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Religion and Social Change

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Abstract: The most important aspect of human life is the Religion which he or she is ahead of as a means of survival. The title of this paper is "Religion and Social Change". The growth of every society depends on the religion and how positive or negative it has affected the environment and the lives of the worshippers. This work shall look at the influence of religion as a social change on the society, which includes culture, economic, politics, education, leadership, and marriage. The researcher, as well, listed the benefit of religion as an agent of social change which are, relationship, respect, and protection. The challenges involved in religion and social change are conflict, religious intolerance and indiscipline. Due to the essential nature of this research work, this research made use of historical analytical methods as well as personal communication (interview), books, journals. The research recommends amongst others that, the adherents of religions should practice their faith base in public and secret to please God instead of man and the society should accept the change brought by religion for peace and transformation of societal wafers.

Keywords: Religion, Social, Communication, God.

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INTRODUCTION

Religion plays a significant role in the lives of people all over the world and religious practices of some sort are evident in every society. That makes religion a cultural universal along with other general practices found in every culture. Currently, an estimated 4 billion people belong to the many religious faiths of the world. In an effort to explore the place, practice, role and influence of religion on its adherents, it becomes imperative to study and have a good understanding of the various types of societies in which religion has thrived. According to Carr (2002:307) "It is virtually impossible to provide a one-sentence definition of religion". Confucianism, for example, is primarily an ethical system, while Islam stresses belief in the one". (Ferguson *et al.*, 1988:575) supported the view above that "Although the meaning of the term may seem obvious, there is no generally agreed definition and it is used in widely differing senses by different writers. In its original Latin usage (religio), Cicero defined it as the giving of proper honour, respect and reverence to the divine, by which he meant the gods' ". The writer agreed with the above statement that every worshipper holds on to certain divine beings as a miss of accessing the ultimate creator. Therefore, religion is the belief and reverting of a deity which is higher and it is believed that through that deity the worshippers can be saved and their needs can as well be catered for. (Nichols *et al.*, 2010: 438). defined religion as " A socially organized pattern of beliefs, values, and practices that bind people together in their efforts to address the deity (or deities) to give them guidance, sustenance, and ultimate meaning in life and hereafter". (Joseph, 2021:12), asserted that many religions have a

body of written doctrines as well as established rituals and designated functionaries who act on behalf of the common, lay members`. Religion is a body of teachings and prescribed practices about an ultimate, sacred reality or state of being that calls for reverence or awe. According to (Nweke, 1992: 68) "the nature of a being is that which constitutes the essence of that being. What pertains to the nature of a being is thus an essential element of the being in question.....when it is said that religion derives from human nature, it means that wherever there are human beings there is bound to be religion". From the above statement, the writer agreed that human beings are religions. According to (Idowu, 1973:1):

Religion is very much and always with us. It is with us at every moment of life in our innermost beings and with regard to the great or minor events of life; it is discussed daily in the newspapers, through the radio and television, and in our conversations. It is with all of us inevitably; whatever may be our individual, avowed attitudes to it. This is why everybody is interested in religion, be he a believer to whom his faith is a matter of ultimate concern, or a person who thinks that he does not believe and cannot believe in the divine rulership of the universe".

INFLUENCE OF RELIGION AS A SOCIAL CHANGE ON THE SOCIETY

Religion can, at times, be a powerful agent for social change. We tend to think of religion as relatively conservative for the most impact on its own followers.

However, religion is not a social institution that is completely separate from the rest of our society. In fact, at some point in history, religion has promoted dramatic social change. Based on this the writer will discuss the following:

- **Religion Influences on Culture:** it very difficult to separate culture from religion. Religion which remains the bedrock of the society cannot be separated because the people are the religion and the religion is as well the people. Due to the influence of religion on the society, that has patterned the way the people act and belief in that which they hope to assisted them in their living. According to (Nweke, 1992: 68), opines that “man, the summit of creation is a Religious and cultural animal. Hence religion and culture are natural to man that they both form the pivot of his social life. The religious element of man injects basic and ultimate meaning and explanations about his existence of life”. (Omogbe, 2021: 300), opines that “Religion is inseparable part of culture. Every religion is the product of a particular culture within which is grown. Its doctrines reflect the worldview of that culture, its understanding of reality, and its way of looking at things at the particular time”. It is an established fact that there is an intimate connection between our beliefs and social institutions, our values and social relationships. Values, beliefs, ideas, institutions are the basic elements of a culture. Certainly, all cultural changes involve social change. Social and cultural aspects are closely interwoven. Thus, any change in the culture (ideas, values, beliefs etc.) brings a corresponding change in the whole social order. Social institutions cannot live on life shells within which life is extinct.
- **Religion Influence on Politics:** Politics in its meaning involves the dynamics of power that entails the acquiring and subsequent use of the power. This power is used to formulate and execute politics and decisions, which must be accepted by the society in the process of governance. According to (Imaekhai, 2010:172), states that “it is difficult to separate religion and politics in Nigeria. The appointments of political officers in authority are done with the consideration for religion. For instance, when the president is a Christian the vice will be a Muslim”. Religion is a strong tool for political change. It is not news that some of these politicians identified with one religion group others to gain their vote during the election. This religious group is capable of influence them for one reason best known to them and to also guide them in the way they go. This has made religion an agent for social change.
- **Religion Influence on Marriage:** Over the years religion has been a great avenue for marital change. The religion of a man does not

only affect his concept of the family but also affects his relationship with the other members of the family that is the wife and husband and the children. According to (Ezenweke, 2020:134) states that “getting married is purely an act of the deities who have the potential to hinder marriage. For this reason, marriage is ritually celebrated. It is believed that if this is not properly done, the marriage may face serious and series of crises”. According to (Charles, 2020:198), states that “ since the family is the basic unit of any political and social change organizations, the process of erecting it should and was giving serious attention among the traditional African societies”. The writer agreed with the view above that religion controls marriage irrespective of the personality involved; it does not affect religion; instead, religion amplifies how such a home should exist. According to (Mbiti, 1992:106) opines that “marriage puts the individual and his family on the social, religious and physical map of his community”.

- **Religion Influence on Education:** Another aspect of religion and social change is in the educational sector. From the creation of the world it has been that religion brought education to society. According to (Imaekhai, 2010:115), states that “religious education in traditional religious societies reflects the total education of the person. The molding of character for successful living is done religiously. Hence, the child is first exposed to education through the family”. (Aitufe *et al.*, 2011:45), Education is the process of learning and knowing which is not restricted to the four walls of a classroom or school textbook. It is a holistic process and continues throughout life”. (Imaekhai, 2010:115) further that education (formal and informal) involves an organized system of learning. Learning has a goal to change human behavior through the imparting of new values, new knowledge and new ideas'.
- **Religion Influence on Leadership:** Leaders are superior in several respects: they are above average in physical equipment, intelligence, vitality, attractiveness, range of interests, based on this the religion plays a vital role in leadership. According to (Onimhawo & Adamu, 2011:3), “Leadership is a process that is ultimately concerned with fostering change. In contrast to the notion of management, which suggests preservation or maintenance, leadership implies a process where there is movement, from wherever we are now to some future end or condition which is desired or value-based”. Religion influences leaders, since all the leaders belong to one religion or the other. In every religion, they hold a sacred book that addresses how leader should relate with his or her subordinate in other not to attract the punishment from their deities.

- **Religion Influence on Economic:** Economic influences, the most far-reaching is the impact of industrialization. It has revolutionized the whole way of life, institutions, organizations and community life. In traditional production systems, levels of production were fairly static since they were geared to habitual, customary needs. Modern industrial capitalism promotes the constant revision of the technology of production, a process into which science is increasingly drawn.

THE BENEFIT OF RELIGION AS AN AGENT OF SOCIAL CHANGE

- **Relationship-** to what degree should religionists maintain professional distance or promote interpersonal warmth and affection? Those who opt for professional distance discourage the use of their first name, seldom reveal personal struggles, and discourage much familiarity. Such religionists, while not antisocial, nevertheless give credence to the saying familiarity breeds contempt. According to [Uyi (personal interview), 2021] states that “relationships bring individuals who are member of the same religion together in accordance to the laydown of the principles of their sacred book, and for the common good of the national growth”.
- **Respect:** there is known religion that does not teach any respect to God or neighbor as part of doctrinal belief. This has a long way to go in building the nation and individuals on how they should relate to each other whether opposite sex or not. According to [Omorogbe (personal interview), 2021] opines that “religion teaches respect from birth to death, irrespective of who you are, be it man or woman. There are known religions that do not teach their adherents respect. In some religions, respect is part of their doctrine and it is obligatory for every parent to teach their children how to respect others whether home or outside”.
- **Protection:** It is not news that protection is the obligatory of every deity to its adherents and it is their promise to the faithful followers as a make for their faithful followership. Religion serve as a means of protection to the people brings change to the society through its adherents, that is why everyone belong to one religion or the other for protection from any unwanted problems and force of any kinds. According to (Moses, 2021), states that “every faith base and faith adherents does that as a result of the protections they give to their worshippers”. (Akusu, 2021) further states that “the purpose of belonging to any religion is for protection and any religions that fail to protect their followers that show the weakness and failure of that religion”. The writer agreed with

the view above, because to bring about social change protection is needed for the society.

- **Commitment:** Another aspect of the benefit of religion and social change is commitment. Every religion demands commitment of its followers in obeying all the instructions from their sacred book. Through this commitment its faith adherents will depreciate the knowledge and practicality in the society to course change. According [Vincent (personal interview), 2021] on his view, “without commitment religion is useless. If an individual will be expecting change in the society and in their personal lifestyle, they must show serious commitment to their religion tenet”.

CHALLENGES OF RELIGION AS A MEANS OF SOCIAL CHANGE

It is believed that nothing happened in a vacuum. For religion to experience challenge is either the religious leaders or the home lack moral discipline.

- **Religion Conflict:** According to (Ishado, 2015:155), in her view, “conflicts may generally exist whenever and wherever incompatible events occurred and may result in a “win or lose character”. Conflict is a situation whereby two or more people are involved in a serious disagreement which sometimes escalates into violence and open confrontation that sometimes involves the use of arms`. (Ishado, 2015:155), further observed that “the complexity of society containing people of diverse religious, political, and social beliefs explains the inevitability of conflict in human relationships”. The writer agreed with the view above that conflict can affect social change in the society. Many of the problems Nigeria is facing today is as a result of Religious conflict and has led to destruction of lives and properties. This has made religion a trite to the growth of religion and social change. (Gwamna, 2014:1) in his view states that “the Jos crisis of September 7, 2001 climaxed several ethno-religious based conflicts, which had characterized the Nigerian scene in its recent history.” He further states that “the past three decades in Nigeria have witnessed diverse conflicts, some of the very violent type. From political to economic conflicts, Nigeria has been characterized by communal conflicts, oftentimes with ethnic and religious under-pinning”.
- **Religion Intolerance:** (Gwamna, 2014:43), opine that “religious intolerance in Nigeria as a potential time bomb. It shall also attempt to link the growing tides of religious intolerance to the possible external influence (s) and the internal dynamics that have fuelled this growing monster of religious intolerance”. (Gwamna, 2014:42-43), conclude that

“religious intolerance is beginning to eat into the woodwork of our national unity and cohesion. He noted that, while the shadow of ethnic and religious intolerance lengthens; the shadow of understanding is growing short”. Religious intolerance can reduce if not destructing the social change that would have taken place.

- **Indiscipline:** this is another enemy of religion and social change in the society. A lot of religious groups have neglected the disciplinary aspect of their sacred book, following wrong doctrines which have not allowed religion and social change in the society. According to (Charles, 2021:55), observed that “Ecclesiastical discipline is often associated with punishment sometimes even to the extent of excommunication”. This indiscipline that has eaten the woodwork of the nation begins from home. Any religious group that is disciplined begins from where he or she stayed and the type of up-bringing from his or her parents or guidance and this has destroyed the positive part of the religion as an agent of social change.

Recommendations

To resuscitate religion and social change in our society the following urgent measures are suggested:

- All religions should hold on to their sacred book for proper discipline of their adherents.
- All Religions are to see themselves as one knowing full well that all religions point to one God who is the ultimate creator of the universe.
- The adherents of religions should practice their faith base in public and secret to please God instead of man.
- The society should accept the change brought by religion for peace and transformation of societal wafers.

CONCLUSION

Religion is an important tool in rejuvenating the society, if allowed to take its root in home, school, leadership, position and in every ramification of human endeavours. The society needs change in culture, politics, economic, education, leadership and the only the way that can be achieved is through religion and social change.

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