BETWEEN MORAL DECADENCE AND MELTING POT IN NIGERIA: AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to look at the various immoral activities available in the Nigerian society such as cultism, armed robbery, corruption, abortion, fornication, obscene dressing, theft, violence, looting, killing, and many more. These are some of dreadful acts which have deprived Nigeria of its due development.Moral decadence in the life of Nigerians appears to be spreading too fast as to be noticed in every facet of the society. This cancerous disease spreads like gangrene among Nigerians of every decade. This decadent behaviour is manifested in every sphere of life. At the rate they are presently moving, one wonders whether the future of this country would be safe. This paper therefore makes an in road into seeing the Islamic approaches to solving moral degeneration in the society. The paper finally offers some Islamic moral values system as a solution that could help promote moral standard in Muslims and Nigerians particular in all other aspects of life as a whole in Nigeria.

KEYWORD:

Morality, Moral Decadence, Nigeria, Islam, and Islamic Moral System

1. INTRODUCTION

Moral decadence in Nigeria has generated a lot of problems in all sectors of our society resulting in the slow pace of development in the country. The moral decadence ranges from examination malpractices, stealing bribery and corruption, sexual promiscuity, social mal- adjustment, insubordination, disrespect to the constituted authority and to the rules of law. All these immoral behaviours possibly contributed to declining economic and educational standard, resulting in importation of strange social behaviours into our society. This in turn has actually gone deep into the life style of men and women in the society thereby generating fear, unpatriotic, feelings, disunity, lack of faith in the development and progress of the country, distrust towards leaders and unguided behavior in the mind of the ones with conscience who would have loved to uphold high moral standards. Those who gain from these immoral attitudes prefer them to continue. For that reason, there is need for appropriate orientation to be given to the young ones. This will eradicate the moral decadence in our society, thereby creating room for development. This can only be completed by our educational sectors by means of the school which at the grassroots, matters most in the instance of development (www.wikipedia.free. encyclopedia.com).

Morality is part of religion. It is one of the important teachings of many popular religions in the world. Despite the high level of religious awareness in Nigeria, the whole society is still polluted and endemic with immoralities such as corruption, advanced-fee-fraud popularly called 419, embezzlement, adultery, fornication, cultism, armed robbery, obscene dressing, lack of respect (for parents, elders, and constituted authority), and a host of others. And for the fact that Nigeria still witnesses all these vices even at fifty four years of independence may lead to questioning if Nigeria really exists. There is a popular saying that a fool at forty is a fool forever. Nigeria, as a nation, would be considered a fool if, by now, meaningful attempts are not made to put right all the wrongs.

According to Hobbes (1996), morality is simply a declaration of rules and beliefs that are considered absolute guides for human behaviour. This view does not allow for individuals to disagree or for the possibility that other groups are correct in their differing views. The basic premise is, "this is the moral system handed down to us, and any who disagrees with it or acts outside of its rules are evil, mistaken or ignorant. Morality has become a complicated issue in modern times, primarily because of the greater mixing of cultures and religions, each with its own ideas about good and evil. According to Hare (1996), morality is a system of principles and judgments based on cultural, religious, and philosophical concepts and beliefs, by which humans determine whether given actions, are right or wrong.

The word decadence is marked by decay or decline, relating to or having the characteristics of the decline. It is a process of deterioration or decay. According to Hume, (1975) "it could mean a condition or period of decline with regard to morals. Decadence states a falling from a higher standard to a lower state. It is a process of decline or decay in a society, especially in its morals. Decadence can refer to a personal trait, or to the state of a society (or segment of it). It is used to describe a person's lifestyle; it describes a lack of moral and intellectual discipline, or in the Concise Oxford Dictionary: "a luxurious self-indulgence."

2. MORAL DECADENCE

The term „morality‟ according to Okere (2006) is defined as "that quality of human life by which it can be described as good or bad, good in the sense that it must be done, or bad or evil in the sense that it must be avoided." Morality is a spiritual dimension of human action. Animals have no morality. Iroegbu and Echekwube (2005) understood „morality‟ to mean "the conventionally approved rules of behaviour in the society." On the other hand Nwankwo (2012) conceived „moral decadence‟ as "a flight from moral virtues." Moral virtues are good habits which incline and allow their possessors to make good moral choices. Without moral virtue, man and woman are good for nothing and public dangers. Moral decadence is the corruption of moral consciousness. It is a flight from faith and reason. A morally decadent society upholds the philosophy of anything goes. Gbenga (2009) observed that "there has been a great increase in public outcry against bribery and corruption, embezzlement of public funds, the desire to get rich quick and other moral vices like sexual perversion, nudity and loss of family values in the country. Indeed all these vices are the bane of our society."

Odeh (2013) asserted that moral decadence is the failure to uphold sound morality in our society. Muraino and Ugwumba (2014) asserted that moral decadence is the process of behaving in a way that shows low moral standards. It means gross reduction in the moral values in a particular society. Thus, moral decadence appears to be a fall' in the moral standard of the society. It seems to be deterioration or a collapse in upholding our societal values, beliefs, norms and ethical

standards. In addition, Afuye (2015), stated the forms of moral decadence as; cultism, Rape, examination malpractice, Teenage pregnancy, students prostitution, sexual harassment, sale of "Grade" students demonstration, drug abuse, indecent dressing and so on. Idensi (2010) asserted that moral decadence is reported indifferent societies and culture, industrialized world to non-industrialized world and that behaviours denoting immorality such as rape, sexual abuse, drug abuse, school violence and killings have been common among youths and children all over the world.

2.1 MORAL DECADENCE IN NIGERIA

It is quite unfortunate to state unequivocally here, that the high level of religiosity experienced in Nigeria today has not been properly translated into the high level of moral standard expected of a religious booming society like ours. The legitimate Allahliness is quite appreciable, but the gradient of morality is fast depreciating. In Nigeria today, one find many expressions in different practical dimensions of life by which one can prove the low level of morality. This menace has equally affected the pace of development one expects from Nigeria. The religious boom with attendants upsurge in moral decadence breed corruption, which has been described as systematic in Nigeria. The unwholesome consequences are myriad. Corruption, an offshoot of moral decadence breeds inefficiency and diminishes productivity in both private and public sector of the economy. It discourages investment, fuels capital flight, increases unemployment and inflation, creates an acute degree of poverty and reduces the quality of life and life expectancy in Nigeria.

Moral decadence is a social problem because it affects the entire nation. No wonder every community is making serious attempt to check its growth. Ihuoma (1995) observed that a society that does not checkmate the growth of immoral practices would definitely end in disaster. Moral decadence involves any act or behaviour which violates the norms and codes of the society. It is an abnormality involving basic conflict with the society's value system. It could be better described as an aggressive behaviour which defiles the established values in a given society. Rogers (2003) viewed moral decadence as non-compliance through their parental upbringing, peer or societal influence. Parents that involves in anti-social behaviour stands chances of transferring such attitudes to their children, some out of guilty conscience do not have the moral power to instill discipline hence they practice indiscipline.

Religion is today becoming a commerce and avenue to rise to power. Audi (2002:102), citing Oladipo (1999), noted that "in West Africa (including Nigeria), there are people who assume religious leadership as one chooses a business for financial gains." Prayer houses exist where religious leaders administer religious services and totems, requesting beneficiaries to make supplies that include foodstuff, wears, money, labour, and physical lust satisfaction of the self-made leader (Audi, 2002) Some of these religious leaders at times manipulate the psychology of these members through religious persuasions and insinuation to actions, violent or non-violent.
Socially, beginning with major realities like ethnic grouping of communities, one finds the promotion of selfish sectarian exhibition in relationships. People very often see no problem in classifying a group of socially different people as less than human. The Nigerian situation in this respect is quite obvious. We have a stratified society under major and minor ethnic groups. Constant agitations based on ethnic and religious affiliation have not only affected the politics of this nation but have also dwindled the pace of development in Nigeria. Indeed, the religious expectation of accommodating people even for the sake of „proselytism" gets lost at the slight opportunity to talk ill of others (Audi, 2002).

Corruption in Nigeria is endemic. It has gone deep into all the sectors of the Nigerian society. Agbom (2010) lamenting on the mess this evil of corruption has plunged the nation into said, "Corruption gives rise to people consciously doing what is wrong or what is not allowed." It makes it possible for one to get what one is not qualified for or be denied of what one is qualified to get. It creates room for dishonesty, non-patriotism and involves betrayal of social trust, sabotage, lack of respect for human reason and human integrity.

Low moral standard and hypocrisy of the elder generation gives room for the youths to get themselves involved in moral decadence when youths find out that the older generation is somewhat hypocritical, in that they pretend to inculcate set of moral norms but vigorously pursues the opposites (Saheed, 2013). As a result, they tend to join in the camouflage way of life.

2.2 ISLAM AND MORALITY

Islam is a complete way of life which encompasses all aspects of man's existence, his worship, eating habits, the way he dresses, how he acquires and disposes his wealth, his attitude towards himself and his family and society at large, his attitudes as a leader and as the led (Hamid, 1996).

The concept of Islam as a religion is not only limited to the spiritual and inner conscience of man or observation of some rites and practices with little emphasis on his ethical or moral conduct, but it governs man's social, economic and political life. Islam, therefore, means a total submission to the will of Allah. This submission should be a continuous act throughout the entire lifespan of a Muslim (Ayoub, 1991).

Morality on the other hand, is a form of social consciousness, a social institution that regulates people's conduct in all facets of their social life without exceptions (Umaruddin, 1962). Morality is a system which contains beliefs about the nature of man beliefs about what is good or desirable or worthy of pursuit for its own sake; rules laying down what ought to be done; and motives that incline us to choose what is right (Gauhar, 1978). It therefore deals with issues and problems concerning habits, customs, way of life, especially when assessed as good or bad, right or wrong. It also aims at preserving the continuity and stability of the society by upholding the accepted values it cherished as sanctioned by religion. It thus seek to restrict the actions and desires of the members of the society (Hamid, 1983).

3. ISLAMIC MORAL SYSTEM: A SOLUTION TO NIGERIAN MORAL DECADENCE

Islam is a comprehensive way of life, and morality is one of the cornerstones Islam. Morality is one of the fundamental sources of a nation's strength, just as immorality is one of the main causes of a nation's decline. Islam has established some universal fundamental rights for humanity as a whole, which are to be observed in all circumstances. To uphold these rights, Islam has provided not only legal safeguards, but also a very effective moral system. Thus, whatever leads to the welfare of the individual or the society and does not oppose any maxims of the religion is morally good in Islam, and whatever is harmful is morally bad.

Given its importance in a healthy society, Islam supports morality and matters that lead to it, and stands in the way of corruption and matters that lead to it. The guiding principle for the behavior of a Muslim is "Virtuous Deeds". This term covers all deeds, not only acts of worship. The

Guardian and Judge of all deeds is Allah Himself. The most fundamental characteristics of a Muslim are piety and humility.

Islam has laid down some universal fundamental rights for humanity as a whole, which are to be observed and respected under all circumstances. To achieve these rights Islam provides not only legal safeguards but also a very effective moral system. Thus whatever leads to the welfare of the individual or the society is morally good in Islam and whatever is injurious is morally bad. Islam attaches so much importance to the love of Allah and love of man that it warns against too much of formalism.

We read in the Qur'an:

It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards East or West; but it is righteousness to believe in Allah and the Last Day and the Angels, and the Book, and the Messengers; to spend of your substance, out of love for Him, for your kin, for orphans for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask; and for the freeing of captives; to be steadfast in prayers, and practice regular charity; to fulfill the contracts which you made; and to be firm and patient in pain (or suffering) and adversity and throughout all periods of panic. Such are the people of truth, the Allah-conscious. (Al-Qur'an; 2:177)

We are given a beautiful description of the righteous and Allah-conscious man in these verses. He should obey salutary regulations, but he should fix his gaze on the love of Allah and the love of his fellow men.

We are given four heads:

1. Our faith should be true and sincere,
2. We must be prepared to show it in deeds of charity to our fellow-men,
3. We must be good citizens, supporting social organizations, and
4. Our own individual soul must be firm and unshaken in all circumstances.

This is the standard by which a particular mode of conduct is judged and classified as good or bad. This standard of judgment provides the nucleus around which the whole moral conduct should revolve. Before laying down any moral injunctions Islam seeks to firmly implant in man's heart the conviction that his dealings are with Allah who sees him at all times and in all places; that he may hide himself from the whole world but not from Him; that he may deceive everyone but cannot deceive Allah; that he can flee from the clutches of anyone else but not from Allah.
Thus, by setting Allah's pleasure as the objective of man's life, Islam has furnished the highest possible standard of morality. This is bound to provide limitless avenues for the moral evolution of humanity. By making Divine revelations as the primary source of knowledge it gives permanence and stability to the moral standards which afford reasonable scope for genuine adjustments, adaptations and innovations, though not for perversions, wild variation, atomistic relativism or moral fluidity. It provides a sanction to morality in the love and fear of Allah, which will impel man to obey the moral law even without any external pressure. Through belief in Allah and the Day of Judgment it furnishes a force which enables a person to adopt the moral conduct with earnestness and sincerity, with all the devotion of heart and soul.

It does not, through a false sense of originality and innovation, provide any novel moral virtues nor does it seek to minimize the importance of the well-known moral norms, nor does it give exaggerated importance to some and neglect others without cause. It takes up all the commonly

known moral virtues and with a sense of balance and proportion it assigns a suitable place and function to each one of them in the total scheme of life. It widens the scope of man's individual and collective life - his domestic associations, his civic conduct, and his activities in the political, economic, legal, educational, and social realms. It covers his life from home to society, from the dining-table to the battlefield and peace conferences, literally from the cradle to the grave. In short, no sphere of life is exempt from the universal and comprehensive application of the moral principles of Islam. It makes morality reign supreme and ensures that the affairs of life, instead of dominated by selfish desires and petty interests, should be regulated by norms of morality.

It stipulates for man a system of life which is based on all good and is free from all evil. It invokes the people, not only to practice virtue, but also to establish virtue and eradicate vice, to bid good and to forbid wrong. It wants that the verdict of conscience should prevail and virtue must not be subdued to play second fiddle to evil. Those who respond to this call are gathered together into a community and given the name "Muslim". And the singular object underlying the formation of this community ("Ummah") is that it should make an organized effort to establish and enforce goodness and suppress and eradicate evil.

Here we furnish some basic moral teachings of Islam for various aspects of a Muslim's life. They cover the broad spectrum of personal moral conduct of a Muslim as well as his social responsibilities.

4. ALLAH-CONSCIOUSNESS

The Qur'an mentions it as the highest quality of a Muslim:

> The most honorable among you in the sight of Allah is the one
> who is most Allah-conscious. (Al-Qur'an; 49:13)

Humility, modesty, control of passions and desires, truthfulness, integrity, patience, steadfastness, and fulfilling one's promises are moral values which are emphasized again and again in the Qur'an. We read in the Qur'an:

And Allah loves those who are firm and steadfast. (Al-Qur'an; 3:146)

And vie with one another to attain to your Sustainer's forgiveness and to a Paradise as vast as the heavens and the earth, which awaits the Allah-conscious, who spend for charity in time of plenty and in time of hardship, and restrain their anger, and pardon their fellow men, for Allah loves those who do good. (3:133-134)

Establish regular prayer, enjoin what is just, and forbid what is wrong; and bear patiently whatever may befall you; for this is true constancy. And do not swell your cheek (with pride) at men, nor walk in insolence on the earth, for Allah does not love any man proud and boastful. And be moderate in your pace and lower your voice; for the harshest of sounds, indeed, is the braying of the ass. (Al-Qur'an; 31:18-19)

In a way which summarizes the moral behavior of a Muslim, the Prophet (May the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said:

"My Sustainer has given me nine commands: to remain conscious of Allah, whether in private or in public; to speak justly, whether angry or pleased; to show moderation both when poor and

when rich, to reunite friendship with those who have broken off with me; to give to him who refuses me; that my silence should be occupied with thought; that my looking should be an admonition; and that I should command what is right."

5. SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES

The teachings of Islam concerning social responsibilities are based on kindness and consideration of others. Since a broad injunction to be kind is likely to be ignored in specific situations, Islam lays emphasis on specific acts of kindness and defines the responsibilities and rights of various relationships. In a widening circle of relationship, then, our first obligation is to our immediate family - parents, husband or wife and children, then to other relatives, neighbors, friends and acquaintances, orphans and widows, the needy of the community, our fellow Muslims, all our fellow human beings and animals.

5.1 PARENTS

Islam reprimands Muslims to respect and obey their parents provided such obedience does not lead to disobedience to Allah's commands. Equally, Islam made obedience to parents as a way of attaining Allah's love and respect, and thus a gateway to paradise. Respect and care for parents is very much stressed in the Islamic teaching and is a very important part of a Muslim's expression of faith. Allah say;

Your Sustainer has decreed that you worship none but Him, and that you be kind to parents. Whether one or both of them attain old age in your lifetime, do not say to them a word of contempt nor repel them, but address them in terms of honor. And, out of kindness, lower to them the wing of humility and say: My Sustainer! Bestow on them Your mercy, even as they cherished me in childhood. (Al-Qur'an; 17:23-24)

6. OTHER RELATIVES

And render to the relatives their due rights, as (also) to those in need, and to the traveler; and do not squander your wealth in the manner of a spendthrift. (Al-Qur'an; 17:26)

6.1 BE GOOD NEIGHBOURS

Islam commands that neighbours be treated with respect and honour and even if they are unbelievers. The Noble Prophet (May the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) in a statement disclosed that good neighbourliness is part of Iman (faith). It means that one's neighbor should be safe and protected from troubles and problems, otherwise, one's Iman is not complete. The Prophet (May the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) further explained that no Muslim could enter paradise if his neighbour is not safe from his troubles. The Noble Prophet (May the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said that committing adultery with the wife of one's neighbour is one of the three great sins.

The Prophet (May the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) has said:

"He is not a believer who eats his fill when his neighbor beside him is hungry"; and: "He does not believe whose neighbors are not safe from his injurious conduct."

Actually, according to the Qur'an and Sunnah, a Muslim has to discharge his moral responsibility not only to his parents, relatives and neighbors but to the entire mankind, animals and trees and plants. For example, hunting of birds and animals for the sake of game is not permitted. Similarly, cutting trees and plants which yield fruit is forbidden unless there is a very pressing need for it.

Thus, on the basic moral characteristics, Islam builds a higher system of morality by virtue of which mankind can realize its greatest potential. Islam purifies the soul from self-seeking egotism, tyranny, wantonness and indiscipline. It creates Allah-conscious men, devoted to their ideals, possessed of piety, abstinence and discipline and uncompromising with falsehood, It induces feelings of moral responsibility and fosters the capacity for self-control. Islam generates kindness, generosity, mercy, sympathy, peace, disinterested goodwill, scrupulous fairness and truthfulness towards all creation in all situations. It nourishes noble qualities from which only good may be expected.

6.2 COMMANDING GOOD AND PROHIBITING WRONG

Islam has an effective ways of solving social vices in the society. This is the principle of "al-Amru bi al-Ma'ruf wa al-Nahy'an al-Munkar" (Enjoining what is good and forbidden what is wrong). Commanding what is good and forbidden what is wrong is a responsibility on every Muslim who will generate religious laxity among the people and weaken their faith. Allah says in the Glorious Qur'an;

Verily, Allah enjoins justice, and the doing of good to others; and giving like kindred; and forbids indecency, and manifest evil, and wrongful transgression. He admonished you that you may take heed. (Al-Qur'an;16 v.91)

Allah again says;

Who is better in speech than one who calls (men) to Allah, works righteousness, and says, 'I am of those Who bow in Islam (Muslim)?' (Al-Qur'an; 41:33)

Islam makes it obligatory on every Muslim to denounce reprehensible deeds in varying degrees. The lowest degree of denouncing evils generally is for a Muslim to abhor in his heart and show visible signs of pain and anger if he is unable to denounce with his hands or his mouth. And denunciation in his heart means that he should be angry with those who commit the reprehensible deeds, boycott them and sit not or eat or drink with them.

6.3 TRUTHFULNESS

Islam preaches against evils such as telling lies and also condemning falsehood, which is a gateway to hypocrisy. Falsehood leads to wickedness and wickedness leads to hell fire. Hence, the Noble Prophet (May the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said; "truthfulness leads to righteousness and righteousness leads to paradise. And a man keeps on telling the truth until he becomes a truthful person. Falsehood leads to wickedness and wickedness leads to hell fire. And man may keep on telling lies until he is written before Allah as a liar.

The vices of tongue included slander, backbiting and falsehood. These vices do not only damage the image of one but they also destroy the society as they can cause mistrust, misunderstanding, hatred and social disharmony.

6.4 GOOD CONDUCT

Islam cheers Muslims to develop the ideals of good manners in all their dealings with other people, Muslims and non-Muslims alike. This is so as the quality of any given society depends on the quality of the people who constitute the society. For this the Noble Prophet (May the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said; "I was sent to perfect the good character". Thus good manner is the basis of all Islamic teachings. Good manners is part of Iman (faith). No one is better in manner than the Prophet (may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), Anas said "I have served the Prophet (may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) for ten years and he never said a word of contempt to me and he never said why did I do what I did nor why did I neglect what I neglected" (Muhammad, 1981).

7. CONCLUSION

In the light of the findings of this paper, it is concluded that the problem of moral decadence in the Nigeria society cannot be curbed or have the solution finally without turning to the true teachings of Islam as preach by the Noble Prophet Muhammad (May the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). The paper identified various forms of moral decadence among Nigerian this causes includes inadequate home training, emphasis on materialism, moral laxity, decline in religious training, influence of peer group and mass media. The Islamic moral system as well as it basic teachings are amazing, and therefore it is the only option for the Nigerian degeneration. May the light of the truth shine in our minds and in our hearts.

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