

Ethical Teachings of Jesus and Morality in Indigenous African Traditional Education

By

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Abstract

One major characteristic feature of religious Education is its influence on morality and social reform. This paper, therefore, looks at Ethical teachings of Jesus and morality in indigenous African Traditional Education. It studies some of the teachings of Jesus that deal with behavioural patterns and at the same time takes a look at the traditional African instruction on morality and social reform. Features and aspects of Christ's ethical teachings and mode of African traditional Education are looked into. The paper concludes that neither the teachings of Jesus, which Christianity exemplifies, nor African traditional religion support maladaptive behaviours and societal decay. Hence, the paper recommends that African moral Education should be resuscitated and that ethical teachings of Jesus on behaviour and interpersonal relationship should be adopted for a better African society.

Key words: Ethical, Teachings, morality, African Traditional Education.

Introduction

As a teacher, Jesus Christ stands out. While theories of great teachers endure but for a short time and pass away with time, the influence of Christ's teaching upon the world has continued for over two thousand

years. Nicodemus was more right than he knew when in John 3:2 he said of him, “ thou art a teacher come from God”. It is therefore important to study Christ’s method of teaching; how he framed and presented his truths so that they reached most of his hearers’ hearts and yielded results. In the same vein, there is need also to take a look at indigenous African traditional Education, to study different ways they transmit moral instructions and behaviour patterns

I. Features of Christ’s ethical teachings

Lewis (2007) identified oral teaching as an important feature of Christ’s teaching. He thrusts all his precious sayings to the memories of his disciple and hearers. Indeed, we only know of one occasion when Jesus wrote, and the writing was done on sand in John 8:6. He planted the seed of his eternal truths in the human heart and left it there to grow by the power within it, down the ages.

Furthermore, according to Lewis (2007) spontaneity is a feature of Christ’s teachings. He used spontaneous and informal teaching. Much of the deepest truths of his teaching arose from causal incidents and events of the moment. For example, he used his contact with the man with withered hand in the synagogue to teach that it was right to do good on the Sabbath.

Also, Fawole (2009) identified adaptation as a feature of Christ’s teachings; he often adapted his teaching to suit his hearers and the occasion. He made use of natural surroundings and situational occurrences to fix the main facts in his hearers’ minds. He never rushed his hearers, neither did he demand full-fledged faith at the beginning, he accepted the faith they could offer and from that led them to greater things

In addition, Rashdall (2010) identified the use of figurative language as an essential feature of Christ’s ethical teachings. He made use of parables and illustrations to drive home his truths. By the use of paradox he often shocked his hearers into attention and interest.

Ways of transmitting African traditional Education

In the indigenous African setting, there are different ways of transmitting and enforcing traditional African moral instructions. African traditional Education is non-formal, transmitted orally from generation to generation. Ogunrinde (2014) identify different ways of Education among indigenous Africans

1. Africa traditional education uses taboo to teach morality and behavioural pattern. Many moral issues are attached to one taboo or the other to enforce total compliance. For example, Africans regarded as a taboo for one to sit on the mortar or any bowl or hard materials in which substances are crushed with a pestle. Actually, this is to teach some elements of hygiene in the society. It is also forbidden among Africans to engage in talking during the process of eating, this is to prevent the occurrence of possible accident in the home, most of which are due to our carelessness. It is to teach hygiene and table manner. But because it is regarded as a taboo, an average African will quickly comply. It is regarded as a taboo to collect rain water with bare hands. Originally, this is to prevent the risk of exposure to cold, but it is regarded as a taboo and Africans are conscious so as not to break any taboo.
2. The use of curses. Some moral instructions are passed with curses attached to them against anyone who may try to act otherwise. While ordinarily some people may not be willing to follow the said moral instructions, but because curses have been attached to them, they are forced to obey. This according to Perrin (2013), is very biblical. Joshua used this system when he placed a curse on whoever would rebuild the wall of Jericho (Joshua 6:26) Jesus also placed a curse on whoever would add or remove from eschatological revelations and promises in the book of revelation (Rev. 22:18-19). Paul the Apostle by the Spirit of the Lord, placed a curse on whoever refuses to love Jesus Christ in I Corinthians 16:22. Africans believe so much in the efficacy of curses, especially when one breaks any rule to which

courses have been attached. If a person is guilty, evil will befall him according to the words used in the curse. The fear of curses have really helped to check bad relationships and behaviours in the traditional African society

3. The use of parables. Africans are very rich in their use of figurative language and parables in driving home their message and to correct certain social ills prevailing in the society
4. The use of proverbs. There are a lot of traditional African proverbs transmitted from generation to generation to teach deeper truths and give instruction in right dealings and moral living. For example, Yoruba says “ohun t’o koju s’enikan, ehin lo ko si elomiran”, which means, what faces a person is backing another person. This proverb is meant to teach respect for another person’s opinion and perspective; to reduce arguments and promote understanding and peaceful coexistence within the African society. We may not see things the same way
5. The use of story telling. In the traditional African society people congregate at night to tell stories and tales, which are called tales by the moonlight. Different stories are composed by elders and transmitted to younger ones as if these things really happened, so as to teach some moral truths
6. The use of reward and punishment African parents and elders are not hesitant in punishing errant behaviours within the society or family circle. They do that so as to use it as a deterrent against further reoccurrence of such an act
7. Africans use deity attachment to demand compliance to certain moral truth. For example, they frown at cursing others with the believe that certain deities and spirit beings around will sanction it instantly or turn the curse back against the person enforcing it. According to Richard Dtseluge (2016), Africans believe that it is wrong for a man to steal another man’s property and hence, kicked against this act. However, in a situation where it is difficult to locate

where such stolen properties are kept and those connected with the theft, the anti-wickedness divinities are usually called upon for aid, so as to recover such goods. This enhanced African moral values, ethics and societal norms

8. Social decrees in form of prescriptions and proscriptions. There are a lot of do's and don'ts in African society. According to Mbiti (1979), Africans are of the views that some degree of the societal norms and ethics should be maintained in view of the fact that certain actions or conduct of individuals within the community can affect the other members of that community. To prevent man from becoming rebellious and endangering the welfare of the society, there are set patterns or code of behaviour for the individual and the community as a whole. In effect therefore, many laws, customs, set forms of behaviour, regulations, rules, observances and taboos, which constitute the moral code and ethics of any given society or community must be held sacred. It is believed by the Africans that God punisher in this world, hence, each community or society has its own set form of punishment for various offences, both legal and moral. These range from death for offences like practising sorcery and witchcraft, committing murder and adultery, to paying fines for minor cases, or total excommunication from the community

Specific aspects of ethical teachings of Jesus and African traditional moral instruction

Africans are very rich in culture and teaching. Most of Jesus' ethical teachings, as opined by Oluwole (2012) are imbedded in African moral code, though with different presentation and situation.

Jesus' teaching on divorce is a modification of the Jewish conception. He says that divorce is permissible only when the woman is involved in acts of infidelity (Matt. 5:31-32). In the African content, divorce is also permissible as a result of sterility especially on the part of the wife. This is probably the greatest single cause, since inability to procreate blocks the

stream of life. Other causes are continued cruelty from the husband; the practice (and suspicion) of magic and witchcraft on the part of the wife, continued unfaithfulness from either partner and desertion of one party by the other.

Forgiveness is an aspect of ethical teachings of Jesus. Blair (2009) opined that where forgiveness is at work peace and brotherliness will have a chance. In the Lord's prayer Jesus taught us to forgive our offenders. He further gave the parable of unmerciful servant in Matthew 18:21-35 to teach us that we should forgive others. In African traditional moral instructional, forgiveness also has a place. However, forgiveness can only be possible where the offender feels sorry for his offences and some of the times through the mediatory efforts of elders and peacemakers

One of the problems in our society today is people's craze for wealth and riches. Jesus taught that we should not put our trust in riches. He is against wealth gotten by foul means. Hence, he taught that people should lay treasure of good character instead of earthly riches. He taught that it is hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of God (Mark 10:12-30). He says we cannot serve God and money together. Africans also believe that wealth and riches are good, but ill-gotten wealth is a taboo. Hence, they take time to find out sources of people's wealth. Once the source is evil, the wealth is rejected

Love is a very important ethical teaching of Jesus. He taught us to love everybody including our enemies. We are to do good to those who hate us, bless those who curse us, and never retaliate when offended. Love is also part of moral instructions in African. We are to love people and do them no harm. However, there is no love for enemies in African content. It is either you run away or you fight your enemies before they destroy you. This explains why many of the Africans seek spiritual fortification against enemies' attacks.

Jesus also taught on the danger of anxiety. Rather than being unnecessarily anxious about life and what it offers, we are to put our faith in God and be satisfied with His daily provisions. We are to seek the

Kingdom of God and his righteousness while other things would be added for us. Africans also have moral proscriptions against anxiety. In the Yoruba belief, there are several proverbs and wise sayings that warn against anxiety; such as "A kii kanju tu osun olu oran, egbaa re ko to se l'obe;" "A kii kanju l'abe gbigbona", "Eni ti ko gba kadara yio gba kodoro"; "A kii kanju koja aynamo" etc.

On humility, Jesus taught us to humble ourselves. He condemned the Pharisees and the Scribes for their pride (Luke 14:11; Luke 18:10-14). He taught us to emulate the humility of children and not to seek positions of honour at social gatherings. Africans have long-standing traditions on humility in the ways we greet and respect elders; in our speech and reactions, including our body language, all must exemplify humility. Younger ones must not look at the face of an elder when he is talking. It is an abomination to argue with a senior citizen or be rude to him. Younger ones must not talk back when an elderly person is talking. All these are meant to teach humility and abhor pride within the framework of African concept of humility.

Conclusion and Recommendation

All the teachings of Christ are geared towards societal re-engineering and moral reform. Jesus condemned, in strong terms, all forms of ill behaviour. Neither also does African moral Education support maladaptive behaviours. Most of the teachings of Jesus on morality agree with African belief on acceptable behaviour. While Africans reward good behaviour, bad behaviours are vehemently frowned at and are outrightly punished.

This paper hereby recommends, at this juncture, that the teachings of Jesus on behaviour and interpersonal relationship should be adopted for a better African society. African moral Education should be given more emphasis, no matter the level of civilization of this age.

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