ROLE OF PARENTS IN MORAL DEVELOPMENT OF THEIR CHILDREN THROUGH CHRISTIAN MORALITY

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Abstract
The global community is encapsulated with the issues of fundamental human rights and other statutory laws that give every individual opportunity to determine his or her morality. Thus, the role of parents and the need to have moral foundation for Christian children in order to safeguard acceptable moral standards need not be over-emphasized. It has also become necessary that in the face of all these challenges, the Christian community through parents have a mandate in the moral upbringing of their children. The paper emphasizes the role of parents, the Holy Bible and the Christian Church tradition in fulfilling this task. The paper adapted the qualitative method of research based on phenomenological approach on issues of morality, moral development and Christian morality. The finding in the paper reveals that the moral upbringing of Christian children is based on parents, the Holy Bible and the Church tradition.

Keywords: Morality, Christian Morality, Moral Development.

Introduction
Several great philosophers have tried to look at the development of morality based on pure reason and pure humanism without any ostensible reference to religion or God. These philosophers include people like Immanuel Kant and Joseph Fletcher among others who looked at the foundation of morality based on categorical imperative or the principles of pleasure (Okere, 1983). However, whether it is the principles of utility of grosser theories that support the above assertion, the main concern of this paper is to corroborate that religion is not only relevant for moral development but absolutely necessary for moral education. Much more worrisome is the wave of modernism and globalization which has given every individual person the rights to determine his or her morality at the detriment of religious beliefs. Thus, in an attempt to look at the moral development of children, Christian morality has a serious role to play in evolving common and acceptable moral principles for the future generations and morally virile nation. At the base of Christian morality is the understanding that parents have a greater role to play in the moral of their children.

Christian Morality
Obiorah (2009) asserts that morality is universal and is concerned with goodness or badness of human character or behaviour or with the distinction between right and wrong. It includes accepted roles and standards of human behaviour and act of conformity to accepted standard of general conduct. He further opines that Christian morality is:

The morality of men and women who believe in Christ. It is unique because it is based on the person of Jesus Christ. The faith in Jesus has a source which is the sacred scripture, Jesus
is the fulfilment of the Old Testament and He is the faith that is both expressed and communicated by the writers of the New Testament. It is here that the question of Christian morality and the Bible has its foundation (Obiorah, 2009:19).

Okere (1983), further corroborates that Christian morality is derived from the ten commandments in the Old Testament and more importantly in the life of Jesus Christ as a model. For all practical purposes, morality is based indirectly on some belief system, a religion, a transcendent matrix of values. Morality is in fact a belief or value system transcended into action. It is the living out of a deeply believed system of values.

At the centre of Christian morality is the person of Jesus foretold in the Old Testament, believed and experienced in the New Testament. Christian Moral teachings which depend on the Bible as its starting point. Christian moral theologians draw their teaching from the authority of the Bible which comprises both the Old Testament and the New Testament. The church of Christ based its morals on the biblical laws, and sets down moral in the light of Jesus teaching. Besides the Bible, early Christians’ experience of Jesus communicated by the privileged eye witnesses of the Lord or through direct revelation as in the case of Paul was a matrix of their conducts. Jesus’ life and teaching impacted on his followers, formed their “rule of faith” which they lived in their daily life. This embedded faith in Jesus which may or may not be documented in papers is the motivating strength of Christian actions or morality (Obiorah, 2009).

**Sources of Christian Morality in the Moral Development of Children.**

Okoro (1989), has presented to us, some significant sources of Christian morality which include the following;

i. **The Holy Bible:** The Holy Bible is ever relevant in Christian morality and should be a vade-mecum for every Christian. This is because for the Christians, the holy Bible is not only a source of revelation on which to ground one’s faith, it is also an indispensable reference point for morality.

ii. **Moral catechesis:** Catechesis is the science or art of teaching or handing down the faith or teaching a particular aspect of the faith to a particular group of people, while moral catechesis on the other hand is giving instructions to the people of God on such moral truths in a manner that they can practice them and attain moral change in their lives.

iii. **Drama and play:** The role of play and drama in moral development is to reconstruct varied moral situations from distant parts played by the characters to stimulate debate and discussions. Moral lessons are unconsciously internalized by the audience especially children and actors. Religious materials can be transmitted to children in a form of plays or drama. Through dramatic play, a child takes a role and pretends to be someone else. In this manner, he or she unconsciously learns the moral ways of the adult. Children could also be engaged in a creative form of play.
Themes on creation could be taught with aids from this form of play. Different types of play help the child to acquire self-confidence and it can also help the child to attain emotional release in a satisfying and social acceptable manner and learning to get along with others and enjoying their company.

iv. **Story-telling:** In story-telling, personalities are identified. The place of stories in teaching morality is to provide learning and experiences to the audience and thus arouse their interests. In a story, there is need to point out the moral in it.

v. **Music:** It makes children to act happily with others. Though a song could be taught because of the beauty of its melody, meaning of the wordings for the simple intelligence of children in order to attain desired moral and religious objectives of the lesson is quite important.

### Moral Development of Children

Office for standards in education as cited by Ernker (2000), define moral development as building of a framework of moral values which regulate the personal behaviour of individuals. It is the gaining of a sense of moral values from their experiences of learning, enabling them to think and act responsibly. Moral development involves changes in thoughts, feelings and behaviours and also seeks to answer different questions. Some of these questions, include how individuals reason or think about moral decisions, how individuals behave in moral circumstances and how they feel about moral matters as well as characterizes an individual’s moral personality.

Frost (N.D.), asserts that moral development shapes a child's decision-making process. His experiences from birth help mold the morals he eventually develops. As his parents they play a significant role in instilling the morals that they feel are valuable. These include honesty, and respect, generosity and kindness. Parenting can help shape little children into moral adults.

However, the concept of moral development arises from the observation that human beings are not born morally mature. Four alternative theories of moral development have come to the fore in the recent years. The psychoanalytic approach proposed by Sigmund Freud, asserts that moral development coincides with the development of the personality of a childhood as it relates to id, ego and superego. The social-learning approach posits that moral standards are behavioural patterns learned directly through various socializing forces. The cognitive structural approach most fully explicated by Lawrence Kohlberg, asserts that moral norms are imbedded in universal structures of social interaction of which the concept of justice is more basic. The character-formation approach posits that a person’s moral life not only involves social structures and judgements, but also agency, understood as intention, perception, hopes, habits, values and virtues. The fourth approach emphasizes the individuals’ responsibility in moral development (Grenz and smith, 2003).
Holmes (1984), is of the opinion that Christians should be concerned with doing good to others including making decisions which contribute to God’s purposes in this world. Indeed, some Christians have adapted a kind of utilization ethic in the eighteenth century. For instance, Paley (1997) declared that virtue is “doing good to mankind, in obedience to the will of God, and for the sake of evaluating happiness”. It has been argued that since God is benevolent, we too, should be benevolent and aim to maximize the good for others. It is in the above context that we will consider the role of Christian parents in the moral development of their children.

**Role of Christian Parents in Moral Development of their Children.**

**Home:** one of the major determining agents of sound moral development of the child is the home. According to Henry (1978), home is an environment made up of parents and children. Everyone is born in a home as to a particular family. The family is affirmed in the Bible and recognized by social anthropologies as first institution in the society. It is also the oldest known institution predating both the church and the state. The way your home and family operates affect the type of morals your child develops.

It is expected that all norms, values and morals of the community or society are inculcated at home by the parents and other Siblings. The home occupies a strategic and sensitive position in the moral upbringing of children. It is also at home that morality is guided by religious beliefs of the parents and furthermore perpetuated by religious instructions in the school (Lasson, 2002).

Eke (1983), further corroborates that since children are born general (tabula rasa), they learn about good and bad conduct from their cultural environment and parents are the primary agents in the process of moral development. The two major methods of teaching this is by example and instruction. Children learn by imitating their parents’ actions. Also because of the special relationship they develop with their parents, the children identify with them so that even when the parents are absent, the children re-enact their own interpretation of the parents' actions. Sometimes too, parents interpret the moral code to their children by verbal means such as folk tales and admonitions. The technique that parents use to drive home their points to the children is reward and punishment. Thus, parents help children moral beings through consistency in applying rewards and punishment and core oriented techniques involving explanations. The home came into being from the time of Adam and Eve (Genesis 2:18-25) It is certainly the most potent moral agent in the moral development of the child.

**The Holy Bible:** The command for parents to participate in the moral upbringing of their children is also stressed in many passages of the Bible. Exodus 12:21-28 relays that when Moses was teaching the Israelite leaders to observe the Passover, verse 26 state “and when your children ask you what does this ceremony means to you? The “to you” is a direct address to the fathers. The fathers were responsible and accountable to God to explain God’s teachings and perceptions to their children.
Deuteronomy 6: 4-9 teaches how God’s commandments should control parents and children in every aspect of life at home or away from home. Parents must demonstrate faith in one God and truly love Him totally with all their hearts. With a personal relationship with God, parents can then transmit spiritual and moral truths to their children. It is on this faith in God and personal convictions of parents that will lay a strong foundation on which moral and spiritual truths can be built into the lives of their children.

The first eleven chapters of proverbs are filled with teachings on children moral upbringing and discipline by the parents. The primary purpose of child upbringing by the parents is for the children to gain righteousness, prudence and justice. The child will also grow up to distinguish between good and bad, temporal and eternal. (Kore, 2012).

Proverbs 19:18 tells parents discipline your son; for in that there is hope. Do not be a willing party to his death”. By chastisement a child may be saved from both physical and spiritual death. Discipline contributes to making the child pleasing and acceptable to God and man. This is further stressed in proverbs 22:6 “train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not depart from it”.

Proverbs 22:15 teaches that a child needs punishment in order to deal with his sinful nature. Furthermore, proverbs 29:17 say “discipline your son, and he will give you peace; he will bring delight to your soul”. A father find a well-disciplined son delighted and peaceful to live with. A discipline son will be able to discern right and wrong as well as have self-control. He will shun ways of the wicked because he possesses the fear of the Lord Ephesians 6:4 says “fathers do not exasperate your children instead bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the lord”. Discipline means verbal training through admonition and encouragement to the child. Paul tells fathers not to aggravate their children to the extent that they lose their temper and self-esteem. Rather fathers should cherish, nourish, instruct and encourage children with clear goal of pleasing the Lord. Parents should seek to define the purpose and goal for discipline to their children. Interest, intimacy and regular counselling should be the daily routine between a father and his children (Kore, 2012).

Christian Church Tradition: By Christian church tradition we are referring to the belief, custom and rituals up help by Christians in the course of their worship and service to our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ. The Christian choice devoid of which ever denomination has certain beliefs customs and rites that bind Christians together which can serve as sources of moral development for the children. The Church including the people contributes to the understanding and appreciation of moral and social issues and values.
Sunday school classes most usually conducted for children below the ages of fourteen are an important source of moral upbringing. The story-line and certain catechisms imparted on the children mold children’s characters towards becoming morally balanced individuals during adulthood.

The church provides a loving and caring environment for the children in early childhood. The Bible stories reinforce love and caring which the children experience. At this stage some scriptures are given for memorization and strengthening of their faith. The sacrifice of Isaac, story of David and Goliath, the three men in the fiery furnace, are dynamic models which capture the imagination and stimulate the faith of children.

God’s purpose for his children is maturity in all ways including moral and spiritual development, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the son of Lord and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:13-15). Conversion makes this movement toward Christian maturity possible. It changes the content of faith and thereby brings into focus and enhances precisely those cultural values which make it possible for us through the energizing presence of the Holy Spirit to organize the goals of our moral life. In the New Testament, baptism follows immediately or shortly, after conversion. Hopefully our children and adolescents in the church will experience conversion, be baptized and become active members of the church. Thus, our approach to moral reasoning will account for different understandings of the actual implication of this ritual. The church must be aware of these differences. It must teach the significance of baptism and its conventional meaning especially if baptism is followed immediately by acceptance into church membership. Baptism is an infant and adult commitment in which Christians identifies with Christ and covenants with a local expression of the body of Christ to follow Christ together. The maturing child, in particular those who come to faith in later adulthood will need continuing and intensive nurture in order to reach Christian maturity (Wiebe, 1989).

The experience of the child is influential in the church sanctuary by objects and symbols which introduce or reinforce Christian nurture. In the sanctuary of some churches, a number of symbols interpret the faith. The Bible is given a highly visible place in above the baptistery hangs across which indifferent seasons of the church year is appropriate covered by works of art or banners representing the church year. The communion table has a chalice and a bread tray pointing to the fellowship of the saints with Christ and one another. Correctly interpreted these symbols all give occasion to discuss conversion, baptism, communion and the nature of the church. Moral development is most effective when elements of moral reasoning, personal experiences and stages of faith are considered as a whole. The child must be given the opportunity to consider genuine moral problems, moral dilemmas and to experience real social cognitive conflict. The parents’ task is to stretch moral decisions. The parents will be constantly guiding the discussion to real issues of the
gospel and will help the children to be challenged by the gospel in their responses and solutions (Wiebe, 1989).

Conclusion

From the developmental theories highlighted in this paper, it is important to understand that some long standing theories about how children develop moral thinking are being challenged. This article provides a religious domain theory analysis of the role of parents in moral development. Although it is believed that morality is constructed from reciprocal social interactions, both affective and cognitive components of parents’ religious interactions with their children can facilitate children’s moral development. Although moral interactions occur frequently in peer contexts, parents’ domain feedback about the nature of children’s moral interactions are proposed to provide a cognitive mechanism for facilitating moral development. Parents promote children moral understanding by providing domain appropriate and developmentally sensitive reasoning and explanations about the child’s social world, which stimulate the development or more matured moral thought. (Smetana, 2010).

It is important to stress that Christian parents should use the ideals of Christian morality in the moral development of their children. They should direct their children not according to fashion or society’s needs but according to the word of God as explicated in this paper. A Christian upbringing lays a moral and spiritual foundation in a child. We will concur with Mileant (2015), where he asserts that if parents only nurture the child physically, while neglecting him morally and spiritually, he will grow up a “child of nature” and a slave of carnal desires. To educate the hearts of children in goodness and virtuousness is the sacred duty of parents. The violation of this duty makes them guilty of moral and spiritual infanticide. The gospel of Jesus Christ teaches that the principal thing in man’s life is the proper state of the heart. One should understand the heart as the centre of one’s moral and spiritual life, where in all the feelings and devices are concentrated. Here is the location of the origin of a person’s behaviour and moral attitude. Matthew 15:19 says “out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adultery…, then it should become evident that the main task of rearing a child is to give a proper direction to his heart. It is important to educate a child to distinguish unambiguously between right and wrong, to choose virtue and to despise immorality. Parents should nurture in their child a deep love of Lord from a very early age, before he loses his sensitivity and receptiveness.

In Nigeria and perhaps in Africa at large morality is not built in the vacuum but based on sound religious beliefs of Christianity, Islam or African traditional religion. More so, African cultural values that do not go against the entrenchment of moral values are highly upheld by the identified religious adherents. From the summation made in this paper, it is highly believed that Christian morality and Christian parents’ understanding of their roles contribute to the moral development of their children.
References
Holy Bible (The Revised English Bible).