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Full Length Research

Religion Impact in Social Life of Members in Selected Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) Chapters, Lagos State

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Abstract

This study investigated the impact of religion on the social life of members of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) in selected chapters across Lagos State. A descriptive survey design was adopted, utilising a structured questionnaire comprising three sections, each with five Likert-scale items addressing key research questions. The sample comprised 382 respondents, including 36 clergy and 346 congregants, drawn from various CAN-affiliated denominations. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were used to analyse the central tendencies of responses, while inferential statistics (ANOVA) tested for significant differences in responses across denominations at a 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that religion strongly impacts social life ($M = 4.00$) and moderately influences societal life ($M = 3.79$). However, t-test results showed no statistically significant differences in responses across different denominations within CAN, suggesting a consistent religious influence irrespective of doctrinal variation. The study concluded that religion remains a powerful force guiding social life among Christians in Lagos State, though its influence on social behaviour is more effective. Recommendations include that Christian youth should be encouraged to avoid indoctrination that breeds intolerance or blind loyalty but promotes critical thinking to help them engage positively in a pluralistic society, and Christian teachings should be contextualised to address contemporary issues such as corruption, drug abuse, unemployment, and digital or social media influence, among others.

Keywords: Religious Teachings, Social Life, Drug Abuse, Social Media, Christian Association of Nigeria

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INTRODUCTION

The importance of religion can be understood in a variety of ways, depending on one's perspective and beliefs. Religion can provide individuals with a sense of meaning and purpose in life by offering answers to questions about the nature of existence, the purpose of life, and the meaning of suffering (Davis, 2019). Religious institutions often serve as centres of community and social support, offering opportunities for individuals to connect with others who share their beliefs and values and to participate in shared rituals, traditions, and activities. Many religions provide a set of moral and ethical principles that guide behaviour and decision-making, helping individuals to navigate complex ethical issues and make choices that align with their values (Cornwell et al., 2019).

It is important to note that religion is not the only source of ethical and moral values. Many people who are not religious hold strong ethical and moral beliefs based on other sources, such as secular philosophy, personal experience, or cultural traditions. According to Verkuyten, Adelman, and Yogeeswaran (2022), religion has been used to justify unethical and immoral behaviour throughout history, and some religious teachings have been criticised for promoting discrimination or intolerance.

Hence, religion can influence moral and ethical values.

Ethical and moral values are principles or beliefs that guide behaviour and decision-making (Fathallah, Sidani & Khalil, 2020). While the terms are often used interchangeably, there is a subtle distinction between them. In the context of this study, it can be defined in several dimensions, including features of belief, religious practice, moral system, community, culture, and the social and personal significance of religion on human existence. Belief in a transcendent entity is a key component in the concept of religion. Many faiths teach that there is a God or gods who rule over the universe (Quadri, 2021). Hence, different religions have different beliefs, practices, and values, and there is often significant diversity within a particular religion as well. Of course, not everyone finds religion to be important or relevant to their lives, and there are many different beliefs and perspectives about the role and significance of religion (Laksana & Wood, 2019).

Religion has played a profound and enduring role in shaping the fabric of human societies throughout history. Its influence extends across cultural, ethical, and political dimensions, moulding the collective consciousness of communities and individuals. As societies evolve, so too does the intricate relationship between religion and the various facets of contemporary life (Iosif, 2023). The role of religion has been majorly highlighted as a contributory factor to the wellbeing of individuals, especially in the current era when there is a surge in international migration. As a result, to increase migration, people have moved more from different parts of the world to other parts (Richard, 2021). Religion and religious beliefs have also been diversified, so that today in the world there are thousands of deities affiliated with different people. Europe and North America are the leading immigrant destinations, with most of the immigrants migrating in search of employment and education. This has led to a more diversified cultural and religious environment in the West and, consequently, a clash between cultures and religions (Richard, 2021); hence, the formation of the Christian Organization of Nigeria.

The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) was founded in 1976 and originally only contained the Catholic Church and mainline Protestant groups. However, it later expanded to include Pentecostal churches as well. Christianity is one of the largest religions in the world. It is a religious movement entrenched in the life and teaching of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ to regulate human behaviour in this life, with much emphasis on life after death (Asadu, 2021). Additionally, Christianity is an agent of transformation. A critical study of Christianity shows that its influential powers are quite irresistible. It has not penetrated any human society or institution without making a remarkable impact (Asadu, 2021). Only through Christianity were the popes of the mediaeval period very prominent in the governance of Europe at the time. Christianity began in Nigeria through the activities of various evangelical bodies from Europe whose amazing missionary endeavours became fruitful in the 19th century. Every stratum of Nigerian society has

experienced the penetration of Christianity, which has exerted a significant influence. All churches have either increased their numbers through evangelism or reduced barbarism through the ministry of the word of God. It is quite amazing how Christianity is soaring effortlessly above some of the other socio-religious institutions in Nigeria. However, social critics are yet to come to terms with the achievements of Christianity in Nigeria; rather than eulogising Christianity, they are asking to what extent Christianity has enhanced the socio-economic development today (Asadu, 2021). This, therefore, has prompted the researcher to investigate the role of religion in shaping the moral framework and impact on the politics and social life of CAN members.

Religion and Social Values

The term 'value' can connote a range of different meanings and interpretations. Values can equally refer to broad underlying principles in life, important features within a landscape, or monetary figures assigned to goods or services. But as they apply in this context, values are standards, principles, or ideals with which we evaluate actions, people, things, or situations. Tadaki et al. (2017) helpfully outlined a broad typology of value concepts in an environmental context. In exploring the intersection of religion with social values, we focus our inquiry on transcendental or 'held' values. Most commonly, these values are associated with the work by Shalom Schwartz on 'universal' human values. Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) first theorised that universal values might be arranged along various continua, and this idea was refined by a range of scholars, most prominently by Schwartz. Most important were two continua: (1) from self-transcendence (e.g., protecting the environment) to self-enhancement (e.g., social power), and (2) from openness to change (e.g., freedom) to tradition (e.g., self-discipline). Scholars have found the strongest support for pro-environmental behaviour and attitudes within the self-transcendence dimension of human values.

Religion and Societal Values: A Complicated Relationship

Religion certainly can be viewed as a fertile source of values that align with sustainability, simply equating religion with certain sets of values does not adequately capture the more complex interplay of religious belief, belonging, and environmental values. One of the dominant discourses that has considered human values is within the field of social psychology. Although social psychology has amassed detailed knowledge of the structure and composition of values in societies around the world, few scholars of social values have explored why certain values emerge in different contexts. Recently, some social psychologists have emphasized the systems

view of values, namely that values are not simply static constructs in people's minds, but are deeply embedded in culture and ecology (Mohammed, 2023). Taking the broad view of religion that outlined, even 'secular' narratives can be seen to have some religious or quasi-religious dimensions. Moreover, in reality, there is a melding of myriad narratives within most societies. These narratives may be considered as forming part of a larger 'worldview' out of which individuals operate. According to research by Hedlund-de Witt et al., (2014), worldviews are comprised of inter alia axiology (core values), as well as ontology (including a cosmogony), anthropology (the purpose of the human being) and societal vision (how society should be organized or function). Understanding values (axiology) apart from these other dimensions is, therefore, a superficial reading of society.

Another key factor which must be considered in seeking to understand the role of religious values in sustainability is the way that religious identity and belonging works at multiple scales, from individuals to groups to international bodies and values across these scales do not always align (Muhammad, 2023). For ease of explanation, Religious values is present across three scales: the individual scale, the community scale, and the formal institutional scale. These three levels interact with one another and are permeable to the (often notionally secular) socio-cultural and ecological context within which they are embedded Muhammad, (2023). The formal institutional scale includes public statements by major religions or denominations. For example, the Buddhism Faith Statement on Ecology; the World Council of Churches "Justice, Peace and Creation Concerns" (World Council of Churches, 1983) or the Bristol Faith Commitments compiled by the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (The Alliance of Religions and Conservation, 2015). The community scale would represent the teachings and viewpoints of particular churches, temples or faith communities. The individual scale is the values held by individual members of these communities, which may be highly diverse and conflict at times with the values espoused at the other scales.

To demonstrate the complex dynamics across these scales, as one recent example the Roman Catholic encyclical by Pope Francis, *Laudato Sí* (which is examined in depth by Christie et al. 2019). The publication of encyclicals are major events, occurring infrequently, and carrying particular normative force as formal religious teaching by the leader of the Roman Catholic church (Laudato, 2015), the first encyclical on the environment, was widely hailed as precipitating a change towards (or intensification of) pro-environmental values among Roman Catholics, who number nearly a billion worldwide. Interviews conducted by Kidwell (unpublished data), indicated that there was indeed a boost perceived by elite actors (priests and denominational leaders). Again, the point here is not that values are uninfluenced, but that the dissemination and mobilization of values is complex (Kidwell et al., 2018). Popular views often hold that the Roman Catholic Church is hierarchical and top-down.

However, in practice, this research suggests that within the American Roman Catholic context, values are often consolidated in free-standing ways at different scales: from individual, to parish, to diocese, to regional ecumenical partnerships, to global community. As Li et al., (2016) suggest, at each of these levels, actors may be subject to different cross-pressuring effects, whereby political and religious affiliations are in conflict around an issue like "sustainability" may itself also be unstable. It is impossible to locate a universally agreed upon definition of sustainability and as such scholars and practitioners have developed definitions to fit specific purposes. In this ambiguous context, we may appreciate a range of ways that religion doesn't always sit comfortably with 'sustainability' as a concept. Not only may religious communities emphasize particular dimensions of sustainability, emphasizing human health over ecological integrity for instance—religious perspectives may also challenge sustainability as a normative goal. The concept of the "common good" discussed by Christie et al., (2019) within Catholic teaching as an alternative (albeit not inconsistent) aspirational goal to sustainability is a good example. Appreciating narratives and worldviews of faith communities relevant to conservation activities has recently been emphasized as best-practice (Schaefer & Higgins, 2017).

Impact of Religion on Societal Value Development

Man, as a human being, cannot exist without religion because it is intrinsic in his nature. One cannot isolate religion from the life situation. Religion determines its true value from the role it plays in the enrichment of the quality of life. It has a role to play, a contributive role in the evolution of man and development of societal values, by providing society with ethical codes, social rules and ideals, rituals and devotion that guide the activities of man in the course of social interaction. Religion also enhances human values and self-awareness (Bjarnason, 1998). Religion helps one to lead a disciplined and purified life. Religions always stand for the betterment of the human soul. The different religions, though devotedly called by different names, show a surprising likeness of spirit and life. It is a unique, specific expression and cannot be equated with anything. There is no religion which does not stress one form or another of universal brotherhood and which does not advocate kindness to all living things. In the religions of the nonvegetarian people, there is an acceptance, in principle at least, of the nonkilling commandment. And there is the general acceptance by the Semitic religions that a form of grace accompanies fasting and abstention from meat eating on certain days (Iosif, 2023). Buddhism in principle is solidly based on non-hurting (ahimsa), and Jainism makes a high level of this principle.

When religion is not influential in a society or has ceased to be, the state inherits the entire burden of public morality, crime and intolerance. It then must use

punishment and police. This is unsuccessful, as morality, integrity and self-respect, not already inherent in the individual, cannot be enforced with any great success. Only by a spiritual awareness and inculcation of the spiritual value of these attributes can they come about. There must be more reason and more emotional motivation to be moral, etc., than the threat of human discipline.

Religion has historically also served as a catalyst for community formation, fostering a sense of belonging and shared identity among believers. This sense of communal unity often extends beyond religious practices to influence social and cultural norms. Thus, understanding how religion contributes to social cohesion provides valuable insights into the foundations of societal harmony. Religious principles, for instance, have frequently played a role in establishing social norms and maintaining order. By examining the impact of religion on social stability, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of how religious institutions contribute to or challenge existing societal structures. This examination is crucial for deciphering the intricate balance between religious freedom and social cohesion in contemporary contexts (Van Der Braak et al., 2015).

Social concern of members in the form of pastoral care is considered progressiveness of the Pentecostal Movement, which has, in turn, contributed to another factor that contributes to the flourishing of Pentecostal churches. Pentecostal pastors are considered by some observers as exceptionally good in pastoral care. The moment a convert enters their churches, they are handed over to a team of follow-up specialists who give personal attention and care to new converts. Within a short while, the new convert feels totally reassured as his past, present and future experiences are revealed by the man or woman of God. He is told what to do to have a better social condition. The progressiveness in Pentecostal churches is also seen in the readiness of the prophets or pastors to spend a lot of time with each sick person. Most of the Pentecostal churches have a specific member called a worker, evangelist or elder whose duty is to visit and admonish new members of the church.

The traditional Pentecostal position had been to decry medical healing and to prioritise divine healing. Kay reveals that the intensity of the 'faith' position was associated with less well-educated older Pentecostal ministries, although few groups of younger ministries also took this position (2000:283). However, some Pentecostal churches establish hospitals and medical care centres, charging affordable fees to assist the poor and the less privileged. These hospitals are built by religious bodies to supplement and challenge inadequacies of the government health care system. Examples are the Baptist Hospital Ogbomoso, Wesley Guild Hospital, Ilesa, the Sacred Heart Hospital of the Society of African Missions in Abeokuta, Seventh Day Adventist Hospital, Ile Ife and Saint Luke Medical Centre in Ibadan. Building and administering hospitals does not differentiate churches from other secular entities doing the same. The values

and principles applied in administering hospitals can, however, be derived from a Christian background. This differentiates such hospitals from secular entities.

The contributory role of religion to societal value formation and development cannot be overruled. This is based on the established fact that religion is one of the most prominent and wide-reaching social institutions, touching and shaping virtually every sphere of culture and society (Ibikunle, 2015). In corroboration, according to the Pew Research Centre, approximately 84% of the world's population are affiliated with a religion (Pew Research Centre, 2017). Given this ubiquity and social influence of religion, it is argued that articles or publications on social values development ought to consider the place of religion carefully in order to establish the relationship between religion and societal value development. There is a diversity in the practices and worldviews across (and even within) different religious traditions. This makes identifying a clear definition of religion difficult. However, HaluzaDeLay (2014) provided a concise definition of religion by defining religion broadly to include "beliefs, worldviews, practices, and institutions that cross borders, time and scale from the level of individuals all the way to transnational and transhistorical movements". He also noted that the western notion of equating religion with an established set of beliefs does not represent many eastern or traditional religious systems, which often emphasise collective practices as much as cognitive beliefs and may lack firmly established institutionalised teachings.

Various studies were reviewed; Pio and Lengkong (2020) conducted a study that looked at the link between a spiritual person's behavioural traits, spiritual ideals, spiritual virtues, ethical behaviour, and ethical business. punitive measures, and businessmen/women internalising and practising spiritual ideals will assure spiritually virtuous and ethical businessmen/women and ethical enterprises. Setiyawan, Lestari and Setiyowati (2022) conducted a study on the impact of religion and gender on consumer ethics among Indonesian teenagers. Izzati, Bachri, Sahid and Indriani (2019) explored the effect of religious schools on the moral education of English secondary school learners. Alam, Aliyu and Shahriar (2019) examined the influence of religious beliefs and ethical ideology on consumer ethics in the dispute over whether ethics should be separated from religion or not. Among these studies none has been on the moral framework and political and social life of church members, especially those of the registered CAN members. Hence, this study determined the impact of religion on the social life of CAN members in Lagos State.

Objectives of the Study

The objective of the study is an examination of the role of religion in shaping moral frameworks and its impact on politics and social life in selected CAN chapters in Lagos State. The specific objectives are to:

1. Determine the impacts of religion on the social life of members in selected CAN chapters, Lagos State.
2. Ascertain religious beliefs and practices can shape an individual's political views in selected CAN chapters, Lagos State.
3. Find out how religious teachings can influence ethical and moral decision-making among selected CAN chapters in Lagos State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the impacts of religion on the social life of members in selected CAN chapters in Lagos State?
2. What religious beliefs and practices can shape an individual's political views in selected CAN chapters, Lagos State?
3. What religious teachings can influence ethical and moral decision-making among selected CAN chapters in Lagos State?

Hypothesis

This null hypothesis was formulated and tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference in the responses of different denominations of CAN on the impacts of religion on the social life of members.

METHODOLOGY

The research design adopted in this study is a descriptive survey research design. The population for this study comprised 20,000 members of the CAN Lagos State Chapter, Nigeria. Specifically, the study targets active members of the CAN Lagos State Chapter, aged 18 and above, with varied educational backgrounds and socio-economic statuses. The study's sample consisted

of 382 participants, purposely selected from 6 denominations that are CAN members in Lagos State. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure representation across denominations and church sizes. Within each denomination, 2 churches were randomly selected, making it a total of 12 churches, and then 3 clergy were selected, making a total of 36, and 366 congregants were randomly sampled from each church, giving a total of 382 congregants. In totality, this approach allowed for proportional representation and mitigated potential biases, ensuring the sample accurately reflects the characteristics of the population.

The instrument used for data collection was a researcher-structured questionnaire titled "Impact of religion on social life of CAN members questionnaire (IRSLCMQ).

The validity of the instruments was determined by 3 experts from the Department of Religious Studies at Paul University Awka. Validity of a measuring instrument is the ability of the instrument to measure what it is meant to measure. To test the reliability of the questionnaire instrument, the Cronbach's alpha method of reliability was used to determine the internal consistency of the instrument. 20 copies of the samples of the questionnaire administered to 20 respondents from different denominations of CAN that are not part of the sample. A reliability index of 0.68 was obtained and deemed reliable. The research questions were answered using simple descriptive statistics such as the mean and standard deviation. The hypotheses were tested at 0.05 levels of significance with appropriate degrees of freedom using t-test analysis. The hypotheses of no significant difference were retained if the p-value was greater than the 0.05 level of significance; otherwise, the null hypothesis was rejected.

RESULTS

Research Question One: What are the impacts of religion in social life of members in selected CAN chapters, Lagos State?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation on the Impact of Religion on Social Life

S/N	Items	Mean	Std.	Remarks
1	Religion influences my relationships	3.05	0.550	Agreed
2	I choose friends with similar religious values	3.00	0.749	Agreed
3	Religion discourages harmful social behaviour	3.95	0.547	Agreed
4	Religious community supports my social life	3.02	0.548	Agreed
5	Religion shapes my cultural practices	3.98	0.746	Agreed
	Average Mean	3.00	0.611	Agreed

Data from the table 1 revealed that the cluster mean of items 1-5 was 3.00. This is above the bench mark score of 2.50 of a 4-point rating scale. This implies that religion has a high positive impact on social life of members. The Table also revealed that the cluster

standard deviation of items 1-5 was .611. This also shows that the respondents were not far from the mean and the opinion of one another in their responses on the impact of religion on social life of members, adding further validity to the mean.

Research Question Three: What are the impacts of religion in political life of members in selected CAN chapters, Lagos State?

Research Question Two: What religious beliefs and practices can shape an individual's political views in selected CAN chapters, Lagos State?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation on the Religious Beliefs Shaping Political Views

S/N	Items	Mean	Std.	Remarks
1	My faith influences my political beliefs	3.70	0.502	Agreed
2	I avoid parties with anti-religious policies	3.68	0.651	Agreed
3	Religion affects my view on national issues	3.65	0.654	Agreed
4	I prefer leaders who share my beliefs	3.72	0.748	Agreed
5	Religious teachings affect my civic duties	3.70	0.750	Agreed
Average Mean		3.69	0.815	Agreed

Data from the table 2 revealed that the cluster mean of items 1-5 was 3.69. This is above the bench mark score of 2.50 of a 4-point rating scale. This implies that religion has a high positive impact on political views. The Table also revealed that the cluster standard deviation of items 1-5 was 0.815. This also shows that the respondents were not far from the mean and the opinion

of one another in their responses on the impact of religion on ethical values, adding further validity to the mean.

Research Question Three: What religious teachings can influence ethical and moral decision-making among selected CAN chapters, Lagos State?

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation on the Religious Teachings Influencing Moral Decisions

S/N	Items	Mean	Std.	Remarks
1	I apply religious teachings in moral crises	3.30	0.748	Agreed
2	Religion shapes my conscience	3.25	0.647	Agreed
3	I consult faith for moral guidance	3.28	0.550	Agreed
4	I find clarity in religious ethics	3.32	0.749	Agreed
5	I correct wrong behaviour based on teachings	3.30	0.647	Agreed
Average Mean		3.29	0.622	Agreed

Data from the table 3 revealed that the cluster mean of items 1-5 was 3.29. This is above the bench mark score of 2.50 of a 4-point rating scale. This implies that religion has a high positive impact on moral decision. The Table also revealed that the cluster standard deviation of items 1-5 was .622. This also shows that the respondents were not far from the mean and the opinion

of one another in their responses on the impact of religion on moral decision, adding further validity to the mean.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference in the responses of different denominations of CAN on the impacts of religion in social life of members.

Table 4: t-test analysis on difference between different denominations on roles of religion in social life of members

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Decision
Pentecostal	183	3.00	0.68	-4.82	380	0.621	Not sig
Catholic	199	3.82	0.56				

Table 4 reveals a non-statistically significant difference in the mean scores of members from Pentecostal and Catholic Church on the influence of religion in social life. Specifically, the calculated t-value of -4.82 and a p-value of .621 indicate that the difference on the impact is not significant at the 0.05 level. As a result, the null hypothesis is accepted, suggesting that there is

no significant difference between Pentecostal and Catholic Church members on their views concerning the influence of religion in social life of members.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The discussion of findings is derived from the analysis of responses to six key research questions regarding the role and impact of religion among Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) members in Lagos State. The analysis involved 382 participants (36 clergy and 346 congregants), and responses were gathered using 5-item Likert-scale questions per research area.

Religion was found to significantly shape the social behaviours and relationships of participants (mean = 3.00). Respondents indicated that religion informs their choice of friends, marriage decisions, social interactions, and cultural identity. These findings are consistent with Eze (2021), who emphasizes the role of religion in community bonding and social control. Twin et al. (2021) explained the role of religions on politics, economics, and social class in society, as a bridge for inter-religious dialogue discovered that religion have an inter-religious dialogue using their role on political, economics, and social class as the topics to be discussed, unless the religious fundamentalist's activity is not well controlled. Richard (2021) examined religion and the social integration of East African Protestant Christian immigrants in Finland and noted that Religion has been highlighted majorly in many scholarly works of sociologists as a key component of social integration discovered that religion is a major link in social integration and that it can facilitate social integration and as well hinder social integration, depending on the position it occupies within a host society. Such findings go a way to provide explanations as to why societies are different and why it is easy for religious immigrants to settle in certain societies than others.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The study concludes that social behaviour is strongly informed by religious affiliation, reinforcing community-based identity. Hence, statistically significant differences were found across denominations, suggesting theological cohesion within CAN on the matter of religious implications on the social life and development of Christian youths. In the study area..

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following are recommended:

1. Religious organizations should collaborate with civil society to promote moral governance and accountability in leadership.
2. Religious leaders should emphasize character development, honesty and accountability in teachings ensuring that Christian youths are well grounded in virtues.

3. Christian youths should be encouraged to avoid indoctrination that breeds intolerance, or blind loyalty, but promote critical thinking to help them engage positively in a pluralistic society.

4. Christian teachings should be contextualized to address contemporary issues such as corruption, drug abuse, unemployment and digital or social media influence.

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