importance on them

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2.4. Examples of Societal Values

Examples of societal values include:

Respect for sanctity of human life, spirit of communalism (which make each other brother's keeper), success through hard work, honesty, generosity, respect for elders and constituted authority, truth, etc. (Anyacho, 1994, p.48). Here, I will like to dwell more on respect for sanctity of human life.

2.5. Respect for Sanctity of Human Life

According to some scholarly reflections on the origin of man, 'man has a trinity of relationship with God'. First, man is a creature of the Supreme Being; as such His continued existence depends on the wish and decree of his creator. Second, as a creature, his destiny is marked out by his creator who determines the boundaries of his operations in the universal scheme of things (Uche, 2010, p.83).

According to Christianity, Islam and Judaism, man was created in the image of God and is composed of both soul or spirit and body. (Ugwu, 1999, p.1). According to African religious thought, man is seen primarily not only as a creature of God, but also the centre of divine creation (Metuh, 1987, p.169). Man in the views of Agbo (1993), is sacred. According to him, he must be respected; he must not be abused; his dignity ought to be given it full worth. Hence nobody has a right to injure him. As he further noted, he is the climax and culmination of all God has created; therefore, his human dignity must be recognized and respected because of the sacrality of his humanity (p.36-39). All these expressions clearly affirm man's humanity, respect or worth and his sacredness in our society.

2.6. Importance of Societal Values

One major importance of societal values is that it preserves the society. Another remarkable importance of societal values is that it brings the society together as one indivisible entity. In addition to this, it gives the society a sense of identity. In addition, it promotes peaceful cohesion in the society. Furthermore, it prevents child delinquency and make the society socially responsible (<https://qknowbooks.gitbooks.io/class4citizenship-values-andresponsibilities-in/importanceofsocialvalues.html> extracted 29th June, 2020).

2.7. Problems Associated with Societal Values

One noticeable problem relating to societal values is misplacement of values or the sale of moral conscience due to quest for materialism. Money has become an end in itself. Vice is preferred to virtue. Money is seen as most valuable commodity than human life. It has become a common practice for people to kill their parents, mutilate human body for rituals. In our society today, all man's desire is quest for money, cares, hopes, dreams, joys seem to have melted down into naira and kobo. People are now weighed by naira, title, and affluence; life is now auctioned, assassinated and trampled underfoot for its Naira. No value is placed on human life, rights of people are not respected.

2.8. Religious Views on Societal Values

Nigeria as a country is characterized with multi-ethnic groups and multi-religions. The major religions practiced in the country are Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion. None of these religions teaches the member to kill or spill the blood of the neighbor for rituals in quest for wealth. For Christianity, killing is evil. For instance, the Holy Bible said that 'Thou shall not kill' (Exodus 20:6).

Similarly, Islam is vehemently against killing. As for African Traditional Religion, killing is considered a taboo. Furthermore, in the general terms, these religions appeals man's conscience to recognized and respect the sacrality of humanity (Celestina, 2010, p.87).

3. Conclusion

This essay examined religion and challenge of societal values in our society. The paper argues that misplacement of values in our society or sale of moral conscience due to quest for materialism is one major problem relating to societal values especially with regards to sanctity of life. The sacrality of humanity cannot be compromised with evil. It is in the light of this that religion appeals the conscience to recognized and respect the sanctity of human life.

4. Recommendations

- The sacrality of humanity should be recognized and respected.
- Encomiums, promotions, etc. should be used as reward for honesty and diligence.
- Acquisition of wealth through dishonest means should be discouraged with appropriate measures melted out to the individual as a deterrent to those who hitherto may wish to toe on the same part.

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