

**MORAL THEOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS MORAL EDUCATION: A PANACEA FOR EXAMINATION
MALPRACTICES IN NIGERIA**

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Abstract

Church is the custodian of moral standard and moral values. Moral theology judges and advises on the morality of actions and of agents in the height of man's true end, the vision of God. It judges everything by one sample standard and principle. It is the concern of the writer of this paper to x-ray the moral educational value of the society through religion. The researcher examined the forms of examination malpractice and why students in the secondary school and higher institutions always cheat during examination period. The involvement of teachers in this evil act of the students, the role played by government in the eradication of this malaise called malpractice, the deficiencies of the government's decree and constitution so far, as well as the effects of examination malpractice on the society were all discussed in this paper. The author concluded by suggesting, from the Christian ethical point of view, some ways out of this menace.

Keywords: Examination, Theology, Church, Society, malpractices, Industry and education.

Introduction

Moral theology is the discussion of the principles which govern, or should govern, the behavior of a Christian, and their application to particular circumstances or classes of cases. Its sources are; scripture, reasons inspired by faith, the teaching of the Church, particularly those of certain preeminent Church fathers and doctors, for example, Augustine and Thomas Aquinas.

Moral theology judges and advises on the morality of actions and of agents in the light of man's true end, the vision of God. It judges everything by one simple standard and principle: does it conduce to the attainment of man's last end? Does it conform to what is known of the will of the creator? Does it obey the laws which the creator has laid down for attaining man's last end? As those laws are revealed in scripture, perceived by enlightened reason, or apprehended in the teaching and tradition of the Church, they illumine faith and guide reason.¹

Moral theology is the study of human behavior, comprising sections which analyze the nature of a human act, the necessity for it to be the result of a free act or will, accompanied by adequate knowledge and intention of the end or purpose of the act. Having established the essentials of a human act, moral theology goes on to consider the morality of actions, the grounds on which an action is to be judged as right or wrong; the considerations which are to be taken into account; the interaction of the immediate and inevitable consequences of an act and the intention of the agent and the circumstances in which the act does or does not conform with law. And so, there follows a section on the different kinds of law under which human beings live: the eternal law, natural law, positive divine law, and human law (both civil and ecclesiastical) as well as the obligations which they impose, and how and when those obligations cease or are altered.²

A distinction must be drawn between the objective morality of an act and

the subjective morality of the agent; an act may be wrong but the agent thought it right. And so there is an important section on conscience, with the distinction between a true and an erroneous conscience, lax and scrupulous, clear and doubtful (or perplexed). In this discussion is included a description of the so-called systems of non-theology, which are different ways of enabling a person whose conscience is in doubt to arrive at a state of certainty as to what he or she ought to do. The systems are tutorism, probabiliorism, equiprobabilism, and compensationism.³

All these may be regarded as prolegomenon to moral theology. The main business of moral theology is the consideration of the general norms or principles with which Christian behavior should conform and their applications. The usual scheme adopted for this purpose is to treat them either under the heading of the Decalogue of the seven virtues (by which each of the commandments in order is analyzed into actions which it commands explicitly or implicitly, and the actions which it prohibits) or the virtues are examined and the kind of conduct to which each prompts is discussed and the vice(s) opposed to the virtue is (are) similarly dealt with. Taking prudence as an example, the first thing is the definition, followed by an analysis of its different parts, then the opposed vices of imprudence and anxiety.⁴

Though the moral theologian is primarily concerned with describing and analyzing that conduct which is in closest agreement with the will of God for humanity, with expounding and commending those virtues which all people should seek to acquire, and those types of action through which the virtues find expression; yet, there is no way to avoid dealing with difficult cases. When two or more virtues seem to conflict and impose irreconcilably opposite duties, the moral theologian has to try to determine which is the least of the

evils and to advise its choice. He also avoids answering questions which are couched in the form; *may I do this or that; is such and such permissible*, but has the duty of advising and helping the pastor in his task of leading the errant and sometimes unwilling sheep gently up to heaven. Sometimes to recommend the havoc or the highest course of action does more harm than good, and it is important, if not more important, to know what is the lowest course of action to fall below which would be gravel sinful. It is, no doubt, from this part of the moral theologian's work that, casuistry has acquired its sinister reputation. Yet casuistry, in a sense, is the expert's moral and spiritual guidance in solving difficult problems of conscience, in resolving an agony of doubt and indecision. The method is to introduce a number of parallel and analogous situations and by comparing them to bring to light the essentially relevant considerations and pinpoint the precise area of difficulty or obscurity.⁵

Morality and Religion

For many religious people, morality and religion are the same or inseparable. Such people either see morality as part of their religion or see religion as their morality. For others, especially nonreligious people, morality and religion are distinct and separable. Religion may be immoral or moral, and morality may or should be religious, but they agree that they may not be. In thinking philosophically about such matters, we need to ask two forms of questions: the first being about the definitions of morality and religion, and the second, about their relations.

Before addressing these questions, however; it is necessary to note that religion typically involves three things:

1. A world view, e.g. a belief that there is one (or more) god(s) who is (are) important in the affairs of the world who command

or desire a certain conduct on our part, and the belief that we are immortal. (Let us call this the religious world view (RWV).

2. An associated way of behaving and feeling that is regarded as right or good for us, i.e., what is called its "ethics". (Let us refer to this as a religious value and system (RVS) or religious action guide).⁶
3. An associated institution or Church

The other point is that morality is different from religion. Morality is not as such, linked with an organized institution like a Church. It may involve only a set of social or individual rules accompanied by sanctions of praise or blame, and feelings of conscience. It does, of course, involve an ethics or value system (VS) and a way of life. In fact, morality is precisely a code or view about how we should or should not conduct ourselves; in morality, this is primary, whereas in religion, it is secondary. Morality does presuppose some beliefs about the world and life of course, but these need not be of a religious sort; they may be only beliefs about people and what they do or do not do to each other, that they are more or less rational, or that they are in some sense, free to choose what they do. In fact, it is not hard to imagine a society of people that has no religion but has a morality. There are also certainly individuals, who have had a morality but no religious beliefs.

Moreover, it will not do to reply that such societies and individuals necessarily have a religion just because they have a value system or a world view, for it boots nothing to say that what one lives by is one's religion if it is theistic or secular. Such maneuvers cannot win even a psychic victory. What one lives by may in fact be neither moral nor religious, e.g., if one lives by an esthetic code or by the principle of egoism.

If these points are correct, then a moral value system and a religious value system must be distinct kinds of value systems or prohibit the same conduct or character trait. Besides, they do not ordinarily call for quite the same conduct; prayer, sacrifice, worship, and sacraments are normally parts of a religious value system but not of a moral one. That we should rest and worship on the seventh day is not as such a moral requirement since all days are morally the same. Thus, even theologians have often distinguished between moral and ceremonial or cultic laws within a religious value system, and between the Sabbath day commandment and those of the second table of the OT law. In fact, morality and religion might not call for the same conduct at all. Gods of a certain religion may have no concern for human welfare or for how we treat each other, as long as we worship and serve them in the ways they desire. Even the OT and NT writers found it necessary to emphasize that their God was not interested only or even primarily in burnt offerings and sacrifices. Aristotle's God was not even aware of our existence, let alone being concerned about us.

Religious believers need not believe that morality is dependent on religion in any way; they may for instance hold that morality is a valid kind of value system as embodying a better, higher or ultimately more satisfactory way of life. For example, a Christian may hold that morality is a matter of "natural law" that can be grasped, perhaps even adequately, by an unbeliever, and that one's own religious value system is a matter of revelation and simply more sufficient as a guide to life. But religious people usually do believe that morality is dependent on religion.

If it is true that both morality and religion are distinct and that morality is not dependent on religion, they may be related in a number of significant ways. Morality and

religion overlap, as morality and law do. Most people think this is the case but then, as was indicated, morality and religion would or might ultimately, if not proximately, give different kinds of reasons for quiring or forbidding the same thing. Of course, a person can have both a morality and a right value system, (RVS) thinking. For example, for some areas of conduct, there are two distinct grounds for regarding actions as right or wrong, good or bad; and one might see the two either as overlapping or as merely supplementing each other⁷ or thinks that they can on occasion make conflicting demands and that then one takes precedence over the other. It would usually be thought that morality takes precedence over ceremonial rules in cases of conflict. However, being religious and recognizing the difference between a moral and a religious value system, a person might choose to live wholly in the religious way (whether seeing it as possibly conflicting with the moral way or not), thinking it to be not only sufficient for all of life but also in some sense better or higher and in effect, letting the "merely" more way drop out of the picture, except perhaps as something valid for unbelievers to live by (as Sir Thomas Bowne did). In medieval language, such a person might hold that RVS contains all of morality, but eminently rather than formally, much as a quarter contains all of the value of a dime and more.⁸ Even if morality is not dependent on, or logically derivable from a religious world view, it may still be that believing in a certain RWV makes it reasonable to believe in a certain morality, and of course, this can be so only if believing in that RWV is itself reasonable on independent grounds.

Examination Malpractices

Over the years, Examination malpractices in Nigeria have been a major problem which seems to have defied all solutions. Various examination bodies in Nigeria,

including the West African Examination Council, which conducts the highest number of examinations, have not been finding it easy evolving lasting solutions to the malaise.

The Federal Military Government of Nigeria in a move to fight corruption and other forms of indiscipline, promulgated several decrees. Some of these include Decree 27 of 1973. The first legislation against examination malpractices was the miscellaneous offences Decree 20 of 1984 which provide jail terms for cheating. These attempts and many others were aimed at producing better youths in the society. Despite these decrees, examination malpractices have not been completely wiped out in Nigeria.⁹

There have been cases of examination malpractices leading to cancellation of results in some universities in Nigeria. On the same note, Mr. Apeh a public relations officer at the West African council reported that, "WAEC withholds 14,150 senior school results." The statements further added that the results of 41,418 candidates (9.85% of those who sat for the examination) were not released for non-payment of fees. There were also records of examination malpractice in the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board. The situation is even worse at the higher institutions of learning where some lecturers have been dismissed for their involvement in examination malpractices. Some secondary schools have been blacklisted by the West African Examinations Council due to connivance of authority or supervisors with students cheating in examination halls. There are cases of individuals who cheated in examination halls. West African Examinations Council is now ready to invoke or apply decree 20 the miscellaneous offences, which prescribes 21 years jail term and possibly, capital punishment for such offenders.¹⁰

Forms of Examination Malpractices

There are several forms of examination malpractices. These include:

- i. Giraffing, which is an art of stretching one's neck to spy the response of the person near you.
- ii. Passing papers (scripts) to one another in the examination hall; it may be materials written on question paper or on real answer sheets or other sheets in the examination hall.
- iii. "Eegun" (masquerade or exhibit) is the term used for bringing prepared answer sheets into the examination hall.
- iv. Impersonation, that is; helping another person to take an examination.
- v. Using some signs like finger to tell your mates the right answer in multiple choice test papers.
- vi. Eyeing invigilators to seek their assistance during marking.
- vii. Lastly is writing documents on palms, laps, or thighs so that it could be observed during examination.

Reasons for Examination Malpractice

There are many reasons for examination and wieners have shown that success and failure in examinations are attributes to efforts, luck, test difficulty, and ability of the learner. Hence many students get involved in examination malpractice in order to pass well and earn a certificate at all cost in order to meet societal expectations. Others cheat in order to avoid failure, especially when they feel that they have low ability, or when they think they don't have good luck. Others resort to examination malpractice because of lack of adequate preparations for examination, lack of adequate study techniques, absenteeism from lectures, laziness on the part of the students, being engaged in other activities not relevant or compatible with studies, (such as traveling up and down, and engaging in business and social activities).

Inadequate supervision of examination can aid students to engage in an examination malpractice. When students have negative attitude towards examination, that "I will fail this examination, so let me try not to fail by cheating." When students keep bad companies that are not academically inclined, they may be involved in examination malpractice. Shortage of teachers, poor student - teacher relationship, lack of, or inadequate teaching/learning facilities (such as adequate library and laboratory facilities); unavailability of study group to interact with when examination timetable is out; congested and overcrowded academic program and craze for certificate, are all factors that can lead over-ambitious students to examination malpractice.

Effects of Examination Malpractice on the Society

Examination malpractices have adverse effects on individual students that are involved in the malpractice, other students, and even the society at large. Examination malpractice may lead to cancellation of students' results altogether; repeating the examination or the whole year; barring of such students from taking the examination in the future, or/and total dismissal from the school. Such students may be arrested and handed over to the law enforcement agencies for severe punishment as stipulated in the law of the land (for example, Decree 20 may be invoked which stipulates a jail term of 21 years imprisonment as the penalty for the offence). Examination malpractice can also lead to the termination of the offender's academic career from the point where he/she was caught. He/she may have to look for another school, thereby disturbing the family plans in life, may lose sponsorship, or scholarship. Employers may take serious actions against their employees involved in examination malpractice to the extent of such employees losing their jobs, especially as teachers. Educational

institutions where examination malpractices are common may lose credibility and be blacklisted. This may lead to non-recognition of the graduates of such institutions.

The Deficiency of Government Decrees on Examination Malpractices

All the efforts made by the government to minimize examination malpractices through Decree 20 of 1984, which stipulates a jail term for cheating has been describes as grossly inadequate by Salami because, according to him, they covered only leakage of examination papers. In other words, the two decrees of 1973 and 1984 are grossly inadequate in respect of their coverage of these other forms of malpractices which have in recent years become more rampant than leakage, more difficult to monitor and control, and therefore more disturbing. In the first instance, the two decrees only recognize cases of leakage of live question papers, but the exhibits recovered from candidates as a result of leakage are usually not live question papers but hand written or photocopied.¹¹

Besides, the decrees fail to address cases of impersonation, the use of touts and examination "contractors", involvement of school authorities and the staff of examination bodies in aiding and abetting, as well as the gangsters who storm examination halls to smuggle in worked scripts. The decrees also have a procedural defect. For instance, it is requires that the consent of the Federal Attorney General be sought to persecute an offender, a condition which imposes some constraints on the police with regard to their ability or readiness to persecute offenders expeditiously.

Religious Solution to Examination Malpractice in Nigeria

Christian ethics refers to the principles, such as the rules of conduct which are found in the Ten Commandments, which prescribe the behaviors of those who are Christians.

It holds that there is a divine being who has laid down certain rules, and in accordance with those rules, any incorrect conduct consists in violating them. This is the position that compels believers to do, perform, or act in accordance with the dictates of the scripture and in line with God's unchangeable moral character. The Bible for instance, enjoins a good Christian to be perfect, just, and truthful¹⁸ (Lev. 11:15; Matt. 4:8).

The Jewish ethics provides the foundation for Christian ethics. Christians are to have exemplary characters on earth and to serve as models in all societies. They are expected to be honest and trustworthy in all they do. Nigerian people need dedicated men and women who are honest and who are living transparent lives. They are to frown at stealing, cheating, offering or taking kickbacks. Christians are to work with their hands, minds and bodies. They are also expected to conduct themselves in the fear of God. The summary is that; lack of the fear God in hearts of most Nigerians is what is making them to get involved in examination malpractices.

Religious (Christian) leaders thus have the assignment of finding ways of ensuring that their followers, in all spheres of life, follow the Christian ethics

Recommendations and Suggestions

There has been hardly a successful prosecution of examination malpractice offenders caught in Nigeria today. Unless the constitution is reviewed to take cognizance of the various facts of examination malpractices, it will continue to remain an intractable problem in Nigeria. The provision made in the Constitution against examination malpractices must be such that can be implemented, i.e., the procedure must not be made cumbersome, so that offenders can be properly, expeditiously and effectively brought

to book. The moral support of the judicial officers and the law enforcement agents is essential in this very important war against the evil of examination malpractice. In this respect, the magistrates and judges have a moral duty to keep in mind the intent of the law more than the form in which crimes of examination malpractices are presented in court.

The law enforcement agents should also be able to see and view examination malpractices as a serious threat to the educational development of the nation including that of themselves and their children. Therefore all law enforcement agents must join hands at curbing this evil practice. Also, vigorous and sustained enlightenment campaigns must be launched in the Churches and mosques, in the schools, in the media houses, at the various communities, wards and group meetings, at national, state and local government levels against all acts of impropriety and examination malpractice.¹²

As part of the efforts to curtail the menace of examination malpractice, it is also advocated that an improvement should be made in the teacher's welfare, laboratories, workshops and libraries should be adequately equipped. Since lack of qualified teachers in core subjects like Mathematics, English Language, Science and Technology is a factor in increasing the incidence of examination malpractice, it is also suggested that the government should endeavor to employ more qualified teachers to teach these core subjects.

Today, examination malpractice seemed to have been elevated to a mafia level in Nigeria. To my mind, this issue needs to be addressed more seriously, because unless prompt, sincere and effective steps are taken to arrest the situation, it may could soon become (just as drug abuse), part of our national life. Staff of proven integrity should be recommended as

examination supervisors to avoid collusion of such officers with students in examination halls. Parents and other individuals and groups outside school should join in the effort to bring up responsible Nigerians. Our value system as a people should be reordered such that wealth and certificate should not be the only possessions that are valued and respected. Education should be made functional as practicable as possible and all hands should be at deck to make the national policy work.

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