The Phenomenon Of Globalization And Christian Values

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Abstract

Most scholars today describe the world as a 'global village', meaning that it is no more necessarily a place made up of nations that are hundreds or thousands of miles apart from each other. Rather, the world is now a place where people are so highly inter connected that the physical distance between countries is of little or no consequence. The globalized world itself is powered by highly sophisticated technologies in the area of information and communication. As such in minutes any information on any issue in any part of the world can be accessed. As a religion, Christianity is part and parcel of social life in most societies in the globalized world. Consequently, as globalization sweeps across all spheres of life, Christianity and its values will certainly not be left out. Amidst the multifaceted and multidimensional process of globalization, how have Christian values been positioned? Is globalization in any way influencing the landscape of Christian values? Is it a blessing or curse to Christian ideals? Providing answers to these crucial questions is what this paper seeks to achieve.

Introduction

The issue of globalization is one that has in recent times occupied the attention of scholars in different disciplines. The widespread attention given to the phenomenon stems primarily from the fact that it has permeated every aspect of society; politics, economy, health, security, religion etc. Besides its effects are not in contest. They speak very loudly for themselves.

As it concerns the Christian religion generally, and Christian values in particular, globalization, particularly its information and communication dimensions, constitute both a blessing and potential threat. Globalization in the area of information and communication has functioned, and is still functioning impressively to spread Christian values. Adherence to these values is however needed, so that society can be positively affected. Unfortunately, the

globalization of information and communication also provides impetus for adherence to and practice of Christian values to be compromised. As such, despite the free flow of Christian values made possible by the globalization of information and communication, society is still destitute of the positive impact of these values.

Christian Religious Values: An Overview
The word 'Christian' is used to describe a person whose religion is Christianity. Specifically, the term connotes a follower of Jesus Christ, the founder of Christianity. The term was first mentioned in the Holy Bible in the book of Acts of the Apostles chapter 11 verse 26, where it is recorded that " the Disciples were called Christians first in Antioch" (Holy Bible, K.J.V). Those referred to as 'Disciples' here were the followers of Christ while He was on earth, as well as others who joined them later.

Christians therefore represent individuals or groups who have accepted the doctrines of Christ and have become his followers by upholding such doctrines.

Values on the other hand are issues regarded with esteem in the society. They are standards which serve as guide to what is acceptable to people. Furthermore, they represent broad ideas regarding what is desirable, correct and good, that most members of society share (Hughes, Kroehler and Zanden, 1999).

Okpaga (2003) suggests that values are the basis for the judgments people make as to what is desirable, correct and good, as well as undesirable incorrect and bad. In other words, they enable society members to make evaluations regarding what is proper and what is improper and reprehensible. Values therefore serve as guide for socially acceptable behaviours. More aptly put by Ozumba (1990), they act as chatter for acceptable conduct within a society.

Christian values are ideals upheld by Christians. They can be considered to be standards which serve as guide to what is acceptable among Christ's followers. Christian values can also be described as set standards which serve as basis for evaluation of what is right and acceptable or otherwise, within the Christian religion. Christian values therefore make it possible for Christians to know what behaviours to display so as to be adjudged as Christians indeed, as well as what behaviours not to display in other not adjudged other wise.

What constitute Christian values are clearly spelt out by God through his prophets. These are found throughout the Holy Bible, from the book of Genesis to Revelation. They include;
o   Respect for human life. Exodus 20:30
o   Truthfulness. Exodus 23:1
o   Reverence for parents. Ephesians 6:1
o   Respect for the elders. Leviticus 19:32
o   Love for one's neighbour. Matthew 22:39, John 13:35, Galatians 5:14.
o   Sexual purity. 1st Corinthians 6:8, James 2:11, Exodus 20:16
o   Hospitality. Hebrew 13:2, 1st Peter 4: 9, Leviticus 19: 34
o   Peaceful living. Romans 12: 18, Hebrews 12: 14

o   Obedience to constituted authority. Romans 13:1, 1st peter 2:13.

The ideals outlined above are just a few examples of Christian values. These values are numerous and cannot be exhausted in a paper of this nature. The above however provide a brief insight into what constitute Christian values, which serve as guide for acceptable behaviours and life styles among Christians. Guided by these vales, a number of Christians have notably and positively impacted their societies. A ready example is Mother Teresa, who is noted for her work with the sick and the poor, to the extent that she earned a noble prize. Also in pursuance of such Christian values as those of love for the next person (neighbour), hospitality, and charity, Christian bodies in many countries including Nigeria have established such organizations as Motherless Babies' Homes/Orphanages, Home for the Aged, and similar institutions where needs of disadvantaged society members are catered for.

The Phenomenon of Globalization

The term 'globalization' is used to describe the fact that all nations of the world are increasingly becoming interconnected and interdependent. It involves the integration of economies world wide, through trade, finance flow and widespread adoption of information technologies and internetworking. (Adejo, 2003). It is defined as a social process in which the constraints of geography on social and cultural arrangements recede, and in which people become increasingly aware that they are receding (Waters, 1996). Giddens (2006) described it as the growing interdependence between different people, regions and countries in the world, as social and economic relationships come to stretch worldwide. Similarly Kanter and Pittansky (1996) described it as a process in which the world's countries and economies are increasingly integrated as a function of rising cross-border economic activity.

Globalization did not gain popularity until the last decade. The phenomenon it self is complex and multifaceted. A globalization exponent, Kanter (1995), identified four processes associated with globalization, namely; Mobility- the easy and speedy movement of people, goods and services across international borders; Simultaneity- the increasing extent to which goods and services are readily available in different places in the world at the same time; By pass- the increasing degree of innovation, which facilitates the use of alternative channels or routes to reach business or individual consumers around the world, often circumventing established players, and lastly; Pluralism- the dispersion of activity concentrated in a geographical area of multiple centres of expertise and influence. Globalization is therefore created essentially by the coming together of political, social, cultural and economic factors, but driven forward essentially by the development of information and communication technologies that have intensified the spread and scope of interaction between people around the world (Giddens, 2006). In other words, while we accept that a number of forces aided globalization, the revolution in the area of communication and information technology as manifested in infrastructures like mobile and land telephones, digital, satellite and cable televisions, electronic

mail and internet, played much more significant roles in promoting globalization.

While we agree that globalization has increased interdependence and interconnectivity between different countries and cultures around the globe, it is important to stress that in the globalization process, non-Western societies like Africa and indeed Nigeria have been more at the receiving end, while Western countries have been at the giving end. The structures of globalization, particularly, activities of transnational corporations and new communication and information systems, have facilitated significantly the diffusion of Western ideologies, and cultures into non-Western societies. Consequently, Western cultures, lifestyles, political values, ideologies and even language have become largely adopted in non- Western societies like Nigeria. These sometimes even serve as the basis for evaluating what is acceptable and otherwise. This certainly means that globalization is functioning to a large extent to achieve in non-Western societies, the same purpose colonialism achieved among them for the West.

By the technologies of globalization, the world as large as it is, has been reduced to what scholars now described as a 'global village', where time and space have been compressed, while speed and scope of interaction are intensified. For instance, two individuals in two extreme sides of the world like Canada and Australia not only can hold conversation in real time, but can also exchange documents and images with the help of internet and satellite technology. Also, through the cable television technology, someone in Nigeria for instance, can watch an event in London live. Between June and July 2010, billions of people around the world will watch the 2010 World Cup in South Africa via global television links.

Globalization therefore portrays as it were, a world that is borderless, where people including those in the most remote parts of the world are becoming increasingly interconnected, as though there is no distance between them.

Christian Values and Globalization: Two Sides of the Coin

Globalization as a phenomenon has functioned significantly, and still has the capacity to greatly promote the spread of Christian values. The present order of globalization has become a strong force in the spreading of Christian values via various globalized technologies such as television, internet and cell phones. It must be noted that since the last decade, patronage of these technologies has been on the increase. For instance, studies show that on the average an individual in United Kingdom and United States of America watches television for 28 hours each week. (Nation Master, 2009). For the internet, Giddens (2006) reports that as far back as 2002, 45% of people in high income countries such those in Western Europe or North America were classed as internet users. By 2005, the population of internet users around the globe according to Giddens had reached one billion. There is no doubt that by now this population would have significantly increased. In the case of cell phones, it reported by cellularnews.com (2006), that as at 2006 cellular connections around the globe

had reached 2.5 billion, with monthly connections running at over 40 million. Specifically, countries with the highest volume of internet connections as reported by Cellular News include China, India, Russia, Nigeria, Bangladesh, Brazil, Ukraine, Pakistan, United State of America and Indonesia. The data above clearly indicate that the patronage of these technologies is on the high increase and certainly Christians constitute part of this population that patronize the technologies in question. And if they patronize these technologies, there is no doubt that part of the functions these technologies will perform for them would include functions that border on their religious beliefs and values.

The Holy Bible, where Christian values in its entirety are contained can today be stored in mobile phones and computers. The implication of this is that people who have access to mobile phones and computers do not have to wait till they go to their churches, or carry their big Bibles around before they can learn, access or are reminded of Christian values. Instead, once the Bible is installed in one's mobile phone, personal computer or laptop, reference to these values can be made any where; at home, office, in the bus, train, aircraft, in day or at night. These technologies also serve as storage devices for messages and music containing Christian values and can be played by anybody, anytime, any day and anywhere. In Nigeria for example, it is often observed that Christian use Christian music or messages as ring tones for their mobile phones. It is also common among Christians to find them playing Christian messages or music with their personal computers while still working with the computers. These are all avenues of learning or being reminded of Christian values.

Cable and satellite television also play peculiarly important roles in spreading Christian values. There are countless cable and satellite television stations today which operate 24 hours every day, featuring Christian programmes. These include TBN, One Gospel, Rhema, 3ABN, DBN, Love World, TKC, Kingdom life Network, Genesis TV, Hope channel, Daystar, CVV, Adonai, ACBN, CTV, Chosen TV, Solid Rock, Wonderful, and a myriad of others. The unique thing about these stations is not just that they operate on daily basis to broadcast messages, music, talk shows, documentaries and similar programmes which transmit Christian values, but that these stations can be accessed from different parts of the world at the same time. Thus, some one in Calabar, Nigeria for instance, can access and watch a Christian progarmme in South Africa, or U.S.A, and there is no better way for people who have access to television to acquire Christian values than through watching these Christian programmes. In Urban Nigeria where television usage is relatively high, such indigenous and non indigenous Christian preachers like Chris Oyakhilome, David Oyedepo, Ayo Oritsejafor, Joyce Meyer, T. D. Jakes, Paula Whyte, Benny Hinn, Kenneth Hagin, John Hagee, and many others have through the instrumentality of cable and satellite television become household names even when there have been no physical contact with their viewers.

Furthermore, through the internet, Christians around the world are able to share ideas and views on issues regarding their values via emails and websites. Time, distance and location no longer pose serious hindrance to accessing Christian values. These have been conquered by globalization.

Much as it is blessing to the spread of Christian values, globalization also poses a serious threat not necessarily to the spread, but to adherence to Christian values. It is one thing for Christian values to continue to be spread across the globe, it is another thing for people to imbibe and strictly adhere to them. Besides, the only time Christian values can make meaning and impact is when they are adhered to, to the extent that they manifest in people's behaviours.

The globalized information and communication technologies have become the major force inhibiting adherence to and practice of Christian values, especially among young people. It is estimated that around a billion people were using the internet by 2005 (Giddens, 2006). This number would probably have doubled by now. Unarguably, a significant proportion of the population of internet users are young people, Christian youths inclusive.

While surfing the Web, these young people come in contact with somewhat unlimited and uncensored information. Such information includes issues on sex, pornographic and nude pictures and videos. Most of these information, apart from being uncensored, often carry with them justifications for indulging in them.

In their work titled "Technologies of Neutralization: A Theory of Delinquency" Matza and Sykes (1964) stressed that deviant behaviouur is possible not because of an outright rejection of mainstream norms and values, but by the employment of a set of excuses, which they termed 'techniques of neutralization'. The use of such techniques observed Haralambos and Heald (1980) makes deviance acceptable by neutralizing much of the blame and disapproval associated with deviant activities. The point being made here is that when Christians, especially youths, surf the internet and come across these uncensored information and pictures, accompanied with set of excuses, justifications and rationalization for indulging in them, it becomes easy for them to compromise their stance on Christian values. Thus, they can find reasons to begin to indulge in masturbation, premarital and extramarital sex, and similar behaviours which are not coherent with Christian values.

Global media is another aspect of globalization that is weakening peoples hold on their values in the Christian circus. The emergence of cable, digital and satellite television has lunched people into seemingly unlimited choices in terms of what television stations to watch. It is not in dispute that television functions to provide society members with useful information about societal issues. However, some television programmes expose society members, including Christians to different forms of social vices. A number of movies shown on television portray and to some extent promote violence, crime, drug /alcohol intake, indecent dressing, premarital sex, lawlessness etc. Usually, individuals who are portrayed as heroes in some television programmes, especially movies, had to indulge in some of the vices listed above. This tends to influence immature viewers, some of whom are Christians, who may then decide to compromise their values and indulge in some of these ill behaviours in order to feel like heroes. In line with this, Putnam (1996) noted that television

functions to erode social capital i.e. social resources like values that enable people to act effectively.

Finally, television, particularly those with digital and satellite technologies steals a lot of young peoples time. A number of satellite television stations have very interesting and youth oriented and youth friendly programmes. A station like Africa Magic can keep people young and old, glued to it with Nollywood movies. Giddens (2006) reports that in the United Kingdom, individuals aged four and over watch an average of 25 hours of television per week, while older people watch twice as much television as children, perhaps because they are not in school, and go to bed later in the evening. The implication of this for those who have access to television is that part of the time they would have used in reading their Bibles and Christian literature, where they continually remind themselves of Christian values, are often spent by on television programmes. In fact, sometimes some Christians would rather forego attending church for some television programmes. In Nigeria, it is no longer strange to find that on days when some football matches are being played, many Christians would give up going to church and rather sit before their television sets and watch the matches. The final analysis is that giving up church meetings and Bible reading times for television programmes also means a shortfall in opportunities for learning Christian values. The question is, if these values are not learnt, how can they be translated into behaviour? And how can society benefit from these values, which if put into practice can make the world a better place? There is therefore an urgent need for actions, to beat the dimensions of globalization that frustrate the real essence of Christian values.

Suggestions and Conclusion

The need for Christian values to be practicalized is crucial to our society today. Imagine a society where the Christian populations practice their values, so that there is reverence for parents and respect for the elderly. Imagine a society where people are truthful, sexually moral, law abiding, caring to one another, as well as display all the other values spelt out in the Bible for Christians. One might say that this can only be in a Utopian society. However, beyond Utopia, the reality remains that a significant proportion of Christians are not practicing the values of Christianity. That is why social ills like indecent dressing, corruption, sexual perversion (lesbianism and sodomy), pornography, prostitution, violence, crime, drug abuse, alcoholism, divorce and different forms of lawlessness are still prevalent in our society. The question is; are a good number of people involved in these social ills not counted among Christians? Surely, globalization has aided in not only exposing Christian men and women to these ills, but also in providing them with loads of excuses to indulge in them. How then can the negative effect of globalization on the practice of Christian values be cushioned?

First, in addition to the teaching and spreading of Christian values, there is need for much emphasis to be placed on commitment to these values. In other words, Christians should not just be taught these values, they should be

encouraged to be committed to them. Commitment to Christian values especially by young people of the Christian religion can be achieved in different ways. Through Christian movies, the benefits of commitment and consequences of lack of commitment to Christian values can be portrayed. These can positively influence the commitment level of Christians to their values. Also, Christians who are committed to their values can present themselves as role models and mentors to others. By being role models and mentoring others, Christians who are committed to their values can help to positively shape the commitment level of others towards Christian values.

Second, the attention of Christians must be drawn to the adverse consequences of the global information highway, particularly in relation with practicing Christian values. If Christians come to terms with the realities of what harm undue exposure to television and internet can cause them, then definitely, they will tread in such grounds with care. Churches can help in this regard by preaching the need to embrace the provisions of globalization with care.

Third, there is need for Christian parents to keep an eye on what their under aged and older children are exposed to by way of television and internet. Thank goodness cable and satellite television remotes now come with parental control features. Parents can take advantage of these features to censor what their children watch. Similarly, internet facilities have today been reduced to simple and relatively affordable modem. Christian parents can purchase and install these facilities at home. This will mean that their children would not need to go to cyber cafes to browse, but would rather do so at home. Unfortunately, this is still limited to only those who can afford these. However, for such people, it will go a long way in helping parents monitor what environment their children browse when they use the internet. When these checks are in place, the tendency to be exposed to the temptation to compromise or act contrary to Christian values will be minimal.

According to Haralambos and Heald (1980), Talcott Parsons a Functionalist scholar, pointed out that religious beliefs provide guidelines for human actions and standards against which man's conduct can be evaluated. They observed further that Talcott Parsons believes that by establishing general principles and moral beliefs, religion helps to provide consensus which is necessary for order and stability. By implication therefore, Christianity as a religion is capable of transforming and maintaining order in society, if its values are adhered to and practiced by Christians. The negative dimensions of globalization in relation to Christianity must therefore be fought to a stand still bearing in mind the suggestions above, while the positive dimensions are promoted. In this way globalization will remain a strong tool for the spread of Christian values. And if Christian values are practiced as much as they are spread, then we would all be heading to a better world.

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