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Influence of Religion on Values and Behaviour in Kenya: A review of Literature

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Abstract: *The study sought to investigate the influence of religion on values and behaviour in Kenya. The paper adopted a desk top research design. The design involves a literature review of existing studies relating to the research topic. Based on the literature review, the study concluded that religion has positive impact on values and behavior. The study further concludes that a belief in fearful and punishing aspects of supernatural agents is associated with honest behavior, whereas a belief in the kind, loving aspects of gods is less relevant. The study recommended that religious leaders and parents take special care of the religious formation of children, especially during the transition period from childhood to adolescence, when they are most likely to lose their religious faith.*

Keywords: *Religion, Values, Behaviour*

I. Introduction

Religion is the belief in the existence of gods (the sacred) and its bond with men. Its function is to connect men to gods and men to men. Thus, the business of religion is to worship gods, God (the sacred) and also to unite/bond people who believe in the same gods (the sacred). From such understanding, we lead to an understanding that religion is actually a binding relationship between men and gods, God (the sacred). Thus, gods, God (the sacred) become the centre of a religious community and its unifying factor. In this sense, religion and life are not in separate ways. In the Eudemian Ethics Aristotle argued that the goal of our lives is service and contemplation of the god. As we contemplate the god, we become like what we contemplate and so we become most like god by contemplating the god. In his Metaphysics, Aristotle explained that the best human activity is the most god-like namely thinking about the god and about things that do not change. Aristotle considered god as amagnetic, drawing us by his attractive power to live the best kind of life

possible for us (Hare *et al* 2006). The purpose of religion is to give a new direction to human life style, keeping in mind the immediate future and contemporary point of view. Religion contains many eternal values as basis of direction out of which one remained principal (Kumar, 2008). Looking into such understanding, how can we deny the role of religion in human life? We do not believe that human welfare was not the motive behind the establishment of religious communities by their founders, although their scope might be limited. Religion is committed to general human welfare. It was needed not only in the beginning of human beings but today is also needed. It urges for unity and cooperation to build conducive environment for all human being to stay. The idea of religion's involvement in human life is further emphasized by Reza's definition on religion. Reza (1998) defined religion as all around movement in the light of faith in Allah (God) and a sense of responsibility for the formation of thought and belief, for the promotion of high principles of human morality for the establishment of good relations among members of the society and the elimination of

undue discrimination. This definition provides us a clear role of religion in human life particularly human morality. According to Reza, we need religion to provide principles of morality like justice, peace, honesty, righteousness, brotherhood, equality, virtuousness, tolerance, sacrifice, help the poor and others. He argues that these are the virtues without which our lives will lose its order, normalcy and turn into chaos. It is possible to acquire these values without religion but certainly in the absence of firm religious belief, those values appear to lose their meaning and become a mere piece of advice which can be accepted or rejected. These qualities are based on internal feelings and faith and are naturally beyond ordinary law. We believe that it is God who cultivates the values within man and impels him to automatic righteousness and adherence to duty. Will Durant a philosopher, in his book, Pleasures of Philosophy, as cited by Reza says that without the backing of religion, morality is nothing more than arithmancy, as without it, the sense of obligation disappears. Supporting the above concepts, different religions have similar teachings about the role of religion in human lives. In India, the word —Dharmal is used to mean —religionl. Dharma comes from the root —Dhrel which means —to sustainl. Thus, Dharma is the greatest sustaining force or the binding force of the society. The goal of Dharma is to create mental and spiritual fellowship among all men and to regulate its relation with all living beings. It thus tries to keep the world in perfect equilibrium (Barua, 2008). Hinduism, according to Gandhi, is the most tolerant and liberal religion. It contains ethical and spiritual outlook. Gandhi said that the chief value of Hinduism lies in holding the actual belief that all lives is one, that is all lives coming from one universal source and that is Allah (God).

Christianity is not all about God and his relations to human being and how human beings are related to Him but it is all about love. God became human being (incarnation) to save humankind from their sins because of love. God loves human beings, thus He sent his only son to be a human being to save human beings. In return, human beings must love God and his fellow human beings too which is summarized into the greatest commandments: Love your God with all your mind, heart and soul and love your neighbor as you love yourselves. Such commandments are the source of inspirations on how Christians carry their live every day. Thus christian moral life is based on trying to live and treat others as Jesus did (Jakoblich, 2007).

In the United States pollsters and scholars have found evidence that the vast majority of Americans continue to believe in supernatural forces, identify themselves in religious terms, and hunger for a spiritually enhanced life. Regarding the later, there is clear evidence that many Americans participate regularly in religious and spiritual small groups and form a large market for religious/spiritual books, tapes, music, and paraphernalia. Religion is a significant factor in voting patterns, ideology about public policy, and political careers. But pervasive evidence also exists for changes that many observers see as religious decline: declining membership, particularly among liberal/mainline Protestant denominations, and declining participation in religious services and traditional forms of piety like prayer and Bible reading. Tolerance of "other religions" grows along with declines in specific confessional and denominational loyalties (i.e., commitment to "brand name religion") (Barna, 1996; Princeton Religious Research Center, 1996, 1997a, 1997b; Hoge, Johnson, and Luidens, 1994; Roof and McKinney, 1987; Bellah and others, 1985.; Roof, 1993; Wuthnow, 1988, 1997; Marquand, 1996; *The Economist*, 1998:65).

In African thinking, there is no division between religion and life, body and soul, natural and supernatural as one sees in Western thought. What this means is that humankind is best seen as a life-force interacting harmoniously with life forces in the universe namely: God, the deities, the founding ancestors of different clans, the ancestors and other living/dead of the family and tribe. According to Mbiti (1990), the African is notoriously and incurably religious. Hence a conclusion can be drawn that African morals are elaborately entwined with culture (African) which is greatly dosed with spiritual beliefs. Consequently, in order to comprehend the African moral values, an outline of African religion and culture is necessary. Sense of hospitality is innately crucial in the present survival of African values. At all times, there is always unprompted welcome and accommodation to unfamiliar persons and visitors. Africans effortlessly incorporate strangers and offer them lands to settle hoping that they would leave one day, and the land would be returned to the owner. This is usually carried out with the conviction that one will never opt out of his own community. Unlike the West, no appointment and special invitation are required for one to call on a distant family member or neighbor. On arrival, when there is food the visitor is invited to dine. He is handled kindly, just as one would want to be treated when visiting another home. Africans possess a symbolic way of showing welcome. This is done in a

variety of ways for example; in forms of presentation of coconuts, kola nuts, traditional brew, groundnuts etc. in different communities. These are offered to demonstrate that he is welcome and safe. Onwubiko has observed that "a guest must not harm his host and that when he departs, he should not develop a hunch back on the way home". (Onwubiko, 1991).

The Kenyan constitution grants all Kenyans freedom of religion and worship. Many different religions are practiced and celebrated in Kenya, such as Christianity, Islam and Hinduism. Due to the influence of Christian missionaries in the country in the 19th century, most Kenyans are Christians. The Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches are the most established within the country, and other influential denominations include the Seventh Day Adventists (SDA), African Inland Church (AIC) and the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA). Christian missionaries continue to maintain a presence in Kenya today, and offer aid to the country with educational, religious and medical facilities. There are also evangelical churches and Independent African Christian churches in Kenya.

Religious practice appears to have enormous potential for addressing today's social problems. As summarized in 1991 by Allen Bergin, professor of psychology at Brigham Young University, considerable evidence indicates that religious involvement reduces "such problems as sexual permissiveness, teen pregnancy, suicide, drug abuse, alcoholism, and to some extent deviant and delinquent acts, and increases self-esteem, family cohesiveness and general well-being. Some religious influences have a modest impact whereas another portion seem like the mental equivalent of nuclear energy. More generally, social scientists are discovering the continuing power of religion to protect the family from the forces that would tear it down. Starting at an early age, the choices one makes based on spiritual beliefs and values directly relate to the creation of certain lifestyle habits, such as diet, alcohol use, and sexual practices. Moreover, the benefit of a religious community made up of a variety of individuals from many generations also provides a strong sense of support and connection. The overall effect of such practices on one's health and well-being is found to be positive throughout one's lifetime. Many people, because of their love for what is material in nature, have become very selfish thinking only about themselves and what belongs to them. Thus, the moral principles of love, care, mercy, humility, freedom, tolerance, and mutual respect have been replaced with hatred, abuse, misery, pride, injustice, intolerance and bloodshed. This chapter

asserts that the social ills that have afflicted our nation have emerged as a result of a failure to understand the core principles of morality with relation to everyday ethics. There is hope for humanity or such people to change their moral character in order to lead a better and felicitous life. The power to make this change rests on the people themselves. To show to them how the process of change works, an answer for the following critical questions is needed. What should people do to change and enhance their everyday moral character. This study sought to determine the influence of religion on values and behaviour in Kenya.

II. Literature Review

Shehu, (2011) in the study on the Role of Religion in Shaping Moral Character: Islamic and Catholic Perspectives, states that a religious mindset is based on revelation from God, like Torah– Judaism, Bible – Christianity, Qur'an – Islam, or sacred books of Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism, Confucianism, and so on, which are a result of human wisdom. Human intellect is used by Prophets or wise people to interpret the text of revelation or sacred books as well as to extract divine verdicts and rules on which the society is established. From a religious perspective, especially the Islamic one, revelation does not contradict human intellect; rather it corrects it if it deviates from its innate disposition (fiġrah). The revelation or sacred books, on which a religion is based, will create a balance between the seen and unseen aspects of people's life. Thus, every action of religious people is dictated by eternity promoted by revelation or sacred books. The life of a religious person is governed by his faith in the supernatural beings, which stand higher than him. This is what makes a Muslim, Christian, or Jew better than a secular or atheist person. Religion will make its followers feel the sense of responsibility (related to worldly affairs) and accountability (related to hereafter affairs), before they intend to act. This approach will make religious people in general, and Muslims and Catholics in particular, refine their moral character.

Religious organizations have a wide variety of comprehensive services, programming, groups, lectures, readings, models, and so forth that can regularly impart, support, and provide corrective feedback about ethical principles and guidelines to their members. The secular community just doesn't seem to have the organizational structure to do so. Religious engagement and practices encourages and supports "clean living." Research has consistently found that religious people are less likely to engage

in criminal behavior, marital infidelity, alcoholism, unprotected sexual activity as well as being more likely to engage in pro social behaviors such as volunteerism and charity. Thus, those who tend to report being spiritual, religious, or both tend to behave themselves pretty well. Pardini, Plante, Sherman and Stump (2000), Religious faith and spirituality in substance abuse recovery: Determining the mental health benefits. This study explored the relation between religious faith, spirituality, and mental health outcomes in 236 individuals recovering from substance abuse. We found that recovering individuals tend to report high levels of religious faith and religious affiliation, but choose to rate themselves as being more spiritual than religious. Results also indicate that among recovering individuals, higher levels of religious faith and spirituality were associated with a more optimistic life orientation, greater perceived social support, higher resilience to stress, and lower levels of anxiety. Costa and Goodwin, (2006), by helping social norms to be internalized, values are indirectly sources of relationship behavior. Likewise, cultural traditions, religion and language have different meanings that shape beliefs and influence social life. Thus, it seems important to reevaluate the role of values in social life in a society which is extremely distinguishable in religious terms. An adaptation of (Schwartz, S. H. 1994) —Studying human values. In *Journeys into Cross-Cultural Psychology*, (Bouvy, A., Vijver, F., Boski, P. and Schmitz, Amsterdam: Swets & Zeitlinger.) value survey was used. MANOVA analysis revealed significant differences between groups in four value types and in three higher dimensions. Overall, results indicate that a combination of Schwartz' values with insights from individualism/collectivism can be useful in contexts like Mozambique, a nation characterized by divergent religious groups, which can lead to a collision between religious viewpoints and values. Altogether, it seems most important to investigate further the historical and social influences that shape individual and communal identities with regard to questions of religion and values. According to Tittle and Welch, (1983), the fundamental idea is that social order rests on collectively held values. To the extent that people internalize moral commitments reflecting consensual values, they will probably not contemplate deviance, or if they do consider rule breaking, moral revulsion or potential feelings of guilt will restrict action. Religion presumably aids internalization by linking supernatural sanctions to moral precepts, many of which correspond to behavior norms of the larger society. Moreover, participation in religious activities and institutions continually reinforces and strengthens internalized moral commitments –

therefore, according to functional thinking, religious training and active participation should be highly predictive of conformity to social rules – at least those social rules which religious groups define as having moral components. Tittle and Welch's 'perceived conformity' hypothesis states, The extent to which religiosity influences conformity varies directly with the aggregated religiosity displayed in a given context. It would be expected to work best where messages are both widespread and consistent with religious messages. In terms of perceived conformity', boundary maintenance and moral differentiation may become most salient when substantial variation is perceived in the moral conduct of contemporaries. In such contexts, the perceived rarity of virtuous behaviour may enhance its value and motivate religiously active people to distinguish themselves from the mass of sinners through conspicuous conformity to social norms. Holloway (1999), examined the role of religious beliefs in Early Childhood Education: Christian and Buddhist preschools in Japan. The views of teachers and directors in four Christian preschools and four Buddhist preschools are examined in this qualitative study of early childhood education in Japan. In Christian preschools, the guiding principle was that each child was a precious gift of God. This belief resulted in a play-oriented curriculum that maximized the choices available to children. Teachers also attempted to encourage children's creativity and their ability to formulate thoughts and express them to others. A particular focus was helping children appreciate each other as individuals and learn to form relationships based upon that appreciation. In Buddhist preschools, the curriculum was designed to strengthen children's virtue, intellect, and physical well-being. Activities were teacher structured, with an emphasis on attaining literacy and numeracy skills. Lessons were delivered in a whole group context, with an emphasis on absorbing content rather than encouraging personal exploration and expression. The clear implications of these different religious perspectives suggest that similar analyses be undertaken in the United States, where very little research has been conducted on church-based preschools. Emerson and McKinney, (2009) studied the importance of religious beliefs to ethical attitudes in business. In this study, they investigated the relationship between religious convictions and attitudes toward ethical dilemmas. They find strong evidence to suggest that business professionals who self-report higher levels of religious importance are significantly less accepting of ethically questionable behavior-for all 16 vignettes studied. This result is far more consistent and significant than for respondents who simply self-classify as —Christian. Further,

they find evidence, consistent with the literature, that older respondents and females also tend to be less accepting of ethically questionable behavior than are younger, male respondents. Finally, we find that professionals working at larger firms tend to be less accepting of ethically questionable behavior than their counterparts at smaller firms. One would expect a relationship between the ethical attitudes and the religion of individuals. Published research into this relationship has found somewhat mixed results. While some studies have found a significant, positive relationship between religious belief and ethical attitudes, other studies have found either no effect or only a —marginal effect. Mehta (1997), sought to determine the impact of religious beliefs and practices on aging using a cross-cultural comparison. Using in-depth interviews and focus group data generated from elderly men and women in Singapore, this article focused on the impact of religious beliefs and practices on their aging experience. The cross-cultural comparison dealt with the Malay community comprising Muslims, and the Indian community comprising Hindus, Sikhs, Christians and a Jain. The research demonstrated the positive influence of religion at the personal and social levels on the adjustment process in late life. Religion served as an important thread of integration in old age if it had been part of the childhood socialization process and had been sustained through the adult years of the individual. The transmission of religious education was emphasized in both communities, and some sensitivity regarding modification of religious teachings to suit the needs of younger generations was recognized in the Indian community. In an important study published in 1987, a group of professors from the Universities of Georgia, Utah, and Wyoming found that the main cause of problematic adolescent sexual behaviors and attitudes is not only family dynamics and processes, as previously thought, but the absence of religious behavior and affiliation. They further concluded that healthy family dynamics and practices are themselves caused to a powerful degree by the presence or absence of religious beliefs and practices. Miller Higginson McCoy & Olson, (1987). The same results also hold true in international comparisons. Shariff and Norenzayan (2011) sought to answer the question do mean gods make good people.

They found out that fear of supernatural punishment may serve as a deterrent to counter normative behavior, even in anonymous situations free from human social monitoring. The authors conducted two studies to test this hypothesis, examining the relationship between cheating behavior in an anonymous setting and views of God as loving and

compassionate, or as an angry and punishing agent. Overall levels of religious devotion or belief in God did not directly predict cheating. However, viewing God as a more punishing, less loving figure was reliably associated with lower levels of cheating. This relationship remained after controlling for relevant personality dimensions, ethnicity, religious affiliation, and gender. Tadić (2005) The influence of prayer on religious behaviour and moral evaluation of the members of the Cursillo movement. In the first part of the paper the author discussed the phenomenon of new lay ecclesiastical movements, their genesis, fundamental characteristics and beginnings of activity in the world and Croatia. Special attention is given to the contemporary international lay Catholic Cursillo movement, which spread in Croatia in the late 1960s. In the second part of the paper, based on a poll of members of seven contemporary ecclesiastical movements among which there were also 74 members of the Cursillo movement, some results of the Cursillo members' poll have been specially analysed. In other words, the influence of personal prayer on their actual religious life, some fundamental moral evaluations, attitudes and religious behaviour: relationship to those who are not believers, to people who have wronged them, their attitudes towards intentional termination of pregnancy, thoughts on contraception, adultery and infidelity, the insolubility of marriage and premarital sexual relations. Prayer has been taken as an independent variable because all contemporary ecclesiastical movements, including the members of the Cursillo movement, have been recognised as a new type of (post)modern religiosity, as renovatory and prayer-movements in the Church. The results obtained show that there is a significant correlation between the frequency of the examinees' individual prayers and their actual religious behaviour, moral evaluation and attitudes.

III. Conclusion and way forward

From the literature review, the study concluded that religion has positive impact on values and behavior. Religious instruction and belief remain today the lifeblood of society's moral ethics. Not only does religion teach virtue, it catalyzes moral action. As such, religion plays an essential societal role warranting special consideration.

Religious beliefs help the individual acquire central organizing principles for life and an understanding of God. Aided by this sense and these principles, an individual can avoid the unnecessary suffering that stems from bad choices and attain the benefits that flow from good choices followed steadily through

life. The empirical research indicates that there is a critical stage in the development of young adults, from around ten years of age through later adolescence, during which they decide whether they will engage in the religious dialogue of searching for ultimate truths and meaning. The young adolescent who turns away from religion at this stage may well lose his anchoring in the community and is at greater risk for a host of problems that can subvert his personal happiness for a lifetime. Increased attention to this aspect of religious ministry will yield great benefits to the nation. The study further concludes that a belief in fearful and punishing aspects of supernatural agents is associated with honest behavior, whereas a belief in the kind, loving aspects of gods is less relevant. Finally, people without religion have been influenced by the over-whelming power of religion. This is because the moral standards that exist today in society, which are definitely shared by atheists and non-religious people, are a direct result of religion. In history, many acts were done routinely which would now be considered wrong even by the most Godless of people. An example of this would-be incest. Incest was not uncommon among people of the past, but was explicitly banned by religion and labeled as an evil practice Today, you'd be hard-pressed to find a person who does not consider incest to be wrong. Religious teachings, therefore, have influenced even people who do not believe in God by setting moral standards for the society.

The study therefore recommends that religious leaders and parents take special care of the religious formation of children, especially during the transition period from childhood to adolescence, when they are most likely to lose their religious faith. Policy makers were recommended to review the policies involving religion by changing commonly held beliefs regarding the Constitution and religion. It is a good social policy to foster the widespread practice of religion.

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