

RELIGION AND CULTURE IN THE DIGITAL ERA: EMERGING ISSUES IN NIGERIAN SOCIETY

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The Abstract

The nature of today's society has become so complicated that it raises the question of the essence of religion and culture and their relevance in our society. Some of the cultural outlooks of the present time constitute a mockery to our society and the religious boisterousness of the present time seems not to have much impact. The prevalent situation tends to present religion and culture as being in opposition to each other. Using the historical critical method, as well as the socio-cultural method, this paper investigates the nature of religion and culture, their relationship and what impact they can make in a society. The research findings reveal that religion and culture can be seen as human beings' greatest assets as they co-exist together with human beings right from creation. Hence, culture and religion are essential instruments that contribute much to the shaping and building up of any society. Both help to regulate society and help people to be ordered; thus, culture and religion have inherent values that serve as tools for peaceful coexistence among the indigenes of every community. Culture can neither be separated from religion nor religion be separated from culture, they go side by side. Every religion incorporates some elements of culture and culture on the other hand incorporates some elements of religion. Where there is no culture, there is no religion. This paper, as a panacea to the present situation, suggests a reorientation of the youth starting from primary school, through secondary school and university education till old age, creation of employment opportunities and active involvement of the youth in politics.

Key Words: Religion, Culture and Digital Age

Introduction

The issue of religion and culture can be seen as one of humanity's great assets right from creation. It is often said that humans, religion and culture co-exist. Religion and culture seem like complex ideas to study from the perspective of international relations. Scholars have long debated the meaning of these terms and the impact they have had on our comprehension of the social world around us. Religion is an essential element of the human condition. Hundreds of studies have examined how religious beliefs mould an individual's sociology and psychology. While some researchers have asserted that religion is an essential part of an individual's culture, other researchers have focused more on how religion is an element of a culture in itself. The key difference is how researchers conceptualize and operationalize these terms. Moreover, the influence of communication on how individuals and communities understand, conceptualize and pass on religious and cultural beliefs and practices is integral in understanding exactly what religion and culture are. It is through exploring the nature of religion and culture that we can best understand how they shape the world in which we live. Therefore, this work will throw more light on religion and culture, assess how they have evolved over time and also appraise how they have been lived out in the past and in the present. In addition, this work, above all, will give insight on how the religion and culture have been influenced by the digital age.

Conceptual Analysis

Culture

In common parlance, culture is understood as a people's way of life. Culture (derived from the Latin word, *cultura*, literally translated as “cultivation”) is a modern concept based on a term first used in classical antiquity by the Roman orator, Cicero: “*cultura animi*”. The term “culture” appeared first in its current sense in Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries, to connote a process of cultivation or improvement, as in agriculture or horticulture. For the German non-positivist sociologist, Georg Simmel, culture refers to “the cultivation of individuals through the agency of external forms which have been objectified in the course of history” (*Simmel 1971: xix*). In the 20th century, 'culture' emerged as a central concept in anthropology, encompassing the range of human phenomena that cannot be attributed to genetic inheritance. Generally speaking, culture refers to the pattern of human behaviour in a particular society (Chapel, 2021). It concerns how we eat, think, and behave based on the shared values of our society.

Religion

The term religion is derived from the Latin word, *religare* meaning to bind. It has its root to the Latin noun, *religio*, meaning respect for what is sacred, reverence for the gods, sense of right, moral obligation, sanctity and the bond between man and the gods. (Harper, 2000). Religion is an organized collection of belief systems, cultural systems and world-views that relate humanity to spirituality and to moral values. Many religions have narratives, symbols, traditions and sacred histories that are intended to give meaning to life or explain the origin of life or the universe. From the ideas about the cosmos, they tend to derive morality, ethics, religious laws or a preferred lifestyle. Many philosophers and non-philosophers alike have tried to give a monistic definition to religion. However, that has not been possible. Religion is one of the most misconstrued and misunderstood words.

Various individuals have defined religion in varying ways, according to their various backgrounds, personal biases and school of thought. In his work, Toy defines religion as “man's attitude towards the universe regarded as a social and ethical force; it is the sense of social solidarity with objects regarded as Powers, and the institution of social relations with them” (Toy 1924:1). For him, these Powers are regarded as mysteries which are higher than living men.

In the mind of Whitehead, and corroborated by Williams (1984:89), religion is seen as “whatever an individual does with his own solitariness, and if you were never solitary, you were never religious”. For Feuerbach (1881), religion is what differentiates man from the brutes, and being identical to man's distinctive characteristic, it is also identical with self-consciousness, that is, man's consciousness of his own nature. Thus for him, religion generally understood, is consciousness of the infinite; thus it is and can be nothing else than the consciousness which man has of his own infinite nature. Hence, it is the relation of man to his own nature, the end of which is the wellbeing, the salvation, the ultimate happiness of man.

Schleiermacher (2006:29) postulates that religion can be seen on the one hand, as “a way of thinking, a faith, a peculiar way of contemplating the world, and of combining what meets us in the world”, and on the other hand, it could be seen as “a way of acting, a peculiar desire and love, a special kind of conduct and character.” Affirming that religion is essentially contemplative, he goes further to say that “Religion is to seek this (contemplation of the pious) and find it in all that lives and moves, in all growth and change, in all doing and suffering. It is to have life and to know life in immediate feeling, only as such an existence in the Infinite and Eternal” (Schleiermacher 2006:37).

For Geertz (1993:90), “Religion is a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful persuasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in (people) by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.” Also, Livingston (2001:11), having examined the definitions of other authors such as I. Kant, S. Freud, E. Durkheim, Geertz, P. Tillich, M. Spiro and others, and finding them deficient, postulates that “Religion is that system of activities and beliefs directed toward that which is perceived to be of sacred value and transforming power.” In line with this, Omoregbe (2014:46) avers that “religion is something that links or unites man with a transcendent being, a deity believed to exist and worshipped by man, it is a bi-polar phenomenon”.

The above express that there are varied definitions and understandings of religion postulated by different persons, each stemming from his stance. Such definition also takes consideration of a Christian definition of religion that incorporates the Trinity: God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and a Muslim that includes the idea and notion of Allah and in extension Prophet Mohammed in his understanding and definition of what religion is all about.

In summary, religion is man's consciousness of himself in relation to the ultimate being, the transcendent one. However, both culture and religion have been confronted by recent development in the society of today engineered by digital age.

Digital Age

The digital age is the era we live in today. Computers began to penetrate the business world in the 1960s and 1970s; personal computers in the 1980s and computers combined with the Internet in the 1990s dramatically increased the presence of digital devices. In the 2010s, a revolution occurred with smart phones, placing a full-fledged computing device into nearly everyone's pocket. The digital age, also called the information age, can be viewed as the period starting in the 1970s with the introduction of the personal computer, and with subsequent technologies introduced, thus, providing the ability to transfer information freely and quickly. It is the period that has brought about an advanced scientific and technological development. With the emergence of digital age, different societies began to experience changes in the area of culture.

Types of Culture

Sociologists describe two interrelated aspects of human culture: the physical objects of the culture (material) and the ideas associated with these objects (non-material).

Material Culture

Material culture refers to the physical objects, resources, and spaces that people use to define their culture. These include homes, neighbourhoods, cities, schools, churches, synagogues, temples, mosques, offices, factories and plants, tools, means of production, goods and products, stores, and so forth. All of these physical aspects of a culture help to define its members' behaviours and perceptions. Technology, for example, is a vital aspect of material culture in the developed world. Students from these areas are expected to learn to use computers to survive in colleges and businesses, in contrast to young adults in the Yanomamo society in the Amazon who should learn to build weapons and hunt.

Non-Material Culture

Non-material culture refers to the non-physical ideas that people have about their culture, including beliefs, values, rules, norms, morals, language, organizations, and institutions. It is the intangible things produced by the culture (Chapel, 2021). For instance, the non-material cultural concept of religion consists of a set of ideas and beliefs about God, worship, morals, and ethics. These beliefs,

then, determine how culture responds to its religious topics, issues, and events.

When considering non-material culture, sociologists refer to several processes that a culture uses to shape its members' thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. Four of the most important of these are symbols, language, values, and norms.

Elements of Culture

A culture has various elements or components. These include behaviour patterns, literature, art, religion, educational and recreational institutions, government and economy. The behaviour patterns of a group consist of things such as mores, folkways, customs, traditions, laws, morals, stereotypes, taboos, legends, fashion, myth etc. While literature includes prose, poetry, drama, story, etc.; art articulates the material expression of beauty, emotion and belief. It includes music, dance, sculpture, paintings, architecture, photography etc. Religion demonstrates a society's morals and beliefs about humanity's spirituality and reason for existence (Chapel, 2021). It includes worship, observance of rituals, sacrifice, prayers etc. Educational and recreational institutions comprise of such things as library, museum, school, cinema, theatre, and cultural clubs. Government explains the structure created by society to maintain order, and economy entails the rules of buying, selling, trading and assigning of values to things.

Characteristics of Culture (Chapel, 2021)

- i. Culture is the sum total of acquired traits which man acquires by socialization process. Thus, culture comprises behaviour patterns of people in the society.
- ii. Culture is transmitted from generation to generation. Each generation is free to modify the cultural heritage and then transmits it to the next generation.
- iii. Culture is a social heritage of human beings. It represents group's expectations. Humans cannot create a culture bereft of group's influence.
- iv. A culture which does not meet the recurring needs and demands of mankind is obsolete and outmoded. As such, a culture is good if it gratifies the social and ethical needs of a people, group or subgroup.
- v. Culture is not static but dynamic. It receives good things from other cultures. Thus, there is a cultural synthesis or integration. As a result, culture gets refined and influences the life styles of individuals. It is subject to change and growth. So, culture is adaptive in nature. Culture changes as civilization changes.
- vi. Culture has the quality of becoming integrated. Various parts of culture are integrated with each other. It welcomes new elements and incorporates such elements into a culture.
- vii. Culture is the manifestation of people's or groups reaction to their environments and circumstances. Humans are interwoven with cultural mainstreams and they become part and parcel of them.
- viii. Culture is modified and renewed in the light of new experiences.

Conflicting Values of the Past and Present

Human society is dynamic not static and as societies change from simple traditional societies to complex modern societies, people, values, trends and activities also change. Traditional African societies, for instance, were relatively simple with no literary heritage. Oral transmission was what was in vogue as opposed to the modern African societies which have been greatly influenced by the Western world that is more advanced with lots of literary collections on an array of subjects. Globalization and colonialism have made it possible for African nay Nigerian society coming in contact with many cultures. As it is always the case, such cultural contacts bring about new realities.

Just as societies have developed, values have also continued to change to suit the trends of a changing world which have created an increased wave of moral decadence and laxity in present day societies.

Values of the Past

Some of the cherished and upheld moral values of the past include truthfulness, respect, tolerance and cooperation, hard work and functionalism, respect for human life and dignity of persons.

Truthfulness

Truthfulness can be defined as being honest. Honesty implies being frank, direct, open or even straight. It entails standing up for what you believe in no matter whose pride gets in the way. It means not contradicting oneself in thoughts, words and actions. Isichei and Bolaji (2010) define honesty as “the awareness of what is right and appropriate in one's role, one's behaviour and one's relationship”. Honesty is the foundation of integrity; having moral standards. Traditional societies were founded on this value and truthfulness was a quality pursued by all especially by leaders who were looked up to for direction by followers. Leaders valued truthfulness because they believed in personal reputation. They cherished the saying in Proverbs Chapter 22:1 that “a good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver or gold”. They lived in accordance with this principle even when they had not read the Bible.

Respect

Respect is an acknowledgement of the inherent worth and innate rights of the individual and collectivity (Isichei and Bolaji, 2010). The value of respect was cherished in the past, especially respect for elders. This is because it was assumed that elders were more knowledgeable and wiser than young persons. Respect was also given to elders as they comported themselves in manners worthy of emulation. Respect comes with honour and dignity as the individual or group of individuals are regarded as important personalities in their own rights.

Tolerance and Cooperation

Can two people work together if they do not agree? The most logical answer is No. This is because one person will always drawback the other. For persons to work together to accomplish set objectives, they must learn to appreciate their differences, accommodate their weaknesses and pool together their strengths. Tolerance means being receptive to the beauty of differences while cooperation is simply identified as team work. Tolerance involves mutual understanding resulting from mutual respect while cooperation involves mutually beneficial relations. Traditional societies were tolerant and extremely cooperative. They appreciated diversity in nature and realized that though they were different; they had to work together to promote human life and existence.

Hard work and Functionalism

Traditional societies cherished the virtues of hard work and functionalism. Everything these societies did was geared towards inculcating these values in the younger generations. Traditional African education was very functional in its approach as it comprised **basic education** for living in conformity with the traditions of the community; **education for occupation and economic self-reliance** for equipping members with appropriate skills for survival and **education for special occupation** with regards to particular families –family crafts, medicine etc. (Kosemani & Okorosaye – Orubite, 1995). Traditional societies did not support laziness and as such did not encourage it. Individuals had to learn to value hard work as a channel for an improved life. Members were encouraged to be functional by contributing wholly to the growth of their societies. Societies

encouraged members who were committed to their values by rewarding them in various ways especially with leadership positions.

Respect for Human Life and Dignity of Persons

Human life has always been sacred or sacrosanct. Life has always been important and the dignity of persons has been pursued because the origin of life has been linked with “gods” or “deities”. Human belief in the ultimate power of “immortal gods” has caused people to have great respect for human life and treat persons with dignity. Traditional societies promoted the security of life because of their beliefs in the sacredness of human life. Before life was taken, it had to be a necessary sacrifice after a series of interventions of the people for adequate cleansing. Traditional societies as already stated were very simple societies. They believed in **character development and functionalism** of members and they pursued this cause with utmost sincerity. Most of their determination to pursue just causes arose from their religious beliefs in the supremacy of their “gods” and the punishment(s) that could arise as a result of their disobedience to the “gods”. In the words of Kosemani and Okorosaye- Orubite (1995) again, “the yardstick for measuring an educated man is his morals, manners, obedience to authority and respect for the customs, conventions, superstitions and laws of the land”.

Values of the Present

With civilisation and the advent of digital age came a lot of changes both positively and negatively. One negative change that came with the dawn of the new era was moral decadence and laxity. Society has witnessed a fall in moral standards and an increased interest in mundane as opposed to the spiritual or more serious things. Moral decadence has resulted in indiscipline at all levels in the society and its resultant effects are seen in our lackadaisical attitude to work; our readiness to cheat and embezzle, lack of dignity and respect for human life and the monster of corruption. Instead of values, vices are being pursued today (as if they were values) and they include dishonesty, disrespect, intolerance and lack of cooperation, profit oriented relationships, profanity of life and abuse of human dignity, loss of pride in hard work and an increased interest in the pursuit of injustice and other crimes, all in a bid to acquire wealth by adopting the philosophy that “the end justifies the means”. Modern societies are experiencing a wave of corruption driven by the “get rich quick syndrome”. Public goods and resources are audaciously stolen by individuals who are in leadership positions in a bid to acquire wealth for themselves and secure the future of their families caring less about the pain and burdens to be borne by other members of the society as a consequence of their actions. Today, people take pride in telling lies, engaging in ungodly practices and embellishment of various criminal acts. Integrity is lacking in the interactions of people with one another and flagrant abuse of the laws and of human rights is the order of the day.

Hence, it has become obvious that in the digital age the prime values of our culture held to great esteem in the past has been eroded by the vices of the present time. Most shocking is that these vices are celebrated in some ways by the society as if they were values. Moreover, the religious domain is not immuned from the emerging influence of digital age.

Different Views of Religion

The objective View

Objectively, religion is the body of truths, law and rites by which the human person is subordinated to the transcendent being (Arinze, 2008). Objectivity is the idea that unbiased scientific or social scientific knowledge can be reliably obtained through systematic observations of an external reality. This view on religion tries to remove any form of bias in the understanding of religion. The human

person is removed from the picture, together with their personal beliefs, customs and other conventions which can form any obstacle to the comprehension of religion. Every attention is focused on the transcendent being for a more universal view and understanding of the word, religion.

Religion is an element in our life's experience dealing with our relation to a supreme being, whether in worship or in acts of piety. Thus, it would seem a foregone conclusion that anyone having religion must be moved or directed somehow, either from within or without, by a supernatural power, or a claim thereto. But where he without an objective standard received from this Supreme Being, each one, having different backgrounds, would be moved differently both in his worship and in his act of piety, would indicate a totally subjective experience which would be unreliable. Hence, the human persons must be guided religiously by something outside of themselves. If not, the person, left to a subjective experience, would produce as many forms of religion, as there are individuals (Christensen, 1995).

The subjective View

Subjectively, religion is the consciousness of one's dependence on a transcendent Being and a tendency to worship him (Arinze, 2008). Religion can be said to be subjective in at least two senses. First, the practice of religion involves inner experiences and sentiments, such as feelings of God guiding the life of the devotee. Here, religion involves subjectivity in the sense of individual experience. Religion may also be thought to be subjective because the criteria by which its truth is decided are obscure and hard to come by, so there is no obvious "objective" test, the way in which there is for a large range of empirical claims in the physical world. As to the first sense, one of the challenges to the student of religion is the problem of evoking its inner, individual side, which is not observable in any straightforward way. With that as a standard, everybody determines what religion is for him. On the second note, the challenge may be that the promoters of a religion try to define what they personally understand religion to be, thereby, bracketing off the universal meaning of religion. This is, thus, seen in the rules, laws and principle they promulgate as what guides their religion. However, despite the objective and subjective sides of religion, there is no gainsaying that religion has impacted much in human lives and societies.

What Religions Have Been Able To Achieve In Our Society So Far

The practice of religion is a powerful antidote to many of our nation's pressing social ills, many of which have reached historically high proportions. Yet, despite the societal benefits of religion, the expression of faith in the public square has faced many challenges. Social science research indicates that permitting and accommodating free religious practice is necessary to moving society in positive directions. In as much as Islam and African Traditional Religion cannot be denied of any contribution to Nigeria society, much of what we are to say here, due to the scope of this paper, pertains to Christianity. Still the little preamble here will concentrate on Catholicism since there exist in Nigeria multiple Christian denominations.

Profound Christian Religious Presence

Catholicism in Nigeria is well over 151 years old. The Church in Nigeria can be likened to the biblical mustard seed, which began in a very small way at different parts of Nigeria at different times but has now grown to an enviable height. In the Northern part of Nigeria, the very first Roman Catholic Mission was established at Shendam in Plateau State on 12th February 1907 by the missionaries of the Society of African Missions (SMA) led by Fr. Oswald Waller and his companions. The humble beginning in Shendam in 1907, directly or indirectly, gave birth to the dioceses of Kano, Bauchi, Yola, Maiduguri, Jalingo, Kafanchan, Lafia, Archdiocese of Jos and other dioceses in the North.

(O'Connor: 2009) In the West the same Congregation of Society of African Missions (SMA) established the Roman Catholic Mission first at Lagos in 1868 under the leadership of Fr. Bouche. Other dioceses in the West owe their origin to Lagos (Makozi, 1982). The Holy Ghost Congregation led by Fr. Lutz founded the Roman Catholic Mission in Eastern Nigeria, particularly at Onitsha in 1885. From Onitsha, the faith spread to other parts of South East and South South regions (Makozi, 1982).

At these early times, the lay faithful assisted in the planting of the faith by functioning as interpreters and catechists. Numerous lay organisations emerged in the post-war period that supplemented the Catholic Church's missionary efforts, its charitable work, and which increasingly gave the Church an indigenous and africanised flavour. Some of these lay organisations included St. Anthony's Guild, St. Jude's Society, the Legion of Mary and the Block Rosary Crusade. Lay societies provided an important space for internal dialogue and external interface between the Church and followers of indigenous religious traditions.

Those years witnessed an almost unbelievable growth in members, parishes, dioceses and Church institutions. Today, one can feel the influence of Catholic Church everywhere in Nigeria. In 2005, it was estimated that Nigeria has 19 million baptised Catholics. In 2010, the number rose to 52.6 million. In 2019, one can estimate that the figure might have risen above 70 million. Today in Nigeria, we have 9 Archdioceses, 43 Dioceses, and 2 Apostolic Vicariates. (Catholic Hierarchy, Nigeria website).

This brief excursus is to show how gradually Christian religion penetrated into our varied communities with its concomitant benefits.

Education

Education was one of the missionary strategies adopted by the early missionaries in the evangelisation of Nigeria. Because education is important in so many ways for all citizens, any factor that promotes literacy is important to the common good. The missionaries capitalized on such thinking and invested a lot in education (Clark, 1980). They built schools and left consolidated legacy on education to their successors. The missionaries adapted education to help the converts to acquire knowledge to improve themselves spiritually and materially (Nwosu, 1982). Most of the prominent Nigerian elites are products of those schools established by the missionaries and sustained by their successors. Most often, mission schools are preferred to government schools because of their high standard. Academic expectations, level of education attained, school attendance, and academic performance are all positively affected by religious practice (Glanville et al, 2008).

Parents' religious practice also affects their children's educational outcomes. The greater the parents' religious involvement, the more likely they will have higher educational expectations for their children, and the more likely they will communicate with their children about schooling (Glanville et al, 2008). Their children will be more likely to pursue advanced courses, spend more time on homework, establish friendships with academically oriented peers, avoid cutting classes, and successfully complete their degrees.

Students in religiously affiliated schools tend to exhibit a higher level of academic achievement than their peers in secular schools, particularly in low-income urban neighbourhoods. Studies continue to find that inner-city students in public schools lag behind in educational achievement, compared with students in Catholic schools. The cultural values of a religious community are also a significant pathway to academic success for adolescents. To earn a high school diploma or take advanced

mathematics courses, children must plan for the future and structure their activities accordingly. Religious communities typically invest in forming an ethic of such discipline and persistence. A recent study confirms both this indirect contribution of religious community values and the direct influence of the students' own religious activities in promoting academic achievement (Muller and Ellison, 2001).

Earlier studies found this same relationship between religious practice and academic discipline. In 1985, the ground-breaking work of Richard Freeman of Harvard University revealed that attendance at religious services and activities positively affected inner-city youth school attendance, work activity, and allocation of time – all of which were further linked to a decreased likelihood of engaging in deviant activities. Youths who frequently attend religious services were five times less likely to skip school, compared with peers who seldom or never attended. The above findings have proved valid for all ages across the globe.

Charity

Religious practice is linked to greater generosity in charitable giving and volunteering. In an extensive research documenting the relationship between religion and philanthropy, Arthur Brooks of the American Enterprise Institute found that religious people were 25 percent more likely than their secular counterparts to donate money and 23 percent more likely to volunteer time. Even when it came to nonreligious causes, religious people were more generous (Brooks, 2003). Brooks also demonstrated that religious practice correlates with a higher rate of care and concern for others. Compared with peers with no religious affiliation, religious respondents were 15 percent more likely to report having tender, concerned feelings for the disadvantaged. This gap was reduced by only 2 percent when the effects of education, income, marital status, sex, race, and age were taken into account (Freeman, 1985). The high propensity for the care and concern for another experienced amongst Christians cannot be unrelated to the injunction of Christ as expressed in the requirement for the last judgment (Matthew 25:31-46). Thus, in the Christian purview, charity has become the oil that lubricates the society.

Health

In a 2002 systematic review of the academic literature on the effects of religion, majority of research revealed that religious commitment and practice can lead to increased self-esteem and well-being (Johnson, Tompkins & Webb, 2005). Religious practice is also related to greater longevity, and a reduced risk of a number of health complications such as colitis or different forms of cancer (Levin and Schiller, 1987).

Family Relationships

The practice of religion not only stabilizes marriage, it also improves its quality. Scholars found that the more frequently husbands attended religious services, the happier their wives said they were with the level of affection and understanding that they received and the amount of time that their husbands spent with them. Similarly, religious participation tends to foster an authoritative, warm, active, and expressive style of parenting. Parents who attend religious services are more likely to enjoy a better relationship with their children and are more likely to be involved with their children's education. Moreover, the greater a child's religious involvement, the more likely both the child and parent will agree about the quality of their relationship, the more similar their values will be, and the greater their emotional closeness will be (Aquilino, 1999). However, some researches also show that religious differences within families can detract from the parent-child relationship.

How the Contemporary Age Has Influenced Religion

Religion has historically been an impetus to social change. On the other hand different societal factors have also affected religion.

Liberation Theology

Liberation theology began as a movement within the Roman Catholic Church in the 1950s and 1960s in Latin America, and it combines Christian principles with political activism. It uses the church to promote social change via the political arena, and it is most often seen in attempts to reduce or eliminate social injustice, discrimination, and poverty. A list of proponents of this kind of social justice (although some pre-date liberation theory) could include Francis of Assisi, Leo Tolstoy, Martin Luther King Jr., and Desmond Tutu.

Begun as a moral reaction against the poverty caused by social injustice in that part of the world, liberation theology has become an international movement that encompasses many churches and denominations. Liberation theologians discuss theology from the point of view of the poor and the oppressed, and some interpret the scripture as a call to action against poverty and injustice. In Europe and North America, feminist theology has emerged from liberation theology as a movement to bring social justice to women. This has given rise to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) consciousness, all claiming rights in different religious settings. Some religious denominations assert that homosexuality is incompatible with their faith, while others feel this type of discrimination has no place in a modern church. As the LGBT community increasingly advocates for, and earns, basic civil rights, how will religious communities respond? Many religious groups have traditionally discounted LGBT sexualities as “wrong.” However, these organisations have moved closer to respecting human rights by, for example, increasingly recognising females as an equal gender. This has not come to pass, but some scholars believe these changes are a matter of time. No matter the situation, most religions have a tenuous relationship with practitioners and leaders in the gay community. In an attempt to seek for more freedom, many groups left many traditional religious organizations and joined more liberal ones.

Oppositions to Religion and Religious Authorities

The Internet undermines religion in a number of ways. It does so by undermining religious claims to truth through exposure to competing claims, by granting access to dissenters and to those who present opposing ideas. It also does so by undermining the monopoly of access over national broadcast media, and by destroying the effectiveness of the teacher-student model. All these threaten religion simply because truth and debates there from can be accessed by all, unhindered by restrictions that religion can impose locally, and the proliferation of new or alternative movements weakens the sustainability of all of them, great and small. This is why as modernism continues, large religious institutions are failing and smaller ones are in popularity.

All religions are now brought into close contact with each other through communication technologies. The Internet has an effect on religion similar to multiculturalism by opening up all religious claims to comparison with other contradictory claims. It can be seen that as most of these claims are different, most of them are often wrong. Critics of religion and scholarly analyses of religious texts often damage the reputation of sacred texts, and now, such research is not only easily obtained online, but, it is often hard to ignore. Critics sometimes seek out the 'gullible' and make it their mission to inform them of the shortcomings of their religious doctrines and theological stances. Exposure to contradictory opinions is one of the causes of the decline of religion in the globalized world.

Previously, large and established traditional religious organisations could dominate national broadcast media and sometimes enact censorship with their greater output power, finance, and access to national media. But now, dissenting sects and individuals can explain their own points of view relatively unhindered. Those who have been expelled can move abroad if they have to, and broadcast their own arguments back to their home country from a safe place abroad, over the Internet. In Pakistan and Indonesia, for instance, organized atheism is impossible and effectively illegal, but, online groups representing atheists have flourished. Many religions imbibe a teacher-student model, where successively more profound truths are revealed to a student as they are ready, such as the Roman mystery religions. Outer mysteries and public rituals have a secret meaning that is revealed by teachers to initiates. Even in non-mystery religions, such as Buddhism, a student is expected to learn things in a structured order – a student must first be taught the most superficial doctrine, then the less superficial, and 'gradually' led them up to the profound. But the Internet has undermined such carefully-managed apprenticeships because of the free availability of teachings online.

Even traditional Christian organizations where churches are the focal point, rather than teacher-student pairs, are worried. The reason for the worry is that now everyone can freely read the Bible online, complete with varied commentaries. Such situation diminishes and in some instances excludes references to the appropriate religious leaders such as the priests and bishops, for guidance and directives in matters of faith and morals. Hence, care should be taken not to allow the digital era, with its new technology to herald the demise of organized Christianity.

Social Media

With the digital age, the availability and use of the social media have a common place. As there are many positive impacts created by the usage of the social media, so also are the negative impacts. The social media have made it possible to disseminate religious messages to different parts of the world. One can access religious messages from any part of the world and in so doing come to terms with the values and beliefs/faith systems of other religions. This could help in religious tolerance and respect. Apart from this, the social media have been used in disseminating false information, bias and prejudices against a particular religion or religious authorities. This has contributed to a lackadaisical attitude of our youths to religion in the recent time.

Evaluation and Recommendations

It is obvious that culture encompasses religion. The human person is a religious being and as well can be said to be a cultural being because no one falls from the sky. Everyone is born and brought up in a particular culture which they uphold and value so dearly. Culture can neither be separated from religion nor religion be separated from culture; they go side by side. Every religion incorporates some elements of culture and culture on the other hand incorporates some elements of religion. Where there is no culture, there is no religion. Culture precedes religion. Culture is as old as human beings, so it can be said that religion is an aspect of culture (non-material culture; which are seen as ideas of our beliefs). Since religion is an aspect of culture, it is, therefore, dependent on culture and cannot thrive where there is no culture. Be that as it may, culture and religion help to regulate the society and help people to be ordered, thus, both culture and religion serve as tools for peaceful coexistence among the indigenes of a community. However, social change is inevitable. There are demographic changes, technological changes, changes in the natural environment, and more. Social groups are constantly rising up against one another, infringing on territory. Some groups suffer from environmental impacts made by other groups. New technologies and social institutions create

lifestyle changes. Traditionalists are more likely to resist the changes, while modernists are more likely to advocate and adapt to change. The tension between tradition and modernity can lead to constructive change and/or adaptation. This depends on the people involved, and whether they are willing and able to adapt. Whether people have a traditionalist or a modernist orientation, they can act peacefully or violently based on the maturity of their social consciousness.

It is pertinent to note that both culture and religion have been impacted by the digital age. There is that urgency for a wakeup call in both areas. This paper, therefore, makes the following recommendations in order to make the present era a decent and enjoyable era.

1. There should be a reorientation of the youth starting from the primary, through secondary and tertiary levels of education and up to old age as well. Such reorientation should aim at going back to the root and engender healing from the root.
2. Creating more employment opportunities given that an idle mind is the devil's workshop. Both the government and the private sectors should strive in this regard.
3. Active involvement of the youth in politics and a positive mobilization of the masses for political consciousness should be encouraged.
4. All hands must be on deck for concerted efforts towards instituting an authentic practice of religion.

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