

# Chapter 23

## REVISITING CYRIL O. IMO'S PERSPECTIVE ON RELIGION, MORALITY AND GLOBALIZATION

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### Abstract

This work is a wake-up call for Cyril O. Imo's perspective in the aspects of religion, morality and globalization. This is predominantly a review of his thoughts as captured in the inaugural lecture entitled, "Religion, Morality and Globalization" in 2007. It is obvious that such positions have been neglected and a lot of scholars do not have access to such credible ideas as expounded by Imo. It will be interesting if such thoughts can be revisited in the modern scholarly world in order to properly place Imo's ideas on religion, morality and globalization in perspective. This work adopted a critical analytical approach and evaluated Imo's perspective on religion, morality and globalization. Such a refined perspective would make the modern world take proper shape in its religious traditions, imbibe morals and be influenced with religious and moral belief systems which will become a play-card for the modern person who is struggling with a modernized and a technological society.

**Key words:** Religion, Morality, Globalization, Values and Religious Traditions

## **Introduction**

Globalization has become a universal interdependency among people and nations today. This is making religious and cultural values to be neglected by people and nations while foreign religious and cultural practices are being adopted in the name of globalizing the world. There exists a high level of social, economic, political, cultural, moral and religious integrations and developments among people and nations with great influences on individuals, institutions and societies; hence, globalization is not a modern “phenomenon because at all times there have been different processes toward global interdependence and exchange,” although the whole idea of globalization would become a recent vintage (Mazrui 2; Imo 7).

Imo's inaugural lecture is one work on the influence of globalization on religion and morality and the integration of these concepts which has been written but its thoughts are not being circulated. Thus, many people are not familiar with the raised issues in this inaugural lecture. The purpose of the work is “to examine the mutual interactive effects of religion, morality and globalization and the implications of having a globalized world for religion and morality” (8). Pursuing this objective in line with James Kurth's perception of the consequences of globalization as the “first truly world revolution” (1), Imo asks some relevant and guiding questions: How has religion which has to do with the ultimate cultural coding of the person from where the person's identity is derived been affected by globalization? What is the place of religion in the process of globalization? Can religion be universalized? What is the place of morality in the process of globalization? Can there be universal moral norms that are generally accepted by all, irrespective of the religious and moral backgrounds of the different peoples in the future? What influences does globalization have on religion, and morality in the global setting? Is globalization corroding traditional practices and moral traditions in the present globalizing world? (Imo 8).

These questions are the guiding principles for Imo's understanding of the concepts of religion, morality and globalization. Obviously, such questions set the pace for the inquiry, challenging the religious morality of the society in the global world. Imo finds these questions interesting and bases his arguments on them and how they affect the entire human existence.

This work re-echoes the inaugural lecture of Imo with a special concentration on the conceptual analysis of the words religion, morality and globalization. The second section discusses the roles of religion, morality and globalization. The third section discusses Imo's perception of religious traditions and moral systems in the society. And lastly, the work evaluates and challenges some basic positions raised by Imo on religion, morality and globalization.

## **Conceptual Analyses**

### **1. Religion**

In considering religion, Imo states that many people have some ideas of what religion is and some experiences that might be seen as religious (9). This assertion would be in line with John S. Mbiti's observation that Africans are notoriously religious (2), a position emphasized by Apenda on humanity being religious (133). The essence of religion is to serve humanity (Apenda 134). Also,

religion is not by any standard obscure to man. This is because man has known that there is something somewhere higher than him. Man since time immemorial recognized the fact that he is subordinate to the Deity. This deity is believed to be somewhere far above him (Ampitan 10).

Within the scholarly sphere, like other disciplines, defining religion has proven difficult (Vos 9) but Imo explains that many scholars have attempted to explore the possibility of defining the word 'religion' from various fields of life with each definition emerging from personal or professional perspectives (9). This makes Imo's definition to focus on phenomenology of religion rather than attempting to provide a standard definition (10).

Imo sees religion to be used in both objective and subjective senses. He sees religion as “a complex of doctrines, worship, organizations, laws, temples, sacrifices ...by which men internally and personally acknowledge, individually and collectively express their relations to a 'beyond'” (10), that is, the existence of reality outside of this material world. Imo's choice of word “men” makes religion to agree with the patriarchal domain which have been challenged by many feminist scholars (Gross et al. 73-131; McDougall 685; Nordling 228; Celik 54-64; Vuola 1-15; Hawkins et al. 1-42), although Imo could argue to have used the term “men” in its generic sense. It can be stated that in Africa and Nigeria in particular, among some cultures, religious activities were carried out by women. For example, among the Mwaghavul people of Plateau State, women championed the course of religious activities at the inception but later male counterparts felt inferior by women activities and devised means to intimidate and dominate religious activities.

Imo also states that religion can be used subjectively when referring to it as an attribute of human personality, “Religion is characteristic of mankind everywhere” (10). This is connected to human consciousness and an abstraction and manifestation of religions. This agrees with Iwe's position on man's natural and innate consciousness of his dependence on a transcendent supra-human being and the consequent natural and spontaneous propensity to render homage and worship to Him (Imo 6, 11).

Imo considered and adopted the objective sense of religion to elaborate his thoughts with occasional references to the subjective sense of religion (11). He sees it as a social fact expressed as the human behaviour of organized groups. That means, religion is seen as “a system of beliefs and practices, which is important to produce socialized individuals who will substantially abide by the norms of society and contribute towards the development of the state” (11). Imo also states how messianic age' scholars have predicted the disappearance of religion because of the increase in knowledge and how the tie between religion and social institutions have been broken, though not totality erased as there is a strong tie between politics and religion (11). This would make the members of the pluralistic society, consciously and unconsciously, try to connect with the internalised dispositions, which are derived from cultural and religious heritage (Imo 12; Busia 1).

## 2. **Morality**

The word 'morality' is derived from the Latin word *moralis* and it means custom or habits, and it does not carry the same meaning as ethics, though sometimes used interchangeably. These two words, according to Imo, mean character, customs and habit (12). Morality is an ethical issue dealing



with one's conduct either right or wrong towards his neighbour and if one loves his neighbour he or she will not do anything evil to him or her. So, love and morality are both religious terms, based on godly consciousness which should be reflected in one's relationship with one's neighbour (Ukah and Ukah 186).

While ethics is seen as the study of wrong or right and good or bad, the word morality refers to the practical aspects of life. Imo finds the distinction convincing as he sees morality as actual human conduct viewed with regard to right and wrong, good and bad while ethics represents a theoretical study of right and wrong, good and bad (13). Imo's position is emphasized by McClarendon (45-46). However, this distinction is further outlined by Charles E. Curran which Imo used some space discussing such moral thoughts as associated with the human personality.

Imo sees morality in line with Fagothey as the quality of human acts by which we call them right and wrong, good and evil. Such moral grounds are connected with the moral values which reflect in every society. It is also obvious that "Every morality is generally based on certain pre-suppositions, and principles which sustain the entire society" (Apenda 132). Imo adds that "In every society, there has to be ways in which decisions about the organization of their community life is made, the norms or principles that ought to guide the conduct of social and economic institutions, the division of property, the transmission of knowledge and skills, the exercise of power and cultural and religious expressions" (16). These create the diversity of values in the society and moral values need other related values to be beneficial to a person or a society.

### **3. Globalization**

In trying to underscore the word 'globalization,' Imo states that it is "one of the most talked-about phenomena in the world today" (17). To Imo, this is one of the most used or read word today in our papers every day and it has been given diverse meanings depending on the writer's perspective (17). Such position taken by Imo has been expressed by Khan as being the emergence of a global market to the economists, global capitalism for the historian, the social preference in matters of lifestyle and social values for the sociologist, gradual erosion of state sovereignty for the political scientist (1).

Imo interacted with a number of scholars who have shared their views on globalization such as Pendleton (2052-2095), Haralambos (55), Mazrui who saw globalization as "villagization of the world" (Globalization 2), Norchi (1), Tiplady (2), Eisenberg (5) and Giddens (4-5). Such interactions presented Imo with a clear picture of the phenomenon particularly the possession of two positions i.e. the idea of intensifying worldwide social relations and the moving away from worldwide social relations that shape the world in defence of local traditions (22). He disagrees with a number of scholars on linking globalization with westernization and Americanization as the entire phenomenon extends to humanity and beyond borders of every nation (23).

Following the argument on globalization, Imo finds the emergence of global movement being undisputable and therefore the need for a real process towards a global society of societies though its difficulty in religion and morality can be questioned (24). This sets the pace for his thoughts on how such concepts can be harmonized in the process of searching for a unified global society.

### **Integrating Religion, Morality and Globalization**

One of the major efforts in Imo's work is the integration of morality and religion which Imo believes one cannot exist without the other. He traced the entire idea into the ancient Greek philosophers who described the tension between religion and morality, some positions which were re-enforced during the age of the enlightenment (25). Such thoughts are equally raised by Apenda on the issues of relationship between religion and morality. This has also been previously stated by Emeka Madu where morality is seen as the fruit of religion; man's concept of the deity had everything to do with what is taken to be the norm of morality; God made man and it is He who implants in him the sense of right and wrong (135).

Imo cites how deities have been custodians of morality, who safe-guard divine moral rules and disobeying such rules could lead to misfortunes in the societies (25). He also traces the connection in the Jewish and Islamic societies where morality became part of their religions to God as the giver of divine rules to direct the affairs of people (26-7). Such positions can be traced among other world religions and Christianity was never different, according to Imo (27), hence, the teachings of Christ and those of Paul are legitimate evidence for understanding the guiding principles between people in the society. This idea is also applicable to the Nigerian society where there are laws yet there are a lot of crimes (31). It becomes clearer that one cannot be moral without religion.

Imo finds the integration very fascinating as religion plays a vital role in the process of globalization (33). Even Mazrui sees religion as a major cardinal point in the discussion of globalization together with technology, economy and empire, a position echoed from the Roman stand-point in the days of Constantine (1). This is obvious as there are religions who have established themselves in the process of globalization with structures and unique characteristics at different levels of transformation. Imo also finds Pentecostalism to be the most transformed religious community with their emphasis on the Holy Spirit (34-5). This approach has made Christianity to develop another dimension of shared global culture and common spirituality (Klaus 127).

It is clear from the discussion that globalization also has effects on religion. It accelerates the migration of peoples and the speeding up of communication in terms of the Internet. There is also the rise of pluralism, a means to harmonise various religious positions and diversities with distinguished values; hence, no value or belief is absolute (Imo 36). This idea of relativism is taught by the great African philosopher Kwasi Wiredu who believed that truth is relative and the opinion of people (Omoregbe 25).

There is also fundamentalism, secularism and humanism which have become valid pillars of globalization. The 9/11 experience clearly showcased how religion can affect globalization and the event made religious people across the world to turn to God for security (38; Galadima 191). Musa A. B. Gaiya called it "religion after 9/11" and how such event has affected the global religious mind-set of the people across the world (1-36) and that it was the product of prediction made by Sam Huntington in *The Clash of Civilization* (1-2). For Christians, Jesus became the centre of activities as some people thought that the world is coming to an end. Fear was instilled in the minds of people in the world and the society, and there was need to revisit dependence on God and his plans for humanity.

There is also a meeting point for morality and globalization which Imo saw as not being a recent phenomenon as it shows the close link between the communication technology and morality in terms of inter-personal relationship between people in the society (40-1). There is also depersonalization of the person which according to Imo has great influence on the African society. Man is known as *homo socialis*, a sense of being a social being who finds the communal living interesting. Mbiti's "I am because we are and since we are, therefore I am" has become a guiding communal principle in Africa (117). Imo finds such global effort as an attempt to depersonalize the average African person by adopting such new systems of globalization.

Globalization makes it impossible for the African traditional moral system to provide a basis for cultural interaction and maintenance of motivation to live a sound moral life (Imo 42). Imo also sees globalization creating a state of moral crisis in different parts of the world particularly among the Third World countries (43). This has succeeded in creating moral conflicts in the midst of trying to adopt such plurality of moral systems. Africans are mostly affected in this case as they find Western cultures interesting, neglecting their rich cultural heritage which many westerners find adorable and emulating. There is also the aspect of political economy which Imo finds affecting morality (46).

Following these assertions, one finds Imo placing religion and morality on a scale and how such phenomena have been confronted by globalization. Some of these influences are positive; however, many of them are negative and foreign adaptations of values which predominantly affect the African person. For Africans, traditional religion, morality and ethics are also rooted in a blood relationship with one's ancestors. They do not derive from an external, objective and transcendent source. Values and ethics are communal, local and private, not universal. Thus they do not apply to the whole world. The moral laws derived from the cosmos, the spirit world, the gods and divinities are therefore limited in their scope and application. They are to be interpreted in terms of communitarian values (Turaki 174).

In the midst of all, Imo finds a nexus between religion, morality and globalization, though the emergence of a global movement is undisputable and proposed a rethink into a real process towards a global society of societies although the possibility of such a full globalized world becomes a subject of contention in the areas of religion and morality (24), an effort he worked so hard to address from an African perspective.

### **Religious Traditions and Moral Systems**

Trying to understand the globalization, Imo postulates and discusses the basic assumptions of globalization theory as "a process that is inevitable and irreversible and that universalism is the culmination of inter-community contacts across the 'globe'" (48). To achieve this, he focuses on highlighting "the challenges of trying to create a fully globalized world where religion and morality would be adequately universalized" (48). However, the possibility of developing such a fully globalized world has always been a puzzle which Imo tried to suggest further.

This puzzle is obvious because, at some point in time, religion was predicted to disappear in the face of the earth and of course that was indeed a serious religious sinking which shook the world and religion became a “periphery of life” (Imo 49). A lot of global institutions sank and the functionality of their systems became challenging (Imo 50).

There was a great effort that someday the world will embrace such unity or order and become a “single global system” (50). But the challenge of international cultures became a problem which Imo states considering the work of Huntington, *The Clash of Civilization* (20). Following the warning of Huntington, Imo finds it destabilizing and dangerous; as such pursuit of such universal system would encounter many culture shocks among people (51).

According to Imo, there is always the challenge regarding the claim by religious people on the possession of absolute truth, which he considered to be serious for such people when he stated that “This challenge is not a light one for the religious people” as the problem is made complex “by the nature of religion itself” (52). There is also the cultural coding of the person which focuses on technique industry, fashion in dressing and means of transportation with diets and convention cooking, eating, sleeping, spending leisure time at the domestic level (Imo 53). Religion, according to Imo, would provide the world with meanings in these areas and in the areas of interaction of the environments, history and human traditions and it makes a great change among people in the society (53). However, this becomes difficult for the members of the pluralist society to adapt to such forces of change that hamper their religious beliefs and raise so many questions of denial and abandonment of their former religion.

Imo also argues that human responsibility and shared concern for preserving the uniqueness and the peculiarities of the various cultural environment must be considered (56). Also, there is the possible effects of the single world system if established on religion and morality would not make moral and religious systems universal as intended by the global world systems (57). Also, attempting to make religion and morality universal would conflict pluralism; hence, pluralism is seen as a “judicial principle where by the judiciary protects all citizens from possible encroachments upon their liberty” (Imo 58). And lastly, Imo states that relativism and syncretism are other effects of having a single global system (59-60).

Following the outlined challenges above, Imo concludes that it would be cruel to have a person or group of people drop their inherited religion and moral values and this makes the quest for a single global system of the peoples of the world not to be possible and also, having a harmonious environment for mutual co-existence among the people is greatly laudable, if only it can be pursued without doing harm to the efforts at survival being made by the different groups (62). John's vision in the book of Revelation became the focal concluding point of Imo as people might think he sounds pessimistic rather than being optimistic; hence, Jesus would bring all the people of the world together and would be their ruler with a moral and ethical millennium which will conflict the present millennium of political, social and economic deprivations (66). Quoting 1 John 3:3, Imo states that “this understanding of the attainment of a single global system is heart-warming and has the advantage of providing fertile ground for the renewed public influence of religion (67).

### **Placing Imo's ideas on a Contemporary Scale**

Imo's perspective on religion, morality and globalization has been a position which one hardly finds in other literature particularly the contemporary ones. Studying religion has become scientific and has taken morality along in the midst of modern scholarship of religion. Discussions on globalization have dominated the minds of many global scholars who still see the reality of such global attempt as witnessed today in the global world.

The primary aim which Imo advocated alongside other scholars is the idea of the global world which globalization has considered to be its primal cardinal aim. This is called single global system by Imo. It is obvious that achieving such a single global system has been the effort put together by a number of people in an attempt to unite the world. However, there are always contradicting perspectives to achieving such a unified aim. For example, it will be difficult to have the same religious thought, moral standing, dressing code and eating habits. The Covid-19 experience which just hit the entire world beginning late last year (2019) has been seen to a deliberate attempt by a group of people to achieve the sole aim of uniting the world through the global vaccine, the insertion of microchips to globally monitor people and make them have access to global facilities. One would agree with Imo that achieving such a global system would be impossible as the world is full of various religions, culture and belief systems. Imo has made a giant stride by advocating the failure of the unified global system and such a position would find a way to pierce the heart of the modern person and make the world see diversity in religious, cultural, economic and social parameters.

Another aspect of Imo's work which needs re-echoing is his embrace of eschatological conclusion without mentioning the connection with Eden. Though such a conclusion is in line with biblical injunctions, the problem with such an attempt on Johannine literature particularly Revelation 21-22 would be that there must be a connection to the Edenic experience which Adam enjoyed before the world morally got corrupt. The religion and morality of Eden with its global connotation would make the world a better place; hence, John the Apostle was echoing the Eden experience which God (Jesus) promised to restore for humanity. One wonders whether such an eschatological dimension is likely to be achieved in view of the moral decadence in the world and satanic inclinations which are eroding the minds of people and making insensitive about the things of religion and morality yet advocating the emergence of global system, which might only be a Christian perspective of this global issue. Its possibility could be seen because it is recorded in the Bible, of which faith would rise above human reasoning in this context.

Dynamism of religions in Africa would make such a journey for a global system irrelevant to the advocate of this single global system which Imo rightly argued against. Apart from the people from the pluralistic society which Imo predominantly used to buttress his perspectives, Africa is finding its way to the heart of the argument and it is capable of confronting such religious dynamism found in other regions or continents. Africans unquestioningly believe in a Supreme Creator of the universe and humanity. There is no ethnic group in Africa that does not have a specific name for a Supreme God. There are also other religious beliefs about such topics as the spirit world (populated with good and bad spirits), the creation of the universe, the problem of evil, divine revelation, sins,



sacrifices, purification, cleansing, death, judgment, and life after death (Kunhiyop xv). A typical African person is familiar with these realities yet syncretistic in nature particularly when it comes to religion and materialism. Such polytheistic nature of religious activities in Africa makes it difficult for Africans to globally adopt the blending of their religious beliefs with other religions. African traditional religion (ATR) has made distinctive stance on grounded religious thoughts and some of them peculiar to its confine. Christianity and Islam also have their unique positions, which would conflict those of the adherents of ATR and other religions. There are people who find combining some of these religious stances interesting particularly ATR with Christianity or Islam depending on the need at hand. Although such attempt is hazardous to religions like Christianity but such attempts have been found to ravage the African people and would make it difficult for a unified systemic globalization. There are also some levels of similarity in various beliefs among these religions. For example, the understanding of the origin of evil and sin are similar to those of ART and Christianity (Turaki 40). Africa with its diversity of religions would always become an incredible pillar to unified globalization.

The adoption of western values in Africa is alarming and was clearly stated by Imo. There has been the gross importation of foreign morality and the quest for material things in Africa (Apenda 137). This is in connection with adoption of false religion, as expressed by Ralph E. Woodrow, in the aspects of worship of gods, mother and child worship, religious fraud, immorality, adultery, and inhuman inquisition among many others (1-153). Western religious and cultural values have become a norm for defining African religious and cultural values. Imo has clearly argued the rapid speed for embracing such western values in Africa and Nigeria. Apart from Imo, another scholar who advocates against the adaption of western values by Africans is Pic C. Onwochei who has written extensively in the aspect of morality, dressing code and music in Nigeria (*Effective Music Minister* 1-136). Africa is losing its cultural and religious values to adopt what might look substandard but because such values are western, they are upheld above the rich and reasonable values from Africa. Ironically, while Africans abandon their religious and cultural values and chasing western religious and cultural values, the Westerners find those African abandoned values interesting and teaching them to their children. Many westerners are now wearing African Ankara materials while African people rush for their dressing codes and what has been considered universal. Such religious and cultural transvalues are making globalization difficult and achieving such a single global system would detain our belief systems and deprave humanity from experiencing values which make the world a better place.

There is also a high level of hostility and the quest for supremacy of religion over other religions. Each religion feels superior to the other and this religious attitude has exerted pressure on morality and the globalization. Imo has made such positions clear and urged for a revisit on religion, morality and a broader perspective on globalization. Religion is an ancient feature of humanity and the concept of *homo-religiosus* in the thought of Paul Tillich has a strong role to play in developing religious beliefs which seem to be seen as a part of humankind. These various religions will practically not allow another exert dominance on their values. This makes it a bit difficult for globalization to achieve its proposed aims.

The inseparable force between religion and morality in the thought of Imo is worth emphasizing in this work. Even in this global world, religion and morality are inseparable and have always remained guiding principles for many people. Even those in the pluralistic society can attest to this fact separating religion and morality would create more problems for the world and humanity. There is need for blending religion and morality on a global scale and this is what Imo has worked so hard to emphasize.

Lastly, the church is composed largely of people who come out of the African religious background. Their culture, history, worldviews and spiritual aspirations cannot be taken away from them. These impinge on their daily life and experience of the Christian faith. So the church which exists on the African scene bears the marks of its people's backgrounds (Mbiti "Encounter" 817-20). This is the perspective which African Christians must have as we work hard to balance our religion, morality and the quest for a global and universal system.

### **Conclusion**

It is very unfortunate that the world is moving and demanding for a unified world system which will dictate the affairs of the world politically, economically, socially, religiously and morally. Such a global concern would only deprive humanity of its rights to freely relate and practise religion and morality. That is why Imo has spent his life defending and trying to make the world understand that religion and morality cannot be separated even in the quest for a single global system. Such an effort would make humanity understand that humans are unique in their socio-economic and religio-political struggles and that they can freely relate to reality in their cultural and religious spheres in a globalized world. It means when all these are considered then we can say that a brighter day has come.

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