

**THE FEAR OF GOD: A PANACEA FOR SOCIAL VICES AND YOUTHFUL
DELINQUENCY**

BY

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ABSTRACT

The fear of God entails loyalty to Him and, by extension, adherence to His directives, thereby influencing one's values, beliefs, and moral conduct. The reverence for God manifested through modest submission and allegiance is fundamental to genuine wisdom, yet these principles appear to be notably absent, especially among the youth. The paper documented sufficient evidence of societal wrongdoing, including juvenile delinquency and socio-religious transgressions. Numerous youngsters participate in riots, robberies, kidnappings, sexual misconduct, indiscriminate abortions, and drug use, which appear to be legitimised, resulting in societal passivity as these vices proliferate. This qualitative study examines Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 through the lens of hermeneutical principles, positing that a genuinely wise individual (hakham) perceives all aspects of life with reverence for God, whereas the idiot (nabal) is characterised by a lack of morality and delinquency. The study contends that biblical theology, namely the notion that the fear of God is the foundation of knowledge, serves as a remedy for a delinquent society, and its moral teachings are pertinent in mitigating societal vices. The fear of God is an expectation for all adolescents, regardless of their religious affiliation—be it Christianity, Islam, or African Traditionalism—and serves as an exemplary standard for society. The article recommends an urgent reorientation of ethical, moral, and spiritual principles to appropriately address these developments in social institutions, including families, places of worship, and educational establishments. It specifically advocates for a reassessment and reinstatement of moral and spiritual teachings that were essential during the initial periods of missionary schools prior to the government's acquisition of educational institutions. Education policymakers should reintegrate moral instruction into the curriculum of all educational institutions, from early childhood to postsecondary levels.

Key Words: Fear of God, Society, Panacea, social vices and youthful delinquency.

Introduction

The significant deterioration of ethical standards in society is evident. It is evident that no specialised bifocals are necessary to perceive the rapidly declining moral standards contributing to the impending demise of contemporary society, especially among the youth.

Sunday Afolabi remarked, “the seed of decay has germinated.” Values that were once accepted and adhered to are now deemed irrelevant. It is regrettable that the legacy bequeathed to us by our forebears has been forsaken. The incorporation of Bible Knowledge and Moral Philosophy/Instructions in secondary schools has been adequately dissuaded. This has sufficiently resulted in moral degradation in our modern era and society. The anticipated outcome is clear as disloyalty, suspicion, deception, duplicity, and hypocrisy permeate all aspects of life, becoming the prevailing norm in contemporary Nigeria.

Conceptualization of Terms:

Fear of God

Fear of God is a term associated with loyalty to acceptable norms and values. The fear of God is to have allegiance to Him and consequently to His instructions, thus affecting one's values, convictions, and right behaviour. The text, Ecclesiastes 12:13-14, says, Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. God will bring every deed into judgement, including every secret thing, whether good or evil; this message encourages cushioning delinquent behaviours with a humble, reverential life. The fear of God expressed in humble submission and loyalty is essential to true wisdom, and these values seem to be a missing link, particularly among the youth. The word fear simply means a perceived threat to one's security or general welfare and a pure emotional expression of wise behaviour to avert such threats. The concept of fear occurred in the Old Testament about 435 times as a verb, *yara'*, to fear and to honour (Sunday Rotimi Afolabi, October 2018). Its adjectival idea *'yare'* means 'in fear of', and also related as a noun, *'mora'*, which means 'fear, terror, awe, tremble or dread' of someone or something to avert such threats (Chad Brand, 2018). While in the New Testament, the root word is *'phoboe'*, used 146 times, and it means to fear, reverence or respect. The general implication means one's attitude of respect and submission, a proper response to someone in authority, proper behaviour in a setting to avert certain consequences, and a reverential fear of the ultimate being that is in general referred to as God. Fear, an appropriate response of respect and authority, is to be observed from a child to a parent (Leviticus 19:3), citizens to their leaders (Joshua 4:14; Rom. 13:7), a servant to his master (Mal. 1:6, Eph. 6:5), and a wife to her husband (Eph. 5:33). In these cases, fear carries with it an expectation of obedience, respect, and honour. The concept 'fear of God' therefore is used in this paper to mean any of these senses: emotional expressions of wise behaviour of

respect, honour, submission and obedience to any established authority, either from child to parent, from citizen to those in authority, from servant to master and from wife to husband. Simultaneously practicing these appropriate behaviours inevitably reduces social vices and diligent behaviours to the lowest acceptable level within society.

The Youth

It is implausible to give a vivid definition of the term youth. The term Youth or youthfulness may mean one who is still young irrespective of the age. It is also said that youthfulness is a phase before a child becomes an adult. Youthful delinquent is a state of falling in or neglecting of duty or obligation, guilty of misdeeds, or misbehaviors. A delinquent is one who disobeys or breaks rules or laws. The Encyclopedia Wikipedia view youth as “a period between childhood and adulthood, with an attendant physical and Psychological development from the onset of puberty to maturity and early adulthood. It is however important to state that the specific age-range that constitutes youth varies from one culture or society to another. The United Nation’s legal standards consider individuals under 18 as children; meanwhile, youth is usually understood as a much ‘looser’ concept, generally encompassing the age group of 15 to 18. In Britain, the term “juvenile” is usually applied to children aged 10-17 years, while that of young adults is applied to those aged 17-20 years (Shylom, 2006). It is quite important to note that the Western definition of Youth is different from non-Western definitions. For example, in the Traditional African society youths include younger age such as 12 and older age up to 35 years. In the African setting, attaining adulthood for male can mean the ability to support a household, or the capacity to fight in local and tribal wars. For girls, they are considered adult after they reach sexual maturity, irrespective of age. The youth in whichever stance it is viewed connote a period of natural endowment of raw energy. Thus, youths are seen bubbling in spirit, with high hopes, large dreams, aspirations and ideas of what their tomorrow will be. Youths do not naturally stay still or quiet, especially when they anticipate or see their future on a very collapsing socio-economic landscape. The paper therefore tries to examine why most youths or young people of the society have taken to some attitudes that seem to be directed to the wind.

An Overview of Historical Antecedents of Youthful Development

A comparative study give a purview of youthful development from the Ancient Near East people; particularly the Jews, from which it is assumed every other learns from. A very interesting observation of youthful development from the Jewish tradition is a transition from season to season, marked by specific observances, in which every age group has its specific importance and duty:-At five-the child is ready for study of the scripture.

- At Ten-[ready to study the Mishnah
- At Thirteen [ready to study the Talmud,
- At Eighteen [the youth is ready for marriage]
- At Twenty [mature for the pursuit of a livelihood]
- At Thirty [man reaches] strength
- At Forty, he has full understanding,
- At Fifty the ability to provide counsel
- At Sixty he enters his senior years
- At Seventy he attains old age,
- At Eighty [his survival reflects] strength,
- At Ninety bent in anticipation of the grave
- At One hundred he is as dead at past withdrawn from the world, Mishnah Abot 5: 24, (Tropp, 1994). In the African setting, five critical stages of life are considered as rites of passage, namely:
 - Childhood,
 - Youth (Adolescence),
 - Adulthood (Manhood and Womanhood),
 - Old age,
 - eath. The first two stages are relevant to the discussion of this paper as will be enumerated.

The Fist critical stage of life is childhood.

Atowoju observes that, “it is the period of unlimited possibilities. A period of life when the future is unpredictable,, period of innocence. The mistakes made in this stage are made in good fate and honesty. Their mistakes are unlike the adults, which are often characterized by deliberate action, precision and calculative motives. The second stage in human life is that of

youth or adolescence. Youthful stage is a rousy period of life. It is a time of opportunities. The youth strives to snatch every good opportunity that before old age sets in and the strengths of early is gone. It is in youth that man lays the foundation for the future strength and character (Atowoju, 2012).

The distinctive feature that shows between the African Youth and the Jewish youth is that while the Jews begin with the scriptures, which introduces the fear of God, the African youth begins with no scriptural foundation like the Jews, which invariable contributes to several youthful delinquent activities. In this stage, the youthful instincts and emotions come to full strength and clamour for expression and satisfaction. Megbelayin noted that youths who gave to the wind are languishing and suffering because they laid the wrong foundation in their early years through heavy drinking, smoking of Indian hems, weeds, addiction to hard drugs, stealing, various other vices and loose sex life (Meghelayin, 2008). A part of the Old Testament Wisdom literature calls upon the youth, to “Remember also your creator in the days of your youth before the evil days come and the years draw near of which you will say, I have no pleasure in them, Ecclesiastic 12 :1. Therefore, adequate attention should be given for proper upbringing, formation, empowerment, human resource development and training of the youth in a desirable direction and conducive environment, especially if done by teaching the fear of God.

Exegetical Analysis of Ecclesiastic Chapter 12:13-14

Ecclesiastics falls into one of the major three books that constitute the Wisdom literatures; namely Job and Proverbs... The Wisdom literature in its broadest sense is Israel's contribution to the vast body of written or oral sayings hence it is 'didactic' or 'instructional'. It is often practical, moral and religious teachings and often uses the term 'my son' in its presentations. One major addresses or teachings of the Wisdom Literature is on the fear of God which relates to proper attitudes of respect, honour, submissiveness and obedience from child to parents, from citizens to leaders, from servants to masters and from wives to their husbands. The Wisdom teachings transcends racial or national boundaries; its influential teachings is easily transported from one culture to another. The Wisdom teachings when expounded sets the stage for everyone as a principle and particularly to youths and the expected life behaviour which proffers solution to the problems of man and the world as it faces social vices and delinquent behaviours.

The book of Ecclesiastics cannot be interpreted correctly without reading these final lines. No matter what the mysteries and apparent conditions of life is, everyone must work towards the single purpose of knowing God. In Ecclesiastics, Solomon showed that while people should enjoy their life, it does not exempt them from obeying God's commandment. Purpose and meaning in life is not only through human endeavours, but also on positive attitude and strong faith in God. Human efforts apart from God is futile. Therefore, the proper attitude that Ecclesiastics 12:13-14 addresses is that proper attitude of people towards God is to live in respect, reverence, or awe, submission and obedience to God; a way to avert His judgment. The Implications of Ecclesiastic chapter 12:13-14 for the contemporary Youth is that the fear of God is expressed in humble submission and loyalty to societal values is essential to true wisdom. The values seem to be a missing link particularly among the youth.

Factors Responsible for Youthful Delinquency. There are several factors responsible for moral formation Youthful delinquency. Among these factors are parental, peer, social media, environmental influence, cultural, religious and many others, to mention, but few.

The Family

The foundational setups for moral and spiritual formation of life has always been the family, the religious groups; Christianity, Islam and African Traditional religion, and the society with its social institutions such as schools and other variables. These setups contribute to either the moral or the delinquent life of the youth. Helen Olomu succinctly noted that "to the individual, the good character of the Christian Homes of the utmost significance, for the development in all the finer things which relate to morality and spirituality of the youth,(Olomu, 2017).

This implies that the parents have been given the responsibility of bringing up their children in the way and fear of the Lord. Whatever that begins wrong from the family is likely going to spill over to the religious systems of the society as well as the social institutions. Chief among factors of influence on the moral value or delinquency of a youth is the influence of Adults like parents. Parents are the primary socializing agents of a child, although other individuals play important secondary roles.

Parents may significantly influence their children through child rearing techniques, modeling and imitation or incidental learning (Hunter, 2005). Studies have shown that children are

more likely to imitate adults who are pleasant and attentive to them. **Such adults are Parent and teachers and those who seem admired and successful.** For this reason, behaviour therapists advocate that parents in particular should be careful on what they do before their young children.

Peer Influence and Youth Delinquency

The peer group is a secondary social influence on personality development of a youth morally or delinquently. For most youths, peers rank a distant second to parents in influencing choices on the moral or otherwise behaviour of a youth. In other areas where the behaviours are related to popularity and acceptance, peers can exert a powerful influence. Peer group influence centers around engaging in similar behaviours in exchange for mutual support and friendship from others. Overall, the peer group serves many functions and provides acceptance in ways parents cannot. Peers allow for exchange of information, and comparison of the self with others (Olomu, 2017).

The Social Media

The Social Media is another strong factor that contributes either negatively or otherwise. In the society of today, the social media provides a powerful influence on the young people. Most of the social media devices give negative depictions of sex, violence, drug and alcoholic use and vulgar languages and practices. It is very indicative that the educative and morally beneficial programs of yester years have suddenly been displaced by sensual entertainments, pornography and numerous other immoral broadcasts and advertisements. The social media have been abused in no small measure.

Social environment and Culture

Personalities are formed through the process of socialization, growth and training, whereby certain aspects of culture; values, beliefs, ideologies, attitudes, become an internalized part of the individual youth in the society. However, other factors such as genetics, religion, educational advancement, interact with others in contributing to the overall personality formation of the youth.

The Impact of Youthful Delinquency in the Society

There is enough evidence of the fact that youth restiveness, violence, deteriorating world situations are on an alarming increase. It has also come to fore that, the Nigerian society faces a world of hunger, economic meltdown and lack of basic human needs. Jonathan also underscores the fact that “ we face many uncertainties as a nation; there has been cases of kidnapping, armed robbery, fuel scarcity, arson, drug trafficking, political and economic instability, corruption, epileptic power supply, etc, and now the attempted terrorist acts has brought many challenges, especially for Nigerians (Yomi Odonuga,2010).

There is still the problems of erosion of human dignity and sanctity of life, lack of commitment in personal and public life, continuing spread of exploitation, class domination, a vicious resurgence of tribalism, a growing feeling of oppression and marginalization and a growth of religious reactions and fanaticism, which creates an unhealthy atmosphere of religious intolerance. It is not far from the truth to say that everywhere there is an insatiable lust to get rich quickly using unscrupulous means.

Thus, social media also contributes to the menace with constant promotion of sexual immorality through pornography and video, heightened emphasis on quick ways of making millions and billions at the neglect of hard labour, dedication to duty and integrity. It is amidst these issues that this paper attempts to submit that the fear of God is the panacea to these problems. Danfulani corroborates that “no doubt, a return to the Numinous; the Supreme Being alone can rid the society of her gross evil and the restiveness of her youth (Danfulani, 2009)

Moral values deterioration in the Nigerian Society

Morality is the principle of behaviour that is and good, which must be exhibited and approved by society. It is the practical activity or ethics that describes the theoretical, systematic, and rationale reflection upon human behaviour. Therefore, every society is structured on moral principles. When there is high level of immorality in a society, it is an indication of weak moral principles or lack of adherence to the moral principles. It is necessary to note that what constitutes moral issues in every society is underscored by some other concepts such as moral rules or principles, moral ideas and moral standards.

Moral standards refer to the parameter of measuring rightness or wrongness, goodness or badness of a person's character or behaviour. The presence of all forms of moral decadence

in the society calls for the writing of this paper. Gus Tyler painted the loss of moral value in this way; “the delinquency culture has become an inner frontier, raising drug-addicts, kidnappers, arsonists, hired assassins, area boys, rapists, etc. in our midst, strange and hostile to our larger civilization. Out of this debased culture comes the young gang that in adulthood becomes part of organized crime, either by absorption or by conquest, (Tyler, 2014). Abogunrin also states succinctly that “there has never been a time in history when humanity was so degraded and spiritually blind as is evidenced in the madness experienced daily in Nigeria today, (Akanmidu, 2002). Malomo puts it thus, “the ethical situation in Nigeria is morally sick. This morally sickness is however, a product of certain unique internal and certain external morally pathogenic factors, (Molomo, 2019).

In another view, Njoku punched the facts clear “the Nigerian society is characterized by high level of distrusts, suspicion, and everybody has become a suspect of misplaced value. Immorality and lack of sanctity of life have increased as murder, rape and kidnapping have become daily occurrence that pervaded the society with infanticides, fratricide, matricide and suicide in pursuit of materialism. The malady of corruption has polluted the character and personality of every Nigerian. Today, supposed responsible Nigerians within the corridor of powers gather around themselves sycophants and praise singers, (Njoku, 200).

In the light of the above situation, the Nigerian society experiences crises upon crises. What is responsible for several problems of ethno-political instability, developmental retrogression, economic depression and social disorder make the Nigerian society to be classified as a failed state? The fundamental reason and truth is the breakdown of moral value of love and care for fellow Nigerians. The moral decadence in the society has assumed a monumental height as the Nigerian society ranks as one of the most corrupt nations in the world. The crisis of value system, especially love for fellow Nigerian suggests that the growth and progress of the society is being retarded in many aspects through display of intolerance for one another among both the youths and the elderly ones. It is against this background that this paper advocates re-orientation on the fear of God in the society as a panacea and catalyst for a progressive society.

Theological Response to Youthful Delinquency

Theology is often defined as the study about religion. It is derived from two Greek word s; “*Theos*” meaning God and “*logos*” meaning ‘discourse’ Theology attempts to bring to expression in words and action, the wisdom of God for the salvation of humankind. The Old Testament Wisdom literature discusses the fear of God narrowed it from two different understanding, (a)-As action or behaviour: this refers to well-motivated actors achieving an altruistic outcome by creatively and successfully solving problems. (b) As a psychological trait: this refers to a global psychological quality that engages intellectual ability, prior knowledge and experience in a way that integrates virtue and wit, and is acquired through life experience and continued practice According to Proverbs 1:7, Solomon describes “the fear of the Lord” as the basis of wisdom. The concept of Divine Wisdom through the fear of God is further designated as the Principal thing in life, Proverbs 4:7.

The famous passage in Prov. 8:22 ff., depicts where Wisdom is represented as God’s assessor at the creation of the world and especially Wisdom played no small part in God’s creative order. This Wisdom is personified as a call to all humanity to embrace her as antidotes to life problems, Proverbs 8:1. However, Solomon’s wisdom is said to have surpassed that of the people of the East and of Egypt so that he became famous among the nations (1 Kings 4:30-31).

Wisdom, in the Old Testament sense of the word, is not simply intellectual speculation. It is practical to the last degree, with a real moral and spiritual content. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom”; the truly wise man (*hakham*) is the man who views all life in a spirit of reverence towards God; and contrariwise the fool (*nabal*) is the man devoid of moral and religious sensibilities. “God is not in all his thoughts”; when he says in his heart, “There is no God”, he is not professing himself a “freethinker” but leaving God out of life’s reckoning, behaving as if there were no God. This is a true position of the delinquent who acts in aberration to God’s moral and spiritual expectation.

There is enough evidence from the Ancient Near East documents to support the view that Israel’s wisdom Literature was a part of a common human activity of learning about life and seeking to pass on the gathered wisdom to succeeding generations. Obviously, as contained in the Holy Bible, Israel’s wisdom had much in common with the contemporary society since they all belonged to the generic humanity living in the same world. The present day society face most of the same matters of personal and social interaction, and they are a veritable tool

to learn from as far as possible, in harmony with the environment. However, the wisdom derived from the fear of God is considered superior from every other wisdom.

Recommendations

When morality is given the required place in man's life and society, the effect is far reaching, and constructive. However, no other body or organization is given this laudable mandate except the church and other social institutions. The church must therefore, rise up to this challenge of breaking the yoke of this monstrous behavior in the society. The resultant effect would bring about sanity and security, law and order, reliability and trust, credible society, rapid progress and development and society free of corruption. The paper submits the evaluation of the following submissions:

There is the need to strengthen family ties: If the youth must have a sound moral upbringing, the family system must be reoriented. A family is the first site of belonging for most individual; it is an institution that potentially supports and secures attachment and positive self-identity. The family is the first church where moral, religious and cultural values should be inculcated in the life of the young ones. Anthony Kennedy observes that there are three elements that are essential to morality" a moral community, a set of moral values and a moral code. All of these three are necessary. However, with high rates of street children, single parenthood, orphanhood and physically absent parent in the home, especially fathers, many young people are experiencing a lack of belonging in their formative years. This disruption and gap contributes so much to youth delinquency, To be able to correct this, the church needs to teach parents, guardians and elders of the community to do everything possible to model and encourage young ones on the importance of the fear of god as the most fundamental point of life, (Kennedy, 2016).

There is also the need for the church to get involved in the Community development programmes and orientations against youth delinquent activities. The church should orghinize and create awareness on the consequences of social misconducts and engagement in drugs, drinking party, and bad living. BaxJ, corroborates that the need for spiritual guiding light is more widely required today than it was a century ago. The age when man accepts unquestionably both the opinions and status of his superior and communal code of conduct is long since past. Individauls since creation , have always been faced with ethical problems, but

now, the whole race is faced with spiritual, moral and ethical questions of unparalleled magnitude. There is hardly a more auspicious time than this, for theologians to brace up to the challenges militating against the common good in Nigeria, to restore the reputation and integrity of the nation and bring hope for the future, (Bax, 2016)

The Church in collaboration with Political leadership of the Nation, push for the reintroduction of moral education in schools. Moral education should be reintroduced and made a compulsory in all church owned schools This will cause morality to be consciously taught and practiced. There is no reason to assume that youths on their own will know and practice morality with the level of immorality in the society. It is the purpose of God that through the church, the manifold wisdom of God be made known to the rulers and authorities (Ephesians 3:10) Therefore, if the rulers must know the manifold wisdom of God, that should be done in the early stages of the life of the youth.

Conclusion

The overall problem that manifests in youth delinquency in the society is as a result of the decay in moral values. Though several efforts have been made by law enforcement agencies of the society, using legal methods, the Church therefore is the only hope of the society in reorientation of the importance of moral values. It is time the church actively wakes up and participate in the reorientation of people's moral values to save the society from total collapse.

An integral part of life that influences personality, a process that starts at birth and ends in death begins with family orientation, friends religion, economics, law, sciences, school and media. All these sectors should be explored again to reorient the youth on sound moral values as it will help to reduce delinquent behaviours. This paper has attempted to explore the concept of the fear of God and has established that it is the rationale for youthful delinquency. It has suggested some approaches that could be employed in communicating values among the youths. Every parent and other social institutions should rise up to this onerous responsibility to reorient the fear of God as it would promote Godly virtue and values for a better Nigerian society.

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