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ISSN 0794 - 3989

RELIGIONS

A JOURNAL OF THE

NIGERIAN ASSOCIATION

FOR THE

STUDY OF RELIGIONS

Vol. 17, December 2006

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RELIGIONS is a publication of the Nigerian Association for the Study of Religions. It encourages interdisciplinary research into the study of religions in Africa. All correspondences and manuscripts should be addressed to:

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Manuscript should be submitted in two copies
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This journal is published once in a year in the month of December.

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RELIGION AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIAN NATION: A SYNTHESIS

BY

A. G. ALAMU

Introduction

Religion and family ties are so sensitive, instrumental and co-extensive with life as well as a means of controlling influence in human existence and development. No doubt, family is synonymous with religion in terms of functions. Without equivocation, religion and family ties have relevance in the socio-economic aspects of life, which are networks for national development in Nigerian society. This network greatly helps to solidify the national development, because the family as the first point of call is thus seen as a multi functional accounts for its universality and its unavailability of which religion plays a significant role. On the other hand, religion also ensures that the family development serves as a catalyst in positioning society in the pedestal of development. Functionally, both religion and family revolve around man; therefore, they play a complementary role in the development of the Nigerian nation.

However, this socio-religious structure has broken down as a result of the moral uninterestedness on the part of these institutions. Presently, Nigeria is kept on the rails by playing with her human's train set. Besides, no nation can succeed in finding substitute to religion and family, which are the care of human existence, coupled with the transfer of functions of this socio-religious institution. The point, which is worth insisting upon no doubt, is the fact that reconciling these networks will do for a start.

To this end, the thrust of this paper is to examine the concept of religion and family ties vis-à-vis their functions in the society. It will also explore their areas of common interest and as well evaluate the present state of both phenomena. Concluding remarks will be tersely made.

Religion in Nigeria

In essence, religion has a powerful, motivating and controlling influence in human existence and relationship. It is thus co-extensive with life of the people who believe in the supernatural and the supersensible world. Religion is not created in isolation nor does it set to fill a vacuum.

In other words, religion is not an abstract idea but the uncertainty of the world drives man to look into religion as a link between two worlds the supersensible and the mundane. As a matter of fact, there is no society bereft of religion. Dopamu asserts that there is no known society without the existence of religion.¹ Corroborating this assertion Abe remarked, "in the beginning, it was religion; and in the end it shall be all religion",² In fact, religion has explained the world and human understanding of it. Significantly, religion has been defined by a handful of scholars. However, the definition seems to defy the universal goals and satisfaction of its content. Yet, new definition is not given here either. It is worthwhile to examine some of them.

Kenny aptly describes Religion "as any system which relates men to ultimate values, whether God or something else, and which embodies a creed, a code, a cult and a communion".³ In another development, Charles W Keqley distinguishes three basic features of religion as belief, feeling and action.⁴ It is imperative to note that what is pivotal to religion is belief in God or gods, the nature and destiny of the meaning of history and the end. On the basis of this, we come to appreciate the fact that religion does not only command but also gives its adherents something they are glad to live for and if need be, die for...⁵ In the same vein, Ejiofo also attests to the fact that:

Religion is the complex of beliefs and behaviour of men in the supernatural sphere and realities and in the dynamic linkage of the supernatural with the natural...Religion is one of the major drives behind human behaviour. Religion has had an important disciplinary effect on the whole social order in any given civilization⁶

The above shows that religion is a very deep factor in the lives of men. In point of fact, religion identifies itself with the first instinct for self preservation. "Men take off from religion, men march along with religion and they arrive at religion with a minute-to-minute phenomenon",⁷ Ejiofo further buttresses that religion is:

The pride of the mind, the strength of the will, the relish of human emotions, a coveted object of delicate sentimentality... In short, it is the comprehensive resume of man's spiritual, rational and corporate existence.⁸

This reveals that religion is all-in-all to the Nigerians as they cannot be exempted. The people are worshipping beings,

either worshipping God, the transcendental or gods who are means to an end as the case may be. In all things, Nigerians are religious." As sensitive as religion is, it is worth living for, a pride of place for people as they subsequently derive satisfaction from it as well as sense of security. In Nigeria, there is the practice of triadic religions of African Religion (Afrel), Islam, and Christianity. Thus, the history of African Religion is as old as Africa herself. It is a religion handed down through forebears from the yore, and it is orally transmitted from one generation to another. African religion does not possess sacred scriptures, it is thus written in memory of the very world we live and transmit orally as the occasion demands. This is not proselytizing religion, nor does it have a drive for membership, yet it is tolerant, it accommodates and remains autochthonous. Therefore, we are born into it, live in it, and die in it¹⁰. Commenting on the overview of African Religion, Dopamu has this to say:

This is clearly seen in African Religion (Afrel), which encompasses all aspects of life. Africans do not know how to live without religion. They celebrate life religiously and they never embark on anything without bringing in religion. Thus at birth, marriage, death, warfare, healing, the foundation of any project, planting, harvesting, enthronement of chiefs and kings and other areas of human endeavor, Afrel plays important roles.¹¹

Islam and Christianity are the proselytizing religions, which had been imported into Nigeria. Thus, these religions are daily increasing in membership. They have had disproportionate size. Interestingly therefore, Nigeria is a secular and multi-religious state without any particular religion being a state

religion. There is no gainsaying the fact that Nigeria is a country of diverse cultures, traditions and truths. But of the entire diverse elements, religion has proved to be most sensitive agent for socialization in the society. It is this fact about religion that has made it a unifying factor as well as social mechanism for national development. Of a truth, the tenets of religions provide individuals with shared values, roles and incumbents. Religion as a way of life is aimed at the transformation of individual life. This individual life as a means of microcosmic structure in the overall macrocosmic structure of the society. Apart from this, "each of the patterns of life and practice presupposes a structure of shared beliefs. When the credibility of central religious beliefs is questioned. Other aspects of religion are also challenged"¹¹. Succinctly therefore, religion is recognized as a channel for human and national development.

The Family: An Overview

The study of family is as vital as the human life in the society. As a result of ambiguity of the meaning of family, there is no universally accepted definition. Suffice now to state that Murdock as cited by Haralambos and Holbon considers the family as a social group characterized by common residence, economic co-operation and reproduction. It thus includes adults of both sexes, at least two of who maintain a socially approved sexual relationship, and one or more children, owned or adopted of the sexually cohabiting adults.¹² Not only that, Ekong remarked that family is a kinship group linked by blood and marriage and occupying a common household.¹³ While Popence regards family as a unit constituting a husband and a wife living independently for rearing their children, providing each other with affection and companionship and maintaining exclusive sexual relationship.¹⁴

Granted the fact that parents are astutely involved in this social institution, it means that family is universal, its root

transcends beyond the biological nature of man than those of any other known institutions. The effectiveness of other social institutions hinges on the efforts and influence being channeled through the family. Family has been referred to as "the place where we can exert the greatest influence on all forms of morality."¹⁶

Functional theorists such as Barrington More argues stoutly that:

Among social scientists today, it is almost axiomatic that the family is a universally necessary social institution and will remain such through any foreseeable future.... I have the uncomfortable feeling that the authors, despite all their elaborate theories and technical research devices are doing little more than projecting certain middle class hopes and ideals onto a refractory reality.¹⁷

In line with the above, Murdock avers that, "the family is seen as a multi-functional institution which is indispensable to society. Its "many sided utility" accounts for its universality and its inevitability".¹⁸ Having recognized the viability, relevance, permanent and prominent position of the family, it suffices to note that the family has enormous functions and is unavoidable. In evaluating the classical, and neo-classical descriptions of the family, the meaning and description remain insurmountable. To this end, family is the nucleus of human nature as well as the community of parents and children. The needs and inclinations of the child, the affections and innate tendencies of the parents towards the children, the ties of consanguinity with all the implied bodily and spiritual affinities leave no doubt on its natural significance.¹⁹ It is in compatibility with the above that Levi Strauss argues objectively that family has triadic characteristics:

- I. It finds its origin in marriage
- ii. It consists of husband, wife and children, though it is conceivable that other relatives may find their place close to that nuclear group.
- iii. The family members are united by legal bond, economic, religion and obligation. A precise network of sexual right and prohibition and varying amount of feelings such as love, attention, respects etc.²⁰

It is in line with the above that family can be described as universal in nature as well as pivot of society, which is anchored on marriage and consanguinity. Therefore, family is an institution of husband, wife and their offspring-nuclear family.

However, there are variations in family structure and they are fundamental in the society. Those variations comprise nuclear, extended, vertical and horizontal family. As a result of the focus of this work, it would be appropriate to concentrate on the nuclear family, as the first call in the social institution. According to Murdock, nuclear family is universal as a, social and functional group. Hear him:

The nuclear family is a universal human social grouping. Either as the sole prevailing form of the family or as the basic unit from which more complex forms are compounded. It exists as a distinct and strongly functional group in very known society.²¹

The point that is worth insisting upon here no doubt is the fact that Murdock's holistic approach to the nuclear family which is strongly obtainable in Africa. The more complex forms imply the different nuclear families, which are tightly bounded together.

The Functions of Family and Religion in the Society

The family is universal, so is same form of co-residence, intimacy, sexuality and emotional bonds of social relationships. In point of fact, the family's functions for society are inseparable from its functions for individual members. It serves both at one and the same time and in much the same way. From functional perspective. Talcott Parson argues that, Families are "factories" which produce human personalities. He added that they are essential and require a context that provides warmth, security and mutual support. He conceived of no network other than the family could provide in this context.²² To this end, the basic and irreducible function of the family is that the family members socialize their children, primarily during the early years of childhood. Socialization starts at home.

The functions of the family unit are the social tutelage of the child, integration and socialization into the wider community. The family has this degree of child's education, integration and harmony between the kinds of social system if society at large is to function efficiently.²³ In this manner, children learn whom they are, what society requires from them and how to behave towards others in the larger society. In the African milieu, both parents and relatives within the home help in no small measure to develop character and social responsibility in the child "Paul Tappen as cited by Oderinde says "if there is to be any real effective curtailment of law violation in the society, it can come only through the medium of the family".²⁴ It is against this background that other social networks hinge on the efforts and the influence of the family ties.

The family thus becomes a place where all vestiges of morality that can affect and influence the wider society are learnt. Besides, the family has to provide the basic necessities

of life such as food, shelter, clothing and education to the child. The provision of these necessities of life makes the child feels that he is taken care of. The implication of this is that he will feel the sense of belonging, which will lead to a positive effect on his development and growth. In addition, this sense of belonging will contribute immensely and positively to his physical, intellectual and emotional stability as well as moral and social upbringing.

In another development, it is stressed that even adult individuals are also stabilized by the parent's role in the socialization process. This allows them to act out "children" elements of the personalities which they have retained from childhood, but which cannot be indulged in adult society.²⁵ Irreducibly therefore, the process of socialization still includes the adult in the personalities as a result of the social changes in the society which has correspondingly social effect on the psyche of the people. This pattern of obedience and compliance laid down in early childhood forms the basis for obedience to civic authority in later years.

Sequel to the above, the intellectual and moral development of the child decisively depends on the tutelage within the family set up. In this circle the child is taught the relevance of mutual love, the essence of human life, virtue, charity, equality, justice among others. These moral tenets are basically taught at home. This social education is crucial to parents and their offspring because of the urgent need. This decision is reasonable and the parents have their offspring because of the urgent need. In a sense, they must express that "we know best" and yet, they must feel and express a basic trust in the child's judgment and morality. Its mainly the child's sound upbringing and his beliefs that his parents have confidence in him not their rules that keep him on the right track.²⁶ Meanwhile, the child still needs the rules, and the

realization that his parents care enough about him to give him the rules, in order to fill the vacuum in his existence.

The socialization of children does not rest solely on the parents or the family only, other institutions such as schools, churches, mosques, the market, the mass media and the society as a whole play a significant role that cannot be ignored.²⁷ It is the realization of this fact that has made the nuclear family a solid institution that gives recognition to other social networks in the process of socialization. -The functional prerequisites must be operational in the society since its survival depends solely on it. The family is thus examined in relation to the degree to which it means this functional prerequisite. Interestingly, the recognition of the roles of the family has positive implication on the spiritual and material welfare of the child, which takes place in the family unit. Not only that, the family at its best serves as the clearest parallel of the relations between men and God in which case, family relation is the network of God instituted at the foundation of human existence. Also, the material aspects deal with the fact that a good cultivation of moral habit in the family must be incorporated to some extent with the economic system. If this is affected, it also affects the larger society. This is dysfunctional both for society and individual family.

The family has had influence on the peers in the process of socialization. This functional role has been irreducibly regarded as powerful, instrumental and at the same time expressive as a result of the long-testing effect, which might be either way. That is why Benjamin Spock emphasizes that parents should allow them freedom. "It's natural for a child who is approaching adulthood rapidly to insist on rights and dignities that belong to each step..... And some of them confess that they wished their parents would be a little stricter, like some of their friends' parents".²⁸

The peer groups as indicated earlier have strong attachment, and arising from the fact that parents still have roles to play in this regard, children should not be allowed to steer their feeling away from their parents and towards someone outside the family, they cover up the positive feelings with negative ones. The parents, of course, have more or less strong attachment for their adolescent children".²⁹ The parents become handy to revert the sudden rivalry with them.

In respect of religion, we must appreciate the fact that religion and society are closely related. The various religious institutions formulate doctrines, ethics, values and rules that are incorporated into the life of the wider society in religion helps to create a sense of transcendence over worldly affairs.³⁰ As a matter of fact, liturgical activities such as singing, music, dancing, procession, prayers, meditation and incantation are mechanisms, which create a mystical context in which a spiritual union between man and the supernatural beings takes place. Supporting this view, Dzurgba remarks that:

The implications of religious belief on societies are pure thought, ethical behaviour and good citizenship. It may lead also to reconciling individuals, reorganizing relationship, increasing commitment to duty honoring obligation and a greater participation in welfare services.³¹

The family is the "domestic sanctuary" called to pass on the faith of the ancestors to cultivate the religious traditions, to offer common prayer to God and to translate in to daily life its religious convictions. Man's longings for communication, friendships, beauty, play and recreation find their earlier source of fulfillment in the circle of parents, brothers, sisters and relatives. Most of the finest values of culture and

civilization received the first seed and development in its midst³²

The teaching of moral values has been further helped by religious organizations such as churches, mosques, shrines, pastors, imam and priests. Moral values include mode of living, lifestyle, believing in what is right, proper, which people are ready to justify, defend and uphold. These are obedience, respect, love, faithfulness, justice, equality, and honesty among others. These moral values are catalysts to a successful, prosperous and stable society. Knowing that the moral values are prerequisites of social and religious community, the various religious institutions entrench duties, obligations coupled with sanctions on their members. To this end, moral values are derived from religion, supernatural source and human society. Meanwhile, moral values in Nigeria are not uniform. There is great diversity in moral values held by Nigerians. Generally speaking morality originated from religious considerations.³³ So, religion and morality remain inseparable. "The laws, taboos, customs and set form of behaviour all derived their compelling power from religion. Any break of moral value is regarded as evil and liable to punishment".³⁴

These religious organizations help to organize various conferences especially on marriage seminar whereby the would-be couples and couples would be schooled in the art of marriage and the responsibility of parents to the children. However, it must be understood that religion has a unifying factor and a cohesive function of making the society a family. Emile Durkheim in his *The Elementary forms of Religious Life*³⁵ asserts that religion is seen as a functional institution in the society. He says that society's influence is so enormous that it awakes a feeling of reverence and obedience from men. Religion also helps to facilitate a harmonious social existence. To him, society is the religion that men worship.³⁶

Religion serves as a social solidarity among the people and a communal order which society wields on men. This influence that the society wields on man is so great that it is regarded as divine and infinite. However, the views of Emile Durkheim appear reasonable and convincing, but there is transcendental experience in religion which Durkheim cannot down play. In the structural functionalism, understanding, Durkheim avers that;

.....the main function of religion, as a social institution, which involves a collective sharing of beliefs, is to unify people in a moral community. According to this view, religion creates and maintains social solidarity and as society lasts so will its religion last.³⁷

It is important to state that family development and religion simultaneously have a pride of place in the society. In fact, both religion and family revolve around the same man; therefore, they play a complementary and mutual role in the human society.

Evaluation

Regarding the functions of family and religion, it is pertinent that they are crucial to the moral and social development of the society. The idea of the family regarded as one of the most fundamental essentials of its feeling for human life. The value which individual members possess within the family and the intimacy of the family bond are not unconnected with the religious individualism and the universality.

However, in Nigerian society today, many families have failed to inculcate and instruct their siblings along the line of morality. These have obviously contributed to the incessant social vices, which have permeated the society. These social

structures, which the collective wishes of the society have depended upon, have broken down completely. As a result, we have cases of malnutrition, poverty, child and drug abuse, juvenile delinquency, hatred, sexual abuse, rape, armed robbery, bribery and corruption, misappropriation, embezzlement, pen robbery, kickback, riot, and a host of other social ills. These are locusts in the Nigeria nation. The point that is worth mentioning here is the fact that these social ills originated from the inability of the parents to instruct their children when they are still under the control of the family, if the family were alive to their responsibilities towards the upbringing of their wards, social vices would have been checkmated. These orgic and negative ills have universal and corresponding effect in the larger society since the family is the social foundation of all human society.

Apart from this, the various religious institutions in Nigeria have also failed in their responsibilities to inculcate religious tenets to their adherents. Meanwhile, it is understandable that religions play complementary role with the family. However, it is seen that religious institutions allow monetary consideration to override religious beliefs and practices. Some religious leaders show permissive attitude towards criminal acts such as embezzlement of public fund, political violence, fraud, alcoholism and the rate of divorce. The religious leaders do this by not questioning the activities of their faithful. They never query the source of their wealth but too often, they seem satisfied with the outward show of piety and commitment to God and to their followers.³⁸

In addition, it is strongly believed that the Church, shrines and the mosque that are known as schools for ethical development have also performed below expectation. This development is associated with the various politicking, killings rioting, adultery, fornication and other unethical behaviours, which border on ecclesiastical uprising. Intolerance, bickering

and fanaticism amongst religious adherents. All these developments permeate religious institutions as houses that are divided against themselves. For this reason, they have failed woefully in leaving exemplary life for others to follow.³⁹

The effect of the failure on the part of the family has adverse and resultant effect on the society. R. D Liang in his *The Politics of the Family* as cited by Haralambos and Holbon says that;

Problems in the family create problems in society. Due to the nature of the nexus and the process of interiorization, a boundary or even a defensive barrier is drawn between the family and the world outside. This can reach the point where some families live in perpetual anxiety of what, to them, is an external persecuting world.⁴⁰

Despite the foregoing evaluation, family and religion still have some significant roles to play at this crucial time when the Nigeria nation is truly geared towards reforms.

Religion and Family Development in Nigeria: A symbiosis

It is worth-mentioning that Religion and family development converge on the some subject, man, man living, man acting, man socializing, man integrating and man harmonizing the disharmonies in human society. Essentially, Religion and Family Development in Nigeria are anchored on man, so there should be social congruence and spontaneous integrations among the various networks, roles, incumbents and structures.⁴¹ This manifestation must be evidently seen in the human society as intervention of the various organs as stakeholders in the affairs of the state.

The family has inevitably played a fundamental and unshakeable central role in the religious perception of human

life. The family unit can be described as the most essential social network of education and stability in the life of human kind. Apart from this, the family is the determinant factor in the social structure and regulation of the human community. Since the family is the core in social structure of the human society, the parents are expected to do their best to guide, encourage and support their wards in their emotional, educational, and occupational choices and carriers. Since the effectiveness and comfortability of other social structures hinges on the frantic effort of the family, the family should exert the greatest influence on the relevance of moral values, which the society requires for germane sustainability and continuity. Mencius aptly supported this view when he said that "When the family life is regulated, the natural life is orderly, and then there is peace in the world."⁴²

Therefore, the first institution of learning is the family where moral values are inculcated. Once these moral tenets are properly taught and strictly upheld in the childhood process socialization, from their adolescent to adulthood, they would treasure, respect and acknowledge these social values which must be brought to the national life and there would be absolute peace in the inhabited world. We must not fail to stress these social values, which members possess within the family and the subsequent intimacies of the family bond which are not unconnected with the religious individualism and universalism. In some cases, the primary importance of the family has been the moral and religious development of the children from their very beginning. Thus, the relationship of God to man is described as father complex drawn from family. This social responsibility is placed on the parents by all religious bodies as an evidence of the relevance attached to the family.

Sequel to the above, it is discovered that after the acquisition of these moral tendencies, the various religious organizations can sustain and re-emphasize these social values

through a unity approach. By unity approach in this context, we mean, the identification of areas of similarity in all religious ethics. This religious ethics is a trend of unity that holds all religions together. Whatever you find in one religion is expected to be found in another. African religion, Islam and Christianity openly condemn acts of immorality. For instance, the religious organizations are still creating some kind of spiritual atmosphere to shape the ethical life of the people that touches on cleanliness, faithfulness obedience, honesty and frown at pornography, abortion, alcoholic beverages, drug and child abuse among others. Not only that, the religious institutions often shape and still reshape ethical values in order to be put into full practice. Flowing from the realization of the family, the religious bodies have suddenly increased the number of seminars, conferences, and camp meetings to discuss topical issues such as politics, marriages and other professions.

In Nigeria today, the electronic media devote sufficient airtime to the moral teaching of Islam, Afrel and Christianity. This is a welcome development as they positively affect the Nigerian society. Thus, religion has not woefully failed in inculcating its morals in the Nigerian nation.⁴³ To this end, the ethical fulfillment of religious institutions should be more encouraging and all encompassing. These are better ways through which both the family and religion can develop the nation. Besides, the foregoing are life skills developed from the family and the religious networks as socio-religious constituencies, which operate effectively in society in an active, moral and constructive way. In traditional society:

There was an all-encompassing set of norms and values, defining how individuals should behave in more or less all aspects of social life, and these norms and values were transmitted from generations to generation

through the family and through the community institutions such as...initiation rites.⁴⁴

The above reveals the significance of the traditional norms and values transmitted and entrenched by the family and initiation rites, which are the product of religion. Though, urbanization which is the product of civilization has considerably weakened this traditional society, yet, it is advocated that the barrier of these traditional values should be re-built. Therefore, in a nutshell, religion and family development as pedestal for development should truly necessitate the development of self-awareness from the home with the attendant result to cope with emotion and stress. The development of social intercourse, which includes friendship making, adjustment to the society, empathy, love and sexual drive, as well as the ability to resist unhealthy pressure, should be encouraged.⁴⁵

Finally, the various schools of ethical development help to sharpen functional skill, creative and critical thinking, enabling the individual members of the society to make appropriate decisions amidst choices, solve problems and carry out practical tasks in the larger community.

Conclusion

It is universally acknowledged that the family is the core in the social structure of human society as well as religion in terms of functional roles. Thus, the family is the nursery of human nature, and its roots go deep into the biological nature of man than those of any other social networks. The family helps in no small measure to develop character, morals and social responsibility in the nuclear family. No doubt, the family is dynamic, adaptable and innovative in response to social changes of the human society where the wards feature.

Religion on the other hand, moulds this character, morals as well as helping marriages to address the essence of raising children in the way of God. This attention on religion ensures that family development reflects in the wider society.

It becomes apparent that religion and family, which anchor on man in the society, are both stakeholders in terms of roles, networks, incumbents and structures in the intervention of the affairs of the society. Of a truth, they play a complementary role in the development of Nigerian nation. In fact, synthesizing religion with family development is a catalyst for development, because they both operate effectively in the society as instructive and constructive morality. Thus, the schools of ethical development as identified would have the Nigerian nation restored from moral decadence and global threat as Nigeria has been swinging in comfort with social problems. Finally, this socio-religious structure, if fully recognized and entrenched in Nigeria, would promote the total well being of the people now that the nation is currently carrying out reforms. With this, Nigeria nation will become a truly inhabitable world.

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