

MORAL DEGENERATION IN THE NIGERIAN SOCIETY: A FOCUS ON THE STUDY

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Abstract

For some times now, the moral uprightness of Nigerians has been seriously questioned. As a society that has been established on a strong moral foundation from the pre-colonial era, the deviations from the known standards become very visible to all. This paper examines the moral debasement that is prevalent in our country today especially among the youths. It attempts to analyse the moral standard in Nigeria before independence and the present situation in the society and in our schools in order to highlight the likely causes of the moral degeneration among the youths in addition the possible effect of the moral decadence among the youths in our nation are examined and solutions are proffered.

Introduction

The topic Moral Degeneration in Nigerian Society: A Focus on the youths cannot be fully explained without first defining the key concepts: Moral Degeneration and Youths.

Moral Degeneration

The word "moral" refers to that which pertains to the conduct or duties of a man. When a man is virtuous, chaste and able to discriminate between right and wrong, he is said to be morally upright. In other words, he is able to practice the moral duties that are expected from every member of his society.

Moral Degeneration comes in when there is a deviation from the standard expected of every member of the society. When people are no longer virtuous, honest, law abiding, tolerant or respectful, there is decline from a notable state to a lower state and things will become morally bad.

Who is a youth?

According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, the term youth refers to:

- (a) the period of being young especially the time between childhood and adulthood.
- (b) the state or quality of being young.
- (c) the young man especially in his teens.

A youth, according to the above definitions, is young person who is in his teens/or not advanced in life, growth and development. He or she is someone between the age of twelve and twenty-five (12 - 25).

A Glance at Pre-independence Era

Before the advent of western culture along with Christian religion and western education, the standard of morally in our society especially among the youths was at its highest level.

Parents as well as adults who constituted the teachers saw the need to tame the young ones. The youths were taught good morals as well as the cultural values of the society. Fafunwa (1974) stressed that youths were taught to distinguish between right and wrong behaviour and made to know how best they could live successfully in the society. They were taught to respect elders, and those in authority, how to establish good human relationship and participate in community development. Thus, youths in those days were very cool headed, respectful, responsible, tolerant and self disciplined.

The society then, did not tolerate any nonsense from offenders. Those that committed grave offences were either ostracized or punished by death. Hence, there was a drastic curtailment of the liberties and privileges of offenders (Fafunwa, 1974 Aisiku et al. 1982: Abdulkareem 1990 Molagun, 19891).

The Islamic religion, which preceded Christianity in Nigeria, helped and is still helping to impart moral injunctions into the youths. In fact as Ozigi (1979,p.60) put it, "those that received Islamic education have a moral obligation to place their education at the service of their fellowmen particularly those circumstances are less fortunate than their own". Recipients of Islamic education were made to believe that account will be rendered to God in the world and this would include ways by which they have used the knowledge acquired to help fellow members of the society.

By the time the colonialists came together with the missionaries who introduced Christianity and western education, the Nigerian youths were still morally sound. Although the primary aim of the missionaries was to evangelize the people, they realized that catching the people young through the education would be the best way out. As a result of this all the Christian religious instruction, which incorporated the morals, expected of the people were imparted to the *young* ones at school, in fact, the teaching of religion was compulsory.

Youths were taught to seek what was right, shun evil, be humble, loving, compassionate, honest, rejoice with those rejoicing and mourn with those mourners, care for the weak, be their brothers Keepers, be tolerant, hardworking and above all, submit to God's will always.

Apart from this, teachers found engaging in immoral relationships with female pupils/students were usually summarily dismissed. Teachers were seen as small 'gods', looked unto for guidance. Hence, they comforted themselves well and trained the youths accordingly.

Youths at this period engaged themselves in meritorious activities. For example they fought side by side with the politicians for the freedom of the nation. They cooperated with teachers and parents and ensured the safety of everything and people they interacted with.

The Post Independence Era:

Since independence, moral standard in the Nigerian society has been dwindling. Presently the condition is very appalling. One major tool seen, as the best for establishing

morality is education. It is to be noted, that education has been adopted as the instrument per excellence for effecting national development, (N.P.E.1981Ed.) for there can be no meaningful development in a country if its citizens especially the youths who are future leaders are morally bankrupt.

As Omoregbe (1981:197) rightly pointed out that "moral development on the part of all citizens of a country is a condition sine-qua-non for the development of the nation". In other words the state of morality of the citizens of a country is pre-requisite to development of that country.

The essence of educating the youths in schools is to impart into them the relevant and needed knowledge that will help them to contribute their quota to the progress, stability, unity and development of the nation. John Herbert, famous philosopher once stated that "the whole task and the only task of education may be summed up in the concept of morality". He added that the worth of a man is measured by his character. This shows that intellectual development without adequate attention to moral training is no education at all.

In his own contribution Aristotle stressed that education given to the youths, should aim at producing men and women who are temperate, just, brave, and honest. Education received by the gentle man's son according to John Locke should focus on the following: Virtue, wisdom, breeding and learning. These attributes are to be inculcated and intensified in that order. This shows that imparting the virtues ought to be priority of our schools above all other things. This does not imply that acquisition of needed skills should be neglected.

Signs of Moral Degeneration Among the Nigerian Youths

The character of our youths today, both at school and in the society has degenerated into a very pathetic state. In the society, at school, everywhere, indiscipline, stealing, cheating, especially in examination, alcoholics, lack of respect for teachers and school authorities, sexual perversion and addictive behaviours abound.

Ojikutu (1987). having surveyed a group of 200 secondary school students in Laces Mainland area, found out that students had all and still have non-challant attitude to the penalty for examination malpractices as stated in decree 20. She also emphasized that some secondary schools have reputation for the use of hard drugs by their students, it is disheartening to say that despite the fact that students caught for examination malpractices are made to repeat in higher institutions, more students are still involved in this obnoxious practice. A shortcut is always being sought by many Nigerian Youths.

There is no doubt in our schools the Nigeria society. Mutual, peaceful co-existence, religious tolerances are fast fading out of our schools and the society.

For example, in 1982, a Government Secondary School (G.S.S) in Plateau State allegedly burnt down the school science laboratory without remorse all because he was disciplined for committing an offence. (The Punch, Tuesday, Jan. 25th, 1994, p.8). There was the burning of the Mass Mobilisation (MAMSER) secretariat and five vehicles in Calabar during one of the students' demonstrations not long ago.

One can easily recall the issue of "EXPO 77" when the newspaper vendors in Lagos. Ibadan, Aba and some other major towns were saddled with the additional responsibility of hawking WASC examination papers. The forged certificate racket of the mid-70s known as "Oshowo" in some the Universities is indeed a pointer to the gravity of moral debasement among Nigerian youths. (National Concord, August 14, 1991). No doubt Nigerian students want to pass at all cost and not minding the means.

A pregnant teenage SS III three student was hobbled for allegedly concealing 350 kilogrammes of hard-drugs in her body with the aim of exporting it to the United State c America (Punch, Friday 21st June, 1996 p.5).

Apart from this, pre-marital sex, abortion, and other related vices are very rampant among the youths. On this issue, Otu (1987) said that most pregnant girls are often not sure of the men who are responsible for unborn babies. Some of our girls/ladies readily submit themselves to the teachers/lecturers in order to pass the almighty examination. Several innocent babies have been killed prematurely without any remorse displayed by the killers (mothers). Nigerians are been threatened by robbers every day. Report shows that those that are mostly involved are the youths. They make life unbearable for the people in our society.

Religious intolerance as earlier noted is increasing in our society. This is being witnessed in several higher institutions in Nigeria. The reactionary role of religion in our national body has crept into the students' circle. Prior to this period it was quite easy for Muslims and Christians students' to co-exist and relate very intimately especially schools without any trouble. What we now witness on our institutions are religious crisis and violence sectarian clashes, which had claimed several lives (Nigerian Tribune Thursday 10th Feb. 1994).

The problem of religious intolerance is closely related to another cankerworm that is already eating into the very flesh of our youths and nation. This is the problem of cultism. Secret cult activities in our Universities, Polytechnics and other tertiary institutions are increasingly alarming.

- (i) In December (1993), a cult war took place in University of Lagos. This involved raping of female students, while some were heavily bruised
- (ii) About 22 students of the "Eye fraternity ". a secret society in Ondo State University were arrested about 2.00 am sometimes ago while the initiation of new members was on. it is sad to say that most of the cult members a usually in possession of dangerous weapons like guns cutlasses and axes (The Punch, Jan. 4. 1994).
- (iii) Some times ago, eleven students of the University of Science and Technology PortHacourt were imprisoned for belonging to a secret c known as "vilnings' (National Concord. Thursday August. 4.1388 p. 19).
- (iv) Several innocent students have been killed through the activities of cult members in recent times. The example of University of Ibadan, Ibadan Polytechnic, and several others readily come to mind. Section 5 sub section 4 of the students' union activities (control and regulation Decree 4 of 198 is not given any respect by the youths, this is a great pointer to moral distabilisation in Nigeria institutions of higher learning. Nigerian youths were trained to promote peace, progress and the stability of the nation are far from being ready for these roles. Promotion of occultism and incessant killing of innocent students by the youths is a pointer to the doom of the nation.

Causes of Moral Degeneration Among the Youths

Nigerian youths cannot be totally blamed for the terrible down turn of things in Nigeria. Who is to be blamed and what are the factors responsible for this moral degeneration? Undoubtedly, the Home, the School, the Government, the Media and the entire society are to be blamed for the disgusting situation being witnessed today. Since they are the major agencies of educations, partially responsible for this terrible condition.

(a) **The Homes:** Today. Several homes are completely disarrayed; peace, orderliness, love and security are just not there. Instead chaotic situations are acceptable standard and ideals, they pursue earthly things while the children are deserted. Such children find it easy to visit club houses, hotels, neighbor's houses and as such they easily imbibe several undesirable habits. Many children learn how to smoke, drink, engage in sexual perversion, dishonesty and murder from their parents.

It was reported that some tamers are found of denying their daughters transport fares to school in order to have them at home for sexual intercourse. Some would subtly convince their daughters of helping to break their virginity (Sunday Vanguard, July 3rd 1988,p.1).

Ignorance of the importance of education by some parents also exposes many youths to the hazards of street trading. Some parents would not see anything wrong in street hawking while the school is in session, in fact the inability to finance the education of children by some parents doses such parents' eyes to the hazards therein. Unfortunately some girls use the opportunity to engage themselves in immoral behaviors which often lead to pre-marital sex, unwanted pregnancy and criminal abortion.

(b) **Mass Media:** Pornographic films and other immoral programmes watched by children either at home or in hotels also expose the youths to serious danger Some of the programmes do promote immorality, murder, robbery etc.

(c) **The Government:** Apart from the home, the government and the school have contributed in no small measure to these problems. Our schools are presently in serious problem, for instance there is the problem of lack of qualified teachers, funds, classrooms, libraries, laboratories and other educational materials. Teachers were forced to embark on a protracted strike action some months ago as means of compelling the government to supply these needs, up till now, teachers' salaries are grossly inadequate and not regularly paid, in fact teachers are treated as second-class citizens by the government.

The last strike actions did paralyse academic activities in our campuses and in the secondary and primary schools. To prevent idleness some students resulted into the use of dubious means of sustenance, which justified the saying that "an idle hand is the devil's workshop".

Students often clash with the school authorities (representatives of the government) on issues like cost of fees, poor accommodation, and poor funding etc. Nigeria has not borrowed a leaf from Aristotle who says "education should be made free for all, since the educated are the future leaders. Who are being prepared to assume this responsibility". Funding education is not taken seriously by the government. For example Ghana and Zimbabwe gives out 24% and 2% of their respective budgetary allocation to education. This is quite higher than UNESCO's recommendation of 15%. It is however sad to say that Nigeria's vote to the educational sector has been between 6-8% in the last decade. This reveals a lopsided priority on the part of our subletting their rooms to new students for double the amount they paid for them in some of our Universities (Nigerian Tribune, Monday February 1, 1993, p.4).

(d) **The School:** The immoral acts being displayed by some teachers in our school also contributes to moral degeneration among Nigerian youths. Those who are seen as custodians of norms and values have debased themselves by luring young girls to

immorality. Several girls had to succumb to this in order to pass their papers.

These possessors and disseminators of acceptable values are indeed aiding deceit and corruption in our society. For instance, in the last Local Government Election there were cases of underage secondary school students being lured by teachers to vote for particular candidates with promises ranging from free marks to light refreshments and even money. (Nigerian Tribune, Saturday march Z3^{ra}. 1996, p.20).

Also, schools are longer emphasizing the teaching of religion, for instance religious studies has been made optional at the senior secondary school level so that the "possibility of learning some moral injunction through this means is closed. Moreover many students learn to smoke, and engage in several vices through the peer group members at school or at home (Abednego, 1993).

(e) **The Society:** Finally, the entire society can be blamed for this demoralising situation. Morality has degenerated in Nigerian Society, so much that the youths have no option than to copy the adults. While Nigeria is clamouring for development, public funds are embezzled by those who control them. Self-interest is the dominant rule of action in Nigeria. There are bribery and corruption, favouritism, religious intolerance Luke warmth to work, absenteeism, political bigotry, drug trafficking and flamboyant living by those who siphon the public funds into their private accounts, a situation that is not expected from the educated elites. The utility aspects of the certificates acquire with honest services are debased. Thus, youths have nothing better to copy than all that are exhibited by the adults' members of the society.

The Effects of Moral Degeneration on Nigerian Society

1. Things are falling apart in all spheres of Nigerian Society the centre is no longer holding. Armed robbery, embezzlement, incessant killing are making life uneasy for people. Tension mounting experience and increased infant mortality are quite prevalent.
2. Good and experienced hands are laid off either from offices or have their lives terminated which leads to the creation of vacuums that are very difficult to fill.
3. Broken homes are increasing daily as some children's upbringing is left uncatered for parents.
4. Our age-long values are being gradually thrown overboard. Respect elders (Teachers, Parents etc.) is seen as an outdate practices.
5. Innocent children have their lives terminated prematurely. Mothers of the babies are often turned into sadists because of barrenness when have babies become more valuable to them after marriage.
6. Unfaithfulness, injustice, disloyalty, unpatriotic acts abound in our society
7. Several graduates of Nigerian higher institutions have become rogues, fierce looking and killers of fellow human beings.

8. Poverty as a result of mismanagement of public funds, the haves are having more-some through dubious means while the have-nots are getting poorer because of artificial blockages created in the society. The order is being perpetuated through the irritating batons passed across to the youths.
9. Lazed - faire attitudes to anything official is the order of the day as people feel that public works and -property are not owned by any individual, those who squander do so almost unchecked, "Chop and lets chop" syndrome is welcomed everywhere. Poor attitude to work has therefore led to the drop in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) since the output has deteriorated.

Suggested Solutions

1. Teachers/Lecturers are to act as Loco-parentis to their pupils/students. As Quintilian stressed, 'nature and nurture must cooperate for a better development of learners. Teachers are to be very close to the learners and do everything possible to find solutions to their problems.
2. Teachers should be morally good. They should see themselves as models being copied by the youths.
3. Religious studies should not be made optional in our schools. Rather it should be made compulsory for students up to the secondary school level.
4. Teachers engaging in unholy relationship with female students should not be spared.
5. Government should re-instate boarding facilities in our secondary schools so as to ameliorate the hazards of the day system.
6. Teacher's salaries and allowances should be paid promptly. Teachers should be allowed to reap the rewards of their labour here on earth before they get to heaven.
7. Parents should not Ignore their parental role expose their children to risk, but spare more time for them to ensure "he growth of a viable nation. They should also give their children the needed love and security. Parents should understand and accept them and endeavour to meet their needs in order to forestall juvenile delinquency, and other related problems in Nigerian society.
8. The electronic and print Medias should stop printing or producing programmes and materials, that do not educate or influence masses, positively.
9. The communication gap between the school or University authority/government and the students should be bridged.
10. Youths are encouraged to be serious minded, desist from all evils and be ready to understand and reason along with the government and school authorities, not taking the laws into their hands.
11. Religious leaders should impart all ingredients of morality into their members.
12. Both parents and teachers should see the home and the school as avenues for passing across sex education to the pupils.
13. Our Government should employ strict and positive ways of stamping out the wave of occultism from our Ivory towers, if not Nigeria will soon become a lawless society. Fathers and adult members of Nigerian Society who are cult

members are serving as bad example to the youth should be discouraged as much as possible.

14. Instead of submitting themselves cheaply to lecturers, female students should work hard to pass their exams. They are to bear in mind the fact that accounts will be rendered to God in the world beyond on the use of their bodies. Nigerian government should be all out give sufficient funding needed in our ivory towers, relevant books and other facilities should also be supplied. This will help to rechannel the energies of our youths more rewarding and progress - aiding activities (educational, social etc).

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