

## Christian Religious Education and the Redemptive Process of a Collapsed System of Morality in Nigeria

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### Abstract

*The general decay in the core values and moral standard of the Nigerian society has become very worrisome as the world journeys into modernity. Certain forces are responsible for the quantum of moral bankruptcy experienced in the country. Decay in the moral standard of Nigeria has been a grappling issue even among religious and other institutions. This collapse in the moral standard will continue unhindered if a radical approach to redeem it is not applied. It is on this premise that this paper attempts to x-ray the degree of damage the decay in the morality of the country has caused. First, it indicts religious institutions particularly the Christian Religious Educators (CRE) for not preparing a morally sound minded people with good upbringing that will positively affect the decadence experienced in the country. Second, family, political, and the school as other institutions that are also proxies and contributors to the morally corrupt Nigerian society. It advocates that if the moral standard of Nigeria will be raised, the need for spiritual and ethical reformation in these institutions are necessary. It is believed that if CRE rise to the challenge of societal bankruptcy as should be, the society will be rid of the virus that causes decay. It sees CRE as the vehicle that will champion the move of sanitising the Nigerian society beginning from the family, the Church and the society at large. Finally, it recommends that CRE must reposition themselves as agents of moral transformation in the country through living an exemplary life style that is worthy of emulation.*

Key words: Religion, Education, Transformation, Morality, Redemption, Society

## Introduction

**“Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest not thy self? Thou that preaches a man should not steal, dost thou steal”? Rom. 2:21, (KJV)**

Once again it is very plausible to on ourselves examine and re-evaluate this statement. It is a challenge that fits into our individual core values, irrespective of religion, profession or vocation. Our generation has been bedeviled by a world of reality and a new norm which aids societal decay as a breeding ground for some anti-social vices (Is. 5:20, kJV). Is it possible to say that we are the architect of these decadence? It is also possible to clean the inside of a pot so that we can have the integrity to clean the outside also? Is it possible to give what we don't have? Can we come to terms with the fact that we are building a generation that will in future uplift the standard of social values through discipline and good morals? Is it possible to reap what have never been sown? What moral right and justification have we to talk about good morals? Such unending questions continue to stare at us on the face because our Nigerian society is gradually losing ground in terms of morality, dignity and sanctity it should possess.

The scripture above could best describe many religious educators who are no good examples to their followers or the ones they teach. Those who are supposed to uphold the moral standard in the society are the ones destroying it. The type of life religious instructors live is very sacrosanct given the sensitive nature of their work, which involves the training of the total man (body, soul, and spirit) to be morally upright. Ozge (2021) sees morality from the perspective of “temperament,” “character,” or “manners,” (p; 3) which “expresses the established character structure in human and the behaviour of individuals that occur under their own will.” According to him, many philosophers' arguments gathers around whether or not morality can be conceptualized in different fields of life. Morality is seen to cover a wide range of behaviours as to whether they are good or bad. On this, scholars are of the view that though the nature of morality has to do with the concept of “good” or “bad,” “right” or “wrong” in a given society, it is expected that the “wrongs” or the “bad” be prevented by all means which will allow for the “good” or the “right” to thrive among people, (Keith 2007, and Ozge 2021). Generally speaking, every Nigerian moral life should tilt towards upholding the “good” and the “right” behaviours, this should be expressed in people's life in the society. This life style leads to a

reform, from the norm of accepting what is wrong and bad which are the elements that corrupt morality in the Nigerian society.

Furthermore, as broad as the concept of morality is, it shows that it is a much discussed branch among philosophers and among the CRE. However, some scholars would want to compress this broad field into two basic views, first they argued that morality is innate, and as an in born trait within every human which in their views cannot be affected by any external, environmental or social factors are inerascable. Those who support this view are Lamark, Darwin, and some Islamic philosophers like Yusuf Has Hacip, Sa'ddi-I Shirazi, among others (Ozge, 2021). The second view holds that morality and temperament can change due to environmental, social or psychological factors. This suggest that players of change in people's morality are external factors which enforce it. Proponents of this view are Socrates, Aristotle, Kant, John Locke, J.J. Rousseau, among others (Erdem 2002, in Ozge 2021). It is further believed by some of this philosophical school of thought that people can become moral individuals through education, (Ozge, 2021). By this, is it is expected that education as an external factor of positive change could fine-tune to the positive the morality of persons in their respective professions. If this happens we may be heading to a reformed Nigerian society, because good morals becomes the standard of operation in every place, be it office, market place, the street, schools etc. The next question may be what about the illiterates who have no formal education? Education may be classified into "formal," "informal" and "non-formal" (Johnson and Majewska, 2022), if therefore, morality permeates into the fabrics of the Nigerian society; even the illiterates will fall into the good moral standard of living.

While this essay will differ with the argument of the former school of thought which states that morality is innate and as an in-born trait which cannot be erased by any external or sociological factor; however profound this may be. It will beg to adopt the latter school of thought which states that morality can change due to sociological and psychological factors as an engaging dialoguing partner. On this premise, it could be observed that education is a game changer because it is a lifelong process that brings permanent and attitudinal change in the character and behaviour of an individual in the society (Grotluschen, 2023). For instance, certain aspects of human morality that are negative may be jettisoned when insight of education sets in. Also some communities before now did not see anything morally wrong to be cannibals or the killing of twins like the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century

experience in Calabar and the Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in most African communities; but with the enlightenment that education brings, cannibalism, the killing of twins and FGM are now history. At this point it will not be out of place to say that education some religious strands has the potency to change the general perceptions, orientation and the pattern of moral behaviour of a people. Therefore, if CRE channel their education properly it could generate the energy that will forever change the moral decay of the country.

The question now is what if education does not bring about the desired change? Or what if CRE does not harness religious education as a platform to change the immoral behaviours of individuals that they know will be detrimental to the society? In this case, if there is a will power to tilt towards good morals then a moral policy could be chosen based on an individual choice “which he wills to direct his life” this become “his principle and the conscience he had formed for himself, this principle introduce order and pattern into his moral life,” This order becomes a life pattern whether for the good life of bad life. For either way, the chosen life pattern must have its outcome. Also, this “principle” and “pattern” of an individual life constitutes his moral “identity” and “personality,” (Denis, 1989) even though he is an educated fellow.

Good moral pattern of life or principles could become a way of life since they form the core value of a person’s behaviour in the society. Although, man is a free moral agent with the right to choose between what is “good or right,” “bad or wrong;” behavior. For instance, if a man chooses the “wrong or bad” behaviour, he certainly knows the consequences. But if “right or good” it becomes part of the pattern of his life style which his conscience is built on. If this is the case, his core values of good morality becomes the guiding principles of his life anywhere. This should be the connecting bridge that will reform the Nigerian society that is devoid of immoral elements that brings decay. Furthermore, CRE play a critical role in the building of this system of morality by introducing the God or religious factor as the core social values in people. This factor is key to the fact that religion is the foundation of morality and there can never be morality without a strand of religion, (Iwuagwu, 2018, p:3). Also, religion has played an essential role in shaping the moral values of individuals, families, and communities from antiquity to modern time. Religious beliefs and teachings on good ethical and moral values are handed from generation to another. Similarly, religious leaders and instructors have also become role models to people in the society, (Elsayed, et-al, 2023, p:3). On this

note CRE become the role models at home, Churches, schools, and the society at large and through their teachings people with the fear of God and positive minds are groomed for the betterment of the country.

### **Morally Decayed state of the Nigerian society**

Morality has been defined etymologically by Mina and Farhad (2016) that it is derived from a Latin word *moralitas* which means “manner,” “character,” and “proper behaviour.” It is the moral beliefs, views and attitudes of every society. These moral behaviours could be positive or negative as earlier stated. In a broader sense, the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2015) views the definition of morality in two ways, the “descriptive” and the “normative” to them any definition of morality in the “descriptive sense will need to specify which of the codes is endorsed by a society or group that counts it as moral.” These codes should be “distinctive and should distinguish moral judgments, principles, or codes from other normative judgments and principles of codes.” While the normative definition, according to them should focus on “code of conduct that would be endorsed by anyone who meets certain intellectual and volitional conditions, almost including the condition of being rational.” So, both the “descriptive” and the “normative” views of morality are inter-play of behavioural tendencies within the society. A society can adopt either of the above or both based on their social orientations. Also, if good morals or good behaviours are ingredients that builds a happy, healthy and good society; they therefore, fall within the ambit of the descriptive and the normative aspects of morality. So good morals are acceptable developments in the Nigerian society. Outside the context of good morals are the things that causes decay and corruption in the society which are generally referred to as bad or wrong morals. Therefore, moral “decay,” “decadence” or “bankruptcy” is a universal phenomenon which negatively affects societies across the globe, news of cases of moral break down in the family, schools, religious institution, and the political arena are being heard. Issues like social ills, indiscipline, violence, promiscuity, vandalism, corruption, crimes in our high ways, are all a reoccurring decimal in our Nigerian society, which are caused by a declined in parental authority and loss of societal values, media influence, materialism, poverty, among others, (Dick et al. 2020)

If institutions like the school, family and religious spaces that are charged with the responsibility of serving as watch dogs towards ensuring a better and morally corrupt free society are not proactive in



their ethical task; the society becomes vulnerable to infiltrations of decay by all its proxies. Primary and secondary measures which should serve as defense to the society, have been largely neglected which has led to the collapse in our various institutions, hence the society is left susceptible. Moral decay has therefore, become a stain to growth and survival of the Nigerian society and this should not be allowed by all institutions. This could be done by tightly upholding institutional values that fight negative vices and make the society a haven of peace and happiness. The proxies of morality are the institutions through which it rides on, if they are let loosed, immorality and unethical practices becomes the order of the day. Today, to a large extent our institutions at all levels, families, schools and the religious spaces among others have become the entry points of things that decays good morals in the Nigerian society. For instance, because of the level of moral decay some Nigerians are beginning to clamor for right to transgender, bisexuality, gay, lesbianism, bestiality, among others. Religiously speaking, when the people of God deviated from the core values and the principles of God, He always send His servants the prophets to warn them to return to His ways and to uphold His values or face certain consequences. The failure of the moral standard of the society then, was as result of lack or failure of the religious institution or system which were custodian of the people's religious life. (11 Chro. 29: 6, Jer 11:10). Every generation in Biblical days had their moments of collapsed moral standard and core values that should have upheld them as good moral agents. Sometimes the custodians of these core religious values do themselves have a fall out of the religious values and were also guilty of immorality. Apparently, both the custodian of the religious values of that time and the led do fall away from moral standards, these opened the then theocratic society to a total moral collapse. "...the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord and served Baalim." (Judges 2:11). On either ways, these were reasons why God had to raise another prophet that was free from the perennial morally collapsed system and institution to be His advocate. This prophet will have to contend with the many false prophets of Ba'als who sanctioned the moral decay of their time. What transpired in the Biblical days is somehow been revisited today. A collapse in all moral institutions including their custodians, it is on this premise, Randy (2014) observed that "failure of Biblical characters" is responsible for this collapsed system. This failure has therefore, plunged the country into moral chaos that could lead to a declaration of a national moral state of emergency.

Today, Nigerian society is bedeviled by kidnapping for ransom, banditry, terrorist attack, armed robbery, abuse and recklessness in public offices at low and high levels, bribery and corruption in broad day light, nepotism, tribalism and regionalism. Corrupt people are the most celebrated and this has penetrated into every fabric of the Nigerian society, yahoo boys also have a space, ritual killings on the rise. Nude's activity, exams mal-practice, result racketeering, sexual harassments, religious bigotry and divides, bullying of all sorts, commercial sex workers, sex for marks and cultism in all institutions of learning, acts of criminalities, like rapes, alcoholism and drugs related offences. The myriads of moral decay have affected virtually every aspects of Nigerian life. In a survey carried out in Nigeria by Hoffmann and Hilton (2025) they observed that despite twenty five years of attempts at reforms, corruption remains embedded in the country's institution and continues to undermine its democracy and economic growth. They argue further that "corruption permeates politics, law enforcement agencies, public administrators and that in the world corruption perception index, Nigeria is ranked 40<sup>th</sup> most corrupt countries and 35<sup>th</sup> from the bottom." Furthermore, in Africa according to them Nigeria ranked 33<sup>rd</sup> among the 54 corrupt countries in Africa.

This decay grounds social and institutional development. However, this is not peculiar to the Nigerian society, for instance as argued by Alvi et-al (2022) that moral decay is part of the experience of countries around the world. They sites China as an economically and technological advanced country but still suffer from moral decay. Others like UK, USA, France and Germany are not left out of this menace. This is predicated by the presence social vices with their associated evil that have caused a shift from the real societal values. Also, in Nigeria, Ede (2023) is of the view that social vices have become detrimental to the growth of the Nigerian Society. Instead of doing the right thing people prefer doing the wrong things. People tilt towards evil vices easily, and this is a dramatic shift from the existing status-quo. Roles played by Christian Religious Educators are expected to deescalate these vices within the society. These unwelcome developments suggest the level of decay and how the society have nose dive into a severe moral bankruptcy which seems to be growing worse by the day. Christian religious educators are supposed to be role models at home, Churches, schools and the society at large. It is not out of place to say that some Christian Religious Educators have set bad examples on people and therefore, have lost credibility and trust.

## **Redeeming the society through a Robust Christian Religious Education**

Christian Religious Education has been defined by various authors, in this write up some definitions suffice us. Christian Religious Education (CRE) is the process where by Christian learning takes place among people. It often involves teaching which enables practicing Christian to adapt and deepen their Christian beliefs, values and disposition to act in Christian way. It is also a systematic study of religious beliefs and practices based in the life and teachings of Jesus. (Sein, 2026). Furthermore, CRE is geared towards the Christian faith, for the kingdom of God, for liberation, socialisation of mankind. It should shape the lives of people as agents-subjects, in right relationship with God, self and others, (Ewontomah, 2021). This shows that CRE is the total training any one receives based on Christian faith that converts his inability to abilities, wrong desires to right ones and his negative energies to the core societal values that are acceptable. It teaches the right morals, right characters which an individual is expected to learn that become his guiding principles in life. To therefore, combat bad morals in the Nigerian society, it needs the input of CRE.

The world today revolves around religious and ethnic pluralism which enforce the policy of cosmopolitanism as an acceptable societal ideology. No country can live in isolation without embracing others from different nationalities and faith. This policy is made possible as the world engages modernity and sees the need for an inclusive society. Modernity in civilised world view context preaches “inclusionism” of human race. This provides the opportunity for all people irrespective of background to live together to development their immediate environment politically, educationally, economically, socially among others. This ideology is indeed against the policy of “isolationism” which to some extent is linked to a relatively conservative life style of the anti-modern and the civilised world. It is against this back drop that Stott (2006) observed strongly that, if Christians find themselves in such a cosmopolitan environment “they must permeate the society,” they are not to be “socially segregated,” from people of different ethnic and religious back ground. As much as they want their light to radiate through the darkness of the world. He is also of the view that “their light must shine into the darkness and their salt must soak into the decaying meat.” Stott’s point indicates that Christians must get themselves involved in every sphere of life, be it politics, Sciences and the Applied Sciences and Technology, Medical field, Arts and Humanities related fields, and the



Social Sciences, among others. His argument suggests that Christians must be involved in all of these domains of the society for their light to infiltrate and cause impact.

It has been argued that there is a collapsed institutions, this collapse has led to decay within the systems of the society thereby serving as a breeding ground for godless and immoral activities. In situations like this, the job of Christian Religious Educators is to begin a robust grass root orientations that will start with the family then followed by other institutions. These institutions provides a favourable platforms for the propagation of Christian ideals that injects the fear of God and build a godly society. If these refined Christian characters integrates into the society, and infiltrates every institution and profession, they are expected to be the beacon of transformation that will bring the much desired change the country longs for. Stott (2006) argues that “Christians can influence society even if it rejects their faith.” Schweitzer (2023) also opines that CRE must be adapted in different context. Influencing the society positively for the Christians is a divine assignment, in fulfilling this mandate they must persevere in spite of the societal rejection. The simple logic is that light must always out shine darkness. What transforms Christians into light is their encounter with their Lord Jesus, and the strong engagement of their faith which prepares them into morally and religiously sound instrument of change in wherever they find themselves. The robust religious education here refers to Christians who have directly pass through Bible teachings, discipleship classes at home, schools, Bible clubs, Sunday school, Churches and possibly other Christian programs organised around the neighbourhood. All these put together must have added value to the Christians for an impactful outing in any organisation he finds himself. The Christian Religious Educators must also build bridges of peace around religious divides in the dynamics of the civilised land scape.

Armed with the positive life style, the fear of God becomes the Christian central driving force, he therefore, exhibits a life of self-discipline, fairness, transparency, trust, honesty, empathy, and prudence in any public space. In this case his life becomes a clear demonstration of the example of the life of Christ. It is also believed that if the society has such samples of grace planted in them, they become the strong agents of change that will transform the country for good. Their transformation is not because they are super humans, but because of their foundational training which has ushered them into becoming ambassadors for Christ. For example, Haysman-Walker (2023) shares that Harold Moody (1882-1947) once said “as one of (Christ’s) followers, I must impact to each man, no matter

how degraded he may be at the moment....” This statement is reminiscence of the principle of good ambassadors, self-less and patriotic service a Christians is supposed to put up.

Back in the later part of the medieval era and the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries a group of Christians called the Puritans transformed their societies through a radical biblical principles of sincerity, honesty and transparency. They believed that their lives could reflects the ideals and real ethics of a true Christian, this they did by presenting themselves as true samples of the teachings of Christ. Their Puritanic beliefs birth-forth an uncompromising stand which regenerated their societies. In like manner, the city of Geneva through the teachings of John Calvin adopted a work ethics and moral values built on Christian teachings as a model. (Matthias, 2025). Evidence abound historically, that most transformations that shaped the western world, by bringing the much needed change that started from the days of the renaissance down to the revival of the evangelicals had always began from the Church and through its teachings. The outcomes of such experience have always produce a genuine change on adherents who are proxies of the Church. The transformation that took place through the preaching of John Wycliffe, John Hus, Martin Luther, John Knox, John Wesley among others comes to mind and the entire Europe never remain the same. People listened to them and believed in their teachings and ideologies, this changed the mindset of the people thereby transforming the entire continent. These preachers from their pulpits set the stage for self-evaluation that produced self-regeneration and self-change, from individualistic selfish mindset to a communal one. It also brought ethical changes in the way people thought and do things and this got injected into the society. The changes also affected the orientation and the spirituality of the people not only in Europe but in other continents.

What transpired in Europe can happen anywhere. The Puritanic and the Evangelical movement that awakened the spirituality of Europe and purified their society by getting rid of social vices can be replicated in Nigeria. It is a known fact that Nigeria is a highly religious country. This however, has provided Christian religious educators (Christian clergies, teachers of religious education at schools, home and Churches) the platform to thrive while exploring this possibilities. It begins with the Puritanic and Evangelical like teachings of the gospel that is genuine and driven towards a radical change in the lives of adherents. This type of gospel can also bring about the much needed

transformation in our time. The society can witness a dramatic change where it is free from all corrupt practices perpetrated by people.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude this essay, it is pertinent to highlight some of the arguments raised. It is obvious that the forces of modernity have so affected the world and its present civilisation. It is also seen that Christian religious educators and their places of operation have been swallowed by the flowing tide, hence the possibilities of Christians getting involved into the practice of the societal decay. This involvement has therefore, dimmed the light they are supposed to shine. It has also pushed for Christian religious educators to be refined and proactive in driving the transformation bid into reality. Thus, drawing upon the Puritans and the Evangelicals of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century's transformation experience in Europe, Nigeria can also witness a newness. It also advocated for Christian religious educators to live by the example of what they stand for in terms of the right moral life. This could bring about the rebirth of the lost societal values and ethics.

This paper thus, recommends the following:

1. The moral decadence experienced in our society is as a result of the cold nature of Christian Religious Educators, therefore, they must rise to the challenge.
2. Christian Religious Educators themselves must undergo a radical spiritual change before they can undertake this transformation move in the lives of the people.
3. The Christian Religious Educators must accept the principles of a sound Christian virtues, values and good moral life in order to address all detested life styles.
4. They cannot practice what they are not, they must live by example. As light, their light must permeate the darkness of this world.
5. Christian Religious Education should be made compulsory to Christens at all level of education.
6. Christian Religious Educators must give themselves to God as instrument of change in their families and the society.

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