NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA

FACULTY OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

COURSE CODE: CRS423

COURSE TITLE: COMPARATIVE ETHICS IN

PLURALISTIC SOCIETY

NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA

**COURSE
GUIDE**

**CRS423
COMPARATIVE ETHICS IN PLURALISTIC SOCIETY**

COURSE TEAM

Course Developer/Writer	Dr. Joseph Kerker BSU, Makurdi
Course Editor	Dr Godwin I. Akper National Open University Nigeria
Course Reviewer	
Course Coordinator	Dr Uzoma Amos Dike National Open University of Nigeria
Head of Department	Dr Michael Enyinwa Okoronkwo

CONTENTS   **PAGE**

INTRODUCTION

CRS423 Comparative Ethics in a Pluralistic Society is a one semester course. It consists of 18 units and it takes a comparative analysis of the Christian, Islamic and African Traditional Religion ethics and the ethical implications these religions have on corporate existence in a pluralistic society.

Clarification of concepts

The clarification of terms here is necessary to provide a focus as to what this course is all about. There are two key concepts here for clarification namely comparative ethics and pluralistic society. So, what do these concepts mean in the context of our discussion?

To understand what we mean by comparative ethics, let us first try to understand what Ethics mean in general. This will place us in a better position to then understand what comparative ethics is all about. Notwithstanding the various definitions of ethics by different authors, we here define it, for the purpose of this study, as the branch of philosophy that deals with the morality of human actions. The study of ethics therefore provides the platform for the determination of human actions that are right from those that are wrong. There are different areas of ethics, namely, comparative ethics, normative ethics, applied ethics and meta-ethics.

Comparative ethics also known as descriptive ethics is the study of people's beliefs about morality. Normative ethics or prescriptive ethics is the study of ethical theories that prescribe how people ought to act. Normative ethics deals with the rules of human conduct and it concerns itself with the issues of what is to be and what ought to be done. Meta-ethics is the area of ethics that deals with the meaning of words and concepts we use in ethics such as right, good, duty, wrong, bad etc. It is the study of what ethical terms and theories actually mean or refer to. The difference between these fields of ethics is better illustrated by the following questions: Comparative ethics; what do people think is right? Normative (prescriptive) ethics; How should people act? Applied ethics: How do we take moral knowledge and put it into practice? Meta-ethics: What does 'right' even mean?

Basically, descriptive ethics is a kind of empirical research into the attitudes of individuals or group of people. Those working on comparative ethics aim to uncover people's beliefs about such things as values, which actions are right and wrong and which characteristics of moral agents are virtuous. Research into comparative ethics may also

investigate people's ideals or what actions societies condemn or punish in law or politics. Because descriptive ethics involves empirical investigation, it is a field that is usually investigated by those working in the fields of evolutionary biology, psychology, sociology or anthropology. Information that comes from descriptive ethics is, however, also used in philosophical arguments as well as religious field.

Pluralistic Society

Pluralism is often used in different ways, across a wide range of topics to denote a diversity of views and standards in opposition to one single approach or method of interpretation. For example we can talk of cosmic pluralism, which is the belief in numerous other worlds beyond the earth, which may possess the conditions suitable for life; cultural pluralism when small groups within a larger society maintain their unique cultural identities; legal pluralism acknowledges the existence of different legal systems in the world; religious pluralism is used to describe the acceptance of all religious paths as equally valid, promoting coexistence.

Pluralistic society is any society in which citizens can legally and publically hold multiple competing ethical views and are allowed to choose for themselves what ethical beliefs they wish to hold. It is often mistaken for a society which tolerates different ethical beliefs or groups of people and holds that all are equal.

COURSE AIM

The basic aim of this course is to expose you to the concept of comparative ethics and the pluralistic society. Comparative ethics in a pluralistic society therefore endeavors to juxtapose the various ethical beliefs of a given society with the view of balancing between the similarities and differences that might exist between them. We are however here concerned with the religious beliefs, and specifically still with the three major religions in Nigeria in particular, namely, African Religion, Christianity and Islam. These three religions have had very formidable force behind the formation of ethical or moral opinions in the Nigerian society in particular. The purpose of the comparative analysis of ethics in a pluralistic society is not to determine the superiority of any of the systems but to see how best they can interact in an atmosphere of harmony and to ensure a peaceful coexistence of them.

Furthermore, the aim of the course shall be to create awareness among stakeholders of the implications of the pluralistic Nigerian society with a view to providing an appropriate balance in the relationship among

various groups in the country and how the differences might be used to forge a common homogenous society in spite of the existing heterogeneity.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

A dozen objectives are intended for this course. Each unit has some specific objectives which are found at the beginning of each unit. It may be helpful if you continue to refer to them during your study so as to help gauge the progress you are making at your study. You are encouraged to look at the unit objectives after completing a unit. It is hoped that in this way, you may be sure that you have achieved substantially what is required of you in a particular unit. More importantly, it is hoped that at the end of this course, you should be able to:

- determine the meaning of ethics
- explain the need for studying ethics
- identify the basic underpinnings for the study of ethics
- justify the classification of ethics
- classify ethics
- show the place of principles in the study of ethics
- describe how ethical theories are related to ethical issues
- explain how in your opinion society would look like without ethics
- explain the basis of Christian ethics
- determine how God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit and the Bible are said to be the sources of Christian ethics.
- describe what Christian morality is
- briefly summarise the teachings of Islam
- describe how the Quran and Hadith are sources of Islamic ethics
- explain how moral values are derived in Islam
- indicate the centrality of prophet Muhammad to the ethics of Islam
- describe how ethical values are derived in African Religion?
- mention the sources of African ethics
- explain how a pluralistic society evolves
- describe how a common ethical standard can be fashioned in a religiously plural society
- explain how corporate existence can be achieved in a religious pluralistic society

COURSE MATERIALS

1.   Course Guide
2.   Study Units
3.   Textbooks and other Reference sources
4   Assignment File
5   Presentation

You may consult with your facilitator at the study center if you have problems relating to you study.

STUDY UNITS

There are 18 study units, broken into five (5) modules in this course. They are as follows:

Module 1   General Ethics

Unit 1   Nature of Ethics
Unit 2   Branches of Ethics
Unit 3   Principles of Ethics
Unit 4   Ethical Theories
Unit 5   Ethics and Society

Module 2   Ethics of the Christian Religion

Unit 1   Foundations of Christian Ethics
Unit 2   Sources of Christian Ethics
Unit 3   Principles of Christian Ethics

Module 3   Ethics of Islamic Religion

Unit 1   Foundations of Islamic Ethics
Unit 2   Sources of Islamic Ethics
Unit 3   Islamic Religion and Moral Values

Module 4   Ethics of African Traditional Religion

Unit 1   Dimensions of African Traditional Religion Ethics
Unit 2   Agents of African Traditional Religion Ethics
Unit 3   Moral Values In African Religion

Module 5   Pluralistic Society

Unit 1   Pluralistic Society
Unit 2   Evolution of Religious and Ethical Pluralism
Unit 3   Pluralism as a Means to Corporate Existence
Unit 4   Pluralism: A Comparative Analysis

TEXTBOOKS AND REFERENCES

Bascom, W. (1973). *African Art.* in Cultural Perspective. New York:
        W.W. Norton (ed). .   .

Bascom, W. (1983). *Ifa Divination*. Ibadan: University Press.

Boer, H. A. (1980). *A Brief History of Islam*. Ibadan: Daystar Press Ltd.

Dzurgba, A. (2000). *Principles of Ethics*. Ibadan: Agape Publishers,

Dzurgba, A. (2003) *Nigerian Politics and Moral Behaviour*. Ibadan:
        John Archers   Publishers Limited.

El-geyoushi, M. (1982). *The Life of the Prophet*. Lagos: Islamic
        Publications Bureau.   .

Fagothey, A. (1989). *Fagothey's Right and Reason*. London: Merrill
            Publishing Company.

Frindlander, S. (1991). *Ninety-nine Names of Allah*. Lagos: Islamic
        Publications Bureau

Hamidullah, M. (1981). *Introduction to Islam*. Lagos: Islamic
        Publications Bureau.

Hammuda, A, (1978). *Islam in Focus*. Indianapolis: IN: Amana
        Publications.

Imo, C. O. (1993). "Religious Pluralism as a Means of Development in
        Nigeria:a Christian View". R. D. Abubakre. (Ed.). *Studies in
        Religious Understanding.* Ilorin: Christy David Printers,. 213-
        235

Internet Source. Religious Tolerance. Ontario Consultants on Religious
        Tolerance. Islam: Introduction: Part 2. (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/
        islam)

Islamic Conceptual Framework, Section on Shariah, the Ethics of Action. http://www.islamonline.net/english/contemporary/2002/Article23.shtml.

Kerker, J. (2000). *Introduction to Islam*. Abuja: Solar Publications Ltd.

Kerker, J. T. & Ikyaan, F. L. (2010). "Religious Pluralism and the Quest for Human Community". Asiegbu, M.F. & Chukwuokolo, J. C. (Eds.). *Personhood and Personal Identity: a Philosophical Study.* Enugu: Snaap Press. 129-135

Kunhiyop, S.W. (2008). *African Christian Ethics*. Kenya: Hippobooks, African Christian Texbooks.

Malinowski, B. (1993).

Mason, D. "The Morality of the Pluralistic Society". *Milltown Studies* No. 23, spring 1989.

Maududi, S.A. (nd.) *The Meaning of the Quran*. London.

Mazrui, A. (1971). Pluralism and National Integration in *Pluralism in Africa*. (Ed.). Kuper, L. Barkley: University of California Press.

Metuh, E.I. (1987). *Comperative Studies of African Traditional Religions*. Onitsha: IMICO Publishers,

Nigosian, S.A. (1975). *World Religions*. London: Edward Arnold Publishers.

Nyerere, J. (1967) *Ujamaa. The Basis of Africa Socialism in Ujamaa*. Essays on Socialism. Dar es Salam: Oxford University Press.

Omoregbe, J. I. (1990). *Knowing Philosophy*. Lagos: Joja Educational Research and Publishers.   .

Parrinder, E.W. (1961). African Traditional Religion. Sheldon Press.

Peschke, K.H. (2001). *Christian Ethics II*: Moral Theology in the Light of Vatican II. India: Theological Publications.

Popkin, R. & Avrum, S. (1993). *Philosophy Made Simple*. New Delhi: Made Simple Books.

Ray, B.C. (1976). *African Religion*. Symbol, Ritual and Community. Eaglewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.

Samartha, S.J. (1981). *"Religious Pluralism and the Quest for Human Community"*. Courage for Dialogue- Ecumenical Issues in Inter-Religious Relationships Geneva: World council for churches.

Shields, N. (2004). *Christian Ethics*. Plateau State. Nigeria: African Christian Textbooks. ,

Smith, E.W. (1962). *The Golden Stool*. London: Holborn Publishing House.

Stob, H. & William, B. (1978). *Ethical Reflections*. Eerdmans Pub. Co.

Swarup, R. (1983). *Understanding Islam through Hadis*. Delhi, India: Voice of India., xv-xvi, as Quoted in George W. Braswell, Islam: its Prophet, Peoples, Politics and Power (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1986),

Thurstan, S. (1970). *Igbo-Ukwu*. an Account of the Archaeological Discoveries in Eastern Nigeria. London: Faber and Faber. ,Vol. 1

Uduigwomen, A. F. (2001). *Introducing Ethics*. Trends, Problems and Perspectives. Nigeria: Pyramid.

Vissert, H. (1966). Pluralism – Temptation or Opportunity? Ecumenical Review, xviii: 2

ASSIGNMENT FILE

Details concerning assignments to be submitted will be found in this file. Assignments are to be submitted to the course facilitator for marking. There are many assignments for this course, provided at the end of every unit. You MUST attempt answers to all the assessment questions as they are meant to assist you to understand the course.

ASSESSMENT SCHEDULE

There are two aspects of the assessment of this course, the Tutor-Marked Assignments (TMAs) and a written examination. In tackling these assignments, you are expected to apply the information, knowledge and experience acquired during the study of the course. The assignments must be submitted to your course facilitator for formal

assessment in accordance with the deadlines stated in the assignment file. The work you submit to your course facilitator for assessment will account for 30per cent of your total course mark.

At the end of the course, you will need to sit for a final examination of three hours duration. This examination will count for the other 70per cent of your total course marks.

TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENTS (TMAS)

There are many tutor-marked assignments in this course and you are required to submit all the assignments. The best four out of the overall assignments will be counted in your favour. Each assignment counts for 20per cent but on the average when the five assignments are put together, then each assignment will count for 10per cent towards your total course mark. This implies that the total marks for the best four assignments which would have been 100 marks will now be 30per cent of your total course work.

The Assignments for the units in this course are contained in the Assignment file. You will be able to complete your assignments from the information and materials contained in your set books, reading and study units. However, at this level of education, you are expected to research more widely, and demonstrate that you have a very vast knowledge of the subject matter.

When each assignment is completed, send it together with a TMA form to your Course Facilitator. Ensure that each assignment reaches your course facilitator on or before the deadline given in the assessment file. If for any reason you cannot complete your work in time, contact your course facilitator before the assignment is due to discuss the possibility of an examination. Extensions shall not be granted after the due date unless there are exceptional circumstances warranting such.

FINAL EXAMINATION AND GRADING

The final examination for CRS423: Comparative Ethics in a Pluralistic Society will be of three hours duration and have a value of 70per cent of the total course grade. The examination will consist of questions which reflect the practice exercises and tutor-marked assignments you have previously encountered. The examination will cover the entire course. It will be important for you to revise your work especially the TMAs.

This is because the examination questions shall follow a similar pattern as in the assessments and tutor-marked assignments contained in the course.

COURSE MARKING SCHEME

Table 1: Course marking Scheme

ASSESSMENT	MARKS
Assignments	Best four marks of the assignment @ 10% each (on the average) = 30% of total course marks
Final Examination	70% of overall course marks
Total	100% of total course marks

Tips relevant for the course study.

In distance learning, the study units stand in place of the lecturer, which is one of the very great advantages of distance learning; you can read and work through specially designed study materials at your own pace, and at any time and place that suits you best. You are here reading the lecture instead of listening to it. The study units tell you what to read as well as your text books or set books.

Each of the study units follows a common format. The first item is an introduction to the subject matter of the unit, and how a particular unit is integrated with the other units and the course as a whole. Next to this is a set of learning objectives. These objectives let you know what you should be able to do by the time you have completed the units. These learning objectives are meant to guide your study. The moment a unit is finished, you must go back and check whether you have achieved the set objectives or not. If this is made a habit, then you will significantly improve your chances of passing the course. Remember that you are a master to yourself and you must be self disciplined.

The following is a practical guide for working through this course.

1   Read this course guide thoroughly, it is your first assignment.
2   Organise your study schedule to guide you on the time you need to spend on each unit and as the assignments relates to the units.
3   Once you have created your study schedule, do everything possible to abide by it.

4   Turn to unit 1, and read the introduction and the objectives for the unit.

5   Assemble the study materials and your set books for the unit you are about to study.

6   Work through the unit. Review the objectives for each study unit to confirm that you have achieved them.

7   After that, you move to the next unit and also try to go through the assignment, paying particular attention to your tutorial facilitator's comments, both on the tutor-marked assignments as well as written assignments.

8   When you have submitted an assignment to your tutorial facilitator for marking, do not wait for its return before starting on the next unit.

9   After completing the last unit, review the course as many times as possible and get ready for the final examination. Constantly ensure that for every unit of study the objectives are achieved.

SUMMARY

This course guide has introduced you to every aspect of your course on Comparative Ethics in a Pluralistic Society. The course has been broken down into unit that makes it easier for you to understand. If you follow the course guide faithfully, you will surely achieve success in your study.

NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA

MAIN COURSE

CRS423
COMPARATIVE ETHICS IN PLURALISTIC SOCIETY

COURSE TEAM

Course Developer/Writer Dr. Joseph Kerker
                         BSU, Makurdi

Course Editor   Dr Godwin I. Akper
                         National Open University Nigeria

Course Reviewer

Course Coordinator   Dr Uzoma Amos Dike
                         National Open University of Nigeria

Head of Department   Dr Michael Enyinwa Okoronkwo

```
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│                                                             │
│   ╱──────────╲                                              │
│   │ MAIN      │                                             │
│   │ COURSE    │                                             │
│   ╲──────────╱                                              │
```

CONTENTS   **PAGE**

MODULE 1 GENERAL ETHICS

Unit 1   Nature of Ethics
Unit 2   Branches of Ethics
Unit 3   Principles of Ethics
Unit 4   Ethical Theories
Unit 5   Ethics and Society

UNIT 1 NATURE OF ETHICS

CONTENTS

1.0   Introduction
2.0   Objectives
3.0   Main Content
        3.1   What is Ethics
                3.1.1   Classification of Ethics
        3.2   Ethics and Morality
                3.2.1   Morality
        3.3   Ethics and Other Disciplines
                3.3.1   Ethics and Science
                3.3.2   Ethics and Medicine
                3.3.3   Ethics and the Social Sciences
                3.3.4   Ethics and Psychology
                3.3.5   Ethics and Religion
                3.3.6   Ethics and Law
        3.4   The Subject Matter of Ethics
                3.4.1   Ethics Deals With Man
                3.4.2   The Case of Animals
                3.4.3   Angels and Demons
                3.4.4   The Individual Man
                        3.4.4.1 Voluntary Conduct of Individual man
4.0   Conclusion
5.0   Summary
6.0   Tutor-Marked Assignment
7.0   References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit explores the meaning/concept of ethics generally and brings about the need for studying ethics. As is common with most fields the difficulty in defining ethics is highlighted. That difficulty notwithstanding, a survey of the meaning of ethics as given by prominent scholars in the field is made. This unit being the first in the

study of ethics introduces readers to basic ethical issues and terms as well as surveys the nature of ethics generally. It also introduces you to the purpose of ethics which is how to live the good life. Ethics is therefore about the human person and all that pertains to man's well being. Ethics is concerned about the proper ordering of society and of the good life for humanity.

2.0   OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- explain the meaning of ethics
- discuss the need for studying ethics
- distinguish ethics from other disciplines
- describe what constitutes ethical action
- identify the subject matter of ethics.

3.0   MAIN CONTENT

3.1   What is Ethics?

Strictly speaking, it is only proper to see ethics as the father of all disciplines, because elements of ethics are found in all disciplines; for it is customary for us to talk of medical ethics, legal ethics, media ethics, Christian ethics, and Islamic ethics, social ethics, science ethics, education ethics, philosophical ethics, etc. Because of its encompassing nature it is not possible to give a single satisfactory definition of ethics that will also be all encompassing.

In fact, scholars within the field of ethics are unanimous in agreeing that a univocal definition of ethics is not possible. In spite of this, the term ethics, derived from the Greek word *ethos* is synonymous with 'moral' and both are indicative of customs, habits and accepted ways of behaviour of an individual or a community. Notwithstanding the various definitions of ethics by different authors, we here define it, for the purpose of this study, as "the branch of philosophy that deals with the morality of human actions". The study of ethics therefore provides the platform for the determination of human actions that are right from those that are wrong. Ethics regulates human conduct and orders it in such a manner for the attainment or realisation of human goals. Ethics analyses and evaluates human actions and provides justifying reasons for our approval or rejection of such actions. As a principle, ethics permits the performance of certain actions judged to be moral or right, and presents same to us by way of obligations, while at the same time condemning

and restraining us from performing those actions judged to be wrong and amoral.

This notwithstanding, Ozumba (2008:6) defines ethics as a branch of philosophy that is concerned with what is morally good and bad, right and wrong, etc. Fagothey (1989:1) on his part sees ethics as the part of philosophy that studies the person and personal deeds from the point of view of the rightness or wrongness, the goodness or evilness, of the person and the deeds. Terms such as right, wrong, good, bad, virtuous, and sinful, ought, duty, obligation, etc all belong to the purview of ethics. Ethics as a discipline is chiefly concerned with the analysing, evaluating and developing of criteria for dealing with moral problems. It is basically concerned with the nature of human behaviour and social approval. It tries to provide answers to questions such as 'how are men supposed to behave', 'how are men behaving and why', what is man's ultimate destiny and how does that influence his behaviour', what is considered the good life for man' among many others.

Ethics and ethical are often used synonymously with morals and morality and they connote customs, habits and accepted ways of behaviour of an individual or a community. It is concerned with the question of right and wrong in human behaviour dealing with how men ought to behave and why it is wrong to behave in some ways and right to behave in some other ways. This means as Omoregbe (1993: ix) notes, that ethics is all about the reasons why certain kinds of actions are morally wrong and why other kinds of actions are morally right and commendable.

Dzurgba (2003: 18) opines that ethics is a study of human conduct or man's conduct. It is made up of all voluntary actions. Voluntary actions are those actions which are performed under the normal conditions of man's capacities. Conduct includes inward activities such as intentions, motives and desires. Outward activities include speech, movement, sitting, writing, selling and buying. Human conduct deals with relationships between persons and between social groups. It is concerned with the conditions and consequences of people's interactions in society. Ethics is therefore a normative field of study concerned with the practical issues of life.

According to Fagothey (1989:8), ethics is the study of what humans ought and ought not to do, which distinguishes from meta-ethics which is the study of ethical theories. In other words, ethics prescribes behavioural patterns for man in terms of what is right to be done and what is wrong to be avoided.

One definition of Ethics which stands out and clearly explains its nature is that by Henry Stob (1978: 1).

Ethics is conveniently defined as the science of morality, morality being understood as the set of judgments people make regarding what is right or wrong, good or bad, in the relations within or between individual or collective centers of intelligence and will.

This definition is further analysed by him that it is sometimes said that all ethics is social, since man, the agent of morality, is by nature, and therefore inalienably, social. There is no doubt that man is social in his way; he has no ultimate privacy. It is true accordingly, that when he acts others are unavoidably affected by what he does; his choices and decisions have social consequences. It is equally true that a man's moral behaviour is significantly influenced by the community in which he is imbedded and by the social history which is his heritage and, in a sense, his destiny. It is true also that more often than not, man acts not as a single individual, but as a member of a group which includes and overarches him, and of which he is ineluctably representative. But these facts, important as they are, do not make meaningless or unimportant the traditional distinctions between personal, interpersonal, and social ethics.

Men are not sheer unrelated atoms of being. But they nevertheless are individuals, unique centers of consciousness and power. And because, they reside on a vertical as well as horizontal plane of existence they are able through the existence of their God-oriented freedom to transcend the social matrix. This transcendence indeed is the reason why individuals are able to creatively on social structures and processes. But this feature of man' existence also provides a charter for the department of ethics which has come to be called personal. Personal ethics cannot be finally isolated from social ethics, but, unlike the latter, it does not concentrate on collectivities and communities or on impersonal structures and arrangements. It concentrates instead upon the individual moral agent who lies behind and participates in these. Personal ethics contemplates man as a centered self, and it observes and evaluates the development within him of those habits, postures, attitudes, and traits which characterise him as a person. Since in Christian perspective true personhood is unthinkable outside a man's relation to God, Christian personal ethics is as much concerned with the supernatural graces of man as it is with man's socially redemptive virtues, though it never regards these as antithetical or unrelated. Personal ethics, then, may be said to be chiefly concerned with self discipline, with character formation, and with the cultivation and development of those virtues and

graces which fit him for the discharge of his religious and social responsibilities.

It is concerned with the ordering of society so as to achieve the good life for man. We may therefore summarise ethics as follows:

- "Ethics is a general term for what is often described as the science (study) of morality".
- A system of moral principles, rules and standards of conduct.
- System or code of morals of a particular religion, group, or profession.
- Personal code of conduct based on respect for oneself, others, and your surroundings.
- In ancient Greek it is "*ethikos*" meaning "arising from habit".
- In business: Ethics is a "System of principles based on ideas of right and wrong, whether true or false, rules of practice in respect to human actions".
- Ethics deals with what we believe to be good or bad, and with the moral obligations that those beliefs imply. Ethics involves the rules for deciding right and wrong and the code of conduct that is based on our decisions".

The purpose of ethics is to help answer the 'how should I live' question for humanity. It is meant to help guide human conduct and answer certain moral questions that apply to all normal human beings as well as help humanity to better conform to the norms of morality. This is achieved by studying moral principles; moral principles in turn guide human conduct. In other words, the purpose of ethics is to influence human conduct along the line of the moral law. Tan (2004:42) posits that the purpose of ethics is to provide, among other things, an account of how individuals may live the good life.

It is worthy of caution however that it does not necessarily take the study of ethics in order to be able to live a good life. There are many people who have never studied ethics and yet are known to have lived lives of high moral standard. The study of ethics however is intended to help improve one's moral standard.

3.1.1 Classification of Ethics

Ethics can be classified into two, classical ethics and modern ethics. Classical ethics is characterised by the efforts to answer two questions: "what is the good life for people?" and "How ought they to behave?" If we examine these questions from a slightly different perspective, we might interpret them as requests for advice by people who are puzzled

by certain aspects of daily living. And the various answers which the classical theories give can be regarded as telling us that the good life consists of a life of pleasure, and further that we ought to act so as to acquire pleasure. It is assumed in asking such questions and in giving such answers that the meaning of the questions and the meaning of the answers is clear. But in recent times, philosophers have come to realise that many of these questions and answers are not clear at all; that before we can give an answer to them we must find out precisely what they mean. To discover what they mean requires that the questions be clarified. The process of clarifying the meaning of questions and answers is called philosophical analysis. The use of this process persistently in modern ethics causes it to differ enormously from ethics pursued in classical times.

The main difference is that one can engage in philosophical analysis without necessarily being committed to giving any sort of advice for living. For example, one may analyse a theory like utilitarianism without necessarily advocating that doctrine. Of course, it is assumed that the process of analysis is not an end in itself; once one becomes clear about the meaning of the crucial terms and statements which occur in moral theories; it is assumed that one will be in a better position to decide which of them one should adhere to. Thus modern ethics is not regarded as an alternative to propounding ethics in the classical tradition so much as it is regarded as a preparation for the further study of such theories.

We might therefore define modern ethics as that branch of philosophy which applies analysis to moral theories, and classical ethics as that branch of philosophy which applies theories to finding answers to the moral questions, "what is the good life for people?" And "how ought they to behave?" so as to acquire this good life.

3.2   Ethics and Morality

What is the difference if any between ethics and morality, or better still what is the relationship between ethics and morality? The difference or relationship seems to be a subtle one and easily eludes some people. In Omoregbe's opinion, the relationship between ethics and morality is similar to the relationship between logic and thinking or the relationship between theology and religion. Using Omoregbe's view, since theology is the systematic study of the fundamental tenets of religion, it therefore follows that ethics is the fundamental study of morality. Uduigwomen (2001:13) says that the two are so interconnected that the terms ethics and morality are used synonymously and often used as equivalent to right or good as opposed to immoral or unethical. Put differently, morality is the practical expression of the more systematic ethics, which

is theoretical. In other words ethics is the philosophical thinking or systematic study about morality, moral problems and moral judgments. In other words ethics is a critical reflection on morality.

There is a very close relationship between ethics and morality to the extent that sometimes people confuse ethics for morality and use the two terms interchangeably, but there is a slight difference between ethics and morality as can be seen from their definitions. Ethics for example is described as a code or set of principles by which people live; the art of directing the actions of people so as to bring about the greatest possible happiness on the part of those whose interest is at stake (Popkin, 1969: 22). Further descriptions of ethics include; the science of morality or moral philosophy, which entails the philosophical reflection on "the Good"; ethics refers to that relating to the morality of behaviour as it conforms to the accepted standard of behaviour; the branch of philosophy which studies the principles of right and wrong in human conduct.

3.2.1 Morality

Morality is derived from the Latin word, 'mores' or 'moralis' and is defined by Alan Monterfiore as the customs of a community accepted as the way of behaviour, i.e., the standard or principles of good behaviour. According to Durkheim, morality consists in the rules of conduct as perceived as both obligatory and desirable, the obligatory character of the rules derived from the moral authority behind them where their violation attracts sanctions morality is also seen as a way of looking at, an attitude towards and a manner of behaviour regarding people, things and ourselves. It is the dimension of our thinking, dispositions and actions, which arises from our vision of the dignity of each person in his or her own right. Morality ensures the rationality of our aims and objectives and sees to it that they are within a human frame (Masson, 1985:18).

From our discussion above it is very clear then that there is no much distinction between ethics and morality. The basic difference is that, while morality is concerned with the right and wrong of human actions, ethics provides the basic principles for justifying and determining the rightness or wrongness of the human actions. Where an action is said to be right or wrong in morality, ethics steps in, using its ethical principles (ethical theories) to prove or justify the wrongness or goodness of that action. Ethics and morality are very important concepts as both are concerned with providing the basic guidelines and framework to determine human existence in its real form. Without ethics and morality, human life will be meaningless, full of anarchy and life will be lived as

in the jungle, and so the fittest will emerge as the only survival. For any society to live in peace and harmony, certain rules of behaviour or conduct must be provided to regulate existence, and this is the responsibility of ethics and morality. The question of the need for ethics and morality in any given society is therefore out of the question.

3.3   Ethics and other Disciplines

Ethics as we have said is very central to human life and this is demonstrated by the fact that it is found in all disciplines of human endeavour; as we can talk of legal ethics, medical ethics, religious ethics, media ethics etc. For all disciplines, ethics provides the basic operational framework of guidelines for operation, which serves as a code of conduct. It is, therefore, necessary for us to examine the relationship between ethics and the other disciplines and see their point of collaboration.

In this section we shall relate ethics with other disciplines and hence establish the similarities and differences between ethics and those other disciplines. It will be seen that ethics is not an unrelated field to other disciplines; rather it serves as the bedrock and provides them with a motivation and direction that helps them in fulfilling their mandate. To suppose that ethics has no relationship with other fields is not only to be mistaken but also dangerous.

3.3.1   Ethics and Science

There are two dimensions to this section, which is summed up in the following questions; is ethics a science or how is ethics related to science? Concerning the first question, there are divergent views. There are those who think that ethics is not a science while there are those others who think that ethics is a science, but not in the sense of the pure and natural sciences. Basically there are two senses in which science could be understood, the wider sense and the narrow sense, and whether one considers ethics as a science depends on the sense in that the word science is understood. Ethics is basically a science in so far as it is seen as the systematic study of moral principles.

3.3.2 Ethics and Medicine

The relationship between ethics and medicine has also been debated, it is the feeling however that the debates have further served to prove that there is a connection between them. The concept medical ethics is here considered an off shoot of that relationship. Medical ethics is the ethical attempt at inculcating in medical practitioners the virtues of altruism,

158

honesty, dedication and single-minded devotion to duty, purity of life, reprobation of evil things, and knowledge of what is useful and necessary in life, a supreme urge to bring individual problems into a supreme moral law and a predominating thoughtfulness for the welfare of the patient. Ethics therefore provides a regulative framework for the practice of medicine that is in keeping with human goals. Considering the kind of cases medicine deals with, ethics plays a very vital role in guiding relations between the doctors and other medical workers with their clients.

3.3.3 Ethics and the Social Sciences

The social sciences – Psychology, Sociology and Anthropology are all concerned with human conduct. However the sense in which these are given to human conduct is different. For instance, the social sciences are chiefly concerned about the issuing of facts and laws for the smooth running of society and of the behaviour of human beings. They are descriptive and explanatory, that is, their function is to tell how men actually behave and why they behave that way. Ethics on the other hand is deeply concerned with and committed to the evaluation of human conduct. This is a significant difference worthy of note. In spite of the significant differentiation ethics and the social sciences have a connection. The judgments and particularity of ethics become more accurate and more precise when based on the factual knowledge information provided by the social sciences.

3.3.4 Ethics and Psychology

Fagothey (1989:6) says that psychology and ethics both deal with human behaviour, with the abilities people have and the acts they perform. Psychology studies how humans actually do behave, ethics how they ought to behave. Psychology explains human behaviour in relation to the mental and emotional factors which underlie it at the subconscious level. It provides the background to our desires which are classified into organic needs, instincts and innate tendencies. Echekwube (1999:19) says of psychology that it is of immense value in our ethical studies to be well informed about these psychological dispositions in order to better appreciate why the majority of human beings behave the way they do.

3.3.5 Ethics and Religion

There is a close relationship between religion and ethics so much so that it is often difficult to draw a line of demarcation between the two concepts. In the past there was a great debate as to what precedes the

other, i.e., whether religion was a product of morality or morality was a product of religion. Many have attempted to show the relationship between ethics and religion. Several theories have been advanced such as the separability and inseparability systems of thought. The separability theorists hold that ethics and religion are two different worlds as a result of the following; while morality is the direct object of ethics, God (including worship, prayers) is the direct object of religion; the concern of ethics is the present world while the concern of religion is the supernatural world.

Experience has shown that it is possible to be moral without being religious just as it is possible to be religious without being moral. This much the Bible attests to 'having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof …' (2Tim. 3:5), '…professing to know God, but in works denying Him, being abominable and disobedient….' (Titus 1:16).

The inseparability school of thought on the other hand holds that ethics and religion cannot be said to belong to different categories, rather both should be seen as being one and hence inseparable. These advance the following reasons:

Ethics and religion are both concerned human behaviour hence they are given to the prescription of standards of human behaviour.

Ethics and religion attribute responsibility to man for his actions on the basis of man being a rational or free moral being.

Religion is actually a perspective to morality. That is, it provides an incentive for obeying the moral law and recommends punishment for violators of the law.

Morality on its part is the judge of religion. Any religion that directly or indirectly encourages immoral acts (such as adultery, fornication, embezzlement of government fund, lying, etc) is a false religion. Morality thus becomes the yardstick for distinguishing true and false worshippers of believers, or true and false religions. (Uduigwomen, 2001:14, 15).

In spite of the various arguments advanced by some schools of thought, it is obvious that there is a mutual relationship between ethics and religion. While religion lifts man to his highest goals ethics helps man to pursue it to success.

3.3.6 Ethics and Law

Since we have already defined ethics above, we will only define law here so as to be able to capture the relationship between ethics and law. Law is a system of checks and balances, a frame within which and according to which citizens co-exist, compete and cooperate with each other in attaining their individual and collective aims and objectives. Law therefore provides the support, lays down the rules of guidance in organising and co-coordinating the activities that make up the web of social existence. That is why people see law as the guardian of human society, because where the law imposes a duty upon people, to restrain them from, say, taking the life of another person, it helps them to live in relative security, free from the fear of being murdered.

But generally, there are two schools of thought that have gained dominance regarding the relationship between ethics and law, these are the separability and inseparability schools. As the name implies, the separability school of thought posits that ethics and law are separate and have nothing in common. Their argument is based on the following reasons:

Law derives from external authority, morality evolves from within, and that is internally. Morality evolves from man's internal conviction and personal disposition but it is not so with the law.

Law is relative while morality is universal. For instance, different societies have different laws, hence, certain sanctions in certain societies do not apply in other societies it is not so with morality as moral principles have a universal application and cut across all nations of the world.

Morality can exist without the law

The law sometimes permits what morality prohibits. For instance, the law does not necessarily prohibit prostitution and concubine but morality considers them a grievous offence.

The inseparability school of thought on the other hand has advanced reasons to show that law and ethics have a lot in common and should be seen as such. For example, there are some actions which are unethical and therefore affect the society at large, like robbery, violence, murder etc., and such actions must be forbidden and the sanctions of law must be invoked to protect the citizens against them. Again, in other to achieve a desirable order and control in the society, the law lays down certain guidelines and prescriptions, and since all citizens have a moral

obligation to obey or comply with just laws, such prescriptions acquire ethical obligatoriness. Ethics or morality therefore supports the sanctions of the law. In fact there is a symbiotic relationship between ethics and law as they support each other. A sound ethical norm must be supported by law and as such all as citizens have the moral obligation to obey any just law as enacted by the state or society.

Law therefore deals with human conduct; it is the embodiment of ethical norms or principles. Law is made by the state for proper regulation of the conduct of the citizens and it sanctions against such actions like murder, theft, suicide, etc. In this way therefore law provides a direct guidance on human conduct.

3.4   The Subject Matter of Ethics

Every science has its object, or that which, by a curious turns in language we call its subject-matter. The object or subject-matter is that with which the science deals. Thus arithmetic deals with numbers; geometry deals with space and its configurations; biology with the phenomenon of life; logic with the relation of ideas; psychology with feelings; etc. The question naturally arises at this point; what is it the ethics deal with? What is the object that it contemplates? What is its subject-matter?

There are many questions here but the question is actually one, namely the subject-matter of ethics. So, we can thus summarise our questions into one, namely, what is the subject matter of ethics? It is this question that we shall endeavour to answer bearing in mind that there are some elements of creation that are not the subject of ethics including some in man who is the actual subject matter of ethics.

3.4.1 Ethics Deals with Man

Ethics does not deal with nature on the sub-human level, at least not directly and centrally; ethics is not one of the natural sciences, but rather a spiritual science, and belongs to that class of disciplines commonly called the humanities. It should be obvious that ethics is not directly concerned with such entities and quasi-entities as geometrical figures, stones, and plants. These things have no moral function and do not stand under moral obligation; they are not moral agents. They may indeed, and do, become objects of human solicitude, and in this way they do come to stand in a moral relation, but they are not themselves moral objects, since they lack intelligence and will and have no responsibility. Except by extreme pan-psychists, this is universally acknowledged.

3.4.2 The Case of Animals

A crucial question is posed here regarding the status of animals as being the subject matter of ethics. Henry Stob (1978:8) further opines that the case is not so clear in the case of animals. We speak of some dogs as being affectionate and obedient. Others we regard as ill-behaving or vicious. We praise and blame them, and sometimes punish them. Is this an acknowledgement that they are moral beings, possessing a sense of right and wrong?

The answer is obviously no, because, animals even though there is that in them which anticipates intelligence and will, are still wholly caught up in the matrix of nature. They are not made in the image of God, and they have no apprehension of God, and of his purposes and demands. They do act or behave, i.e. they do respond to their environment, but such responses, we have reason to believe, should be interpreted casually, in terms of motor impulses, natural drives, and antecedent events. Animal behaviour is either instinctively or conditioned; it is not deliberate and free. When we praise or blame our dog therefore, we are either approving or disapproving of nature's arrangements or of these arrangements as they are affected by the fall of man; or we are expressing satisfaction or dissatisfaction with our work of conditioning the animal. Anything beyond this is to be accounted for by our persistent habit of thinking anthropomorphically.

Animals, concludes Stob (1978:8) are not moral agents and do not enter into the purview of ethics, except of course, as objects of human concern. That we have obligations to animals; that we can be guilty of cruelty to them; and the like, is generally recognised, and certainly by the Christian from the biblical command; "Thou shall not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn." Inasmuch as the biblical command might be very strong, the ox itself has no moral duties and obligations, and is therefore, not a subject of ethics.

3.4.3 Angels and Demons

But is ethics concerned with these? Is the science of ethics obliged to work out a system of angelic and demonic morality? There is no doubt that angels and demons are part of the created cosmos, and thus so far forth legitimate objects of scientific inquiry. It is also evident that they are persons, with intelligence and will; that they stand under moral law; they can be praised or blamed; in short, that they are moral beings.

Yet they are not the proper objects of ethical discussion. This does not mean that we cannot say anything significant about them and do this in

an ethical context. We know, for example, that both angels and demons are obliged to love God with all their heart, and to be ministering spirits to man; that the angels delight in God's praise and service and are steadfast to it, while the demons hate and oppose God and attempt to frustrate his purposes by tempting and encouraging man to sin. All this and more we know about these beings, yet we do not include them in our ethical purview.

One reason we do not do so is that we know so little about them. God has not seen fit to tell us much about them, and we ourselves are not in a position to independently investigate them, since they inhibit a realm quite other than our own. But the more telling reason why we do not and cannot treat them as the subject of ethics is this. They are no longer in moral tension; they stand above and below the threshold of moral struggle. The angels, by their fidelity to God at a crucial juncture, are confirmed in virtue; they can no longer sin. The demons, because of the fateful act of rebellion, are confirmed in vice; they can no longer do any good and are irredeemable. In the situation of these entities, moral injunctions are in a significant sense irrelevant; what they are to achieve, they have achieved; each class of beings has reached a kind of perfection, the one a positive, the other a negative perfection. So far, they stand outside the moral arena, where the fight takes place.

We conclude therefore that, man, and only man alone is the proper object of ethical study. Man is the one existentially moral being. Made in the image of God, created perfect, but fallen from his high estate, he stands in tension between the actual and the ideal, involved to the end of his days in the moral struggle between good and evil. Subject to the moral law and with an ineradicable sense of obligation, he lives in the presence of God, the sway of whose imperious will he cannot escape. It is with this being that ethics is concerned, not the other species even though such may have some ethical values before man requiring man to treat them in a particular way without being the subject of ethical behaviour. But then how is man subject of ethics when he is both individualistic and collective.

3.4.4 The Individual Man

We have seen from the above that the subject matter of ethics is man, but this is too general a sense. Ethics is concerned with the individual man because; only the individual is truly personal and therefore an authentic moral agent.

No group or society is this. It is true that a society or communion, when infused and animated by a single spirit and organised into a single

institution, is more than a mere sum or aggregate of discrete entities, and thus has a certain personality and individuality of its own. It is also true that such an institution, as for example a state or a church, can in a sense be held accountable for its deeds and become the object of moral approval or disapproval, but only in a sense. Strictly speaking, societies and communities, far from being true persons and individuals, do not even exist. They are real enough, but they are abstract realities; they lack concreteness. Where, for example shall we look to find the state, the public, or the Christian Church, or the modern man, or similar entities? They are not discoverable for the simple reason that they do not exist, because they are universals.

For this reason, they cannot be morally judged, either now or at the end of days. Those whom the lord will call to account when he comes in judgment are not societies, or organisations, or generalities, but precisely individuals, for those alone existing and responsible entities, and these alone can stand before his throne. It is with individual men, that ethics has to do.

3.4.4.1 Voluntary Conduct of Individual Man

Man is a very complex being. He participates and functions through every aspect of the created world. He runs the gamut of the universe, being indeed, a micro-cosmos, exhibiting in himself all the modalities of being distinguishable in creation. Man functions in the arithmetical, geometrical, physical, biological, etc spheres of life. Among these spheres is the moral, and it is as man functions in this realm that he becomes the subject of the science called ethics.

In the sphere of morality, we are not also concerned with all the actions of man. This is because; human acts are to be distinguished from the acts of man, which are performed without intervention of intellect and free will. They comprise all spontaneous biological and sensual processes like, nutrition, breathing, sensual impressions; all acts performed by those who have not the use of reason, like people asleep, lunatics, drunken people (Peschke:228).

This therefore implies that ethics deal with behaviour in so far as it is uniquely human. So man is not morally responsible to all involuntary acts or conduct such as, heartbeat, breathing, etc. But he is morally responsible for all voluntary conduct which includes both acts of commission and omission. A man is responsible for the negative acts and attitudes of passivity, quietude, inertia, hesitancy, indecision, etc as he is for the more positive acts he commits. A decision not to act is as much a decision as is a decision to act (Stob, 1978:13). So, where there

is no involvement of the will, there morality is impossible and ethics is irrelevant.

4.0   CONCLUSION

Ethics, in spite of its wide coverage has been defined as a science of morality. Ethics is the product of human interaction in the society, so that as man engages in trying to unfold the puzzles in life, he is already engaged in the field of ethics. It will therefore be a mistake to think of ethics as a purely academic exercise having no intimate connection with our daily lives. There is a close relationship between ethics and morality. The basic difference is that, while morality is concerned with the right and wrong of human actions, ethics provides the basic principles for justifying and determining the rightness or wrongness of the human actions. Where an action is said to be right or wrong in morality, ethics steps in, using its ethical principles (ethical theories) to prove or justify the wrongness or goodness of that action. Ethics and morality are very important concepts for without ethics and morality, human life will be meaningless, full of anarchy and life will be lived as in the jungle, and so the fittest will merge as the only survival. It is this central character of ethics in the society that one can correctly describe it as the mother of all disciplines; because, ethics relates to, science, law, religion, psychology, philosophy, education, etc. Ethics deals not with all creatures but only with man in his individual constituent, and who is with all the ability to freely act and be accountable to the wrongness or rightfulness of his actions.

Because ethics determines the right and wrong of human actions it applies the necessary principles and theories in the determination of what is the proper conduct for man through critical analysis of the terms and concept we use in moral discourse.

5.0   SUMMARY

Ethics is a normative discipline that spans a wide jurisdiction cutting across all other disciplines. It is a parent discipline that sets standards for behaviour and demands conformity. It shows the shortfall in human behaviour and regulates human conduct in all ramifications. The need of ethics in everyday human endeavours is therefore not in doubt.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Having gone through the introduction to the study of ethics do you think there is need for the study of ethics?
What do you think are the basic underpinnings for the study of ethics?

6.0   TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1.   What is Ethics?
2.   Where does ethics originate?
3.   What is the difference between ethics and morality?
4.   Assess the relationship between ethics and science
5.   How is ethics related to law?
6.   What is the subject matter of ethics?

7.0   REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Dzurgba, A. (2000). *Principles of Ethics*. Ibadan: Agape Publishers.

Fagothey, A. (1989). *Fagothey's Right and Reason*. Merril Publishing.

Kunhiyop, S.W. (2008). *African Christian Ethics*. Kenya: Hippobooks, African Christian Texbooks.   . .

Mason, T.F . (1985). *Postgraduate Lecture Notes*. Jos: University of Jos.

Omoregbe, J. I. (1990). *Knowing Philosophy*. Lagos: Joja Educational Research and Publishers.

Peschke, K.H. (2001). *Christian Ethics II*. Moral Theology in the Light of Vatican II. India: Theological Publications.

Popkin, R. & Avrum, S. (1993). *Philosophy Made Simple*. New Delhi: Made Simple Books   .

Shields, N. 2004). *Christian Ethics*. Bukuru: African Christian Textbooks.

Stob, H. (1978). *Ethical Reflections*. William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.

UNIT 2   BRANCHES OF ETHICS

CONTENTS

1.0   INTRODUCTION

Ethics is a wide field concerned with the behaviour of man in society. Even though man is expected to behave in a particular way, he does otherwise. Ethics is therefore concerned with this deviation for the purposes of condemnation or justification (Anyacho, 1994:49). In order to achieve this, ethics has been divided into branches; each branch treats in-depth issues within its range. This unit is therefore concerned with the branches of ethics.

2.0   OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- distinguish between the branches of ethics
- categorise ethical issues.

3.0   MAIN CONTENT

3.1   Meta Ethics (Analytic Ethics)

Since the field of ethics is broad it has been fragmented into three forms otherwise known as approaches or branches of ethics. These are normative or prescriptive ethics, applied or descriptive ethics and meta-ethics.

Among the branches of ethics, Meta ethics is that branch of ethics which refers to the activity of clarifying our concepts and ideas otherwise known as conceptual analysis. Since we use words to express our concepts, the goal of conceptual analysis is to reach a clearer

understanding of the meaning of words. Meta ethics may therefore be said to be the study of the origin and meaning of ethical concepts. The import of this is that Meta ethics is not concerned with the substantive content of ethical theories or moral judgments; rather, it is concerned with questions about their nature such as whether moral judgments are objective or subjective.

Meta-ethics then is the study of ethical theory itself; it is ethics' own reflection on itself judging from the success or failure of self as moral theory. In general meta-ethics has two aims; (1) to analyse the meaning of the terms used in moral argumentation, and (2), to examine the rules of reasoning and methods of knowing by which moral benefits can be shown to be true or false.

The first aim is to explain precisely how much terms as, good and evil, right and wrong, duty, ought and moral obligation, function and moral language. We express our moral actions, judge our conduct, appraise our own and others' character and motives, reflect and deliberate about what we ought to or ought not to do, and evaluate what we and others have done. In all these activities, we are using moral language carrying on moral discourse. The task of met-ethics is to make a careful and through analysis of the meaning of the words and statements that make up moral discourse so that we can understand fully our moral concepts and how they function in moral discourse.

The second aim of meta-ethics is to make explicit the logical principles that are followed when we give moral reasons for or against doing something or when we try to justify our acceptance or rejection of a moral judgment or argument. What philosophy of science does for the natural sciences, meta-ethics does for ethics, that is, try to show the logical structure underlying the method whereby statements are verified and theories are supported by appeal to evidence. So, meta-ethics try to show how moral beliefs or convictions can be established as true or false and on what grounds a person can claim to know that they are true or false (Fagothey, 1989: 8).

3.2   Normative Ethics (Prescriptive ethics)

Normative ethics is that branch of or approach to ethics which seeks to set norms or standards for conduct. Norms in turn are prescription for actions. It is concerned with what one ought to do and the basis for one's action. That is, the concern of normative ethics is whether actions are to be judged right or wrong solely on the basis of their consequences. This aspect of normative ethics that judges the worth of an action by its consequences is called 'teleological' and the aspect of normative ethics

that judges the worth of an action "normatively", that is, whether it accords with a certain rule is called 'deontological'. Owing to this nature of normative ethics it is sometimes called prescriptive ethics.

Put differently, normative ethics properly called prescriptive ethics involves arriving at moral standards that regulate right and wrong conduct. It is the search for an ideal litmus test of proper behaviour of which the golden rule is an example. The golden rule requires us to do to others what we would want others to do to us.

The objective of normative ethics is to bring some level of order and consistency into human beliefs and relate them to a universal principle or principles from which they supposedly derive their validity as rules for the guidance of man's behaviour. It attempts to answer the question - what kinds of actions or things are right and wrong, and why? Halverson (1967:279) adds that normative ethics attempts to set forth a set of ethical beliefs as a coherent system deducible from one or more general principles.

3.3   Applied Ethics (Descriptive ethics)

Applied ethics is the approach to ethics or branch of ethics which studies the moral codes of different societies or cultures. It scrutinises moral views held by diverse cultures or societies. As the term implies, it is the application of ethical principles to specific contexts of various professions for the purpose of achieving the good life. In Uduigwomen's (2001) view, the aim is to establish the fact as to whether such ethical views are universally held. Owing to its relative nature, applied or descriptive ethics is also called comparative ethics.

But applied ethics is much more than that, because it deals with theoretical issues in ethics and the practical dilemmas which people face in their daily lives that are intimately intertwined. Practical problems give rise to theoretical questions, and theoretical solutions must be tested against the all too-human issues which ordinary people face every day. The philosopher as we have seen attempts to formulate systematic and coherent sets of principles which will not only deepen one's understanding of the issues at stake but will allow for the justification or rationale of certain sorts of actions. Practical problems of a moral kind arise in nearly all of the domains of human life. Should a society prohibit divorce? Should Abortion or Euthanasia be legalised? Should physicians be given the right to decide when a critically ill patient should no longer receive life support systems?

The fact is that society has often been split, with some persons vigorously supporting positive answers to the above questions, and with some supporting negative answers. Let us look at one example of applied ethics.

One example of applied ethics is the one concerning abortion of unwanted pregnancies. Those who favour keeping the right to have an abortion legal emphasise that the woman carrying the pregnancy has the right to chose what to do with her own baby, and that is a private, personal decision in which the state have no interest. Opposed to this is the view that the unborn child has the right to live, and the state should reserve a duty to protect the unborn child. Central in arguments pro and con is the question of whether the fetus is a living person entitled to be treated just as any other person. For decades scientists and medical and theologians have argued about, when life begins and when the fetus is a viable person. Even if the factual questions could be answered to everybody's satisfaction, there would still remain the basic ethical issues concerning the rights of the woman carrying the fetus. Many who are opposed to legalised abortion are willing to grant that, in some circumstances, abortion may be justified. Such circumstances may involve saving the life of the mother, preventing the birth of a severely deformed child, and preventing the birth of a child who resulted from the rape of the mother. These considerations of the health of the mother or child, or the circumstances causing the pregnancy, can lead to considerations of the mental health of the potential mother, considerations of the economic and social viability of an offspring, and many other matters. The ethicist would first have to determine when life begins, and when an unborn child is a person. If preserving life is taken as the principal value, then one has to consider the competing life claims of the mother and the potential child. If the quality of the life being preserved is taken into consideration, then all sorts of medical, psychological, economic and social factors have to be evaluated, and the court will give the legal position of the constitution (Popkin: 63). Applied ethics therefore deal with complex ethical problems of universal nature.

4.0   CONCLUSION

Ethics takes as its starting point the fact that people make judgments about the rightness and wrongness of human conduct. Are there any presuppositions ethicists must make to be able to work out an explanation of this fact? If there are what are they? Would you also make the same presuppositions? Why? These kind of questions are the kind that ethics tries to provide answers to but because, these questions are many and diverse, various areas of ethics deal with those specific

areas, such that, normative ethics which seeks to set norms or standards for conduct, meta-ethics analysis and evaluates the actions and language we use in moral discourse, whereas applied ethics deals with ethical issues in their concrete context within a given society, such as abortion, euthanasia, cloning, organ transplant, human experimentation etc.

5.0   SUMMARY

It is for the purposes of proper evaluation and objective consideration of ethical issues that the field of ethics has been fragmented into various branches, basically, meta-ethics, normative and applied ethics. Each branch of ethics takes an in-depth look at issues with a view to proffering a solution that will be enduring in the face of emerging ethical issues and human predicament. Meta-ethics concerns with the analysis of the ethical concepts we use to determine their content and meaning; normative ethics attempts through ethical theories to set norms and standards for conduct; applied ethics deals with concrete but complex ethical problems of general nature in particular situations and circumstances, such as abortion, homosexuality, euthanasia, etc.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

i.   Justify the classification ethics
ii.   Give your own classification of ethics

6.0   TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1.   Identify the various branches of ethics
2.   What do you understand by meta-ethics?
3.   Discuss any moral issue of applied ethics

7.0   REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Dzurgba, A. (2000). *Principles of Ethics*. Ibadan: Agape Publications.

Dzurgba, A. (2003). Nigerian Politics and Moral Behaviour. Ibadan. John Archers Publishers Limited.

Fagothey, A. (1989). *Fagothey's Right and Reason*. London: Merrill Publishing Company.

Peschke, K.H. (2001). *Christian Ethics II. Moral Theology in the light of Vatican II*. India: Theological Publications.

Popkin, R. & Avrum, S. (1993). *Philosophy*. New Delhi: Made Simple
        Books.

Uduigwomen, A. F. (2001).*Introducing Ethics: Trends, Problems and
        Perspectives*. Nigeria: Pyramid.

UNIT 3   PRINCIPLES OF ETHICS

CONTENTS

1.0   INTRODUCTION

A principle is a general truth used as a basis of reasoning or action. In other words, when I say that such and such is the case, what general truth do I use to determine that such and such is the case? What principle do I use to establish my case? All our actions or reasoning is based on some kind of principle, otherwise, such actions or reasoning will be baseless and meaningless. There are various principles relating to various disciplines, such as economic principles, political principles, legal principles, religious principles and also ethical principles. In all these cases the principles provide the basic foundations upon which our reasoning or actions are based and justified. This unit therefore deals with the principles of ethics

2.0   OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- explain what are principles
- discuss the basic ethical principle (s)
- differentiate between good and right
- differentiate between pleasure and happiness
- differentiate between obligation and duty
- discuss human rights in the society.

3.0   MAIN CONTENT

Ethical principles do the same thing in the area of ethics thus providing the general frame of truth upon which all ethical actions are based and analysed. Principles in general guide our actions and determine those that are good from those that are bad; those that are right from those that are wrong. When we say that someone is acting in principle, we mean that the person judges a particular action to be right even if the consequences of that act may be less in value to him alongside the other available options before him. Acting in principle is to act from a detached position, not influenced by personal feelings and attitude (Dzurgba, 16). People who act on principle are usually seen as objective people, and are actually respected by the societies in which they live and this explains the importance of principles in the society. In fact it will not be out of place for anybody to infer that without principles there can be no meaningful society.

3.1   Good and Bad

Good and bad are the basic fundamental principles in ethics which provides the gate way into ethical issues. The basic ethical principle is that the good must be done and the bad avoided, that is why by instincts alone human beings refrain from doing things that are bad, but are motivated to doing the good things of life. Good and bad reflects quality and value and so when we say that an action is good or bad, we have passed judgment on its quality in terms of value. Good and bad are inherently interwoven in human language, so if we say that an action, policy, event is good, we accept that it has value on its own account and that value is positive and beneficial to mankind (Dzurgba, 15).

3.2   Right and Wrong

Closely related to good and bad in ethical language is the concept of right and wrong to the extent that sometimes people think that a good action is right action whereas a bad action is a wrong action. The terms right and wrong assume that an action is compared with some standard of morality outside of the action itself. The standard could be a matter of social, traditional, custom, national or religious law. The fact remains that the terms are closed related but are different in content, in the sense that a good action might be wrong, while a bad action could be good. For example, while an action can be right in the sense that it conforms to a tradition or custom or law, if the motives that produce it are selfish or unworthy, it is not good action. In the NT the Pharisees gave alms to the poor. Jesus called what they did 'acts of righteousness (Mt 6:1). He was saying that they were doing what was right, but their actions were bad

because their motives were not to help the poor but to call public attention to themselves.

3.3   Making Choice

In all our daily living, people make choices out of the available options before them. This is a basic ethical principle where everyone is free to choose from the various opportunities before him. We make choices on the scale of varied options on the grounds of good and bad, right and wrong, valid and invalid, relevant and irrelevant, helpful and unhelpful, etc.   In making choices, we weigh the degree in value of the items before us and therefore make a comparative moral judgment. Generally speaking everyone one is expected to be free to make choices of the things in life out of the permissible and non-permissible.

3.4   Obligation/Duty

An obligation is a moral duty which is enforced by a moral conscience and law. An obligation or moral duty is governed by a principle of compulsion. When we claim that an action is our duty, we mean to say that such act is our compulsory obligation; that we must carry out that act. Official assignments and duties are obligations that bind various people in various areas on endeavour. An assigned official duty comes with it the principle of compulsion and consequently it becomes a moral obligation binding on the employee to his or her official duties. These duties do not depend on ones motives, beliefs, efforts, attitudes etc, and so it is on the principle of moral obligations that soldiers sacrifice themselves and materials to secure peace, security and freedom for the citizens of their country (Dzurgba, 20). All citizens of a country have upon them as a moral obligation to subject themselves to the economic, social, political and to a great extent the religious laws of the country. In fact, obedience to the law is both a civic and moral responsibility of all. Just laws bind in conscience by reason of their intrinsic necessity for the common good, because human law is rooted in the very nature of men and their final end (Peschke: 146). An obligation therefore is a due of the individual in order to meet some basic moral necessity. It could be duty in relation to a moral standard imposed by custom or religion or in relation to the inner promptings of what is known as conscience or to both (Shields:11). Man's conscience is spontaneously aware of the supreme jural principles, which include, 'that the lawful authority must be obeyed'.

176

3.5   Human Rights

Human rights are those right endowed on man by virtue of the fact that he is man. A decisive step in the promotion of human rights was the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations (UN) of 1948. The principle of human rights tradition is very close to natural law thought, since the basic rights are derived from the fact that in contradistinction to all other beings, human nature is endowed by reason and free will and therefore of a common, equal dignity in all men (Peschke: 238). This declaration has basically two groups of rights: first, individual rights, which essentially entitle a person not to be prevented from retaining or attaining certain fundamental goods, such as life, property, movement, speech, freedom of conscience, association etc. The second social rights which are substantially rights to be helped, such as work, free choice of employment, equal pay, rest and holidays etc.

These rights are granted to people across cultural lines and as a matter of moral principle. They are called universal because they cut across cultural and national boundaries and apply equally to all people. They are also objective.

One of the greatest problems of man today is the violation of human rights of the people, whether they are religious, economic, social and political rights. Human life is today all over the world not secured as people are daily killed sometimes even by government, and there are those whose freedom of worship, movement, expression and association, etc have been suppressed. In Nigeria these human rights violations are wide spread to such an extent that people are disfranchised during elections to elect people who will lead them politically.

3.6   Happiness and Pleasure

As an ethical principle everybody seeks happiness in his life. By instincts, human beings are more inclined towards things that produce happiness or pleasure rather than those which produce pain and suffering. Early philosophers were preoccupied with trying to understand what the good life is for man, and they came to agree that what people of all endeavour considered as good life was characteristic of happiness. People all always engage in what produces happiness or pleasure and for philosophers like Epicurus, believe that people always pursue pleasure and only pleasure is good. All human activities are directed towards the acquisition of pleasure and avoiding of pain. That people not only in fact seek pleasure, but further that they ought to do so since only pleasure alone is good.

But again, the problem is, what do we understand by the word happiness or pleasure? In answer to happiness Aristotle describes it as an activity of the soul in accord with perfect virtue (Popkin: 9). By this definition, Aristotle means that, happiness is something which accompanies certain activities in life instead of being the goal of these activities. It is a way of engaging in the various activities of life such as, eating, dancing, intellectual pursuit, friendship, etc, without any depression or bored. If anybody who engages in these activities is not bored, depressed of downcast, then he is a happy person.

Although being happy or having pleasure in one's life might be subjective, it is important to understand that, as a moral standard everyone seeks both happiness and pleasure, because they are the sole good. Nobody wants pain and suffering and that is why causing one to be sad or unhappy is against the laws of morality. One important point in Epicurus philosophy is the division of pleasure into those that accompanied by pain and those that do not, and only considers those that are not accompanied by pain only as good.

4.0   CONCLUSION

Principles are basic in human actions because through them we try to justify our actions and they represent the truth. We must always act out of certain principles for the validity of our actions otherwise such actions will be baseless and without any foundations of reason. That is why most of the times in ordinary life, when we say that some is acting out of principle or that a person is highly principled, we mean that he always stand for the truth. Such people are usually respected in the society in which they live and sometimes they are not loved by the people around them. But in general, in the area of ethics, principles are basic requirements as guide to the attainment of human goals in life and that is why we must always act out of one principle or the other for the justification of our actions.

5.0   SUMMARY

Principles are a basic human reality that determine the validity of our actions and also judges them to be good or bad, right or wrong. Human beings are involved in daily activities of life where they are required to make choices and take decisions and these must be guided by certain principles. For example, an obligation or moral duty is governed by the principle of compulsion, which impresses on us to perform such a moral duty that is presented as an obligation. When we fail to respond to the demand, we sin and when we obey, we are judged right. One requirement in human life is human rights which are by nature conferred

178

on every human being by virtue of the fact that the person is a human being. Next to the basic principle of ethics (do good and avoid evil), is the principle of freedom where as human beings we must have the freedom to behave in any way we consider good, and this is the basis for the principle of responsibility and liability in human actions.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

What is the place of principles in the study of ethics?

6.0   TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1.   What is the basic principle of ethics?
2.   Differentiate between good and right
3.   Differentiate between obligation and duty
4.   What is the relationship between happiness and pleasure?
5.   How are human rights related to ethics?

7.0   REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Dzurgba, A. (2000). *Principles of Ethics*. Ibadan, Agape Publications.

Fagothey, A. (1989). *Fagothey's Right and Reason*. London: Merrill Publishing Company.

Kunhiyop, S.W. (2008). *African Christian Ethics*. Kenya: Hippobooks, African Christian Texbooks.

Peschke, K.H. (2001).*Christian Ethics II. Moral Theology in the Light of Vatican II*. India: Theological Publications.

Popkin, R. & Avrum, S. (1993). *Philosophy*. New Delhi: Made Simple Books.

Shields, N. (2004). *Christian Ethics*. Nigeria: African Christian Textbooks.

Stob, H. (1978). *Ethical Reflections*. William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.

UNIT 4 ETHICAL THEORIES

CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

There are many ways of dealing with the problems of life which confronts man as he engages himself in his daily activities; thus there are various ways in which he can deal with adversity. They can succumb to it, fight, or escape from it and so on. For each of these types of behaviour there is a corresponding ethical theory which justifies it. This unit is therefore concerned with the identification and analysis of selected ethical theories which attempt to justify our ethical actions.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- define ethical theory
- classify theories into classical and modern theories
- explain the adequacies and inadequacies of ethical theories
- apply the theories to concrete ethical issues
- analyse the efforts of the theories in addressing ethical problems.

3.0   MAIN CONTENT

3.1   What is Ethical Theory?

From units 1-3, we have been discussing what ethics is and its relevance to the society as well as its relationship with other disciplines. We have also shown how ethics deals with very complex situations and issues that do not have straightforward solutions. Theories of ethics therefore attempts to find out the various ways in which ethical problems can be resolved.

Basically an ethical theory is the process by which we organise complex and competing information…… An ethical theory therefore attempts to address the questions of what is the good life for man and how he ought to live.

Because ethics deals with numerous problems of life, there are many ethical theories each dealing with a particular issue or number of issues? In attempting to discuss these theories, we shall divide them into classical and modern ethical theories. A few shall be selected for discussion as well.

3.2   Classical Theories

A classical theory is that which does one of two things, or both; if it attempts to answer the question: what is the good life for people? Or how should people act?

3.2.1 Platonism

One of the first classical theories we shall discus is Platonism which takes its name from the famous philosopher called Plato. According to this theory, evil is due to lack of knowledge. If people can discover what is right, Plato argues, they will not act wickedly. But the problem is how do we discover the right things which Plato calls 'the good when people differ greatly in their ideas and opinions about the good life'. Plato's answer to this question is that, finding what constitutes the good life is an intellectual activity very similar to the discovery of mathematical truths. Just as mathematical truths cannot be discovered by untrained people, so the good life cannot be discovered by ordinary people. In order to discover what the good life is, people must first acquire certain kinds of knowledge. Such knowledge can be arrived at only if they are carefully schooled in various disciplines such as, mathematics, philosophy and so on. That is why in his suggested programme for training people to lead good lives; Plato believed that they must be

instructed in two different ways. They must develop on one hand, virtuous habits of behaviour, and on the other hand, they must develop their mental powers through the study of such disciplines like mathematics and philosophy (Popkin *et al.*,: 5).

The main thrust of Platonism is that there is fundamentally one and only one good life for all men to lead. This is because, goodness is something, which is not dependent upon men's inclinations, desires, wishes, or upon their opinions. Goodness exists independently of men and remains to be discovered if men can be properly trained.

The weakness of this theory first and foremost lies in the mistaken position that, if a man knows what the good life is he will never act wickedly. But we know that people who steal knows that stealing is not good. They have the knowledge of the evilness of stealing and that is why they try to avoid being caught, yet they continue to steal. In this case Plato will say that such a person is not aware that stealing is bad or evil. This is also true of people who commit various crimes and sins, for the theory believes that such people are only ignorant of the criminality or sinfulness of their actions. Yet we all know that those who engage in those acts usually feel insecure and always attempt to avoid detection and arrest which is an empirical fact that they know full well the implications of their acts.

Another weakness of this theory also lies in its absolutism. It assumes that there is one and only one right course of action for all men in every given circumstance. Plato's position of objectivity of moral principles is opposed to all philosophies, which contend that morality is merely a matter of opinion or preference. Moral actions are guided by such factors like circumstance, motive, agent, effect, etc, which must all be considered in judging the morality of any human action.

Another major objection to Platonism is that, moral conundrums do not seem to be in the final analysis analogous to scientific questions. This is so because, while it is possible that, when all the facts in a scientific issue have been gathered, we can in principle decide the issue but this is not true in ethics. All the facts in a moral problem may be presented before a person but the decision to be taken would still be a difficult one. For example, we may be informed that, a pregnant woman is infected by cancer on the uterus and the continuation of the pregnancy would lead to the death of either the child or the mother or both. To take a decision in this case is difficult unlike when we know that striking a matchstick near an inflammable petroleum product would be dangerous. To decide in the second case, which is a scientific one is simple, while in the first case, which is a moral one, is difficult. For anyone to look at moral problems

and their solutions from the light of scientific problems, their solutions will be mistaken. This is what Platonism has done.

3.2.2 Aristotle's Theory of "The Mean"

Aristotle's attempt at addressing the issue of the good life for man needs some explanations before the theory can be well understood. But in summary, Aristotle says, the good life for man is a life of happiness, and that people should always behave in order to achieve happiness. Secondly, how can we behave so as to achieve happiness? He says happiness is an activity, which accompanies certain activities, and once someone engages in these activities without experiencing any pain, frustration, or depression and so on, then the person is happy.

He gave the analogy that happiness is like being well fed. How much food a person requires to be well fed depends to some extent on every individual's size and the kind of job he does. Besides, it is only after eating various portions of food that we can determine the exact quantity that we can consume and be satisfied. If we eat a particular quantity and remain unsatisfied, we should eat more, but after eating a particular portion and we feel overfed, we should eat less. The exact portion can be determined after several meals. The correct amount is a "mean" between eating too much and eating too little.

With this kind of reasoning, Aristotle was able to point out that the proper way for man to behave in the moral sphere is in accordance to the mean. For example, in order to be happy, he must be courageous, liberal, proud, witty, modest, and so on. But all of these virtues as Aristotle designates them are virtues of moderation: courage is the mean between cowardice and rashness; liberality between prodigality and frugality; pride between vanity and humility and so forth. That, in order for men to achieve happiness, men must act moderately; they must act so as to be striving for the mean between two extremes. The important consequences of this doctrine on ethics are that, there are various correct ways of living for different people. What is good for one person may not be good for another person and this is very practical. Again, one cannot tell prior to the actual experimentation, by use of reason alone, which is the correct way of living for him. From this presentation we can easily see that Platonism and Aristotelianism are directly opposed to one another. Plato, it will be remembered, contended that 'goodness' is an absolute characteristic. Either a man is good or he is not. There is one and the only one proper way for him to behave in a given set of circumstances. But this is precisely what Aristotle is disputing: there are many good lives as many as there are differences in men perhaps.

However, just as we have problems with Plato, there are some few problems that we have with Aristotle, even though at first glance the theory appears to be quite plausible. For example, while he advises for moderation in moral issues there seems to be other moral situations where the advice will not be applicable. For example, there is no middle course between keeping a promise and not keeping one, between telling the truth and not telling the truth. In all these cases, one is keeping a promise or may not; either telling the truth or telling a lie.

Another problem with this theory is that, there are instances where only immoderate behaviour is required. For example, a man who is temperamentally passionate and romantic may find that, that "moderate" behaviour does not suit him. If he is to act moderately, he will be acting against his will and so he cannot achieve the desired happiness that he is expected to have in order to be happy.

3.2.3 Hedonism

The main proponent of this philosophy is Epicurus. That is why sometimes it is also known as Epicureanism. His main theory states that, the good life for man is the life of pleasure, because he considers pleasure as the sole good. The ethical philosophy of Epicurus consists mainly of advice for living moderately and pleasurably. He considered pleasure to be the sole good, but he also warns that if a person pursues pleasure too arduously, pain will follow. If a man, for example, drinks too much he will suffer from headaches and stomach pains the next day. The proper way to proceed in life is to live pleasantly without suffering from any form of the undesirable effects of such living. In fact, Epicurus philosophy may be regarded as containing instructions, which are designed not only to enable one acquire pleasure but also to avoid pain.

There are two versions of the theory, Psychological Hedonism and Ethical Hedonism. Psychological Hedonism is a doctrine that men in fact do pursue pleasure, and only pleasure, in their lives, while Ethical Hedonism is the view that men not only seek pleasure, but that they ought to do so since pleasure alone is good.

One of the main arguments against hedonism is that it is difficult to distinguish between pleasures that are accompanied with pain and those that are not. This is so because, even friendship, which Epicurus considers as painless pleasure, in the long run may turn out to be painful pleasure, like when a person loses such a dear friend to death. He will definitely show some sadness and a deep sense of loss.

3.2.4 Cynicism

To fully understand the philosophy of Cynicism, we shall give a brief background that produced the philosophy. There are various ways in which men can deal with adversity. They can succumb to it, fight it, escape from it and so on. For each of these types of behaviour there is a corresponding ethical theory which justifies it. Quietism, for example, is an oriental ethical philosophy, which advises men to accept and succumb to adversity. Hedonism can be seen as a way of escaping from adversity and utilitarianism as a way of combating it. All ethical theories arise because men are dissatisfied either with their personal lives or with the world in which they live. Philosophers offer these theories as advice for altering the situation as they see it. This is particularly of Cynicism. It can be regarded as prescribing behaviour for those whose lives became intolerable owing to the collapse of the world around them, or for reasons of personal despair. With the collapse of the renowned social institutions like the Alexandria Empire with all the magnificent edifices within it, men are likely to consider how they can achieve personal salvation. The question therefore is that, if all that the people thought were the ultimate in life have become worthless, then, what is the purpose in life? Cynicism is one moral theory that attempted to provide answers to the problems. It holds that all the fruits of civilisation are worthless, government, private property, marriage, religion, luxury, and all artificial pleasures of the sense. If salvation is to be found it can be found in the rejection of the society and a return to simple life to a life of ascetic living.

The cynics believed that the world is not just worthless, but it is fundamentally evil; and in order to live a proper life, a man must withdraw from participating in it. But at the same time, even if a man lives a private life, such a life may be devoted to acquiring the usual goods of the world like money, house, nice clothes and so on. This theory contends that if we trust our happiness to the possession of them, we may find ourselves again betrayed. Consequently all external interest, whether they be private or public must be dispensed with.

The merit of this theory lies in the fact that it has a way of moderating the craze that one may have for worldly things. It is true that some of these worldly things constitute the basic needs of the human person but where one becomes enslaved to them, it becomes a problem according to Cynics who advice that it should not be total rejection of them. The dynamics of the society is live and let live. I live because you live, and you live because I live. That is the social order but Cynicism is anti-social. It is selfish in character in the sense that an individual can gain

his own personal salvation and have no business with the other person, but we know that nobody is an Island.

The classical theories in general address one problem which is how we can live a good life. There are, however, different opinions regarding what is the good life. Some people think that the good life is a life of happiness; others say it is a life of pleasure, and yet others think it is a life of asceticism. As we have shown, all these opinions otherwise known as theories run short of one thing and the other but all together they contribute in one way and another in our understanding of moral issues. Let us now turn to the modern theories.

3.3   Modern Theories

The attention of the modern theories is slightly different from the classical theories and most of the classical theories have been taken over by the modern theories. But like the classical theories, the modern theories too, have become subject of study because, most of them appeared quite plausible at the first glance but under examination they have been found to be inadequate. They however address one problem, the justification of moral actions, or the rightness or wrongness of moral actions. Some of these theories include moral positivism, ethical hedonism, utilitarianism and the categorical imperative.

3.3.1 Moral Positivism

The theory of Moral Positivism is probably the most widely held among philosophers. According to the theory, all morality rests on positive law, either enacted or customary. It is the contention of the theory that all morality is determined by commands, rules, laws, conventions, customs; that morality is the result of someone's will commanding or forbidding certain kinds of acts. Morality therefore, is not based on something intrinsic in the act itself or in the nature of man, but in the imposition of a will, something quite distinct and extrinsic to the human act in question. The starting point for this theory is that, there is much contradiction and doubt about moral values themselves so, the law introduces uniformity, objectivity and simplicity. Again, that people are normally aware of moral obligations only when law imposes such moral obligations, while commands and threats are very powerful ways of engendering consciousness and compliance.

The problem with this theory is that it relies much on man-made laws and it forgets the fact of human fallibility. It has also emphasised on the social aim of the law and loses sight of the moral obligation, which is independent of the law. The theory has also relied on such concepts like

customs, convention and rules which are quite complex whereby in a more elaborate discussion they would require some detailed analysis. This could be problematic.

3.3.2 Ethical Hedonism

Another theory is Ethical Hedonism. There are different versions of the theory. According to all forms of the theory, the goal of a person's actions should be his own self-interests: the promotion of whatever is to his own long-term advantage should be the end at which he aims. One form, which this way of thinking may take, is to judge the goodness of an act by its pleasant consequences, either for one self or for others. Modern Hedonists however prefer to use the word happiness instead of pleasure. The greatest protagonist of ethical hedonism in modern times was Jeremy Bentham. He maintained that, two masters govern mankind, pain and pleasure and the duo determine our actions. That happiness rather than pain is the only right and universally desirable end of human action. It follows therefore that, the morality of an act, its goodness or wickedness, is to be judged by its consequences. An act is good or evil depending on its usefulness for producing pleasure or pain. Pleasurable consequences are good, painful consequences are bad.

According to this theory therefore, all human action is motivated by happiness and pain alone; that moral actions whether good or evil, are not determined in themselves, but by their consequences for pleasure and evil respectively. Those acts, which increase pleasure and diminish pain, are morally good while those, which increase pain and diminish pleasure, are morally evil.

This theory like others seems quite plausible but as others too, it is deficient. First and foremost the theory is subjective. Each individual determines pain and pleasure as he sees it in the performance of certain actions, and as long as what he engages in produces pleasure for him or any other people, we would consider his action as right. If we adopt this theory then we could say that the person who derives pleasure in killing someone and is without pain does what is right. Certainly, this way of thinking is quite mistaken for all human actions.

Perhaps, it is not also true to say that all human actions are motivated by pleasure and pain alone. Indeed, if in fact this were the case there would be no place for the theory of ethical hedonism because then human beings would in any case do what is most pleasurable and avoid the painful without the moral injunction. This theory was very influential especially as it appealed to practical living. It is a theory that moved or

advised people to live lives full of enjoyment temporarily here on earth not minding if there is any life to be lived in the world beyond.

3.3.3 Utilitarianism

- The next theory the researcher intends to consider here is Utilitarianism. The most famous exponents of this theory are Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. This theory proposes that the sole ultimate standard of right and wrong is the principle of utility or beneficence, which says that the moral end to be sought in all that we do is the greatest possible balance of good over evil or the least possible balance of evil over good. This implies that whatever the good and the bad are, they are capable of being measured and balanced against each other in some way. According to the theory, we only know what is good and what is evil by evaluating the consequences of our actions in measuring the balance of good over evil, or the well being over happiness. Utilitarianism is an attempt to lay down an objective principle for determining when a given action is right or wrong. The essence of the theory is that it lays stress upon the effects that an action has. If an action produces an excess of beneficial effects over harmful ones, then it is right; otherwise it is not. The fundamental point of this theory is that, the consequences of a given action determine its rightness or wrongness, not the motive from which it is done. Neither is any given action right or wrong in itself. The main result of the theory is to separate the rightness or wrongness of an action from the goodness or badness of the agent who performs the action.

There are two kinds of the theory. Act utilitarianism and rule utilitarianism. Act utilitarianism states that in general or at least where it is practicable one is to tell what is right or obligatory by appealing directly to the principle or, in other words, by trying to see which of the actions of his will, or is likely to, produce the greatest balance of good over evil in the universe. One may ask "what effect will my doing of this in this situation have on the general balance of good over evil? Not what effect will everyone's doing this kind of act in this kind of situation have on the general balance of good over evil? Rule-Utilitarianism on the other hand posits that when we are proposing to do something, we should ask not what will happen if I do that in such case but what will happen if everyone were to do that in such cases.11

In general, and with regards to utilitarianism, there are both theoretical and practical difficulties about how to determine the balance of good over evil in an action. For example, it is supposed by this theory that in

188

computing the amount of good over evil an action creates, every person count equally for one unit of goodness. Thus we add up the number of people who are made good by the act add up the number of those who are made evil, and presumably we can then determine whether the act produces an excess of good over evil.

Again, since it is the effect of an action that determines its goodness or badness, it then means that we will have to wait for so long and sometimes indefinitely to see the effect of an action so as to be able to judge its goodness or badness. Besides, in ethics, it is rationality and not number that determines what is right or wrong.

3.3.5 The Categorical Imperative

This theory is one of the most universally accepted theories that are found in all societies in one form and another. It is sometimes referred to as the "Golden Rule" and can be expressed and also interpreted in many different ways.

The theory of the Categorical Imperative is most associated with Emmanuel Kant. Kant himself has expressed it in different ways. In one of its forms Kant says, "Act only on that maxim whereby you can act at the same time that it should become a universal law." Kant means by this statement that a man should always act as if every action were to become a universal law. Thus no one should steal, because if we were to steal and if everyone were to steal then moral relations based upon the possession of private property would become impossible. Similarly, with regard to telling lies. One should never tell lies, because, if lying were to become a universal law, all human relations based upon trust and the keeping of promise would become impossible. In short, the view is that all acts should be entered into as if they were to become general laws.

In another formulation of the categorical imperative he says, 'So act as to treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of any other, in every case as an end withal, never as a means only.' This formulation is similar to the biblical golden rule of 'Do unto others, as you would have them done unto you. The most prominent interpretation of this version of the theory is that, it is an injunction for us to treat other people with respect because they are rational, or human beings as us. The theory thus recognises the dignity of the human person and enjoins us all to respect it.

Interestingly, this theory has a very long tradition in the history of ethics. It has had important consequences on democracy. It supports the

democratic view that all men are created equal and therefore no person should be discriminated against before the law.

Although, this theory sounds quite convincing, it has some difficulties. First and foremost, it does not handle cases where we have a conflict of duties. Suppose I promise to keep a secret, and then someone else asks me about it. I cannot tell the truth and still keep my promise. Yet, according to the theory, I should do both. In such a situation, I cannot, logically, universalise my behaviour; if I tell the truth, I will break my promise to keep the secret. If I keep my promise, I will not tell the truth.

4.0   CONCLUSION

There are many ways of dealing with adversities, and similarly there are many ethical theories each concerned with particular ethical issues or problems. Beginning with Platonism, we have examined some of the classical and ethical theories, bringing out the merits and the demerits of each of the theories. From our examination of the moral theories so far, it is clear that there is none of them that is adequate in addressing any of the ethical problems it attempt to solve. For example, Platonism believes that evil is due to lack of knowledge, but we were able to show that there are situations where people have full knowledge of the action they are about to perform, including its evil effects, yet they go ahead to perform the act. Aristotle's doctrine of the mean is also proven to be defective, because, not in all situations that one is to moderate between two extremes. But at the same time, each of them has made some remarkable contributions in our understanding of the nature of ethical problems. For example, we know that people are required to have full knowledge of ethical issues to be able to take moral decisions, and that sometimes it is always necessary to adopt a life of moderation, because, too much of everything they say is bad. So, the ethical theories are still very relevant for us in taking moral decisions in life, notwithstanding some of their shortcomings.

5.0   SUMMARY

Ethical issues are usually very complex and so sophisticated that there are no simple and straightforward answers to them that is why philosophers of ethics have introduced these theories where these complex ethical issues are organised and systematical interpreted to get solutions to the problems.

There are two types of theories, classical theories and modern theories. Classical theories attempt to address the ethical questions of what is the good life for people, and how they ought to behave in the society.

Classical theories are more or less bent on advising people on how to live the good life, the life of pleasure and happiness. Modern theories on the other hand apply philosophical analysis of the concepts, terms and the general language used in the ethical theories. At the beginning most of these theories were considered quite plausible in addressing the issues raised in ethics, but under critical analysis it became obvious that all the theories are deficient in one way and the other. Therefore, it is important to note that there is no one theory that is adequate in addressing the various ethical issues that arises in ethics, not even the categorical imperative of Emmanuel Kant. But it must be accepted that the ethical theories give us much insight into understanding the depth of ethical problems and also help us in solving some of these problems through critical analysis.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

How are ethical theories related to ethical issues?

6.0   TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1.   What is an ethical theory?
2.   Distinguish between classical theories and modern theories.
3.   What are the merits and demerits of Platonism?
4.   How is utilitarianism related to democracy?
5.   Why is the "categorical imperative of Kant" called the golden rule?
6.   What are the merits and demerits of Aristotle's "doctrine of the mean?"
7.   Analyse the theory of moral positivism.
8.   What do you understand by "ethical hedonism?"

7.0   REFERENCES/ FURTHER READING

Fagothey, A. (1989). *Fagothey's Right and Reason*. London: Merrill Publishing Company

Peschke, K.H. (2001). *Christian Ethics II. Moral Theology in the Light of Vatican II*. India: Theological Publications.

Popkin, R. & Avrum, S. (1993). *Philosophy*. New Delhi: Made Simple Books.

Stob, H. (1978). *Ethical Reflections*; Essays on Moral Themes. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

UNIT 5   ETHICS AND SOCIETY

CONTENTS

1.0   INTRODUCTION

The problem of the relationship between ethics and society can simply be described as complex, because it is not clear whether ethics originates from the society, in which case we try to locate in historical times when there was an ethic-free society. Society in the wide sense is a lasting association of men for the attainment of a common goal. The association can be necessitated by nature or freely willed. Societies are accordingly divided into necessary societies, also called natural or primary societies, and voluntary or secondary societies, which results from freely chosen purposes. It is generally seen as a lasting association of men for the attainment of their existential ends.

2.0   OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- describe the dynamics of the society
- determine the importance of ethics in the society
- examine the preoccupation of social ethics
- identify the problems of social ethics.

3.0   MAIN CONTENT

You are expected to know the importance of ethics in keeping the society healthy and good for human existence. This is because, ethics is a product of the society, because ethics teaches the good and the bad because if ethical rules did not exist to guide the society, and then there will be anarchy. So, human interactions must have boundaries as man experiences it through existence, as we cannot imagine of an ethics-free society in human history of existence.

3.1   Ethics, a Product of the Society

Many people believe that ethics is a product of the society, and therefore the relationship between ethics and the society becomes too obvious. According to Popkin, it would be a mistake to regard ethics as a purely academic study, having nothing to do with the daily lives of people. Every person who is reflective and who is troubled by certain situations in his or her daily life is a philosopher of ethics to that extent. Suppose a person believes that, no one should take the life of another person, and also believes that one has an obligation to defend his country against its enemies. What should such a person do when his country is at war? If he refuses to fight for his country, then one reneges on his belief that one has to defend his or her country. On the other hand, if he or she fights to defend his or her country, in the course of doing so might take human life.

These are the kind of issues that ethics deals with and these are issues of the society; this is based on the dynamics of the human society to the extent that the aim or goals of the society are achieved. The aim and function of the society is the attainment of the common good, which is the sum of the conditions of social living whereby men are enabled more readily and more fully to achieve their perfection and appointed ends (GS 26 in Vatican II). The common good of the society is promoted by members of the society. There is the responsibility and obligation to respect and achieve it. Moreover, the unity and cooperation of the common commitment requires an authority to assure this unity. The gravity of the obligation to respect and preserve the common good of a specific society depends on the importance a society possesses for the realisation of man's existential ends and ultimate goal.

Man is created for a purpose and must realise this purpose for which he is created, yet we all know that the whole of human life is full of pain, so confusion, so conflict-ridden and full of disasters. The role of ethics became quite demanding as the human society began to expand and people came to live together. It became imperative that human beings must live by rules, (even if they are frustrating), so that human existence can have meaning.

3.2   Social Ethics

Social ethics deals with human relations within the society by providing the basic principles for social interaction, so as to conform to the norms of living. Since the individual or person is never merely centered on himself, but always stands in relationships, ethics cannot restrict itself to the consideration of the moral agent as such. It must also contemplate

the person in his attitude and actions towards others, and in the first instance towards those whom he meets as individuals. These sorts of encounters take place all the times, individuals meet other individuals in a vast variety of situations, and they are required to respond to each other in morally appropriate ways. Interpersonal ethics is concerned with human behaviour on this level and in these restricted contexts. Enveloping social structures cannot be ignored in this branch of ethics, for they simply exist and must be reckoned with, but critical attention is not focused on them. What is chiefly concerned with here is the moral response an individual makes to the neighbour who is immediately present to him, a response not mediated through the structures and agencies of society, a response made directly and with a certain degree of intimacy. The case of the Good Samaritan may be taken as typical of those contemplated in interpersonal ethics.

Social ethics derives its special character from the explicit attention it pays to the social dimension of human existence. One consequence of its social orientation, and one mark of its distinctiveness, is its unique awareness of and preoccupation with super-individual entities, its concerned with the moral significance of more or less integrated human groups, collectives and communities. In this respect, it is significantly unlike personal and interpersonal ethics.

It is not however, true, that in social ethics the individual fails out of purview. Social ethics is concerned with the moral behaviour of individuals as well as with that of super-individual corporate realities. Its concern with the individual is; however of a special sort; it is socially qualified. It does not contemplate the individual not merely as the centered self it is, nor specifically as one who responds without explicit intermediation to the neighbour who in his singleness or indeterminate plurality directly confronts him. It rather contemplates him as one who either makes an individual response to some super-individual community, or as one, who functioning communally, acts in connect with others through the agency of some group with which he is affiliated.

But since social ethics is concerned not only with the behaviour of individuals in relation to or from within community, but also with the morally significant vitalities and interactions of communities as such, at least four sets of moral problems are customarily considered by those who work within it.

One important area of concern in social ethics which has already been suggested is that in which the individual is confronted by and set over against some social magnitude, such as the state, which while embracing

and assisting him also limits and sometimes threatens him. The central problem here is how to harmonise the interest of the individual and the community. The problem arises because individual and collective centres of life and purposes, though interdependent, are always in tension; the freedom and spontaneity espoused by the one is balanced by the authority and order espoused by the other. The moral task lies in establishing such social arrangements as will prevent a lapse from balance into conflict. What needs to be secured is that delicate adjustment of freedom and order which will exclude both anarchy and tyranny, that measure of harmony which will prevent either individualism or collectivism from taking root.

Another set of problems arises in social ethics because, not frequently the individual acts not singly but jointly, not on his own but in concert with others, not against but from within some organisation or community by which he is embraced. The chief issues arising here concern the existence or non-existence of common ground for deliberation and action, and the reality and meaning of such things as corporate responsibility, collective guilt, exemption from the effects of majority decision by reason of conscience, and the like.

A third set of problems in social ethics arises because there are many organisations and communities in society whose relations and interactions require definition and regulation. An issue here is the exact nature of these communities, the fixity of their boundaries, the status of their claims, and the nature and extent of their possible cooperation. Typical of the problems in this area of existence and inquiry is the age-old problem of the relation of Church and State. Calling for attention here too are the economico-political issues involved in Socialism, Communism, and the Welfare State. Involved here also are such inquiries into the nature of family, state and church, and school and may provide warrant for public, private or parochial education (Stob:5).

Closely related to the set of problems just referred to, but distinguishable from them, are the problems arising from the issues of plurality and unity. In social ethics one is concerned not only to determine and appraise the relative claims of the several communities existing within society, but also to discover under what conditions and by what sanctions all the particular groupings can be joined and harmonised.

During the middle ages Occidental society achieved a kind of unity under the hegemony of the church. Since then, through the impulses set loose by the Reformation and the Renaissance, religious diversity, ethnic heterogeneity, cultural variety, and social pluralism have characterised the society of the West. The big question in social ethics is whether a

society so characterised can endure, and if so, what view of God and Man is calculated to make it viable. It is at this stage of its inquiry that social ethics impinges on the ultimate questions of metaphysics and theology, the answers to which relate not only to the questions were raised but to all the questions considered in the other departments of ethics (Stob, 1978:6)

4.0   CONCLUSION

Human existence is for a purpose and man must act in such a way as to achieve this purpose in life and this can be made possible through ethical behaviour which has its chief source from the creator himself. That is why, social ethics deals with human relations within the society by providing the basic principles for social interaction, so as to conform to the norms of living. But social ethics is confronted with many problems of organising social behaviour such as the multiplicity of organisations and communities in the society that requires regulation of conduct.

5.0   SUMMARY

Ethics is a product of the society but social ethics poses such a great difficulty in terms of the plurality of society. There are different societies of varying intensity and so when one begins to think of social ethics, the first problem is that of achieving the unity in ethics within these pluralities of ethical systems. As the society continues to develop and more problems emerge, more ethical issues of higher challenge also continues to appear ant it is the responsibility of ethical philosophers to continue to find ways of resolving these ever emerging challenges.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

In your opinion how would society look like without ethics?

6.0   TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1.   How is ethics related to society?
2.   Define social ethics
3.   What are the problems of social ethics?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Fagothey, A. (1989). *Fagothey's Right and Reason*. London: Merrill Publishing Company.

Peschke, K.H. (2001). *Christian Ethics II. Moral Theology in the Light of Vatican II*. India: Theological Publications.

Popkin, R. & Avrum, S. (1993). *Philosophy*. New Delhi: Made Simple Books.

Stob, H. (1978). *Ethical Reflections*. Essays on Moral Themes.William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

MODULE 2   ETHICS OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION

Unit 1   Foundations of Christian Ethics
Unit 2   Sources of Christian Ethics
Unit 3   Principles of Christian Ethics

UNIT 1   FOUNDATIONS OF CHRISTIAN ETHICS

CONTENTS

1.0   Introduction
2.0   Objectives
3.0   Main Content
        3.1   Christian Theology
        3.2   Revelation
        3.3   General Revelation
        3.4   Special Revelation
4.0   Conclusion
5.0   Summary
6.0   Tutor-Marked Assignment
7.0   References/Further Reading

1.0   INTRODUCTION

Christian Ethics is so called because it is an ethical tradition that derives its tenets from the Christian religion. That is, it is Christocentric, which means it has Christ for its foundation. It further implies the Christian standard, rules or laws, which guides the thought, words and deeds of the Christian. In other words it provides the frame work for operation for the Christian and the Christian religion. According to Igboin (2005:51), Christian ethics postulates the fundamental of ethics to include the enactment of God's love, fostered in prayer and liturgy, Christian ethics is all-embracing and all-inclusive. It explicates man's relationship with God and man as well as with nature. This horizontal and vertical dimension to the application of ethics makes it all embracing. The effect of Christian ethics and the society needs no emphasis because there are very few societies in the world today which can be said to not have come under the influence of Christian ethics even though much of it is also found in many other societies including those that have not come in contact with the Christian ethical systems.

2.0   OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- describe the meaning of Christian ethics
- explain the basis of Christian ethics
- describe the origin of Christian ethics
- identify the Bible as source of Christian ethics.

3.0   MAIN CONTENT

3.1   Christian Theology

Christian ethics finds much expression in Christian theology, and so to embark on studies in Christian ethics without first looking at Christian theology might be misleading. So, in this section, we shall be looking at the foundations of Christian theology in which Christian ethics is fully grounded.

For quite some times now, supernatural elements or external sources of authority have been abandoned by Modern Western ethics, and it is only in Christian Ethics that Christian theology is firmly grounded. This therefore implies that Christian theology is critical to the development of Christian ethics, and so it will be wrong to dismiss it as too abstract to be of any relevance to our lives today. Kunhiyop (2000:45-46), quotes McGrath and Sayers to support the above point. Alister E. McGrath (1992: 20) notes: "To lose sight of the importance of doctrine is to lose the backbone of faith and to open the way to a spineless ethic." Dorothy L. Sayers makes the same point:

> It is … useless for Christians to talk about the importance of Christian morality, unless they are prepared to make their stand upon the fundamentals of Christian theology. It is fatal to let people believe that Christianity is only a mode of feeling; it is vitally necessary to insist that it is first and foremost a rational explanation of the universe.

So, Christian ethics believes that all ethical norms come from God ultimately, and such norms are based on human values and ideas, but derive their content and sanction and dynamic and goals from God, not from some inference from anthropology or sociology. But how do we know what these norms are? A Christian's answer is that God has revealed them to us as part of his disclosure of himself through general and special revelations.

3.2   Revelation

Christianity is a revealed religion. It means that it is not the mere claim of some obscure figure seeking fame and relevance amidst stiff opposition. Rather it is a religion which holds that the transcendent God appeared to the forebears or founding fathers of the religion. This appearance was to later find a fuller manifestation and culmination in the only son of God, Jesus Christ. This much the Christian bible attests to. Heb. 1:1-3.

Revelation plays a vital role in the understanding of Christian ethics as it is believed that all ethical norms ultimately come from God. The revelation of these norms comes to us in two forms, general revelation and special revelation.

3.3   General Revelation

General revelation is all about God's revelation of himself through nature, history and the human conscience. According to the bible, creation itself testifies to God's existence. The Old Testament renders witness as follows: "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard" (Ps. 19:1-3).

There is ample witness in the New Testament as well. St. Paul's letter to the Romans reflects this understanding of the self revelation of God: "since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities-his eternal power and divine nature- have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse" (Rom. 1:19, 20). Paul, in his preaching at Lystra told the people that they needed to turn to the God who made heaven and earth and who had permitted nations to go their own ways, "yet he has not left himself without testimony" (Acts 14:15-17). The implication of these words is that God's witness can be seen both in nature and in history.

Again, according to Kunhiyop (2008:46), the bible insists that natural revelation ministers to the human conscience so that people can make ethical decisions and judge between right and wrong. Hence, Paul points out that "when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, this proves that "the requirements the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them" (Rom. 2:14-15).

The above goes to show that the Bible teaches that people live in ways that are not consistent with God's revelation to them instead they live in ways that are a misinterpretation of what He has revealed to them.

3.4   Special Revelation

In contrast to general revelation, special revelation is the manifestation of God to man in more concrete terms. That is special revelation finds a more concise expression to man. Kunhiyop notes that while general revelation tells us about some of God's attributes, it does not clearly reveal his will for creation, that is, what he wants it to become hence, the need for special revelation to supplement general revelation. This special revelation is both verbal and personal as the writer of Hebrews reminds us when he says; 'in the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways' (Heb 1:1) Though the forefathers referred to here are Abraham, Moses and David, these words can also be applied to all our human ancestors who received divine revelations. But God's supreme revelation of himself to us came when he spoke 'to us by his son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe' (Heb 1:2; Jn 1:18).

The record of God's special revelation is contained in scripture, as Peter reminded us when he says that "no prophecy of scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For every prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:20-21). It was God who pushed all the authors of scripture to write, and that is why Paul can state that, "All scripture were inspired by God" (2 Tim 3:16a).

God's revelation in scripture not only tells us about who he is but also about how we should live. As Paul goes on to say, 'it is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Tim 3:16-17). In the Bible, God clearly lays out what he regards as the ethical behaviour: "to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Mic 6:8).

The importance of scripture as source of our ethics is also clear from the fact that the Hebrew Scriptures are constantly quoted in the New Testament as the final authority on issues early believers were struggling with. There is also abundant evidence from the early church that even before the New Testament books had been complied in one volume and accepted as canonical, the letters from the ancestral faith communities held a place unparalleled among religious and philosophical movements of the ancient world.

4.0   CONCLUSION

Every society or system has its basic ethical principles that guides its actions and deeds, but on the whole are ethical principles that have close affinities to each other due to the principal source of ethics which is God. Throughout human history, God has revealed himself and his will to mankind through general and special revelations so that man may know him as he truly is. Apart from God revealing himself to man through his natural environment, he reveals himself again through the scriptures, and finally in the person of Jesus Christ. All these have become the main sources of Christian ethics as is contained in the ordinances and rules of conduct designed for man's existence.

5.0   SUMMARY

Revelation is the process through which God makes himself and his will known to people of different society at different times and events. It is to be noted that God created man for a purpose for it is his will that man should share in the fruits of creation through compliance to his will and law. It is to facilitate this fact that God revealed himself to man so that man will understand him as he is and also obey his will and laws for the realisation of man's goal in life. There are two levels of revelation, general and special revelations. In the general revelation God revealed himself to people in their concrete historical and cultural environment, that is, the cultural matrix of our ideas about God. But the will of God is not fully revealed in general revelation, except his attributes, and that is why there is need for special revelation where God reveals himself fully to mankind.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

What is the basis of Christian ethics?

6.0   TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1.   What do you understand by Christian theology?
2.   How is Christian theology related to Christian ethics?
3.   What is Revelation?
4.   Distinguish between general and special revelations.

7.0   REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Dzurgba, A. (2000). *Principles of Ethics*. Ibadan: Agape Publications.

Fagothe, A. (1989). *Fagothey's Right and Reason*. London: Merrill Publishing Company.

Kunhiyop, S.W. (2008). *African Christian Ethics*., Kenya: Hippobooks, African Christian Texbooks.

Peschke, K.H. (2001). *Christian Ethics II. Moral Theology in the* Light *of Vatican II.* India: Theological Publications.

Popkin, R. & Avrum, S. (1993). Philosophy. New Delhi, Made Simple Books.

Shields, N. (2004). *Christian Ethics*. Nigeria:, African Christian Textbooks.

Stob, H**.** (1978). *Ethical Reflections*. William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.

UNIT 2 SOURCES OF CHRISTIAN ETHICS

CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

From our discussion above, we have shown that Christian ethics implies that Christian standard, rules or laws, guides the thought, words and deeds of the Christian. It can be seen as a code of conduct for those who are Christians in respect to their relationship with God, with his fellow man and his natural environment. Like in the case of origin of ethics, we may ask a similar question regarding the origin of Christian ethics; where does a Christian ethic originate? In other words what is the source of Christian ethics?

There are basically four sources of Christian ethics namely, God the creator, Jesus, Holy Spirit and the Bible.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should able to:

- explain Bible as a source of Christian ethics
- discuss Holy Spirit as the source of Christian ethics
- differentiate between conscience and natural law.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 God, as Source of Christian Ethics

The Scripture opens with God as the creator of the world and of all forms of life. It presents man as made in the image of God as the crown

of all creatures (Gn. 1:27). As such man was and always remains a moral being, one who is responsible to God and whose actions can be judged right or wrong, good or evil on the basis of what they conform or deviate from his character and from the demands he makes in scripture. Basically, God created man for a purpose and for man to achieve this goal or purpose in life provided for him some rules and regulations to guide him in the full realisation of this goal. For example, at creation man was given a number of duties. He was to reproduce his own species in one flesh through marriage (Gn. 1:27-28), 2:24). To realise this task God made marriage a divine institution, by the fact that "it was not proper for man to be alone". He was to work in order to gather the fruit of the earth for food; he was expected to rule over other creatures. These God-given instructions are known as creation ordinances, and they show that from the very beginning, man was accountable to God for his deeds or behaviour.

For all these duties God provided enabling environment to facilitate their attainment and with rules and regulations to further assist man in the full realisation of these duties. In the Garden of Eden for instance, there were rules and codes of conduct to be observed, among which included the eating of all fruits in the garden except the fruits of the tree in the middle of the garden (Gn.3). Adam and Eve when they disobeyed God's command, they were called to account for their actions just like Cain was held responsible and punished accordingly for the murder of his brother Abel.

Apart from God's intended plan for man to attain his goal in life, these rules or creation ordinances were to show and safeguard the sanctity of human life, by such provisions that, whosoever sheds the blood of a human being would have his own blood taken.

3.2   The Bible as Source of Christian Ethics

The bible is the word of God, through which he has spoken with his people through all ages and from generation to generation. Through the Bible God makes his will known to mankind regarding what is pleasing to Him and what is not pleasing to Him. The Bible both the OT and NT remains the main source of Christian ethics and from where Christian morality is chiefly drawn. The Ten Commandments given to the people of God on Mount Sinai have been fully incorporated into Christian morality. The Ten Commandments provide conditions regarding man's relationship with God and man's relationship with his fellow man. In fact, in the teaching of Moses, there are two basic absolute commands; which in broad terms define how man should relate both to God and his fellows; You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with

all your soul and with all your strength and you shall love your neighbour as yourself (Deut. 6.5, Lev. 19:18). These commandments cover dietary laws, marriage, agriculture, commerce, tourism, finance, worship, sin, in fact all aspects of human endeavour. They are spoken to people at different times and in their peculiar social and cultural circumstances. The scripture as we have it today has come to us over a long period of time. That is to say that the scripture as we have it today was spoken to people of many centuries before us, and we are today trying to unfold the meaning of these words of God spoken to the people of those generations, as the words are still relevant to us today. Initially these words of God were passed on from generation to generation orally before they were finally put down in written form.

God's words, as represented in the Bible, both OT and NT, contains God's will and plan for mankind. Through the Bible, God revealed his salvation plan to mankind and has also provided the divine ordinances to enable mankind realise this salvation. These ordinances are found all over the bible and they concern and regulate man's relationship with God, as well as man's relationship with his fellow man in the society. The laws stipulate what is good and what is bad, against what is right and what is wrong. Christian ethics therefore generates its ethical teachings from the Ten Commandments of God covering and focusing on the spiritual and moral issues.

The records in Genesis 1-5 shows that in the beginning, God gave human beings specific instructions about how to conduct their lives. These instructions include:

To rule over and subdue the rest of the other animals and to eat the produce of seed-bearing and fruit-bearing plants, and all these imply working as a duty to mankind.

To reproduce "their-own-kind", this therefore implies the requirements of marriage.

So the Bible is full of ordinances provided by God the creator of the universe where mankind's moral authority is based and it is one of the major sources of Christian ethics.

3.3   Jesus as Source of Christian Ethics

Jesus the son of God, was sent into the world to redeem man from his sins after the fall of man and thus enable man to attain his goal in life, the attainment of the kingdom of God. Jesus as the model teacher instructed his followers to obey and respect the will of his father for the

attainment of the kingdom of God, as contained in the moral code. Jesus for example affirmed that at the beginning, God imposed a moral quality on marriage; he meant it to be permanent (Matt. 19:3-12). Jesus for example endorsed the Ten Commandments. He directly quoted all except the fourth, but his statement, 'the Sabbath was made for man' clearly reaffirmed the principle that one day's rest should follow six days of toil. Thus Jesus incorporated the duties of the Ten Commandment into his law and by doing so placed absolute obligations on his followers (Shields: 27).

In many situations in life Christians find that the commands of Jesus do not speak specifically to them in terms of the problems they face. In this situation, the NT provides principles and sets goals that become part of a Christian's obligation. In the days of Paul for example, the eating of meat, which has been offered to idols was a problem (1 Cor. 8-10).

But basically, the Christian is meant to live under the law of Christ and thus keep the absolute laws of biblical morality. Christian morality is based on the law of Christ and requires for example that a Christian should avoid murder, adultery, stealing, false witness and coveting what belongs to others. He is meant to love the lord with all his whole being and to love his neighbours as himself.

3.4   Conscience/Natural Law

Conscience is that moral faculty which manifests moral obligations to men and compels them to fulfill them, as well as practical moral judgment, which tells men in concrete situation what their moral obligations are (Peschke: 163). According to Shields (2004:10) conscience is the faculty within us that judges our actions or our intended actions and which seek to direct us towards right actions and against the wrong ones.

Conscience is a general phenomenon and it is known to all societies and cultures. Among primitive peoples, such words as heart and loins were used for conscience. An ancient Egyptian text reads, 'The heart is an excellent witness' and one must not transgress against its words, he must stand in fear of departing from its guidance (Peschke: 164).

The OT is also not unaware of the existence of conscience and its operations in human beings. Expressions used for the reality of conscience are mind, loins, and the heart. From the beginning of salvation, the phenomenon of conscience which condemns man after sin is seen in the examples of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, David killing his brother and so on.

In the NT, Christ himself and the Gospels do not use the term conscience either but expressions of this kind abound in the NT. Christ warns against the obscuring of a person's spiritual eye (Mt. 6:23). Paul uses the word conscience better still. The use of 'for the sake of conscience' in Rom.13:5, is a request to act not merely out of fear of God's wrath, but also out of appreciation for the inner goodness of the moral law which is also known as the natural law. It is natural in the sense that it is written in the hearts of all men in the same manner all over the world.

The Gentiles, who in Paul's time did not have the laws of Moses for example, had the requirements of the divine law written in their hearts and they like those who lived before Moses were accountable to God and will be judged by him (Rom. 1:18-2:16).

Basically, conscience is that inner voice in man which tells him what is right and what is wrong, and which judges actions and commands him to do the right and avoid the good. It is the moral law that is written in the hearts of men. Ethical principles are based on the conscience of men and ethics therefore has its source from it.

4.0   CONCLUSION

Christian ethics is rich in precepts of ordering behaviour as this is derived from the bible where the creator has put down in written form, his will and his desire for men. The Holy Spirit which is actually in the mind and conscience of people constantly guides and directs human behaviour to conform to approved conduct. So, mankind is constantly under the obligation to live an ethical life since this has been carefully directed to enable him do so.

5.0   SUMMARY

We have discussed four basic sources of Christian ethics, namely God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit and the Bible, and these sources contain ordinance where our moral authority is based. So when man seeks to do good it is because, God, or Jesus, or the Holy Spirit or the Bible have commanded that it should be done so. These ordinances regulate man's relationship with God, man's relationship with man, and man's relationship with the society.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Show how God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit and the Bible are said to be the sources of Christian ethics.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Discuss the Bible as source of Christian ethics.
2. Discuss the Holy Spirit as the source of Christian ethics.
3. Differentiate between conscience and natural law.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Dzurgba, A.(2000). *Principles of Ethics*. Ibadan: Agape Publications.

Peschke, K.H. (2001). *Christian Ethics II*: *Moral Theology in the Light of Vatican II*. India: Theological Publications.

Shields, N. (2004**).** *Christian Ethics*. Nigeria: African Christian Textbooks.

UNIT 3   NATURE OF CHRISTIAN ETHICS/MORALITY

CONTENTS

1.0   INTRODUCTION

The moral character of human actions is essentially determined by their relation to God's will. Man's actions are morally good if they agree with God's will, and they are morally bad if they disagree with it. In this section therefore we shall be looking at Christian morality as it determines the rightness or wrongness of an action.

2.0   OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- explain the nature of Christian morality
- describe the responsive character of Christian morality
- determine the ultimate purpose of moral demand
- classify the scripture as the source of Christian morality
- deduce the categorical character of moral demand.

3.0   MAIN CONTENT

3.1   The Responsive Character of Christian Morality

But God's will is not primarily expressed in codified set of rules and laws. It is first of all an inner calling and a summons to accomplish a task within the universal plan of God for man and this world. Hence

man's response to this calling determines the morality of his actions and of his entire way of life. If a man's response is faithful to his calling, his actions and way of life are morally good. But if he is unfaithful to his calling, his actions are morally bad. This section therefore shall concern itself with the responsive character of Christian morality.

The calling of each person is personal and unique, but still not isolated and without relation to the common calling of mankind. God has not only a plan for each individual, but a universal design for all mankind and for the entire world. Each man's personal vocation is related to that superior, universal design and ultimate stands in its service. The ultimate goal of man and the world is an ultimate criterion for the moral goodness of his actions. Whatever stand in contradiction to this ultimate goal cannot be morally good, because it would frustrate the meaning of a man's existence and contradict God's purpose for man and the world. In fact the question of the ultimate end of man is fundamental for the nature of morality.

The categorical character of the moral demand, means then that, in man's moral decisions, his ultimate end and the very meaning of his existence are at stake. That is why man needs to open up to the Holy Spirit for guidance; because man's precise contribution to it can only be the matter of God's personal call through the Holy Spirit.

The literal sense of the world responsibility will help us understand its meaning. It means to say, "Liable to take responsibility for what one has done." Yet if one has to give an answer, surely, one has to give it to somebody. Man is not primarily responsible to himself. A word-response relationship presupposes two partners. Only in a derived sense can one speak of a person's responsibility towards himself. Man is above all responsible to his neighbours and to the various social groups to which he belongs.

Man has also a cosmic responsibility for the world at large, as mankind of today comes to realise more and more. Yet ultimately a person is answerable to God. This is the immediate consequence of the theological doctrine that God is the creator of the universe who has arranged everything according to his purpose. Responsible then is the person who gives the appropriate answer to his calling by God (Peschke:15).

3.2   The Holy Scripture

At the beginning of all religious thoughts of Holy Scripture is the theme of covenant. At Sinai, Israel, the people that God had delivered from the

slavery in Egypt entered into a covenant with Yahweh. In accordance with his plan of salvation, he decided to give his privileged love, protection and salvation to his chosen people, and at the same time state his conditions which man in turn is expected to adhere to. If you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples (Ex.19:5).

The message of the prophets constantly refers to the covenant. Whether they unanimously denounce the infidelity of Israel towards her God, whether they preach the catastrophes which threaten sinful people, it is because of the pact of Sinai. They enrich by other analogies and new aspects the covenant relationship between Yahweh and his people, which originally appeared primarily under a juridical aspect. Israel is the son, and Yahweh the father (Hos.11:1-4), Israel is the flock and Yahweh is the Shepherd (Ezek. 34:11-23), Israel is the spouse or wife and Yahweh the bridegroom or husband (Is. 54:1-10).

Yet Israel did not remain faithful to the covenant as she turns to other gods, but God promised them a new covenant which shall be established at the end of time, which will renew that of Sinai and bring about a change of heart and gift of the divine spirit (Jr. 31:31-34, Ezek. 16:60, Ezek. 36:26-28).

This new covenant was therefore entered into by God with mankind through his son Jesus Christ. The word covenant mentioned the four accounts of the Eucharist at the Last Supper and other passages of the NT. Placed at the centre of the Christian worship, the covenant theme is the background for the whole NT, and in contradistinction to the old covenant, which was a privilege of the people of Israel, the new covenant reached out to all nations, for the blood of Christ has secured the unity of all human race (Eph. 2:12-19). But just like in the OT, God expects an answer from man for his every action, the answer of faithful obedience and love (Peschke:16).

So, in the OT, God spoke his word through Moses and the Prophets, in the NT, through Jesus and his Apostles and Disciples, who offered the message of salvation and the word of life to all men. Again the word demands a decision and response from men, of which some reject and others accept and keep to it in order to be saved.

So, this is the nature of Christian morality. God speaks to man in manifold ways, Moses, prophets, Jesus, Apostles and the Disciples. Man is called to respond. Those who respond positively are saved, while those who reject it get judgement. So the word of God speaks to

212

everyone thus: He awaits an answer from every man, and man's eternal destiny depends upon his answer (Peschke: 17).

3.3   Christian Theology

Religion is essentially an encounter between God and man. God is concerned with man, as he reveals himself to him. This makes religion possible. Whenever man turns to God; he answers. Christian religion is simply an encounter with a divine being. God expects man to relate with him in faith and love and in fulfillment of God's will for man. This encounter takes place in Jesus Christ. Christ is the message and revelation of the eternal love of God. In Christ, the ultimate sacrifice was made on the cross for the salvation of man. But Christ is also, by virtue of his humility, represents God's love to men. His life is lovingly dedicated to the father's will. In fellowship and union with Christ, Christians are called upon to emulate the lifestyle of their master. 'The response of the Christian should be that of a son, modelled on the filial response of the only-begotten Son and grounded in it.'(McDonagh: 29).

Man's response to God has two dimensions. There is a direct response to God, which is religion in the strict sense. Man responds to the revelation of God's glory, majesty and holiness, to his love and mercy in the divine virtues of faith, hope and love, and in the acts of worship. But there is also a second form of response. It is a response to the revelation of God's will with regard to this created world. The divine will is made known to man through the order of creation, the testimony of conscience, and to Christians also in the word of the biblical revelation. Man's response consists in recognition and promotion of the created values, in the faithful fulfillment of the task assigned to him in the world as well as in the respect of the calling of his fellow men and the rights resulting therein. This divine invitation in its twofold dimensions is extended to men of all times. And all men are summoned to answer this call in willing obedience and responsibility (Peschke:19).

This is very central in Christian ethics and morality. God speaks to man through many channels, inviting him to enter into a relationship with him which has as its ultimate end, the salvation of man. Man is expected to respond to this call in willing obedience. If he responds positively, he benefits from God's gratuitous love, it he rejects it, and he is judged and condemned. Man therefore has the freedom to choose between accepting God's offer of salvation, or rejecting the offer and this is made personal to all men apart from the universal call. The very core of moral decision is obedience to God, by saying yes to his will. But this decision is essentially more than just saying yes to the will of God, as it makes certain demands for the obedience of certain rules and laws.

3.4   The Ultimate Purpose of the Moral Demand

God calls men and women to commune with him and to obey his will. And they are expected to answer this call in ready acceptance, in obedience and responsibility. But the question arises whether there are any further criterions by which a certain course of action can be determined as obedient or disobedient, as responsible or irresponsible. Accord or disaccord with God's will has been pointed out as the criterion of the moral goodness of an action. This criterion however is still of a very general and indeterminate nature.

The common nature of men and the universal character of the word of God in Scripture points to a common goal and purpose of men. This means to say, they point to a common calling. In fact according to the definition of moral theology, man's final goal is the ultimate criterion for the moral quality of an action. Those human actions which contribute to the realisation of the final goal are good; and those actions which lead man away from this goal and obstruct its realisation are bad. The more specific determination of man's ultimate goal and purpose is therefore of greatest importance for every system of moral theology and philosophy.

But there are different views with regards to the ultimate goal of man and of his activity which have been categorised into four, namely:

(a)   Temporal happiness and welfare
(b)   Self perfection and temporal welfare
(c)   The realisation of the moral value for its own sake
(d)   God's Glory through the realisation of divine design.

3.4.1 Temporal Happiness and Welfare

Eudemonist ethics considers temporal happiness and welfare as the ultimate purpose of human life and activity. According to this theory, man's ultimate in life is to live a life of pleasure and happiness which is after all transitory and temporal. Pleasure and happiness is the only thing good in itself, while evil is what causes pain and sorrow. Morally right then is what is useful and profitable in achieving the goal of temporal well-being and success. Eudemonism accordingly is always utilitarian. But also vice versa, Utilitarianism is always eudemonist, at least the way it is most frequently understood. Furthermore, since the good or bad consequences decide whether an action is useful and therefore good or evil, eudemonism and utilitarianism are likewise typical instances of consequentialism. Even where utilitarianism is not professed theoretically, it is very often the factual basis of conduct.

214

Basically, there are of course different temporal values in which happiness can be aspired to. Some attempt to find happiness in sensual pleasure, riches, honour, social standing and power, renunciation in favour of tranquility and peace, and others in harmonic satisfaction in earthly needs.

Eudemonism as a matter of fact has a great appeal because it is a simple one-principle system with a concrete and tangible and persuasive goal. Yet it has its short comings, it cannot serve as the basis for a morality worthy of its name. The ultimate purpose of human activity and life is that value for which, in the case of conflict all the others are sacrificed. The temporal happiness of an individual and even the welfare of the group is obviously a limited value, which cannot prove its right to preference in principle over the well-being of others. In more general terms, preference of limited values over more comprehensive values is always a distortion with disharmony and injustice in its train (Peschke: 25).

3.4.2 The Ethics of Self-Perfection and Temporal Welfare

Self-perfection, conceived from the naturalistic sense, is considered by humanistic personalism as the ultimate end of the moral effort. In psychological and psychotherapeutic literature it is frequently referred to as self-actualisation and self-realisation and promoted as the all-encompassing goal of human life (Peschke:29). Similarly, existentialist thinkers often place the ultimate purpose of man in the realisation of his true self and authentic personality. A religious type of the striving after perfection with the goal of self-sanctification is not presented in Christian literature as the central task of moral life.

The Vatican II also thought it important enough to comment on the tendencies to individualism in ethics and to reject them. It rather called on believers not to content themselves with a merely individualistic morality. The reason is that individualism does not sufficiently account for the social necessities which are among man's chief duties today (GS. 30, cf. 32, Vat II). The decisive deficiency of the morality of self-perfection lies in this that it centres in values of limited nature, leaving aside superior values which alone deserve to be the ultimate centre of attention and love.

3.4.3 Morality for its Own Sake

In the systems today, actions are considered as good or evil according to their contribution to the realisation of the values of happiness, self-perfection or temporal happiness. The morally good is consequently not

an independent, self-sufficient value. It is rather relative to another value, in whose service it stands and whose promotion or impairment is the measure of moral goodness. In contrast, what the Kantian ethics and the ethics of values have in common is that they view the morally good as values in themselves, which receive their goodness not from their relation to another value, but should be realised only for the sake of their own worth and beauty.

Kantian Ethics

Kant gives the moral obligation a formal foundation in the categorical imperative, which is formulated thus: "So act that the maxim of your will could always hold at the same time as a principle establishing universal law" That is to say that the rule from which moral activity springs must be capable of becoming a universal law, and man ought to act as would like all men to act. The categorical imperative is formal in the sense of containing no definite subject matter, but providing only a general principle and criterion of all moral commands and duties. This moral obligation must be fulfilled for its own sake, not for the hope of happiness since this would be mercenary ethics founded on pleasure or utility; nor for the sake of God as lawgiver and final goal, since - as Kant explains- an obligation imposed on men by God would result in turning men into slaves.

There are some shortcomings in Kant's position. Kant is too extreme when he rejects the hope of happiness not only as the ultimate goal of the moral effort, but also as any kind of motive at all. The desire for happiness is a helpful and justified incitement for man to pursue his true assignments. Certainly, the usually vague inclinations must still be cleared up and further specified by reason and by confrontation with the moral demands.

The Ethics of Values

Ethics of values goes beyond the purely formal principle of categorical imperative by maintaining the existence of moral values with concrete content. These values are thought of as some sort of ideal entities, somewhat like Plato's ideal forms. They are not merely subjective conceptions, but essences in the antic realm, though not physically existing entities. In consequence, the moral values are not rationally deduced from any ultimate end of human life.

Ethics of values attempts to overcome any kind of utilitarian relativism inasmuch as the values are defined as ideal entities which are independent of any further purpose and goal. Ethics of values also

accords a fairer place to happiness in man's moral life than Kant does. Although it is true that happiness does not establish the ethical value but follows from it, the experience of a value is by nature connected with a corresponding feeling of happiness, which is quite legitimate.

God's Glory and Kingdom as Ultimate Purpose

Every ethics which affirms the existence of an unconditional 'ought' requires for the justification of this 'ought' a purpose which is unconditional itself. No temporal, transitory value can establish an unconditional, ultimate claim. Such a claim can only emanate from an absolute, supreme value and purpose and meaning of human life and of the history in God's will and decrees. Nothing determines its particular character more comprehensively and decisively than the biblically founded Christian understanding of the ultimate end.

Teaching of Holy Scripture

Just as the moral command has (according to the scriptures and Christian theology), its origin in God, so also has it in him, his glory and his kingdom, its ultimate purpose. According to the OT, God's praise and glory are the highest and the purpose of man and of all creation. In his external works, God manifests his majesty, his holiness his name to man. And he wants men and all creatures to glorify him through their word and existence. "Let them give glory to the lord, and declare his praise" (Is. 42:12). The glory of God is the content above all of the Psalms, which summon sun, moon and stars, seas and mountains, plants and animals, men and all nations to join in the praise of the Lord (Ps. 96, 145, 148, etc). Manifestation of and contribution to God's glory is the reason for their existence and therefore their assignment and duty.

In other texts of the OT, especially in wisdom literature, fellowship with God is felt to be the supreme goal of moral action. More important than all individual goods is the friendship with the lord. Guided by this knowledge, the palmist prays; "A day in thy courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of God than dwell in the tents of wickedness (Ps. 84:10).

Nevertheless, this understanding of man's destiny coexists with another motivation of moral conduct, which is at least equally strong. Earthly blessings are the promises given for a good life and for Israel's faithfulness as a nation, such as worldly possessions, abundance of children, long life, victory in war, a glorious Jerusalem, etc.

The NT vision of the meaning of human life and of history resumes the valid elements of the OT traditions, but also adds interpretations and images of its own. Glorification of the father in heaven was the concern of Jesus during his earthly life (Jn. 8:49f). St Paul extols Christians; whether you eat or drink, whatever you do, do all to the glory of God (Cor. 10:31 etc). This is because, from him and through him and to him are all things, just as in the book of Revelation God reveals himself as the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end (Rev. 22:13). All creation therefore has its centre in God and is called to contribute to his glory.

The idea of God's glory as the ultimate purpose of creation in general and of man in particular gains a new fulfillment and concreteness in Christ's preaching about the kingdom. Just as the kingdom of God is the principal motive in Christ's ethical teaching, so it is also the most characteristic description of man's ultimate end in the gospels. The metaphor implies that the will of God is the highest authority for men, and that mankind as well as all of creation finds their salvation in the fulfillment of this will. "Seek first the kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well" (Mt. 6:33). The kingdom of God is the greatest and the most important treasure for which a man must be ready to sacrifice everything else (Mt. 13:44-46).

Participation in the kingdom of God and its blessings is Jesus' most important promise in the beatitudes and to those who follow him (Mt.5:3-13, Lk.18:28-30). The unity of both concepts of God's glory and of the establishment of his kingdom is very aptly expressed in the first petition of the "Our Father", where Christ teaches his disciples to pray foremost of all: "Hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come" (Lk. 11:2).

In the Book of Revelation the concept of the kingdom of God is complemented by the metaphor of the New Jerusalem, whose appearance will reward and crown the struggle of the children of God against the forces of Evil. The seer sees 'the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God'. And he hears a great voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them" (Rev. 21:2f).

Theological Reflection

When scripture thus describes the ultimate end of man as God's glory, his Kingdom, the New Jerusalem, the unity of all things in Christ, the new heaven and the new earth, such assertions are still very descriptive

and indeterminate. For the elaboration of the moral norm, a more precise and scientific definition of the ultimate goal of man and creation would be desirable. Nevertheless the statements of Holy Scripture contain some very basic insights.

First, creation is not the event of a blind fate or irrational demiurge, but the outcome of a wise and provident Creator, who has structured it according to a discerning plan and comprehensive purpose. Second, this purpose is intimately related to the divine realities and is therefore lastly of a religious and not of profane character; it culminates in the fellowship and community with God. Third, the final goal is not primarily centered in the individual's perfection and bliss, not even in the welfare of social groups; rather it embraces mankind as a whole and beyond it the totality of creation; it is of universal and cosmic nature. And fourth, this goal brings about a condition far better than the present one. It realises all present achievements and denies to any human institution the status of the final answer. It ever anew challenges man to transcend the limitations of the present and affirms the possibility of reform and improvement. The final answer to man's longings will be given not in terms of earthly attainments, but in terms of a transformation that belongs to another world (Peschke: 44).

The theological reflection of the kingdom of God as the ultimate goal of creation finds its exposition in the teaching of the Church. Christians on pilgrimage towards the heavenly city should seek and savour the things which are above (GS, 57). This includes their obligation to foster communion with God through the praise of his name, through prayer and contemplation, through liturgical worship in community, through the sacramental life. For the human is ultimately " directed toward and subordinated to the divine, the visible to the invisible, action to contemplation, and this present world to that city yet to come, the object of the quest"(SC 2;cf.10).

Yet the vocation of Christians to commune with God and to divine worship in no way decreases, but rather increases, the weight of their obligation to cooperate in the development of this world, to contribute to earthly progress, and to work for the perfection of creation. In relation to this world, God's glory is achieved by the unfolding of the creator's work and the realisation of the divine plan in history. Men 'can rightly look upon their work as a prolongation of the work of the creator, a service to their fellow men, and their personal contribution to the fulfillment in history of the divine plan.

Salvation and the Moral Demand

Besides the glory of God and his kingdom, the books of the Holy Scripture also indicate with great frequency man's salvation as the purpose of a good life and as the motive for obeying God's commandments. Salvation holds a very important place among the motives and goals of the moral effort in Holy Scripture and subsequently also in the piety of the Church. The question arises as to the role and rank of this goal. May a Christian aim at salvation as the principal goal of his moral action? Or must the motive of salvation always be subordinated to the glory of God as the center of all values? How is the aim of man's personal salvation related to the goal of God's glory and kingdom? Finally, is there also a temporal aspect of salvation and is there a place in it for liberation from temporal evils?

Salvation in Holy Scripture

Salvation is as much a key biblical concept as the concepts of God's glory and kingdom. The notion of God who saves his people is a recurrent theme in the OT. This salvation is often liberation from temporal afflictions, but it also constitutes an eschatological promise. There are many times the people of Israel experienced God's saving grace like in the Exodus event and many other times during the time of the patriarchs (Ex.14:13, Is. 43:11f). The title of "saviour" for Yahweh becomes a major theme in prophetic eschatology. Yahweh will save his people by leading them back to their land; He will save his sheep by bringing them to good pasture (Jer. 23.6-8, Ezek. 36:26). So the notion of salvation abounds in the OT.

In the NT, salvation obtains an even more important place as the Gospels regard salvation as the purpose of Christ's life. He has come to earth to save that which was lost; to save the world and not to condemn it; the child conceived by Mary shall be called Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins, and so on. All these are NT expressions concerning the notion of salvation. The situation is the same in the apostolic times as well as in the Epistles of St. Paul and finally in the book of Revelation, where "the manifestation of the lord and Saviour will bring about salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ" (Rev. 12:10).

Theological Reflection

Theologians regard the striving after salvation as lawful and even obligatory, although they usually judge it to be subordinate to the Glory of God as the center of all values; for there is only one ultimate Goal for

man, which is his glory and Kingdom. There is doubtless a concern for a person's salvation which is legitimate. The innate desire of the human heart for happiness cannot be described as the expression of an imperfect personality. The unrest of the soul which longs for rest in God is implanted in the human heart by the creator himself, and this cannot be for nothing. Salvation is communion with Christ, who is himself both Saviour and the giver of salvation; this is the union with God. Since salvation signifies then a condition in which everything is right and whole, and a state which is by its nature centered on God, Holy Scripture does not find objection in placing salvation and eternal life before men as the ultimate reward for a faithful life and the final goal to be aimed at by them (Peschke: 51).

The close unity between the Kingdom of God and the salvation of man should make it plain that salvation has also a temporal, terrestrial dimension, just as the kingdom of God also has a temporal dimension and includes a commitment to the development of the world. Salvation therefore may not be too narrowly understood as reward and happiness in the world.

The Categorical Character of the Moral Demand

By the categorical character of the moral demand we mean that moral obligations command unconditional obedience. Because they are categorical, they do not leave to man a free choice whether he wants to follow them or not. They demand unreserved obedience and do not permit denial of submission, because they are concerned with the very purpose of Man's existence and with the very goals of the creator himself.

Holy Scripture is deeply conscious of the categorical nature of the moral demand; God will not permit his will to be disobeyed without avenging. The OT assures lasting blessings to those who obey God's commandments and laws, but it threatens severe chastisements for those who disobey them. The Prophetic books are full of references to divine judgments on the just and sinner.

In the NT the expectation of a final judgment, which will take place on a certain day, occupies an important and even central place. Christ himself announces a decisive judgment over all mankind, a day that will bring salvation for those who believe and do good, and condemnation to those who refuse to repent and believe, who do not show mercy but instead do evil (Mt. 25:31-46). In fact everyone will be judged according to his attitude to Christ and according to his works.

The conviction that man and the world exist for a purpose which has been decreed for them by God is however not a mere act of faith without further rational foundation. The supremely wise order in the entire creation and its organic evolution gives witness that the universe has been created according to a coherent, purposeful plan. Likewise the correct concept of God as the wise and provident source of all things leads to the compelling conclusion that God has set a purpose to the world and endowed it with a value worthy of its creator.

Openness to God's Guidance and Discernment of Spirits

Since the concrete nature and design of the ultimate goal of human history and creation is not known to men but only to God alone, mankind needs to be open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Through his inspirations, the Holy Spirit moves men and women again and again to choose the way which God wants them to go when the insights of reason come to an end. The Church has always been conscious of the need for such guidance, as is testified by the teaching on the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. If we are going to maintain that the basic structure of the Christian moral life is to respond to the initiative or call of God, then God should be seen as the center of value for us. We need to see all things in their relation to God and to integrate all things into our love of God. Discernment helps us to do that, but how can a man discern whether his ideas came from God? The fact is that the discernment of spirit is not an easy task, but a matter which requires great care and discretion.

Holy Spirit frequently speaks of God as the source of good insights and decisions. But it is also greatly concerned that the spirits which moves and influences a person be carefully tested. St. John warns: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit but test the spirit to see whether they are of God". Every man and woman is challenged to take personal responsibility for the decisions they make, as authority alone does not suffice to discover God's will. The discernment of spirit therefore requires prayer, because prayer and experience of God, striving after goodness and humility of heart are basic preconditions for the discernment of spirits.

4.0   CONCLUSION

So, the nature of morality is that of man's ultimate goal in life. God created man for a goal and purpose while morality is the signpost for man as he journeys towards the attainment of the ultimate goal in creation that is his salvation. Because, salvation history is centered around man, and because of God's unlimited love to save man has

provided morality as a guiding principle for his ultimate goal in life. Man must obey the moral demands and ultimately for his own good, so as to enter into a relationship with the creator that culminates in his attainment of the kingdom through salvation. These moral demands have a categorical character in the sense that they demand unreserved obedience and do not permit denial of submission, because they are concerned with the very purpose of man's existence and with the goals of the creator himself. To know and faithfully comply to these moral demands, man discerns with the help of the holy spirit, as the Holy Scripture frequently speak of God as the source of good insights.

5.0   SUMMARY

The concept of morality demands that man's actions must always be good or right inasmuch as they are in relation to the will of God. Man's actions are therefore morally good if they conform to the will of God and they are morally bad if they disagree with the will of God. This is because, God created man for a purpose and that purpose can only be achieved through proper discernment of God's will, as he calls us all personally and collectively for the realisation of that goal. The question of the ultimate end of man is fundamental for the nature of morality. This brings us then to the issue of responsibility. That man is responsible for all the actions he takes in life and could be held responsible, which presupposes two parties. In Christian thinking, man is not primarily responsible to himself alone, but also to his neighbours and ultimately, he is answerable to God, by virtue of the fact that God is considered as the creator of the universe.

This fact of the responsible relationship with God is found in central capacities in scripture. Yahweh delivered the people of Israel from Egypt, entered into a covenant with them under the terms. "If you will obey my voice and keep my covenant you shall be my own possession among all peoples. The message of the prophets constantly referred to the covenant, where God's call of Israel out of love demands obedience of the will of God. In the NT, God's word is made known to the people through his son Jesus Christ, who is the word himself. As in the OT, Christ presents the word to all men and who are also invited to receive the word and bear fruits, while judgment awaits those who reject the word. In fact since Christ himself is the perfect answer to the love of the father, his person and actions become a model and example for his disciples. The Apostles and Disciples of Christ continue to preach the word of God throughout the world, offering them as usual the message of salvation. Thus a lasting drama is brought to pass around the word of God. God speaks to men in many ways: through Moses, the prophets, Jesus Christ and the Apostles. And man is in all situations called upon to

respond to the word. He who believes in the word, who acknowledges and receives the word, enters through him into the life of the theological virtues of the child of God (Jn.1:12).

In the sacramental life of the Church too, this dialogical character of the Christian faith finds expression, as the Vatican II document states: 'in the liturgy, God speaks to his people and Christ is still proclaiming his Gospel (Sc 33).

The question that arises at this point is that which pertains to the moral quality of human actions. What is the criterion for judging the moral quality of human action? According to moral theology, man's final goal is the ultimate criterion for the moral quality of an action. This means then that only those actions that promote and contribute to the realisation of the final goal that are good while those actions that lead man away from this goal and obstruct its realisation are the bad ones. The more specific determination of man's ultimate goal and purpose is therefore of great importance for every system of moral theology and philosophy.

But where do we locate this ultimate goal of man and his activity here on earth? There are four views here; a) Temporal happiness and welfare, b) self-perfection and temporal happiness, c) realisation of the moral value, and d) God's Glory.

The first theory believes that the ultimate goal and purpose of man is temporal happiness and welfare. Pleasure and happiness is the only thing good in itself, while evil is what causes pain and sorrow. Whatever is right is considered morally right, useful and profitable for achieving the goal of temporal well-being and success. The second theory argues that self perfection, conceived from the naturalistic sense, is considered by humanistic personalise as the ultimate end of the moral effort. Similarly, existentialists often place the ultimate purpose of man in the realisation of his true self and authentic personality. The third theory, which is built on Kantian ethics and the ethics of values deviates from the first two theories. The Kantian ethics and the ethics of values view the morally good as values in themselves, which receive goodness not from their relation to another value, but should be realised only for the sake of their own worth and beauty. Kant gives the moral obligation a "formal" foundation in the categorical imperative which is formulated thus: "So act in such a way that the maxim of your will could always hold as a principle establishing a universal law." The categorical imperative is formal in the sense of containing no definite subject matter, but providing only a general principle and criterion of all moral commands and duties.

The fourth theory sees God's glory and Kingdom as the ultimate goal and purpose of human activity. This widely attested to by the scripture. According to the OT, God's praise and Glory are the highest end and purpose of man and of all creation. 'Let them give glory to the Lord, and declare his praise.' The glory of God is the content above all of the Psalms, which summon sun, moon and stars, seas and mountains, plants and animals, men and all nations to join in the praise of the Lord (Ps96, 145, 148). In the NT, the glorification of the father in heaven was the concern of Jesus during his earthly life. For St. Paul to the Christians, "Whether you eat or drink, whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." The early church too is not left out as we find this in the doxologies "To our God and Father be the glory forever and ever."(Jn. 8:49, Eph. 1:12, Phil. 4:20).

The idea of the Kingdom of God as the ultimate of man's end also receives full attention in the Gospels especially in the teachings of Jesus Christ. "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well."(Mt. 6:33) "The Kingdom of God is the greatest and most important treasure for which a man must be ready to sacrifice everything else." (Mt. 13:44-46). In reference to the Kingdom of God, the primitive church spoke of the last event which will bring about the final establishment of the kingdom of God.

In the book of Revelation the concept of the kingdom of God is complemented by the metaphor of the New Jerusalem, whose appearance will reward and crown the struggle of the children of God against the forces of Evil. The seer sees "the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God". And he hears 'a great voice from the throne saying, "behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them'" (Rev. 21 2f).

Besides the glory of God and his kingdom, the books of scripture also indicate with great frequency man's salvation as the purpose of good life and as the motive for obeying God's commandments. The notion of God as one who saves is prominent in the OT and NT to the extent that the title of "Saviour" for Yahweh becomes a major theme of prophetic eschatology. In the Gospels, salvation is regarded as the purpose of Christ's life. The Evangelists, Mathew and Luke underlines Jesus role as Saviour from his very infancy. To the Shepherd they announce the birth of the Saviour (Lk.2:11; Mt.1:21).

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

What is Christian morality?

6.0   TUTOR-MARKED ASSESSMENT

1.   What is the nature of Christian morality?
2.   Give the responsive character of Christian morality
3.   Assess the ultimate purpose of the moral demand
4.   iv   Evaluate the scripture as source of Christian morality
5.   What do you understand by the categorical character of the moral demand?
6.   How is Kantian ethics relevant to Christian ethics?

7.0   REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

African Christian Textbooks.

Fagothey, A. (1989). *Fagothey's Right and Reason*. London: Merrill Publishing Company.

Harring, B. *Free and Faithful in Christ*.

Kunhiyop, S.W.*African Christian Ethics*. Kenya: Hippobooks, African Christian Texbooks.

Peschke, K.H. (2001). *Christian Ethics II*: *Moral Theology in the Light of Vatican II.* India: Theological Publications.

Popkin, R. & Avrum, S. (1993). *Philosophy*. New Delhi: Made Simple Books.

Shields, N. (2004). *Christian Ethics*. Nigeria.

Stob, H. (1978). *Ethical Reflections*. William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.

MODULE 3   ETHICS OF ISLAMIC RELIGION

UNIT 1   FOUNDATIONS OF ISLAMIC RELIGION

CONTENTS

1.0   INTRODUCTION

As in the case of Christian ethics, Islamic Ethics is chiefly drawn from its religion and we shall briefly look at this before considering the foundations and sources of Islamic ethics. The Islamic religion is one of the world's major religions belonging to the monotheistic family of faiths that also include Judaism and Christianity. From its beginnings in what is now Saudi Arabia over 1,400 years ago, it grew and spread to include almost a billion adherents. Though the majority of Islam's followers, called Muslims are found in the continents of Africa and Asia including the Asian Republics of the Soviet Union and North-West China, there has been a substantial increase in the number of Muslims living in the Americas, as well as Australia and Europe in the last quarter of the 20th century.

This unit therefore deals with the origin and development of the Islamic religion and its global influence.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- determine the origin of Islamic religion
- describe teachings of Islam
- derive the five pillars of Islam.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Origin of Islam

The entire teachings of Islam as a religion centers on the person of Muhammad its founder, and to understand this religion it is imperative that we know this man called Muhammad.

3.1.1 Prophet Muhammad

Muhammad was born in Mecca 570 AD, by Amina who did not have a difficult delivery. His father Abdullahi died two months after their marriage. One story said his mother was told in a vision to name the child Muhammad. The other story says that the child's grandfather named him Muhammad (Boer 1980:6).

There are many stories regarding his birth. It was customary for the people of Mecca that a baby when born was to be handed over to the woman who would shield him with a basket made of palm leaves until the following morning. This was done for the prophet, but the following morning they were surprised to find the basket torn across the top. The baby's eyes were open and he was looking at the sky. When the grandfather was told this he told the women to keep him under their personal care for I expect him to be very famous (El-geyoushi, 1982: 76).

Muhammad's mother took him to the desert but on their way back she died when Muhammad was only five years old. As a youth he exhibited fine qualities and was loved by the people of Mecca, and for this reason a wealthy merchant woman from Mecca called Khadijah employed him to work for her as a servant in her business outfit. He later married Khadijah at the age of twenty five while Khadijah was forty years.

His full ministry started fifteen years after his marriage as he used to stay in caves for solitude and meditation, and it was during one of these visits to the caves that he received his divine calling in AD, 610 during the month of Ramadan, when the Angel Gabriel (Jubril), came to him

228

and told him to read, but the prophet said he could not read. This was repeated two times and by the third time the Angel said, read in the name of the lord who created man from a clot of blood. Read and thy lord is the most generous who taught man by the pen what he knew not (Boer, 1980: 9).

Muhammad received several of those revelations for which he became convinced that God was calling him to be his prophet and during this period he committed more time to praying and meditating.

3.2   The Proclamation in Mecca

After sufficient evidence that God was calling him to be his Prophet, he finally made his proclamation in Mecca as a Prophet of God. His early religious ideas as expressed in his revelations include the following:

a.   There is one God besides whom no other gods can exist
b.   God is merciful
c.   Man is morally responsible to God for all his deeds
d.   There is a day of judgment following resurrection
e.   The damned will suffer in hell and the blessed will enjoy the pleasures of heaven.
f.   Man's religious duties believe in God, repent from sin, pray to God, help the poor, and do not do deceitful business. Muhammad also explained to the people that, though there have been other prophets before him, men had corrupted their messages and that; God was now calling him as the last prophet.

When he started many of his converts were members of his immediate family. This was short lived as the people began to oppose him especially as his preaching began to touch on their cultural and business interests. The persecution was so strong that on his advice, a group of Muslim converts fled to Abyssinia (Modern Ethiopia) to meet the Christian group there, whom the Prophet said will receive them. He also discovered that it was no longer possible for him to continue to Mecca so he fled to Medina in AD, 622 (Boer, 1980:17).

3.2.1 The Hegira

The departure of the Prophet from Mecca to Medina is known as the Hegira. The Hegira marks a turning point in Islam; the first mosque was built in a suburb of Medina where the Prophet spent his first night; it marks the dating of the Islamic calendar. From Medina, Muhammad went back to Mecca and made it the centre of Islam by introducing the holy pilgrimage to Mecca.

The Teaching of Islam (wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam).
The teaching of Islam is centered on the five pillars of Islam, namely, profession of faith, prayer, charity or almsgiving, fasting and pilgrimage to Mecca.

Profession of Faith (Shahadah)

All Muslims must profess their faith and are expected to live by it. The Shahadah simply states that: There is only one God and Muhammad is his prophet. All Muslims are expected to recite this creed at least once in one's life time, even though some prefer to say it daily. The longer version of the creed includes belief in spirits and angels, the day of Judgment, where the righteousness shall preside over the people.

Prayer (Salat)

Prayer is an obligation in Islamic religion and pious Muslims are expected to pray five times a day as the Prophet himself did. Besides its spiritual and moral benefits it has a great social aspect. It levels down all differences of race, colour, rank and nationality from among its followers. There are obligatory and non-obligatory prayers. The obligatory prayers are mandatory whereas the non-obligatory are optional even though encouraged by all Muslims.

Almsgiving (Zakat)

The act of charity is very important in the religion of Islam. All Muslims are enjoined to spend their wealth in the way of Allah through services to humanity, just as in the same way they pray; this is contained throughout the Quran. Love of God should be the motive for charity and not for self esteem. The Holy prophet described Zakat as money taken from the rich and given to the poor, for the purpose of distributing the wealth of the community in such a manner that no member is left uncared for.

Zakat is of two types, voluntary (sadakat), and non-voluntary (Zakat). Zakat is fixed amount payable once a year while sadakat is not fixed and can be paid as many times as possible. Zakat is given as both cash and kind.

Fasting (SAWM)

The introduction of fasting as an institution came in the second year after the Hegira, as before this time the Prophet used to fast as an optional devotion, on the tenth day of *muharran*. Fasting is a common

activity among all the prophets of God. Islam rejects the idea of fasting as a commemoration of sorrow and affliction and in its place has introduced regular and continuous fasting as a means to developing of the inner faculties of man. Fasting makes one more respectable in the eyes of Allah.

Fasting is a spiritual discipline, it brings us nearer to God, because, it is due to the love and fear of him that we give up food, drink and other pleasures of life. There is no one policing us to ensure that we fast, but Islam recognises voluntary fast and obligatory fast. The voluntary fast is observed by different people at different times of the year and for different reasons and purposes. The obligatory fast known as Ramadan is observed by all Muslims who are of age, sane and physically fit. Some people are however exempted from fast due to some conditions.

Pilgrimage (Hajj)

Pilgrimage to the holy place in Mecca (The sacred Mosque) is one of the ritual duties incumbent on all Muslims. The pilgrimage was instituted in the second year of the Hegira. Hajj is obligatory for all adult Muslims, only once in his life time, subject to certain conditions including health and economy.

Articles of Faith

The Islamic concept of faith alongside the pillars includes:

Faith in God

Allah is the name for God with no plural or gender used by Muslims to cover the one God. Islam's fundamental concept is a rigorous monotheism, called, tawhid. God is described in chapter 112 of the Quran as Saying; he is God, the One and Only God, the Eternal, Absolute, He begotteth not, nor is He begotten; and there is none like Him.

Angels

Belief in the Angels is a fundamental faith of Islam. The Arabic word for angel is Malak meaning messenger. According to the Quran, angels do not posses free will, and they worship God in total obedience. Angels' duties include communicating revelations from God. Glorifying God, recording every person's deeds, and taking a person's soul at the time of death. They are also thought to intercede on man's behalf. The

Quran describes angels as messengers with wings, two or three or four pairs.

Prophets

Muslims identify the prophets of Islam as those human chosen by God to be His Messengers. According to the Quran, the descendants of Abraham and Imran were chosen by God to bring the Will of God to the people of all nations. Muslims believe that Prophets are humans and are not divine, though some are able to perform miracles to prove their claim. Islamic Theology says that all of God's messengers preached the message of Islam, that is, submission to the will of God. The Quran considers other figures in religious history as, Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus and Muhammad as the seal of Prophets.

Resurrection and Judgment

Belief in the Day of Resurrection considered also as Day of Judgment, is also crucial for Muslims. They believe that the time of judgment is preordained by God but unknown to man. The trials and tribulations proceedings during the Day of Judgment are described in the Quran and hadith, and also in the commentaries of scholars. The Quran emphasizes bodily resurrection.

Predestination

The Islamic religion believes in the theory of predestination so that for Muslims, everything in the world that happens whether good or evil has been preordained, and nothing can happen unless permitted by God. According to Muslim theologians, although events are preordained, man possesses free will in that he has the rights to choose between right and wrong, and is thus responsible for his actions.

4.0   CONCLUSION

Muslims believe that Islam is a religion of peace and that there is only one God who is incomparable and that Islam is the complete and universal version of the primordial faith that was revealed at many times and places before including through the prophets like Abraham, Moses and Jesus, with Muhammad as the last of all the Prophets, after whom there shall be no other. So, like the name indicates, Islam means peace and submission to the will of Allah, and all Muslims are expected to submit totally to the will of Allah since he alone is the almighty, the all-knowing, all-loving from whom man shall derive all that he needs in his life.

Because man needs to totally submit himself to the will of God, he must carry out all his religious duties which are obligatory in nature through prayer, fasting, almsgiving, pilgrimage and profession of faith.

5.0   SUMMARY

Islam as a religion has its foundations from Prophet Muhammad to whom God revealed his will from the tablet preserved in heaven. All these revelations constitute the Quran as they were recorded down in written form. The duties of Muslims are well described in the Quran under the five pillars of Islam, and they include:

- To recite at least once during their life time the shahadah, "There is no God but God and Muhammad is his Prophet. Most Muslims even repeat it daily.
- To perform the Salat five times a day if possible.
- To donate regularly through charity a percentage of their income whereas they are generally urged to donate additionally to the needy as they feel moved to do so.
- To fast during the lunar month of Ramadan, the month believed to be when Muhammad received the first revelation.
- To perform the pilgrimage, if financially possible, at least once in a life time.

God is the center of religious practice of Islam so that whatever one does, it must be in glorifying the name of Allah. The entire life of man is to be lived in the way of Allah and that is why in Islam there is no demarcation between the secular and the religious. The secular is religious and the religious is also secular. The religion of Islam therefore determines the moral or ethical conduct of every Muslim to the extent of his clothes, food, speech and so on which are subject to religious precepts.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Briefly summarise the teachings of Islam.

6.0   TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1.   Trace the origin of Islam.
2.   What is the significance of the Hegira in Islamic context?
3.   What are the five pillars of Islam?
4.   What is the relation between the religious and secular in Islam?
5.   How is the religion related to morality or ethics?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Boer, H. (1980). *A Brief History of Islam*. Ibadan: Daystar Press Ltd. M. El-geyoushi.

Frindlander, S. (1991). *Ninety-nine Names of Allah*. Lagos: Islamic Publications Bureau.

Hamidullah, M. (1981). *Introduction to Islam*. Lagos: Islamic Publications Bureau.

Internet Source. Religious Tolerance. Ontario Consultants on Religious

Kerker, J. (2000). *Introduction to Islam*. Abuja: Solar Publications Ltd.

Maududi, S.A. *The Meaning of the Quran*. London.

Nigosian, S.A. (1975). *World Religions*. London: Edward Arnold Publishers.

The Life of the Prophet. (1982). Lagos: Islamic Publications Bureau,

Tolerance. Islam: Introduction: Part 2. (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/islam)

UNIT 2   SOURCES OF ISLAMIC ETHICS

CONTENTS

1.0   INTRODUCTION

The norms and assumptions that have characterised belief and action in Islam, have their initial inspiration from two foundational sources, one scriptural, the *Quran* and the second from the traditions, the *Sunnah.* These are the two major authorities for Islamic morality. Muslims all over the world regard the Quran as the ultimate closure in a series of revelations of God to mankind, and the Sunnah as the historical projection of a divinely inspired and guided human life in the person of the Prophet Muhammad, who is also believed to be the last in a series of messengers from God. The life of the Muslim in terms of what he does every day is decided in the Quran and the Hadith, so that there is nothing in his life that is personal to him, except in relation to Allah. This unit therefore deals with the Quran and Hadith as the major sources of Islamic ethics.

2.0   OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- explain the nature of Islamic ethics
- classify the Quran as source of Islamic ethics
- identify the Hadith as source of Islamic ethics
- explain the state and religion in Islamic ethics.

3.0   MAIN CONTENT

3.1   The Quran as Source of Islamic Ethics

The late Fazlur Rahman, a notable University of Chicago scholar of Islamic thought and modernist Muslim thinker argued that in its initial phase Islam was moved by a deep rational and moral concern for reforming society, and that this moral intentionality was concerned in many ways that encouraged a deep commitment to reasoning and rational discourse. Like other religious traditions, and particularly Christianity and Judaism, Islam, in answering the question 'What ought or ought not to be done thus had a clearly defined sense of the sources of moral authority. While revealing his will to mankind in the Quran, God also urges them to exercise reason in understanding revelation. One part of this rational inquiry into the meaning of revelation led Muslims to elaborate rules for ethical behaviour and the principles upon which such rules could be based.

The Quran is the record of God's will for mankind as revealed to Prophet Muhammad from time to time from a tablet preserved in heaven. These revelations came to the Prophet in bits, from time to time as the need arose and he received them in a trance. The Quran contains all that has happened and the future.

In one of the chapters of the Quran, entitled the criterion (Furqan: Sura 25), revelation – to all mankind – becomes the point of reference for distinguishing right from wrong. The same chapter goes on to cite examples from past Biblical Prophets and their role as mediators of God's word to their respective societies. Like Judaism and Christianity, Islam's beginnings are thus rooted in the idea of the divine command as a basis for establishing moral order through human endeavour. In the other parts of the Quran, the same term also indicates the concept of morality that presents humanity with a clear power to distinquish between right and wrong, which is not subject to human vicissitude. By grounding a moral code in divine will, an opportunity is given to human beings to respond by creating a rational awareness that sustains the validity of revelation. Thus a wider basis for human action is possible, if rationality comes to be applied as a result of revelation to elaborate criteria for encompassing the totality of human actions and decisions. These themes are played out in the Quran teaching of the story of Adam's creation and regress.

Adam the first human being is distinguished from existing angels, who were asked to bow down before him by virtue of his divinely endowed capacity to name things that shows his superior knowledge capable of

being described linguistically and thereby codified. This ability was not accessible to angels, who were seen as one-dimensional beings. This creative capacity carries with it however, an obligation not to exceed set limits. Satan in the Quran disobeyed God's command to honor and bow before Adam, thus denying his own innate nature and limits. In time, Adam too failed to live within the limits set by God and therefore lost his honourable status which he needed to recover subsequently by struggling with and overcoming his propensities on earth, the arena that allows for choice and action. Ultimately, he does recover his former status, attesting to the capacity to return to the right course of action through rational understanding of his failure and transcending the urge to set aside that rationality and test the limits set by divine command.

Adam's story therefore reflects all of the potential for good and evil that is already built into the human existence and the unfolding saga of human response to the continuous divine revelation in history. It exemplifies the ongoing struggle within humanity to discover the mean that allows for balanced action and submission to the divine criterion. It is in that sense that the word *Islam* stands for the original revelation, requiring submission to achieve equilibrium in that a *Muslim* is one who seeks through his actions to attain that equilibrium as well as fit into society.

The human quality that encompasses the concept of the ideal ethical value in the Quran is summed up in the term *taqwa* which in its various forms occurs over two hundred times in the text. It represents on the one hand, the moral grounding that underlies human action while on the other, it signifies the ethical conscience which makes human beings aware of their responsibilities to God and society. Applied to the wider social context *taqwa* becomes the universal, ethical mark of a truly moral community.

The Muslim *ummah* or community is thus seen as the instrument through which the Quran ideals and commands are translated at the social level. Individuals become trustees through whom a moral and spiritual vision is fulfilled in personal life. They are accountable to God and to the community, since that is the custodian through whom the covenantal relationship with God is sustained. The Quran affirms the dual dimension of human and social life – material and spiritual- but these aspects are not seen in conflictual terms, nor is it assumed that spiritual goals should predominate in a way that devalues material aspects of life. The Quran, recognising the complementarity between the two, asserts that human conduct and aspiration have relevance as acts of faith within the wider human, social and cultural contexts. It is in this

sense that the idea that Islam embodies a total way of life can be best understood.

An illustration of one aspect of such a vision is the Quran's emphasis on the ethics of redressing injustice in economic and social life. For example, individuals are urged to spend their wealth and substance on family, relatives, orphans, the poor, the traveling and homeless, the need and the freeing of the enslaved. Such acts define a Muslim's responsibility to develop a social conscience and to share individual and communal resources with the less privileged. They are traditionally in the Quran through the duty of *Zaka*t, a term connoting giving, virtue, increase and purification. In time this became obligatory act, assimilated into the framework of the ritual pillars of the faith, including prayer, fasting and pilgrimage. The Quran also sought to abolish unnecessary practices in the mercantile community of Mecca and Medina, stigmatising such practices in reflecting the lack of ethics and an undue exploitation of those in need.

At the social level, the Quran's emphasis on family includes concern for ameliorating the status of women, through the abolition of pre-Islamic practices such as female infanticide and by according women new rights. Among these were the rights of ownership of property and inheritance. They are also allowed the right to contract marriage and to initiate divorce if necessary, and to maintain one's own dowry. Polygamy, the plurality of wives, was regulated and restricted, such that a male is permitted to have up to four wives but only if he could treat them equally. Muslims traditionally understood this practice in its seventh-century context, as affording the necessary flexibility to address the social and cultural diversity that arose with the expansion of Islam. Some modern Muslims, however, maintain that the thrust of the Quran reform was in the direction of monogamy and an enhanced public role for women. They also hold that the development and occurrence of customs and practices of seclusion and veiling of women were as a result of local tradition and customs, occasionally antithetical to the spirit of emancipation of women envisaged in the Quran.

Since Muslims have been privileged by the Quran as the best of communities, whose function it was to command right and prevent wrong, the prophet Muhammad's mission, like that of some past Prophets, involved the creation of a just and divinely ordained polity. The struggle towards this goal involved Muslims in warfare, and the term in the Quran that encompasses this effort as a whole is *Jihad.* Often, simple and erroneously translated as holy war, Jihad carries a far wider connotation that includes striving by peaceful means, such as preaching, education and in a more personal and interiorised sense, as

struggles to purify oneself. Where it refers to armed defense of a justly executed war, the Quran specifies the conditions for war and peace, the treatment of captives and the resolution of conflict, urging that the ultimate purpose of God's word was to invite and guide people to the ways of peace.

3.2   Sunnah and Hadith as Source of Islamic Ethics

With the death of Prophet Muhammad, the authoritative direction of the Islamic community came to a terminal point. The only source of authority for guidance was the Quran itself which in some cases demanded some authoritative explanation.

Again in all religions, there are professional theologians whose responsibility is to define what a man must believe and to in order to live as a faithful member of the faith. In Islam these duties are more embracing since they cover all details of human activity. For example, the precise details governing the washing of hands, head and rinsing of the mouth and nostrils and ears, and the use of dust or sand when water is not available are all well prescribed and obligatory; the kind of clothes and personal ornaments people may or may not wear, the way they should salute each other and so on, are all subject of religious law and not matters of personal preference.

So, readers of the Quran will perceive that the laws which govern Muslim custom in those everyday affairs are mentioned in there, but they will look in vain for the dews which make these customs into formal rites and rules of behaviour. They must look for the book of traditions, to find the backing authority to those duties. Because of the importance of this, some few collections of the Prophet's traditions and those of his companions were made. The traditions refers to what the prophet did or said, what he is reported to have done or said; or gave tacit approval by his action; they also include what the prophet's companions did or said, or are said to have done or said by their actions.

There are various instances in the Quran which gives support or authenticates the Hadith:

4:59   Obey God and obey his Messenger

59:7   what the messenger giveth you, take it and whatever he forbids, abstain from it.

53:3-4   neither does he speaks of his own desire; it is naught save a revelation that is revealed.

| 33:21-22 | and verily in the Messenger of God ye have a good example for him who looked unto God and the last day and remembered God much. |

3.3 Religion and State in Islam

Muslims believe that the purpose of existence is to worship God, and perceive him as being very close to man whom he answers whenever he is in need or in distress and calls upon him. There are no intermediaries such as clergy between God and the creation that he brought into being by a sheer command, 'be and it was.' To live in Islam is to live in the way of God. Mainstream Islamic law therefore does not make or distinguish between matters of Church and matters of a State. The Islamic scholars function as both jurists and theologians. In practice, Islamic rules frequently bypass the sharia courts with a parallel system of so-called grievance courts, over which they had sole control. As the Muslim world came in contact with western secular ideals, Muslim societies responded in different ways. Turkey has been governed as a secular state ever since the reforms of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, in 1923. In contrast, the 1979 Iranian Revolution replaced a mostly secular regime with an Islamic republic led by the Ayatollah Khomeini.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The Quran and the Hadith are the most valuable readings in Islam. The Quran is both a book and recitation that all pious Muslims are required to be committed to, if not all, a substantial part should be memorised and recited at the time of need. It is a very unique book, well arranged with universal application, even though the initial revelations to the Prophet were intended mainly for the Arabs just as the Torah was meant for the Jews. The Quran addresses all issues of life at least from the general standpoint while the Hadith takes care of the details. The Quran was published a few months after the death of the Prophet, while the task of collecting the data on the sayings and deeds of the Prophet as well as his tacit approbation of the conduct of his companion (Haddith) was undertaken by some persons in the life time of the Prophet, and later by many others after the prophet's death. More than a hundred thousand companions of the Prophet have left to posterity, valuable traditions based on what they remember on the subject. Some put them down in writing and others conveyed them by oral communication. The Quran and Hadith all together provide details for the Muslim as they engage in their day to day interaction within the society.

5.0 SUMMARY

The word Islam is a verbal noun originating from the Arabic verb *Aslama* which means to give up, desert or surrender (to God). The other word *Salaam* means peace. Islam therefore is a religion of peace with total submission to Allah. The founder of this religion is Prophet Muhammad and the Quran is their holy book of instructions. Muslims believe that the holy books were dictated by God to various Prophets like the Torah and the Gospels which have been distorted by their adherents. The Quran is viewed by Muslims as the final revelation and the literal word of God. Part of the Quran was written while the Prophet was alive.

The Quran is divided into 114 suras or chapters the chronologically arranged chapters, revealed at Mecca are primarily concerned with ethical and spiritual topics. Later Medina chapters mostly discuss social and moral issues relevant to the Muslim community. The Quran is more concerned with moral guidance than legal instruction, and is considered the source of Islamic principles and values. Muslim jurists often consult also the Hadith, or the written record of Prophet Muhammad's life, to both supplement the Quran and assist with its interpretation. Translations of the Quran are considered as commentaries and not the Quran itself as the Quran itself is only in the Arabic language.

The practices of the Islamic religion are carefully packed in the five pillars of Islam and to some extent they are obligatory for adult Muslims. The Quran presents them as a framework for worship and sign of commitment to the faith. They are, the Shahadah (creed), daily prayers (salat), almsgiving (zakat), fasting during Ramadan and Pilgrimage to Mecca (Hajj). Along these five pillars are the articles of faith in Islam in which strongly believed in. Islam does not distinguish between secular and religious.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

How are the Quran and the Hadith sources of Islamic ethics?

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1.   What do you understand by the word Quran?
2.   How is the Quran source of Islamic ethics?
3.   How is the Quran related to the Hadith?
4.   What do you understand by the Hadith?
5.   What necessitated the collection of the Hadith?
6.   Discuss the relation between the secular and religion in Islam.

7.0   REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

(en.wikipedia.org/wiki/islam) Tolerance. Islam: Introduction: Part 2.

Frindlander, S. (1991). *Ninety-nine Names of Allah*. Lagos: Islamic Publications.

Hamidullah, M. (1981). *Introduction to Islam*. Lagos: Islamic Publications Bureau.

Internet Source. Religious Tolerance. Ontario Consultants on Religious Bureau

Kerker, J. (2000). *Introduction to Islam*. Abuja: Solar Publications Ltd.

Maududi, S.A. *The Meaning of the Quran*. London.

Nigosian, S.A. (1975). *World Religions*. London: Edward Arnold Publishers.

UNIT 3   MORAL VALUES IN ISLAM

CONTENTS

1.0   INTRODUCTION

Islam has laid down some universal fundamental rights for humanity as a whole, which are to be observed and respected under all circumstances. To achieve these rights Islam provides not only legal safeguards but also a very effective moral system. Thus whatever leads to the welfare of the individual or the society is morally good in Islam and whatever is injurious is morally bad. Above all the focal point of Islamic moral teaching is the love of God and the love of fellow men.

2.0   OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

•   appreciate the love of God and man
•   explain the love of parents and other relatives
•   describe the love of neighbour
•   identify social responsibilities.

3.0   MAIN CONTENT

3.1   The Love of God

Islam attaches so much importance to the love of God and love of man that it warns against too much of formality. We read in the Quran:

It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards the east or west; but it is righteousness to believe in God and the last day and Angels, and

the Book, and the Messengers; to spend of your substance, out of love for Him, for your kin, for orphans for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask; and for the freeing of captives; to be steadfast in prayers, and practice regular charity; to fulfill the contracts which you made; and to be firm and patient in pain or suffering and adversity and throughout all periods of panic. Such are the truth, the God-conscious (2:177).

We are here given a very beautiful description of the righteous and God-conscious man in these verses. He should obey salutary regulations, but should fix his gaze on the love of God and the love of his fellow men. Islamic moral teaching emphasises that our faith should be true and sincere, we must be prepared to show it in deeds and charity to our fellow men. We must be good citizens, supporting social organisations and our own individual soul must be firm and unshaken in all circumstances. All these constitute the standard by which a particular mode of conduct is judged and classified as good or bad. This standard of judgment provides the nucleus around which the whole moral conduct should revolve. Before laying down any moral injunctions Islam seeks to firmly implant in man's heart the convictions that his dealings are with God who sees him at all times and in all places; that he may hide himself from the whole world but not from Him; that he may deceive everyone but not God; that he can flee from the clutches of everyone else, but not from God.

Thus by setting God's pleasure as the objective of Man's life, Islam has furnished the highest possible standard of morality. This is bound to provide limitless avenues for the moral evolution of humanity, as it provides also a sanction to morality in the love and fear of God, which will compel man to obey the moral law even without any external pressure. Through belief in God and the Day of Judgment it creates a feeling which compels man to adopt good moral conduct with earnestness and sincerity with devotion of heart and soul. Islamic moral teachings widens the scope of man's individual and collective life; his domestic associations, his civic conduct, and his activities in the political, economic, legal, educational and social realms. It covers his life from home to society, from the dining table to the battlefield and peace conferences, literally from the cradle to the grave. In short, no sphere of life is exempt from the universal and comprehensive application of the moral principles of Islam. It makes morality reign supreme and ensures that the affairs of life, instead of dominated by selfish desires and petty interests should be regulated by norms of morality.

It stipulates for man a system of life which is based on all good and is free from all evil. It invokes people not only to practice virtue, but to

also establish virtue and eradicate vice, to adopt good and reject wrong. It wants the verdict of conscience to prevail and virtue must not be subdued to play second fiddle to evil. Those who respond to this call are gathered together into a community and given the name Muslim.

3.2 God-Consciousness

The Quran mentions God-consciousness as the highest quality of a Muslim. "The most honourable amongst you in the sight of God is the one who is the most God-conscious. Humility, modesty, control of passions and desires, truthfulness, integrity, patience, steadfastness and fulfilling one's promises are moral values which are emphasised again and again in the Quran. We read in the Quran;

> And God loves those who are firm and steadfast. And vie with one another to attain to your sustainer's forgiveness and to a paradise as vast as the heavens and the earth, which awaits the God-conscious, who spend for charity in time of plenty and in time of hardship, and restrain their anger, and pardon their fellow men, for God loves those who do good (3:133-134).

We read further in the Quran:

> Establish regular prayer, enjoin what is just, and forbid what is wrong; and bear patiently whatever may befall you; for this is true constancy. And do not swell your cheek at men, nor walk in insolence on the earth, for God does not love any man proud and boastful. And be moderate in your pace and lower your voice; for the harshest of sounds, indeed, is the braying of the ass (31:18-19).

In a way which summarises the moral behaviour of the Muslim, the Prophet said:

> My sustainer has given me nine commands: to remain conscious of God, whether in private or in public; to speak justly, whether angry or pleased; to show moderation both when poor and when rich, to reunite friendship with those who have broken off with me; to give to him who refuses me; that my silence should be occupied with thought; that my looking should be an admonition; and that I should command what is right

3.3 Social Responsibilities

The teachings of Islam concerning social responsibilities are based on kindness and consideration of others. Since a broad injunction to be king is likely to be ignored in specific situations, Islam lays emphasis on specific acts of kindness and defines the responsibilities and rights of various relationships. In a widening circle of relationships, then, our first obligation is to our immediate family, parents, husband or wife and children, then to relatives, neighbours, friends and acquaintances, orphans and widows, the needy of the community, fellow Muslims, all human beings and animals.

3.4 Parents and other Relatives

Respect and care for parents is very much stressed in the Islamic teaching and is very important part of a Muslim's expression of faith. Your Sustainer has decreed that you worship non but him, and that you be kind to parents. Whether one or both of them attain old age in your lifetime, do not say to them a word of contempt or repel them, but address them in terms of honour. And out of kindness lower to them the wings of humility and say: My Sustainer, bestow on them your mercy, even as they cherished me in childhood (17:23-24). The Quran further stresses this to the relatives: And render to the relatives their due rights, as also to those in need, and to the traveler; and do not squander your wealth in the manner of a spendthrift (17:26).

3.5 To Neighbours

The Prophet has said: "He is not a believer who eats his fill when the neighbour besides him is hungry and whose neighbours are not safe from his injurious conduct."

Actually, according to the Quran and Sunnah, a Muslim has to discharge his moral responsibility not only to his parents, relatives and neighbour but to entire mankind, animals, trees and plants. For example, hunting of birds and animals for the sake of game is not permitted. Similarly, cutting of trees and plants which yield fruits is forbidden unless there is a very good and pressing need.

4.0 SUMMARY

Thus, on the basic of moral characteristics, Islam builds a higher system of morality by virtue of which mankind can realise his greatest potential. Islam purifies the soul from self-seeking egotism, tyranny, wantonness and indiscipline. It creates God-consciousness men, devoted to their

ideals, guided by piety, abstinence, discipline and uncompromising with falsehood. It induces feelings of moral responsibility and fosters the capacity for self control. Islam generates kindness, generosity, mercy, sympathy, peace, disinterested goodwill, scrupulous fairness and truthfulness towards all creation in all situations. It nourishes noble qualities from which only good may be expected.

5.0 CONCLUSION

Central to the moral teachings of Islam is the love of God and the love of men. All that man is expected to do or say must be for the good of God and mankind and he must avoid whatever is injurious to God and mankind. The God-centered moral teaching of Islam is predicated on the qualities of God that demands nothing less than total submission to the will of God. If, for example, God is all powerful, all knowing, all seeing, all hearing, all smelling, all good, all loving, ever present and everywhere, and so on then, what can one do or say that will not be known by God? When we do everything therefore we must do so in the service of God; whether working or resting, crying or smiling, in public or in private, in riches or poverty, and this is the totality of Islamic morality.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

How are moral values derived in Islam?

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Discuss the centrality of the love of God and man in Islamic moral values.
2. State the position of the Quran on moral values in Islam.
3. What is the position of the Sunnah on moral values in Islam?

7.0 REFERENCE/FURTHER READING

file;//G:/moralvaluesinislam.htm Downloaded 22-2-2011

UNIT 4 ISLAMIC ETHICS

CONTENTS

1.0   INTRODUCTION

When it comes to Islamic ethics people like S. Parvez Manzoor makes it clear that, "there is no division of ethics and law in Islam" and this the most popular view. A study of Islamic ethics is more fruitful when done in conjunction with a study of Islamic law. For a clearly understanding of Islamic ethics one needs to study Islamic law, but for our purpose here we shall look at Islamic ethics only.

2.0   OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- determine the relationship between ethics and law in Islam
- explain the role of the Prophet in Islamic ethics
- describe the moral absolutes in Islamic ethics.

3.0   MAIN CONTENT

3.1   Islamic Ethics: Muhammad as Example

Historically, Muslims derive their Islamic ethics from the Quran and Hadith. The Quran contains several commands that the followers of Muhammad must obey. The Hadith presents Muhammad as an exemplary human whom Muslims must imitate in all aspects. Muhammad was only a mortal being commissioned by God to teach the word of God and lead an exemplary life. He stands in history as the best model for man with respect to piety and perfection. He is a living proof of what man can be and of what he can accomplish in the realm of excellence and virtue (Hammuda, 1978:8).

In another development, Ram Swarup explains how the actions and judgment of Muhammad recorded in the Hadith are perceived by Muslims:

> The Prophet is caught as it were in the ordinary acts of his life – sleeping, eating, mating, praying, and dispensing justice, planning expeditions and revenge against his enemies. The picture that emerges is hardly flattering, and one is left wondering why in the first instance it was reported at all and whether it was done by admires or enemies. One is also left to wonder how the believers, generations after generations, could have found this story so inspiring.

The answer is that Muslim believers are conditioned to look at the whole thing through the eyes of faith. An infidel in his fundamental misguidance may find the prophet rather sensual and cruel and certainly many of the things he did do not conform to ordinary ideas of morality but believers look at the whole thing differently. For them morality derives from the Prophet's actions; He applies moral in whatever he did. Morality does not determine the prophet's actions, but his actions determine and define morality. Muhammad acts were not ordinary acts; they were Allah's instructions. It was in this way and by this logic that Muhammad's opinions became the dogmas of Islam and his personal habits and idiosyncrasies became moral imperatives.

3.2   Moral Absolutes in Islamic Ethics

The Islamic view of ethics, like the Christian view of ethics, affirms ethical absolutes. Whereas the Bible grounds morality in God's essential character, the Quran teaches that God cannot ultimately be known. Certain actions are good not because they derive from the character of God, but because God chooses to call them good. God could have decreed a different set of moral principles. Therefore, Muslims know moral goodness by God's decree. Islam and Christianity agree to some extent of the same moral standards although significant differences exist.

The concept of morality in Islam centers on certain basic beliefs and principles which revolves around the relationship between God and man.

(i)   One of the beliefs and perhaps the foundation of all other beliefs is that, God is the creator of all things, living and non-living, and is the source of all goodness, truth, and beauty.

(ii) Next to this is the belief in Islam that man is a responsible, dignified and honorable agent of his creation.

(iii) God has put everything in the heavens and the earth in the service of mankind, which goes to support the second belief that he is a very responsible and dignified creature of God.

(iv) By his mercy and wisdom, God does not expect the impossible from man or hold him responsible or accountable for anything beyond his power; nor does God forbid man to enjoy the good things of life.

(v) Moderation, practicality, and balance are the guarantees of high integrity and sound morality.

(vi) All things are permissible in principle except what is singled out as obligatory, which must be observed, and what is singled out as forbidden, which must be avoided.

(vii) Man's ultimate responsibility is to God and his highest goal is the pleasure of his creator.

4.0 CONCLUSION

When viewing Islamic ethics, Muslims see Muhammad as the exemplary human being, the one all people should seek to imitate. Along with more general virtues, the five pillars of practice form a core of Islamic ethics, namely (a) the profession of faith, where the Muslim recognises only one God and Muhammad as his and last of all the prophets. This has constituted part of the Muslim daily prayers today even though it was to be recited once in one's life time. (b) To perform the Salat, five times a day if possible. There are obligatory and non-obligatory prayers and Muslims are encouraged to endeavour to perform even the non-obligatory prayers. (c) To donate regularly through charity a percentage of their income whereas they are generally urged to donate additionally to the needy as they feel moved to do so. (d) To fast during the lunar month of Ramadan, the month believed to be when Muhammad received the first revelation. The ethical character of fast is very unique because Muslim faithful give up the best of things in life including food and prefers to go without them for the sake of Allah. (e) To perform the pilgrimage, if physically allowed, at least once in a life time. There are people who today perform the Hajj several times and sometimes preventing those who are supposed to do so not to do so. In addition to many motivations to ethical behaviour, anticipation of final judgment is the strongest. The final judgment awaits all people of God when the good and the bad of human beings will be separated and rewarded and punished accordingly respectively.

5.0   SUMMARY

There are similarities between Islamic and Christian ethics which can form a good background in dialogue between the Muslims and Christians. But be that as it may, Islamic ethics is built strongly on the person of Prophet Muhammad who is the living example of Islamic morality. Because, God cannot be ultimately known he has made his will known to mankind in the Quran as revealed through the prophet, and the prophet whose acts are empowered, guided and approved by Allah, have become determining factors in Islamic ethics. And so from the point of view of Islam therefore morality is derived from the actions of the Prophet, the perfect example.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

How central is the prophet Muhammad to the ethics of Islam

6.0   TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1.   How is ethics related to law in Islam?
2.   How true is it to say that Islamic ethics is built on the person of the Prophet?
3.   Discuss the concept of moral absolutes in Islam?

7.0   REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Hammuda, A, (1978). *Islam in Focus.* Indianapolis, IN: Amana Publications.

Islamic Conceptual Framework, section on Shariah, the ethics of Action. http://www.islamonline.net/english/contemporary/2002/Article23.shtml.

Swarup, R. (1986). *Understanding Islam through Hadis.* India: Voice of India. (1983). xv-xvi, as quoted in George W. Braswell, Islam: its prophet, peoples, politics and power (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman,) 83.

MODULE 4   ETHICS OF AFRICAN RELIGION

Unit 1   Dimensions of African Traditional Religion Ethics
Unit 2   Agents of African Traditional Religion Ethics
Unit 3   Moral Values In African Religion

UNIT 1   DIMENSIONS OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION ETHICS

CONTENTS

1.0   INTRODUCTION

The study of African Traditional Religion is bedeviled with a lot of problems such that make studies in African Traditional Religion very difficult and complex. Initially the problem was that of the name, whether it was to be called African Traditional Religion in the singular or African Traditional Religions in the plural. This was contended by the fact that there were various religious traditions of the various tribes of the African People each very distinct in form and content. There are those who think African Traditional Religion without "s", is better description of African Religion, while other think that African Traditional Religions with "s", is a better description of African

Traditional Religion. In later years of studies in African Traditional Religion by such African Scholars like Temples, Mbiti, Idowu and others, the use of the word "Traditional" in qualifying African Religion began to be questioned due to its derogatory character as applied by early studies on African Traditional Religion mainly the anthropologist, whose main occupation was not the study of African Religion. And so today there are people who prefer to refer to it as African Religion rather than African Traditional Religion. For the avoidance of doubt, I prefer therefore to use the name African Religion in these notes.

2.0   OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- identify the problem of name of African religion
- define African religion
- determine the various sources of African religion
- explain the relation between African religion and Ethical values.

3.0   MAIN CONTENT

3.1   The Nature of African Religion

3.1.1 The Problem of Definition

Given our discussion above, it is clear that it is very difficult to give one definition of African Religion that will do justice to the religious content of African People. But because, since no term adequately describes the contents of African Religion has been found, several descriptive terms have been suggested. Often one comes across terms like, 'Tribal Religion', 'Ethnic Religion', 'Pre-literate Religions'. Whatever the merits of these names, they are inadequate as they have evolutionist overtones. The Abidjan Conference on religions held in 1969 recommended African Traditional Religion (1969). Arguing from the point of view of the term traditional without application to Christianity and Islam in Africa, Dr. Erivwo, for example has suggested, "African Indigenous Religion." However, the term "African Religion" seems to be the concept more acceptable by many African scholars today as written by Metuh (1987:5).

"In fact the term 'African Religion' by itself is sufficient to identify and distinguish traditional religion from other religions which are now practiced in Africa; I have therefore retained the term 'African Religion' in this book".

So, today many people favour the term African Religion more than any; but related to that again is the problem of 'one' or 'many'. Recently, there has been much discussion on whether one should talk of African Traditional Religion, in the singular or African Traditional Religion in the Plural. There are two leading positions on this matter and the two protagonists of these are Mbiti and Idowu. Mbiti, one of the leading scholars of African Religion prefers African Traditional Religions in the plural, while, Bolaji Idowu, prefers, African Traditional Religion in the Singular (Metuh, 1987: 5-7).

Arguments in support of each of these two positions sound convincing, and so, make the problem remain unresolved. But generally, sociologist and anthropologist would prefer to study each set of religious beliefs in their social and environmental contexts, because they would be interested in the social functions of religious beliefs. Theologians on the other hand would emphasise the transcendental validity of religious beliefs as man's expression of relationship with God. Therefore, while the social anthropologist would tend to talk of 'African Religions', the theologians may prefer to talk of 'African Religion'.

3.1.2 Definition of African Religion

The problem of name of the African Religion generates the problem of the definition of the religion. But because we have settled for the name 'African Religion', this problem has been narrowed. So, there are many definitions of African Religion that have been offered by many African scholars. Metuh, for example defines African Religion as, 'institutionalised patterns of beliefs and worship practiced by various African societies from the time immemorial in response to the supernatural as manifested in their environment and experience'.
African Religion as defined by Metuh represents the way and manner of worship of the Supreme God by the African people.

But there are more fundamental problems in the study of African Religion which have remained with us up to the present time, and these problems are well discussed by Ikenga-Metuh as here under treated.

Firstly, African Religion unlike the so-called prophetic religions is not a religion of the Book. This means that it has no written documentary source, nor are its tenets defined and preserved in a collection of books as it is the case with other religions like Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam which have been the objects of systematic studies. Religion pervades and permeates the African life to the extent that any attempt to separate his religion from the ordinary would amount to distortion. In fact, there

is no formal distinction between the sacred and the profane, the religious and non-religious, between the spiritual and the material areas of life.

Secondly African Religion is ethnically based so that every ethnic group has and worships its own god in a particular way even though there may be similarities in their form and content. It is a folk religion that has grown out of the experiences and practices of the people who for the most part, live in small scale societies, and therefore its tenets are tailored to suit the particular needs and situations of each ethnic group. This is why Mbiti says "where there are one thousand ethnic groups in Africa, each has its own religious system."

Thirdly, that the study of African Traditional Religion has at various stages of its historical development been subjected to various historical currents – evolutionism, colonialism, the functionalism of the British Anthropological School, African Nationalism, etc. Some of these have influenced the methodology and interpretation of African Traditional Religion, so that originality of African Religion is sometimes lost. All these have made the study of African religion very difficult, but that notwithstanding scholarship has identified some basic approaches to the study of African religion which we shall briefly discuss under.

3.2   Sources of African Religion

We have earlier said that African Religion is not a religion of the book as the so-called advanced religions, namely Christianity, Islam, etc. This implies that African Religion does not derive its tenets from any revealed book, and this is its major handicap, so it relies mainly on other sources. So what are the sources of African Religion?

The sources of African religion are wide and many, but are here broadly classified and discussed under three groups namely, Art Forms, Institutions and Oral Traditions.

3.2.1   Art Forms

Different categories of works of arts can be invaluable sources of religious life. These art forms could be objects recovered from archaeological excavations or contemporary works of art. Archaeological discoveries could provide a wealth of information on a people's past as well as contemporary religious beliefs. The oldest African sculptures are the terracotta heads found at Nok in Northern Nigeria which are said to be over two thousand years ago. The famous bronze and terracotta sculptures of Ife and Benin in the South-Western Nigeria which date from about the 19th century may well be successors

to the Nok sculptures. Many of the bronze heads are representations of sacred kings; other sculptures represent Yoruba deities, such as Oduduwa, the founder of the race and Olokun the sea-deity (Parrinder, 1961:19).

Further to the east, were discovered the famous Igbo-Ukwu bronze objects dated about 850 A.D. These objects which were discovered from an underground burial chamber of a priest-King, Eze Nri who before the advent of the British Colonial rule, was recognised by most Igbo as the traditional supreme religious and ritual head of the Igbo people who still inhabit the area. Igbo traditions believe that the Eze-Nri is a descendant of the first divine king sent by God to organise the world and found the Igbo society and religion (Thurstan, 1970:271).

According to Bascom (Bascom, 1973: 11)

> Most African sculptures appear to have been associated with religion, which pervades most aspects of African life. The religious genres included, votive figures, which adorned shrines, reliquary figures, charms, figures, stools, used in initiation to the cults, the apparatus for divination, dance staff, musical instruments and a variety of other ritual paraphernalia.

So, on the whole, art forms reveal much about the religious beliefs and practices of a people, since the sculptures in many cases are miniature of the real religious figures of the people, though, this is not well projected in the archaeological discoveries in Africa.

3.2.2   Sacred Institutions

The word institution is defined as; an established law, custom, usage, practice, organisation or other elements in the political or social life of the people. There are many of these institutions in every African society which have the imprint of traditional religious beliefs and practices. Some institutions like the Sacred kinship, the priest-hood, chieftaincy titles, initiation rites, festivals and so forth, are hedged round with certain beliefs, rites observances or taboos which are inspired and sustained by firmly held religious beliefs. Let us use the Golden Stool as an example, as described by E.W. Smith (2).

3.2.3 The Golden Stool

The case of the Golden Stool linked with the sacred kinship of the Ashanti people of Ghana is a typical example of how knowledge of a people's institution can give us insight into the vast resources of their

religious beliefs and traditions, and how ignorance of the beliefs and the traditions which surround them could bring about disaster of great magnitude. The Golden Stool of the Ashanti kingdom was not a symbol of royalty but the embodiment of the soul of the nation. A legend claims that it was sent down from heaven by Onyame, the Supreme Being, through one powerful medicine man Anotchi, during the reign of the 4th king of Ashanti, Osai Tutu, to make Ashanti a great and powerful nation. Anotchi proclaimed that it contained the Sunsum (Soul) of the Ashanti people, that with it was bound up their power, their honour, their welfare, and that if ever were captured or destroyed, the nation would perish. The central rite of the installation of the king consists in raising him three times over the stool as if he were going to be sat on it. This brings him into contact with the Soul of the nation and invests him with the power of the ruler of the nation. Once a year the Golden Stool was carried in a solemn procession under its own umbrella and accompanied by its own attendants. The king as the occupant or sole trustee of the stool represents all those who have occupied the stool before him. He is the link, the intermediary between the living and the dead. For the dead, the living and those yet to be born of the tribe are regarded as members of one family, and it is the stool that binds that family together (Smith: 2).

The Golden Stool is thus a demonstration of how beliefs linked with an institution is a pointer to the different ramifications of traditional beliefs of the people.

3.2.4 Oral Tradition

Another major source of African Religion is Oral Tradition. The other major source of information about African Religion is the oral tradition, that is, the many stories and legends by which knowledge is transmitted across generations by way of the spoken, as opposed to the written, word. This tradition includes myths and stories, liturgies, songs and proverbs. Western scholars have often looked at oral tradition as being less valid and credible than written sources. Judaism, Christianity and Islam for example are often seen as valid and superior to other religions because they have written records. But these religions too did not always have written records. Many of the Hebrew Scriptures were transmitted orally for generations before they were committed to writing, and Christianity was transmitted by the spoken word before it was recorded in written word. The reliability of these forms of oral traditions as vehicles of the authentic beliefs of the people varies. The condensed and memorised forms like proverbs, names, sayings or the famous Ifa divination verses which diviners are said to memorise as they were handed down from time immemorial are certainly more reliable than

257

myths, legends, folktales, sayings and daily speech which are susceptible to changes and sometimes have discordant versions.

3.2.5 Myths

Malinowski (1969:107) observed that the traditional Islanders whom he studied clearly distinguished myths (Liliu) from both folktales and legends. Folktales he noted are told for entertainment, and legends are supposed to recount recorded history of the group. He defined myths as sacred tales, which are told when the ceremony or a social or moral rule demands justification, warrant of antiquity, reality and sanctity. According to Bascom (1969:123) legends and myths are regarded as history of what actually happened. Hermann baumann, after studying about 2, 500 African myths came to the conclusion that, a myth is a clear presentation of the outlook of people living in communities. It is their objective and permanent philosophy of life.

So, myths certainly tell us a lot about a people's world-view, their environment, their geography, history, medicine, social organisations and their religious ideas.

3.2.6 Proverbs and Names

Africans have a very rich store of proverbs and names which are enshrined an ancient wisdom, beliefs and accumulated experiences of past generations. Rattaray R.S and Christaller J.A, have each collected thousands of proverbs of the Akan people of Ghana, and have found that they give us great insight into the people's beliefs. Some proverbs speak of God's justice and uprightness. Some proverbs here shall suffice. A Yoruba proverb says that, an enemy may beat the drum of someone's down fall but God will not let it sound. African names express the same religious beliefs of the African people. The Igbo names, Chukwukere, Chukwuka, means, God created, or God is greater respectively. The Yoruba names, Oluwasegun, Olorunkoya, Mawunyo, means, God is victorious, God rejects punishment, and God is just respectively (Metuh: 24). There are similar names among the Tiv people of central Nigeria. Aondongu, Aondofa, Aondoyavenga, means, there is God, God knows and God never sleeps respectively.

3.3 Other Sources of African Religion

There are many other oral sources of African Religion, and these include, riddles, daily speech, prayers, invocations, blessings, curses, oaths, spells and so forth. Some of them are specifically religious activities and would contain a lot of information on religious beliefs.

Prayers for example are found all over Africa and they are often made to god, the Deities and the Ancestors. People pray for everything they need in life, children, good health, rain, good harvest, etc.

3.3.1 African Religion and Ethical Values

Our study of African Religion clearly shows some of the major problems associated with the study, among which is the absence of the written word. This problem is not limited to the study of religion alone but any other study on the African People.

It is therefore interesting, to note from the very beginning that, in such a society, it will be very difficult also, to come up with a uniform system that will be called African Ethics. So, can we really talk of an African Ethics? Is there a difference between African ethics and African morality?

To properly address these questions however, the experiences of the various ethnic groups will be examined in considering the ethics and morality of African Religion.

The terms "Ethics" and "Morality" are closely related to the extent that sometimes a clear difference between the two is difficult. Some people consider ethics as the theory while morality is the practical actual behaviour. Thus, James William McClendon (1969:45) writes:

Morals and morality come from the Latin word mores, meaning custom or usage, while ethics comes from the Greek word, ethos, whose meaning is roughly the same. So it is hardly surprising that, today, as earlier, these two words are often used interchangeably. When a distinction is made, "morals" nowadays refers to the actual human conduct viewed with regard to right and wrong, good and evil, "ethics" refers to a theoretical overview of morality, a theory or system or code. In this sense, our morality is the concrete human reality that we live out from day to day, while ethics is an academic view gained by taking a step back and analysing or theorising about morality.

Very often, people tend to assume that theoretical issues are good only for the scholar, teacher, student or professor in the classroom, while the practical is what is real, useful and true in life situations. But be that as it may, I shall use the two terms interchangeably in these notes.

Let us also try to establish a distinction between personal and social ethics from the onset to define our focus. Personal ethics deals with individuals' obligations or duties, or in other words, with what is

required of them. Social ethics, on the other hand, deals with community morality and emphasises communal values and interpersonal relationships at the expense of the individual's desires and decisions. In Africa, the focus falls on social ethics rather than personal ethics because, for Africa peoples emphasise the community rather than the individual. Individuals are not neglected, but they are expected to fulfill their roles in a way that fits with the ethos of their society. Communal morality regulates and controls their conduct. For example, a man may marry not because he wants to but because his parents want to have grandchildren (Kunhiyop : 5).

3.3.2 Values and Ethics

Again it is important to clarify this idea of values and ethics from the very beginning so that we can get to understand these words before embarking on the study of ethics in African Religion.

Values are the underlying, fundamental beliefs and assumptions that determine behaviour. In Africa as in the west, these beliefs and assumptions often remain unchanged even after there has been a religious conversion. Thus many African societies may have converted to Christianity or Islam but they still cling to traditional beliefs and assumptions that determine how they act morally. It is therefore critical to know and appreciate the role of values in the study of moral actions.
Failure to understand key elements that regulate African morality led many westerners and missionaries to misinterpret African moral life. For example, when western missionaries saw a Christian take a second wife, they assumed that he was committing adultery. The fact that this polygamy was public and endorsed by his society was taken to show that African peoples are very immoral and quite without a European sense of shame.

In making this judgment, the missionaries were looking only on externals and were assuming that the only factor at play was sexual desire. They failed to understand the values intrinsic to the African view of marriage and procreation, sexuality and immortality that underlay the practice of polygamy. To the man involved, the question was not whether he married the second wife, but whether the marriage would produce a child (especially a male child) who would continue his lineage and honour him as an ancestor.

If the Westerners did get a glimpse of these values, they often dismissed them, finding it ludicrous to apply any such terms as moral to African beliefs and actions as they were perceived as perversely irrational and ghost-ridden. But the westerners were wrong. African behaviour was not

irrational or lacking morality. Thus, we shall in these notes attempt to address such questions as, "what are the roots of African values and moral behaviour?" The ethical principles explored in this section are the general principles that have shaped African behaviour, and if we do not understand them, then we will draw wrong conclusions about African morality.

4.0   CONCLUSION

In Africa there is no much demarcation between the sacred and the profane as religion permeates the life of the African. This makes the study of African Religion most difficult especially the fact that there are no sacred scripture. The major sources of African Religion include oral tradition, myths, stories, names etc. But generally Africans are very religious even though early scholars of African religion did not see this element.

5.0   SUMMARY

It is a common fact that, Africans are very deeply religious, for religion permeates every aspect of their life. What Arthur Leonard wrote about the Lower Niger, applies to most African Societies: "They are in the strict sense of the world a truly and deeply religious people, of whom it can be said, that 'they eat religiously, drink religiously, bathe religiously and dress religiously" (429). African religious beliefs and practices are expressed in art, institutions and oral traditions in the absence of the written word; the so called advanced religions too, had their religious beliefs and practices transmitted orally for a very long period before they were committed into written form.

But generally, religion pervades and permeates every aspect of the life of the African, and is so knit to life that to separate or extricate what one would consider the religious elements from their contexts for a separate study would result in distorting them. In fact, there is no formal distinction between the sacred and the profane, between the religious and non-religious, or between the spiritual and the material areas of life. Where the African is, there is his religion, observes Mbiti. So, it is this all pervasive nature of African Religion that makes it difficult to have a secure grip of this subject. For this reason, to get an objective view of a people's religious beliefs, one would have to study their whole life. For this reason, different categories of people at different times – missionaries, historians, anthropologists, sociologists and theologians, have claimed to be authentic interpreters of African Religion and have approached its study from various ways, using various methods.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

How are ethical values derived in African Religion?

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. What name do you consider appropriate for African Religion?
2. Give one definition of African Religion.
3. Discuss two major sources of African Religion.
4. Discuss African Religion and ethical values.
5. Give your own definition of African Religion.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Bascom, W. (1973). *African Art (in Cultural Perspective).* New York: W.W. Norton (Ed.).

Bascom, W. *Ifa Divination*. Ibadan :University Press.

Erivwo, S. (1979). Alternative Captions for African Religion. A Paper Presented at the 5th National Conference of Nigerian Association for the Study of Religions, Ilorin.

Malinowski, B. Opus Cit, 107

Metuh, E.I. (1987). *Comperative Studies of African Traditional Religions*. Onitsha: IMICO Publishers.

Parrinder, E.W. (1961). *African Traditional Religion.* Sheldon Press.

Smith, E.W. (1962). *The Golden Stool*. London: Holborn Publishing House.

Thurstan, S. (1970). *Igbo-Ukwu, An Account of the Archaeological Discoveries in Eastern Nigeria*. London: Faber and Faber.

Vatican. (1969) Secretariatus Pro Non-Christianis. (edit). *Meeting African Religions*. Rome.

UNIT 2   DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF RELIGION

CONTENTS

1.0   INTRODUCTION

There are various methodological approaches to the study of religion. For the study of African Religion, authors are yet to agree on the methodology for it. This is because; the systematic study of African religion is confronted with many problems quite inherent in the African religion itself, while others derive from the historical development of the religion. For example African Religion has no sacred books; it has no written documented source, nor its tenets defined and preserved in a collection of books as is the case with the other religions like Buddhism, Hinduism or Islam, which have been the objects of systematic studies. it is ethnic based, and highly influenced by evolutionism, colonialism, the British Anthropological School, African Nationalism, etc. It is because of this that, different categories of people, such as missionaries, historians, anthropologists, sociologists, and theologians, have claimed to have authentic interpreters of African religion and have approached its study in various ways. We shall look at the Evolutionalist, Anthropological, Philosophical, Descriptive, Historical and Comparative Thematic approaches for the study of African Religion in spite of the other numerous approaches people have proposed. This is because these are the approaches that have had considerable influence on the development of the study of African Traditional Religion.

2.0   OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit you should be able to:

- discuss the Problems in the study of African Religion
- explain the various approaches to the study of African Religion.

3.0   MAIN CONTENT

3.1   Evolutionist Approaches

The study of religion in the later part of the19th century was influenced by the doctrine of evolutionism. This had far reaching effects on the study of African Religion. Under the spell of evolutionism, the study of religion for the most part concerned itself with the search for the most primitive form of religion, and the stages of its development to its highest form. This they assumed was monotheism, the form of religion practiced in Europe. African religion was very much in focus at this time, not because it was thought that it deserved study for its own sake, but because, the evolutionist authors believed that examples of primitive forms of religion which they were looking for had survived in Africa. What African religion gained from the evolutionists is a large collection of derogatory terms supposed to designate primitive forms of religion- fetishism, animism, totemism, polytheism. These terms unfortunately are still widely used to designate African religion in literature and in some books about Africa.

Another legacy left by the evolutionists, who dominated the study of African Religion at that period, was the assumption that any higher forms of beliefs, concepts, institutions, art, or any item of culture found in Africa must have been imported from outside Africa. Consequently, all kinds of theories and explanations were put forward on how different religious traits had reached African societies usually from Egypt, Middle East or Europe. One of these theories is the so called "Hamitic Theory" according to which, higher religions of civilisation like iron working, sacred kingship, the notion of the Supreme Being were brought by the Hamites – a branch of European race who was indigenised.

It is true that Africa has been in contact with the outside world especially North Africa and the Middle East for several centuries. It must therefore have imported from but also have exported ideas to these areas. So, the attitude of tracing the outside source of whatever is noble and of some worth in Africa is unscientific and racist in the sense that it denies Africans any inventive capabilities. Evolutionist approach lost its appeal when it was discovered that monotheistic concepts existed side

by side with animistic and fetishistic beliefs among many so called primitive peoples. In fact, some authors in the evolutionist camp, like Andrew Lang and Wilhelm Schmidt, put forward the opinion that monotheism, not fetishism or animism, was the earliest form of religion, and polytheism, animism and fetishism were later degenerations. This opinion was not popular with evolutionists. It in fact marked the beginning of the decline of the evolutionist approach in the study of African Religion. However, Schmidt's work did focus attention on the significance of the Supreme Being in African Religious Traditions.

3.2   Anthropological Approaches

The colonial occupation of Africa in the 19th century and the establishment of colonial rule in most parts of Africa created a favourable atmosphere for anthropologists to carry out extensive fieldwork and documentation of traditions, customs, beliefs and practices of the people before they were contaminated by foreign influences. For this reason, anthropological writings still constituted an important documented source of African Religion today. Anthropologists of course were primarily concerned with the study of small scale societies. They studied religion as one of the many cultural items in each small-scale society. Consequently, social anthropologists have all along insisted that the religious beliefs of different peoples must be studied in the social context in which they are found. The significance of traditional beliefs and practices considered outside their social context, they point out, can be likened to the way in which the collection of African masks in a museum gives us very little understanding of the significance of any particular mask in the context of the whole outfit worn in a dance celebrating some event of a communal significance.

Because of this, the approach of social anthropologists to the study of African Religion has been described by Aylward Shorter as "fiercely particularistic", insisting on a through-going study of each and every ethnic group, and professing an almost total agnosticism in respect of any similarities or links between them. On the one hand, this particularist approach has shed new light on the various symbols, values, significance and functions of different traditional beliefs. On the other hand, the refusal of many anthropologists to go beyond this, and their insistence on seeing religious beliefs only through the binoculars of their social and psychological functions, has given rise to the charge of reductionism – reducing African Religion to merely psychological, sociological or political devices.

A move within the anthropological camp initiated by Evans Pritchard sought to counter balance particularism with comparative approach, and functionalism with a quest for meaning. On particularism/comparism, he suggests:

"A number of systematic studies of primitive philosophies have to be made. When that has been done a classification can be made on the basis of which comparative studies can be undertaking which possibly may lead to some general conclusions"

The comparative approach which Evans-Pritchard is proposing here presumes the study of the philosophy, i.e., the meaning of religious beliefs and practices of each group as a system of ideas and practices in its own right. In other words the comparative approach presumes the thorough study of the meaning of religious beliefs and practices of each individual society, so that particularist approach is a necessary prerequisite for the comparative approach.

3.3   The Philosophical Approach

In contrast to the early British anthropologists who focused on the social order and studied African religion from the point of view of its functions in the social order, the French focused on the symbolic-philosophical order, and regarded this as the determinant of both social structure, and other aspects of African life – their law, ethics, psychology and ritual. This approach seeks to demonstrate that African religious systems form coherent systems of ideas and practices in their own right, supported by and under-lying philosophy or worldview. In pursuit of this belief, the French anthropologists made great advances in elucidating African cosmological systems and the philosophies implicit in their belief systems. Thus the anthropological research mission led by Griaule, discovered a fascinating cosmogony and a set of cosmological ideas among the Dogon people of Mali which shape their beliefs and habits. This led Griaule to observe that in fact, the Dogon live by a cosmogony, a metaphysic and a religion which Christian theology might study with profit.

The approaches and conclusions of the British and French are so diverse that one is sometimes inclined to inquire how far the assumptions and approach of each group influenced their findings. At a seminar on 'African Systems on Thought", in 1960, at which both parties were represented, there was general agreement that both approaches were convergent and complimentary as shown below: What was required was a theoretical frame which would take full account of both the structural

and functional and logico-meaningful modalities of religion and would reveal their hidden interconnections (Fortes: 15).

True to their philosophical traditions, several French-speaking authors (European and African) have tried to identify the unifying philosophical principles which underlie African religious systems. The most influential of these attempts is Placid Tempels'(1969:77) use of the Bergsonian concept of Vital force (which he claims to be an authentic Bantu traditional concept) to explain every aspect of their life and beliefs – their psychology, epistemology, ethics, jurisprudence as well as their religious beliefs. According to Tempels, the Bantu see beings primarily as vital force or living forces which are capable of growth or weakening.

At the head of the hierarchy of all vital forces is God, 'the Supreme Force", next come the deities, then the ancestor founders of the clan; then, comes man, followed by animals, trees and mineral forces while beings are linked to one another by a network of relationships. Harmonious interaction of beings results in the mutual strengthening of their vital forces, while any pernicious influence emitted by any of the forces results into evil. His theory which is in the nature of a hypothesis is so well argued and illustrated that some writers who may have some reservations about some of his conclusions would still agree that over-all, his theory is on the right lines.

Less successful perhaps is the attempt of Alexis Kagame, followed by Jan Jahnheinz to use Aristotelian categories to classify African concepts of being. They retained Tempel's basic concept that essence of being is force (Ntu) and identified four categories of Ntu (forces). Mu-ntu forces endowed with intelligence and will like God, Spirits, Man; Ki-ntu visible beings without intelligence like animals, trees and mineral; Ha-ntu, beings of space and time category; Ku-ntu, modality or qualities of being like beauty, happiness, size, etc. There is no doubt that Kagames' theory as that of Tempels has been inspired by European philosophy. Kagame in particular, openly admitted that he was inspired by Aristotle because as he said his philosophy has a universal application and relevance. However, the impression one gets is that it is an attempt to work our African equivalents of Aristotelian categories and then to slot in African concepts forcibly into these categories whether they fit or not.

3.4   Descriptive Approach

This approach tries to make a systematic presentation of African Religion by describing its major tenets as found in different African societies. The description centres around the main items of belief

common to most African societies- the supreme being, the Deities, Ancestors, Worship, and the system of morality. However, variations and divergences of the beliefs are pointed out where they exist. Representatives of this approach include such big names as Parrinder in two of his famous books, "African Traditional Religion' and "Religion in Africa" and Mbiti in his "African Religions and Philosophy". The big name on the French side is Deschamps in his book, "Les Religions De L'Afrique Noire". Mbiti's description of his method is typical of this approach;

"My approach here is chiefly descriptive and interpretative, bringing together in a comparative way those elements which are representative of Traditional religions from all over Africa".

The weakness of this approach is in fact that it tries to cover too many societies and too many religious phenomena. This weakens its attempts at making comparisons, and it often ends up making enumeration of different items of beliefs and traditions from a large collection of societies. Furthermore, it has been criticized for ignoring the socio-cultural contexts and the historical dimensions of African Religion. Consequently, its analysis is lacking in depth and often paints a larger-than-life picture of African Religion.

3.5   Historical Approach

The neglect of the historical dimension of African Religion was not restricted to the protagonists of the descriptive approach. In fact until recently most writers on African Religion paid no attention to this aspect partly because of the anthropological bias against history, but more so because of the lack of documentary sources and archaeological materials. No writer would of course deny that African Religion has a history; the question was whether it could be known. About this many writers like Evans – Pritchard were skeptical;

'Nuer religion, like any other, has of course a history, but we can only trace it in so far as it survives in the memories of the Nuer themselves, for reports by travelers, which started barely a century ago, are on this matter slight and unreliable.

Consequently, most anthropological and descriptive accounts continued to present an image of an African Religion that was not subject to historical changes. Recently, some African scholars in collaboration with some American colleagues organized a series of conferences on the historical study of African Religion. The result of their research is now published in the book "The Historical Study of African Religion" edited

by Ranger and Kimambo. By combining the use of oral history, more recent political history and contemporary socio-religious analysis, they were able to show that there has been a high degree of cultural interaction between different African ethnic groups, and how this has resulted in the introduction of new cults and the modification of new ones. This work demonstrated that the study of the history of African Religion is not only possible but also that no study of African Religion which ignores this dimension can be said to be objective.

3.6   Comparative Thematic Approach

This approach seeks to remedy some of the short-comings of the descriptive approach which as we have seen is that its coverage tries to span the whole of Africa and too many themes. One way of delimiting the wide scope is by concentrating on a geographical or cultural region. Geographical continuity and environmental and cultural affinity will facilitate the comparative work and is more likely to lead to historical conclusions about the factual interactions of people. This has been called the Limited Comparative Approach. The thematic approach aims at limiting the scope by selecting specific themes and studying them in details, in the contexts of two or more societies, and comparing them the findings in order to identify the similar and dissimilar features. In other words, each theme is developed and illustrated with examples from two or more societies whose beliefs on the subject have received a thorough study. This approach permits one to discuss each of the themes in dept and in its various dimensions, and at the same time, draw examples from all over Africa.

4.0   CONCLUSION

The study of African Religion has been the preoccupation of African Scholars especially towards the end of the 20th Century as a reaction to what Western scholars and missionaries have derogatorily ascribed to or said of the African Religion. Soon after embarking on the study of African Religion they were able to discover that, one of the major problems in the study was the non-existence of written records about the religion; and there are also many other problems associated with it. But what is obvious about the African is that religion penetrates and permeates his life to the extent that separating his religion from his social life is almost impossible. It is this factor that has produced the various approaches to the African religion so that the theologian, the anthropologist, the philosopher, etc, all approach it from their own perspectives. All these approaches at the appropriate time converge and provide a common understanding of the rich religious heritage of the African people.

5.0   SUMMARY

African Religion has many problems ranging from its name to non-availability of sacred books about the religion. This has therefore produced different approaches to the study of African religion. African religion must be understood and studied in its cultural and concrete historical context. The different approaches to the study of African religion immediately indicates that, African religion can be seen and described based on the approach the describer has adopted. Certainly, as people adopt different approaches to the study of African religion that is how the religion will be described differently from the different perspectives. This still leaves us with the problem of trying to identify the nature of African religion.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Which approach do you consider to be the best in the study of African religion?

6.0   TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1.   Why study African religion from different approaches?
2.   What do you understand by the Philosophical approach?
3.   How does the comparative thematic approach set out to correct the shortcomings of the descriptive approach?
4.   Evaluate the anthropological approaches to the study of African religion.

7.0   REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Fortes, M. & Dieterten, G. (1965). *African Systems of Thought*. Oxford University Press.

Griaule, M. (1965). *Conversation with Ogotemelli*. Oxford University Press.

Idowu, B. (1975). *African Traditional Religion, A definition*. NY: Orbis: Maryknoll.

Mbiti, J.S. (1969). *African Religions and Philosophy*. London: Heinemann.

Metuh, E.I. (1987). *Comperative Studies of African Traditional Religions*. Onitsha: IMICO Publishers.

Pritchard, E. (1965). *Neur Religion*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Tempels, P. (1969). Bantu Philosophy. *Presence Africaine*.

UNIT 3   SOURCES OF AFRICAN ETHICS

CONTENTS

1.0   INTRODUCTION

Like in Christian ethics the question of the origin of African ethics is very crucial here because, it will provide a much more and deeper insight into the study of our subject matter. While in Christian Ethics we discovered that the bible was the source of Christian ethics, the situation is not the same in African ethics. One of the problems for the study of African ethics is that there was traditionally no written record and no place where its ethical principles were clearly spelt out. Again, unlike modern western ethics, African ethics does not regard ethics as a separate discipline, because morality is indistinguishable from the rest of African social life. So, to set out to understand African ethics through abstract moral principles is to embark on a journey of frustration. Instead, to determine what constitute moral behaviour one has to observe and reflect upon the social life of the people i.e., their rituals, customs, practices, events and relationships. Our sources of knowledge of African ethics are thus not written records but customs and the rich African oral traditions.

2.0   OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- explain how oral tradition cuts across all traditions and cultures
- discuss the relationship between ethics and morality
- discuss the relationship between values and ethics
- differentiate between social and personal ethics
- mention other sources of African ethics.

3.0   MAIN CONTENT

It must be admitted however that, it is sometimes difficult to understand and interpret traditions correctly, but there are ways in which this can be done. Bolaji Idowu (83-84), gives some helpful hints:

"First, it is necessary to listen carefully and get at the inner meaning. Secondly, it is also necessary to remember that the African situation is one in which life is not divided artificially into the sacred and the secular, that it is one in which reality is regarded as one, and in which things of the earth (material things and man's daily doings and involvements) have meaning only in terms of the heavenly, (the spiritual, reckoning with the transcendent and that part of man which has links with the supersensible world). Thirdly, a doctrine is not necessary unhistorical or merely imaginary simply because it is mythological."

Kunhiyop (adds the fourth principle to the three listed by Idowu: Traditions must be interpreted in their own contexts. Interpreters of the Bible like to say that, a text without a context is only a pretext. The same principle he says applies to African customs and the African oral traditions.

3.1   Customs and Taboos

In Africa, ethical principles and rules of conduct have been preserved over the ages in various customs and traditions that provide explanations of the reason, motivations, values and purpose of behaviour. They supply the moral code and indicate, "What the people must do to live ethically" (Idowu: 42). Traditions that are passed on from generation to generation become the scripture of the people, that is, their source of knowledge about what God requires. This knowledge is maintained by the elders, who are the custodians of the rules and regulations that guide the whole community. Thus Africans will often enquire what the elders (and the ancestors) have to say about something, and the tradition they transmit has the force of law. If tradition forbids someone from

marrying from a particular clan, he or she must abide by that rule. Failure to do so will bring problems for the whole community, which comprises not only the living but also all those who have died but are still a vital part of the community.

Although, murder is prohibited, the tradition of some people allows euthanasia for the very elderly who can no longer function in society. Thus among the Bajju of Nigeria, an old woman who is tired of living may request her relatives to permit her to die peacefully and join her ancestors instead of living in misery. She then dies, either because her relatives asked God to take her life, or because they served her poisoned food. Similarly, in some societies, tradition has also laid down that twins are to be murdered because they bring bad luck, and babies with deformities are also killed immediately after birth.

Many traditions relate to women and sex. Sexual intercourse with one's wife before a hunting expedition is wrong because it will bring misfortune and unsuccessful hunt. Husbands are forbidden to have sexual intercourse with their wives during their menstrual periods. Pregnant women are expected to treat children with respect. If they do not, they will endure a very difficult childbirth until they repent of their harsh attitude. Some groups forbid husbands from beating their wives during the week of peace before the planting season in order to avoid angering the goddess of the earth. Whistling at night is also strongly forbidden because it invites evil spirits into the compound, just as exposing to the public the god that the people worship is instant death (Kunhiyop: 10).

3.2   The Oral Tradition

The other major source of information about African ethics is the oral tradition, that is, the many stories and legends by which knowledge is transmitted across generations by way of the spoken, as opposed to the written, word. This tradition includes myths and stories, liturgies, songs and proverbs. Western scholars have often looked at oral tradition as being less valid and credible than written sources. Judaism, Christianity and Islam for example are often seen as valid and superior to other religions because they have written records. But these religions too did not always have written records. Many of the Hebrew Scriptures were transmitted orally for generations before they were committed to writing, and Christianity was transmitted by the spoken word before it was recorded in written word. To then say that early Christianity was invalid and inferior because there were no written documents is to completely misunderstand the place of oral and written records. Jesus method of teaching was by oral instructions, and the apostles and the

early church fathers employed oral tradition, which was passed on to later generations. John the apostle himself states in 1 John 1:1: 'we declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life.' The reference to "what we have heard" clearly refers to oral transmission of the message he and the other apostles received from Jesus. There is thus no reason to despise the oral tradition as valid source of knowledge, except that it must be carefully interpreted within its own context.

3.3   Myths and Legends

Myths and legends are traditional stories about something that happened in the past which explains something in the present. They usually involve gods and heroic figures. As pointed out, it is important to take into account the context in which they are told if one is to interpret them correctly. Failure to do so will give a false and misleading meaning.

A Tiv story from Nigeria illustrates what this means in practice. The story says that in the ancient times God used to live very close to human beings. However, one day a woman was pounding her yam so vigorously that her pestle hit God on the eye, and he retread into the heavens. A careless reading of this story among the Tiv suggests that they saw God as a human being. But the context and thrust of tradition have nothing to do with God's physical nature. Rather the story explains why we cannot see God, and thus deals with his transcendence. He exists, but far removed from the human beings. This story is found in many other African societies with little variations yet with the same meaning or interpretation.

3.4   Stories

Stories abound in Africa and storytelling is a common feature among the African people and these are an important way of entrenching ethical values and motivation. All African children who grew up in traditional societies listen to stories after dinner and by the fireside. The story tellers, who are usually older women such as grandmothers teach many values.

The context in which young people learn (these values) is fellowship with older, wise persons. In a society in which the spoken word is more important than the written, fellowship with old, experienced persons is an essential task in life, since the young person who is growing up must not only learn how to master life, but must also acquire the art of speaking (Bujo: 25).

274

Some of these stories are traditional myths; others are made up to teach some moral principles. Various animals like the jackal, hyena, hare, lion, cat, elephant, python, dog and he-goat are personified to teach moral truth. Specific animals often represent specific characteristics: the hare is clever and shrewd; the hyena is greedy, and the he-goat is very promiscuous. Thus a story is told about a he-goat who asked some passersby whether they had possibly seen any women walking along the road. They told him that the only women they had seen were his mother and sisters. The goat replied that was fine: his mother and sisters were women, and so he could sleep with them too. The moral of this story is that failure to respect basic morality and the rules governing sexual relationships reduces a person to acting like an animal. Through these stories the young people grow and develop high quality of morality and this is sustained and passed on from one generation to the other so as the chain is maintained and preserved. They contain the rich moral traditions of the African people.

The category of stories can also include modern novels like Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. It deals with many communal traditions regarding marriage, sex, funerals, suicide, capital punishment, fertility, work, dignity, honor, pride, courage, truth and falsehood, wealth and health (Kunhiyop:12).

3.5   Songs

Singing is part of everyday African life, and songs reveal much about the ethical motivation for action. There are special songs for particular groups to sing on special occasions. There are wedding, war, hunting, burial and farming songs, etc. Wedding songs, for example reveal the community's expectations when it comes to marriage. Virginity is highly prized in many African societies: Chastity before marriage on the part of the woman is essential. A woman who is not virtuous at marriage is a disgrace both to herself and the family. Chastity in married life is a woman's bounden duty, and so if a girl is found to be a virgin on her wedding day, there is praise and dancing for her self control and the family is proud. But if a girl loses her virginity before her wedding night, she brings shame and disgrace on her family, and this shame is recorded in songs that are sung for all to hear.

Songs also indicate the community's attitude to procreation. The following song is sung by a Dinka woman who is barren:

a.   What misfortune has befallen me?
b.   O Abyor
c.   People of my father

d. Do not blame me
e. Is it not for a baby born?
f. That a woman keeps her home.

The song affirms that the purpose of marriage is child-bearing. When there are no children, the marriage is meaningless. This belief is shared by many in Africa.

Songs for warriors demonstrate correct conduct during battle and a warrior's responsibilities. In Things Fall Apart a special song is made for Okafor, who defeats the famous known as Amalinze the cat in a wrestling match. As soon as Okafor swings his legs over his opponent's head, his supporters sing:

a. Who will wrestle for our village?
b. Okafor will wrestle for our village
c. Has he thrown a hundred men?
d. He has thrown four hundred men.
e. Has he thrown a hundred cats?
f. He has thrown four hundred cats
g. Then send him word to fight for us (C. Achebe, 36).

The song makes it clear that a warrior is expected to use his skills on behalf of his community, and that talents bestowed on an individual must be used not only for himself but for the benefit of all the other members of the community or society. There songs that not only tell people what they must do but also warn them about what they must not do, such as raping or stealing. Songs also celebrate the activities of daily life such as hunting, fishing etc.

3.6 Proverbs, Riddles and Wise sayings

African proverbs, riddles and wise sayings are a record of beliefs, values and morality. The concept of fairness is enshrined in the saying, "the cooking pot for the chameleon is the cooking pot for the lizard", the African version of "what is good for the goose is good for the gander". Patience is taught from the Hausa proverb which says that with long, slow cooking, one can even make soup from a stone. Endurance is the theme of the saying, "The horns cannot be too heavy for the head of the cow that must bear them", meaning that one should bear one's burdens even if they are heavy.

Other proverbs offer warnings: The Hausa warn that greed is the gateway to grief. The Yoruba warn against judging how someone is doing by how they look by saying " all red-necked lizards look healthy

276

including the one that has a stomach ache". People are urged to be cautious about what they say by the warning: "until the rotten tooth is pulled, the mouth must chew with caution"- if a guilty person hears what you are saying, he may try to escape. "If you defecate in the shade, you must stand in the sunshine" is a reminder that if you chose to leave a good situation because you hope for something better, you must endure the consequences of your choice.

There are many other proverbs that deal with human relationships. The Hausa again say that kindness is elastic and can be extended to many. If a husband and wife are very close they are said to be as needle and thread the thread goes wherever the needle goes, just as it does when sewing. Bad or dictatorial leadership is referred to as "the leadership of the cocoa yam". A cocoa yam is a kind of root that has one big yam from which the other little yams grow. However, the presence of the big yam prevents the little yams from ever growing to full size.

As usual these proverbs and sayings are in the custody of the elders who use them in educating the younger ones who themselves after some period of schooling become vexed in them. Most of the times they are offered without explanations but they are understood as they immediately communicate what virtues are as well as moral truths about relationships, marriages, leadership, and the like. During discussions on matters of dispute, proverbs and wise sayings take a central stage and only those who understand them get meaning out of such discussions.

3.7   Liturgy

African religion has a rich tapestry of invocations, prayers, rituals and sacrifices addressed to the gods, spirits and ancestors. Worshipers pray for a good hunting season, birth of a child or protection from harm, or they give thanks that their prayers have been answered. The words they use reveal much about their beliefs, values and morality. Again in Achebe's "Things Fall Apart" an elder prays to the ancestors:

> We do not ask for wealth because he that has health
> and children will also have wealth. We do not pray to
> have more money but to have more kinsmen. We are
> better than animals because we have kinsmen. An
> animal rubs his itching flank against a three, a man
> asks his kinsman to scratch him (1958:117).

The African communal relationship commands a very high regard in African ethics as illustrated by Achebe in the above quotation. If the man asks his fellow man to scratch his itching part of the body, that

demonstrates one's sense of brotherhood in African ethics, and being one's keeper in African religion is central to it.

3.8   Religion in African Ethics

The definition of religion by Clifford Geertz (1973:90), clearly illustrates the role of religion in African ethics and morality, thus:
"Religion is a system of symbols which acts as to establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seems uniquely realistic"

Arising from this definition of religion Kunhiyop believes that the stress on moods and motivations and on the general order of existence in this definition makes it clear that moral and religious values or beliefs are intimately related. Religious values and beliefs have a great impact on the way people live (15).

The above point holds very strong in Africa, for as noted by many scholars of African Religion, Africans are incurably religious and religion permeates all aspects of life. It was Idowu who once said this with reference to the Yoruba; "in all things they are religious. Religion forms the foundation and the all-governing principle of life from them."(5) He insists that "with the Yoruba, morality is certainly the fruit of religion. They do not make any attempt to separate the two; and it is impossible for them to do so without disastrous consequences" (5).

Throughout Africa, God, the ancestors and the spirits are all powers or forces that impinge on human life in one way or another and in this sense therefore they can rightly be seen as agents of morality. Thus in order to understand African morality or ethics, and Africa's deep sense of right and wrong, good or evil, it is important to understand the African religious beliefs. In fact by getting involved in religious practices of the African people, one is already deeply involved into the morality and ethics of the African people.

3.9   God's Existence and Nature

The debate about the existence of God for the African is simply a waste of intellectual energy and is rather ridiculous, because, God is the foundation and explanation of all creation and existence, for if he did not exist, nothing else could exist. In Africa, knowledge of God is never sought for theoretical reasons or to satisfy intellectual curiosity. He is sought for practical reasons, and the appropriate response to him is

practical devotion shown by living in the way he prescribes. This is the moral part of life for God is the ultimate source of all morality. God made man and it is He who implants in him the sense of right and wrong (Idowu: I45).

God is known by special names among all African peoples and these names attribute to him the all the qualities of the supreme God among the other gods who play subordinate roles to him. For example, he is called Olodumare in Yoruba, Mrungu among the Digo, Lubanga among the Acholi, Umlungu among the Nyika, Kazah among the Bajju, Chukwu among the Igbos, Leve among the Mende, Mawu among the Ewe, Dagwi among the Berom, Aondo among the Tiv, Owoicho among the Idoma, Ngai among the Kikuyu and Nkulunkulu among the Zulu. Most of these names rather describe the nature of God and can be translated to mean, the Supreme Being, the creator, the owner of the sky, the one above.

Although, among the Ngbaka, he is known as Gale, the one who helps in times of difficulties, which makes him so immanent, and very near to the people. The name, Naawuni, used by the Dagbani literally means the king of the gods, while the name Katonda, used by the Buganda, means the lord of creation, which means that he is superior to all and can be referred to as the father of the gods.

This Supreme Being, by whatever name He is known, has the attributes of being the creator, king and judge who is all knowing, all powerful, all wise, all seeing and immortal. His moral attributes also include goodness, mercy, holiness, governance, justice and love. He is the one who gives good harvest, children, protection and more. Because he is good, he also demands that his created beings be good in their relationships with one another. This explains why man is always striving for good and avoiding evil, because this is intrinsic in human nature to help him man lives good life as God his creator is also good. This is found in all religions.

It then translates that without God there would be no morality. Morality is therefore strongly tied to belief in God. But although God is all powerful and around us, (omnipotent and omnipresent), he is also ultimately unknowable. This is because, as shown among the Yoruba people, he has assigned responsibility for most of his daily dealings with men and women to intermediaries, such as the spirits and ancestors. Thus in the Gods are not to Blame, the character Aderopo is sent to the land of Orunmila, to ask the all-seeing god why they were in pain (Ola Rotimi: 166).

Orunmila is a deity who occupies a position below that of the Supreme God, Olodumare, but who exercises some of his functions in that he too is all-seeing.

The correct response to God is to do what he dictates. As far as the Yoruba are concerned, the full responsibility of all the affairs of life belongs to the Deity; their own part in the matter is to do as they are ordered to do through the priests and diviners whom they believe to be the interpreters of the will of the Deity. John Mbiti (174), points out that It is believed in many African societies that their morals were given to them by God from the very beginning. This provides an unchallenged authority for the morals. It is also believed or thought that some of the departed and the spirits keep watch over people to make sure that they observe the moral laws and are punished when they break them deliberately or knowingly. This additional belief strengthens the authority of the morals.

African ethics are thus deontological, in that they focus on doing one's duty by being obedient to the demands posed by the gods or the spirits of the ancestors. Since God is completely good and there is no evil in him, evil is associated with the other deities, spirits and witches or sorcerers. Death, lightning strikes, sickness, miscarriages, suffering and all other human misery are the direct work of these malevolent spirits, with whom some human beings may be in league. In this sense, African religion is dualistic.

3.10 Spirits

A great variety of spirit beings form an important supernatural reality. Mbiti (78) notes that, myriads of spirits are reported from every African people, but they defy description almost as much as they defy the scientist's test tubes in the laboratory. For example, the Yoruba of Nigeria have at least 1700 deities. These spirits, which form part of the invincible world, influence human life on a daily basis and humans have to deal with them. According to Idowu (174), spirits are ubiquitous; there is no area of the earth, no object or creature, which has not a spirit of its own or which cannot be inhabited by a spirit.

The spirits are powerful but they are not omnipotent like God and are subordinate to him. Some of them are benevolent and some of them are malevolent. They can assist one to have children, to become wealth and to perform wanders such as flying in the sky, etc. Spirits can posses somebody to help others, such as in the Bori dance in some parts of Nigeria. This dance involves a person, usually a woman becoming possessed by a spirit so that she goes into a trance while drums are

beaten in a certain rhythm. While in this trance she can diagnose and prescribe medication for a sick person. The spirits can also make people do evil things, such as a mother killing her children. They can strike a person with sickness like madness or severe fever. If they so desire, some spirits can even take female form and be married and have children with him. The Bajju of Nigeria believes that an epileptic attack is actually sexual intercourse with a spirit. Spirits often give justification for certain actions such as war.

Depending on their nature, different spirits have greater or lesser association with human morality. In things Fall Apart, Achebe (85) tells us that Ani the earth goddess, was the ultimate judge of morality and conduct because, she was in close communion with the departed fathers of the clan whose bodies had been committed to earth. The departed fathers or ancestors are an important category of spirits. Mbiti (1969:83) calls them the "living dead" because although they have died they are still very active and interested in the affairs of their descendants. He describes them as the closet links that men have with the spirit world…they are bilingual: they speak languages of men, with whom they lived until recently; and they speak the language of the spirit and of God, to whom they are drawing nearer ontologically. These are the spirits with which African peoples are most concerned: it is through the living dead that the spirits world becomes personal to men. They are still part of their human families, and people have personal memories of them.

Ancestral spirits are omnipresent, affecting the affairs of men and women on a constant basis. Achebe (85) notes thus the land of the living was not far from the domain of the ancestors. There was coming and going between them, especially at festivals and also when an old woman died, because an old man was very close to the ancestors. A man's life from birth to death was a series of transition rites which brought him nearer and nearer to his ancestors.

Ancestors often reveal themselves to their descendants through dreams and visions in order to provide information, such as warning against bad behaviour or revealing how to cure some disease. They usually appear to the oldest in the family, who will communicate their message to the other members of the family. These appearances have revelatory authority and are binding upon all members of the family.

Great care is taken to give old people fitting burial with observance of all the appropriate rituals. Though many people who are aged and are Christians, sometimes at moment of death give instructions on how they should be buried, with some insisting for example that they should not

be buried with any red material or in a coffin. This is built on the belief that certain objects obstruct contact with the spirit world. They therefore threaten to embark on revenge on the family if their wishes were not honoured.

The memory of the ancestors is kept alive through rituals, through telling and retelling their biographies to their descendants and, above all by seeing that the living follows their teachings and instructions. Thus the ancestors are continually involved in the lives of their descendants. What the living, do or do not do affects them greatly.

If the living disregards a tradition or break taboos like those against incest, the ancestors are displeased and bring punishment through barrenness, miscarriage, poor harvests, misfortune and war. On the other hand, if the descendants do what traditions and custom require of them, the ancestors are pleased and bless them with abundant harvest. Answer prayers, fertility, good health, prosperity and protection (Richardson: 40).

In this sense therefore ancestors in Africa regulate the moral lives of the living. African people always do the good things of life, not only for themselves but to appease the ancestors, and also for the fear of been punished with some dangerous event or disease. Respect for the old and weak takes a central stage in African morality, just as care for the sick, as they are seen to be moving closer into the spirit world where they possess the power to inflict harm on the living. African humanism is highly demonstrated during this period of old age, sickness and suffering, according them the honour quite unprecedented. An old sick man with tuberculosis would in modern considerations be isolated and rejected, but in Africa, this is when he is shown the greatest love, by even eating with him in the same bowl of food. After, if he finally dies, his corpse is given red carpet treatment until after burial, and the respect continues even after, like in weeding around the grave all the times.

3.11   The Role of Community in African Ethics

One's grasp of African morality is dismal if one does not come to terms with the profound concept of community. Richardson believes that community is the central concept in African ethics, the central experience of African morality (40). The idea of "we" and "us" is entrenched in Africans right from childhood, so that as they grow they know that they belong to and must function within the community in which they are rooted. This understanding is supported by many proverbs that buttress the significance of community and relationships. Thus the Lube tribe of the Democratic Republic of Congo has a saying,

"When you get meat, share it with your family, or no-one will share with you when you don't have any (Munza: 15).

The individual "I" and "me" is understood from the perspective of "We and "us'. Western individualism is abhorrent in traditional African society. Africans argue that if God had wanted human beings to live and function only as individuals, he would never have arranged for them to be born into families.

John Mbiti, who was probably the first to articulate the African concept of community, as he wrote:

In traditional life, the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. He owes his existence to others people, including those of past generations and his contemporaries. He is simply part of the whole. The community must therefore make, create or produce the individual; for the individual depends on the corporate group … Only in terms of other people does the individual become conscious of his own being, his own duties, his privileges and responsibilities towards himself and towards other people. When he suffers, he does not suffer alone but with the corporate group; when he rejoices not alone but with his kinsmen, neighbours and his relatives whether living or dead. When he gets married he is not alone, neither does the wife belongs to him alone; So also the children belong to the corporate group of kinsmen, even if they bear only their father's name. Whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. Therefore the individual can only say, 'I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am."(108)

Another way of expressing this is "I am because we are related." It is in accordance to this understanding of community thinking that Mbiti reasons thus:

The greater number of morals has to do with social conduct, that is the life of society at large, the conduct of the individual within the group or community or nation. Africa morals lay a great emphasis on societal conduct, since a basic African view is that the individual exists only because others exist (174).

There is thus interconnectedness in African sense of community. Malidoma Some in *Remembering Our Purpose* notes:

> What's good about this is that the individual never
> feels isolated from the rest of the community. And
> nobody is higher than anybody else, so there is no
> class. There is something very interesting about a

classless society: it's one that allows itself to be led by the spirit. There is a greater tendency to assist those who are older and slower, and it prevents people from feeling cut off or left out or off track (Quoted in Kunhiyop: 22).

What the community says or believes in is binding on the individual. Africans who have lived in the west have seen the absurdity and cruelness of individualism and the so-called freedom which is at the core of western culture. The African scholar, some states: "The sense of privacy people have in the west is a very lonely privacy; it is a very frightening privacy. The freedom that goes with it is of pretty much the same nature; it is a freedom that is weighty, that is burden.

The African sense of community is sometimes perceived by westerners as encouraging laziness and allowing people to act as parasites. This is not true. Rather responsibility and hard work is encouraged. The Bajju of Nigeria, for example, say, "If you eat alone, you must pay. Another common saying among them is, "who will grind while another person is eating?" Traditionally, the Bajju and many traditional societies in Africa used stones to grind corn to make food from its flour. The art of grinding corn is very hard work. The saying means that, it is not proper for one person to be working away at grinding, while another just sits around and eats.

In the same vein, Julius Nyerere commented,

> Those of us who talk about the African way of life, quite rightly, take a pride in maintaining the traditional hospitality which is so great a part of it, might do well to remember the Swahili saying … "Treat your guest as a guest for two days, on the third day give him a hoe." In actual fact, the guest was likely to ask for the hoe even before his host had to give him one – for he knows what was expected of him, and would have been ashamed to remain idle any longer (Nyerere: 31).

Of course, there is the danger that this strong sense of community may jeopardise individual creativity. But it is not as if there is no individuality among Africans. The African view of community includes a balance in which individuals are encouraged to be creative. As Benjamin C. Ray notes,

African views of man strikes a balance between his collective identity as a member of society and his personal identity as a unique individual. In general, Africa philosophy tends to define persons in terms of the social groups to which they belong. A person is thought of first of all as a constituent of a particular community, for it is the community which defines who he is and who he can become … But African thought also recognises that each individual is a unique person endowed by the creator with his own personality and talents, and motivated by his own particular needs and ambitions. However, the emphasis upon a person's individuality is always balanced against the total societal and historical context (182).

Thus individual achievements are encouraged, acknowledged and interpreted in the context of the whole community. The success, achievements, failures, frustrations and grief or sorrow of the individual are shared by the entire community at the same time as the solidarity of the unit is stressed at the expense of the individual's private interest or loyalties.

Packer J. Palmer, writing for a different context, expresses this relationship well:

In a healthy society the private and the public are not mutually exclusive, nor in competition with each other. They are instead, two halves of a whole, two poles of a paradox. They work together dialectically, helping to create and nurture one another (31).

The community defines the taboos and rules of marriage, sex, war, farming, leadership and hunting for the community. In all cases the good of the community is to be sought and anything that will harm it rejected. The elders play a crucial role in this, for they are said to speak words of wisdom. For example, in cases of widow inheritance, they decide who is to inherit the wife of the deceased. In some societies the elders could decide that a son could inherit his father's wife, provided she is not his mother.

Because of this strong sense of community, the concept of shame is an important regulating factor in African morality. If an individual does something disgraceful such as committing theft or adultery or breaking a taboo, the whole tribe, village or clan shares his disgrace. Thus for example, an Akan child who commits nine crimes will be punished only for five of them, for the clan shares responsibility for his misdeeds (Fisher Quoted in Kunhiyop: 24). It is said among some tribes in Nigeria that the thief feels no shame; it is his brother who is ashamed. The Hausa also say that a good person belongs to everyone, but someone

who is wicked can only be claimed by his clan or people. The strong concept of community means that the common good takes precedence over the individual good. Consequently, an individual who is really a danger to the community; or threatens the clan with loss of life or goods, must be simply removed. Thus some groups in Africa will kill anyone who has committed adultery with a relative. It can thus be said that, a major part of African morality is the mutual obligation of human persons in particular the duties of children towards parents, and the connected obligations towards the ancestors.

Many years ago, John Taylor summarised the importance of community in African life:

Every man is born into a community. He is a member of a family and he grows up inheriting certain family characteristics, certain property, certain obligations; he learns certain family traditions, certain patterns of behavior, and certain points of pride. In the same way also, he is a member of a particular clan, tribe, and nation, and these will give him a particular culture and history, a particular way of looking at things, probably a particular religion. It is in such ways that every human being belongs to his own environment. He has his roots in a particular soil; he cannot be transplanted to a different soil without feeling the change very deeply; and if he is left with his roots in no soil his personality will become weak and unhappy and sick. Men and women who do not live in a community and feel that they really belong to it are not completely human. Something essential is missing, something which God has ordained for them as necessary for their true life. It is not good for man to be alone (Gen 2: 18).

It is however unfortunate that this African communal life is fast disappearing from public life and also including even the Christian religion where we are called to be our brother's keeper. This has made Benezet Bujo to recommend that community should be the organising framework for African ethics. He stresses that Africa has always thought in terms of a "we" ethics, involving not only the present, but also the dead (ancestors) and future generations. In all cases, any African morality that rejects the community nature of African society rejects completely the African existential reality. Community living brings to fore the centrality of human relationships in an African society and this whole concept must be understood in dealing with the African person and in also talking to him.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The most significant aspect of ethics in African societies is the intimate relationship between religion and morality or ethics. There is a firm belief that one cannot be moral without a strong belief in the supernatural, which includes belief in a supreme God and other deities such as spirits and ancestors, all of whom can interact with the living. The other fundamental aspect of African morality is community. The interpersonal relationships are more emphasise by Africans than individual satisfaction. The community shapes and regulates moral life and behaviour. The religious and communal aspects of morality both reflect and create values, that is deep-seated, entrenched belief systems that exercise a profound influence on African morality. These core moral truths are embedded in the oral traditions, liturgies, stories and proverbs that are the foundations, grounds and motivations of morality among African people.

The emphasis on values and motivation provides the answer to the question of whether African morality involves only external conformity or whether it also involves an internal attitude. Bujo declares, "African traditions make it plain that the people considered that thoughts and intensions, as well as external acts, had a moral character, and deserved to be considered good or bad. The morality we have discussed here is the traditional morality that exists independent of Christian influence. This information is very necessary because, in many contemporary African societies, Christianity and western civilisations have influenced most of the African morality so that the originality of it is totally lacking today.

5.0 SUMMARY

Ethical behaviour is central to African way of life and it is expected that everybody, man and woman, young and old develop ethical virtues that guarantee healthy co-existence. In African moral system, it is incumbent on the elders to be models of ethical behaviour for the younger ones to emulate, since whatever the elders endorse is seen as a law that must be followed.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

What are the sources of African ethics?

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Discuss customs and taboos as sources of African ethics
2. How reliable are oral traditions as sources of African ethics?
3. Give a story in your ethnic group about love of neighbour
4. Asses the role of the community in African ethics
5. Do you have a myth on creation in your ethnic group?
6. Compile a list of proverbs in your own community that have some religious meaning.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Achebe, C. (1958). *Things Fall Apart.* London: Heinemann.

Bujo, B. (2001). Foundations of an African Ethic: Beyond the Universal Claims of Western Morality. Trans. Brian McNeil; NY: Crossroad.

Greetz, C. (1973). *The Interpretation of Cultures*. NY: Basics.

Idowu, B. (1975). *African Traditional Religion: A Definition*. NY Orbis: Maryknoll.

Idowu, B. (1988). *Oludumare, God in Yoruba Belief*. NY: African Islamic Mission.

Kunhiyop, S.W. (nd). *African Christian Ethics*. Kenya: HippoBooks Zondervan.

Mbiti, J.S. (2008). Introduction to African Religion. Quoted by Kasongo Munza. *A Letter to African about Africa*. Kempton Park, South Africa : Trans -World Radio.

Metuh, E.I. (1987). *Comparative Studies of African Traditional Religions*. Nigeria: IMICO Publishers.

Nyerere, J. (1967). Ujamaa. The basis of Africa Socialism in Ujamaa: Essays on Socialism. Dar es Salam, Oxford University Press.

Ray, B.C. (1976). *African Religion: Symbol, Ritual and Community*. Prentice Hall: Eaglewood Cliffs.

Rotimi, O. *The Gods are Not to Blame*.

MODULE 5   PLURALISTIC SOCIETY

Unit 1   Pluralistic Society
Unit 2   Evolution of Religious and Ethical Pluralism
Unit 3   Pluralism as a Means to Corporate Existence
Unit 4   Pluralism: A Comparative Analysis

UNIT 1   THE NATURE OF PLURALISTIC SOCIETY

CONTENTS

1.0   Introduction
2.0   Objectives
3.0   Main Content
        3.1   Nature of the Pluralistic Society
4.0   Conclusion
5.0   Summary
6.0   Tutor-Marked Assignment
7.0   References/Further Reading

1.0   INTRODUCTION

Pluralism is a situation where more than one ideology exists. It is a situation in which people of diverse persuasions co-exist and explore the richness of their different traditions for the benefit of the larger society of which they are members. Nigeria is a pluralistic society because various religious and cultural traditions are represented in it with each making an undeniable mark. The pluralistic nature of modern societies calls for a closer examination of the issues that so easily upset the peace and tranquility of the society. If this is done the different ethnic and political groups will learn to see and appreciate the value and relevance of the others and dispense with chauvinism and hence see diversity as a situation to uncompromisingly explore for positive development.

2.0   OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit you should be able to:

- explain the nature of the pluralistic society
- identify what accounts for the pluralistic society
- See the value of the pluralistic society
- understand the dynamics of pluralism
- make distinctions of the terms pluralistic and pluralism.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT
3.1 Nature of the Pluralistic Society

Pluralism is the concept of having more than one tradition – cultural, ideological, ethical, ethnical, political or religious. According to Imo (2007:36), pluralism is an ideological viewpoint that has emerged from the transformation of the societies of the world; this has the potentials of narrowing the distances between peoples of the world which in turn has the effect of bringing the coexistence and interaction of human beings of different social backgrounds inseparably together. This according to Thomas Mason (1989:72) leads to an increasing multiplicity of roles throughout society and the acquisition of more roles throughout an individual's life span. The pluralistic society is a society characterised by expressive or active diversity. Mere diversity is not enough to give us the pluralistic society. For example, different people may do different things at the same time or the same people may do different things at different times, it still does not account for pluralistic nature. Denis Mason (1989:72) says further that pluralistic tendency emerges when societies are so constituted that individuals within groups and groups themselves think and act in such a fashion that their ways of behaving impinge on and affect each other. This is what we mean by expressive or active diversity. Members of such society may have a range of understandings and expectations upon which interactions are based and thus recognised. The pluralistic society thus means that people may have different and sometimes incompatible viewpoints or opinions, interests and aspirations, yet they maintain an enriching and harmonious coexistence amidst their differences. This interaction of different members of the pluralistic society is occasioned by an understanding that all groups and individuals are members of a larger society. In such a society, the institutional frame provides a setting in which people of different ideological, moral, social and economic persuasions co-exist. For Denis Mason (1989:74) and (Imo) this connotes a sharing in the richness of different traditions for the benefit of the whole society. It further looks to a community in which the convergence of different groups promotes a greater dimension of the quality of life for all.

In summary therefore marks of the pluralistic society may consist of the following features:

- Different kinds of diversities exist in such a society and the different people in that society are conscious of such differences.
- These diversities exist under the same political community where the people share things in common.

- Those who are connected with these diversities interact with each other in such a way that there could be some form of interference or encroachment on each other's stand or possessions.
- There is an institutional frame under which all the peoples of different persuasions coexist, either sharing in the richness of the different traditions for the promotion of the quality of life of the whole society or discriminate against one another on the grounds of such differences.

The pluralistic society is therefore one in which there is an understanding of a certain degree of social relationship and shared identity. A common and simple example may suffice here. Different people can stay within the same geographical area without feeling the differences that exist between them because they do not, socially speaking, have much in common. This means that although they exist side by side each other, they do not have experience of each other's uniqueness. That is to say that their social engagement is not active nor has any bearing on them. Such a society cannot be said to be pluralistic. Imo (1993:220) insists that there cannot be a pluralistic society without a mutual encounter between individuals of different groups that affects the ways of thinking, the attitudes to be adopted and the actions to be taken or omitted regarding each other.

The pluralistic society has its merits and of course demerits with various degrees of consequences. Firstly, in a pluralistic engagement, ethnic triumphalism may be evident and this has the potentials of generating tension and chaotic conflicts of uncommon degree. Ethnic triumphalism is a situation where one ethnic group or such other lays claims to superiority owing to some natural or achieved advantage. It could be numerical, literary or economic and political advantages a particular group or tribe has over others in a given situation. Land encroachment by the stronger members of society over the weak of less privileged may also pose a danger to the peaceful and harmonious coexistence of the pluralistic society. On the other hand however, the communal coexistence of people of diverse persuasions, values and interests has the potentials of enriching the society in such a way as will enhance the promotion of the common good of that society. Imo (1993:220) alludes further:

> In this positive sense, the pluralistic society will be seen to provide institutional frame in virtue of which all such groups and individuals see themselves as members of one larger political society which they jointly strive to protect, defend and promote. The state will then provide an institutional frame and atmosphere in which individuals of different ideological, political and moral persuasion coexist.

This situation imposes on the member groups in such a society the necessity of sharing the richness of the different traditions for the benefit of the whole society. It looks to a nation in which the convergence of such groups; their insights and aspirations promote a greater dimension of the quality of life.

Pluralistic societies have the advantage of drawing from the richness of their diverse traditions that make up those societies. The cultural make ups of such societies are supposed to be a blessing and not a curse as is often the experience. Kerker and Ikyaan (2010:133) assert that it affords an opportunity for an enduring society since dependency and collaboration can only be realised through the frame of pluralism.

There is a subtle difference between the terms pluralistic and pluralism. The term pluralistic simply means the plural nature or feature of a phenomenon. It points to the diversified nature of societies which in recent times have become largely heterogeneous and ceased from being homogeneous. Pluralism on the other hand, derived from the word plural as opposed to singular, refers to a situation where more than one thing exists.

4.0   CONCLUSION

Perhaps all modern day societies are pluralistic in nature because societies have become stratified ideologically, morally and politically. In these days of globalisation previously detached homogenous societies have been fused together in to complex and heterogeneous ones such that it is no longer possible to presume that all members of one society will unquestionably subscribe to the cultural tenets that once held sway. Man is continuously on the move such that interaction with the farthest ends of the world is not only possible but easily facilitated by the availability of modern day equipment. The import is that interaction today has become more or less a necessary feature and rule of modern life. Therefore the pluralistic nature of society has come to stay.

5.0   SUMMARY

In this days of globalisation societies all over the world are becoming more pluralistic than ever before. Societies are not only being fused together, the rate of encounter is also becoming more practical. Nigeria is also a pluralistic society whether in terms of religion, ethics, ethnic, political, ideological etc. The implications are numerous and far reaching and therefore calls for a proper understanding of the state of the Nigerian nation so as to share in the richness of the diversities existent today. This will lead to the avoidance of discrimination against one another on the grounds of the existing differences.

SELF- ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

How does a pluralistic society evolve?

6.0   TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

i.   What is meant by pluralistic society?
ii.   Why is it necessary to study pluralism?
iii.   Discuss pluralism and globalisation
iv.   Distinguish between pluralistic and pluralism

7.0   REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Imo, C. O. "Religious Pluralism as a Means of Development in Nigeria: a Christian View". R. D. Abubakre. (Ed.). *Studies in Religious Understanding.* Ilorin: Christy David Printers, 1993. 213-235

Kerker, J. T. & Ikyaan, F. L. "Religious Pluralism and the Quest for Human Community". M.F. Asiegbu & J. C. Chukwuokolo. (Eds.). *Personhood and Personal Identity: A Philosophical Study.* Enugu: Snaap Press, 2010. 129-135.

Mason, D. (1989). "The Morality of the Pluralistic Society". *Milltown Studies.* No. 23. Spring.

Mason, T. "Towards a Philosophy of Pluralism". (An Unpublished Paper Presented at the Occasional Seminars Organised by the Dept. of Religious Studies, University of Jos, Jos, Nigeria).

UNIT 2   RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

CONTENTS

1.0   INTRODUCTION

We have said before that pluralism is a situation where more than one ideology exists and gives rise to various traditions cohabitating together. Of the various traditions such as ethnicity, culture, politics, etc, of which the term pluralism is employed to describe, religion is the most potent and hence the popular expression religious pluralism. In other words, although pluralism is associated with the above named concepts like culture, ethics, ethnic etc, it is more popular in the religious realm. That is to say religious pluralism is more prevalent perhaps because it is more problematic. Pluralism is occasioned by the social transformation which gives rise to people of different beliefs, values and customs being brought together by the dynamic forces of history. In discussing religious pluralism we shall from time to time make reference to Nigeria which is a perfect example of a religiously pluralistic society.

2.0   OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit you should be able to:

- explain the term religious pluralism
- discuss how religious pluralism evolve
- identify the problems of religious pluralism
- differentiate between religious pluralism and interfaith dialogue
- appreciate the fact and reality of religious pluralism.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Nature of Religious Pluralism

Religious pluralism is a loosely defined expression concerning acceptance of various religions, and is used in a number of related ways. In one way it is used as the name of the worldview according to which one's religion is not the sole and exclusive source of truth, and thus that at least some truths and true values exist in other religions. It is also used as acceptance of the concept that two or more religions with mutually exclusive truth claims are equally valid. It is also sometimes used as a synonym for ecumenism, i.e., the promotion of some level of unity, co-operation, and improved understanding between different religions or different denominations within a single religion. Again it is sometimes used as a term for the condition of harmonious co-existence between adherents of different religious denominations (Wikipedia: the free encyclopedia).

Religious pluralism is a situation where more than one religious ideology exists. It is a situation in which people of diverse persuasions co-exist and explore the richness of their different traditions for the benefit of the larger society of which they are members. Others see it as the result of social transformation which gives rise to people of different beliefs, values and customs being brought together by the dynamic forces of history. Nigeria is a pluralistic society because diverse religious traditions are represented in the country. Whereas religious pluralism is often viewed negatively as breeding divisive tendencies in addition to relativism in religious truths and encouraging syncretistic attitudes among adherents; this paper posits that in spite of this imputation religious pluralism can and is a useful means of fostering national unity and stability where people of diverse cultures can live in complete harmony and peace with one another yet recognising their individual differences and respecting the state of being of the other person. The paper is however, not oblivious of the fact that the realisation of a truly human community appears to be a very difficult thing but that to a large extent some greater percentage could be achieved that would improve the living conditions of people with little or negligible divisive tendencies.

Religious pluralism today has become or is fast becoming a truism. Hardly is there any society that is unaffected by the current global trend of change in which traditional structures are giving way to the new ones. This breaking down of old structures and the emergence of new systems has led to a variety of religious traditions and systems co-existing side by side with each other. Science and technology with their attendant

consequences coupled with the effects of globalisation have facilitated the changing of the world from a homogenous society to a heterogeneous one. The breakup of the monolithic structure of the world to a pluralistic one is no less the effect of globalisation.

Today people in Nigeria are not only aware of the presence of the other people but are also seeking to interpret the meaning and implication of this presence with the view to finding solutions to the challenges and or dangers posed by it. Put differently, in a world that is fast being reduced to a smaller neighborhood, how can men and women respond effectively to the burdens of the differences arising from the community of diverse traditions, particularly religious traditions? Thus, to maintain or entertain Christianity centered version of the universe would be out of place as the realities of other religions and their marks remain undeniable.

Moreover, Nigeria is not left out of the web of globalisation and religious pluralism. Quite a number of religious traditions are evident in Nigeria- Traditional Religion, Islam and Christianity. Above all, nearly all the major living religions of the world, especially in their new forms have come to be represented in Nigeria, thus heightening the tension arising from their encounter with one another

In the face of these, the search for a community of people with different persuasions co-existing in the sharing of a common vision as members of a single society becomes imperative. The search for human community is quite an old concept. The Book of Genesis chapter 11 presents us with the frantic effort by man to dwell together. This they did by embarking on a project of common interest- that of building a tower that stretches out into the heavens, a building that takes them to God, the chief Good. Hence the burden of this paper shall be to explore the appellation "religious pluralism" in its ramifications Vis a-Vis the possibility or otherwise of a human corporate existence.

3.2   The Dynamics of Religious Pluralism

Earlier in these notes we hinted at the fact that the concept of pluralism has many applications. Hence it is better understood when put in context. Its specific meaning may change depending on the context within which the word is being used. In spite of this, the word is not without meaning. Pluralism comes from the root word plural and means non- singular. Pluralism implies the multiplicity of a phenomenon or its divisibility or diversity.

Although, the term pluralism can be applied to a dozen of human experience like ethnic pluralism, economic pluralism, cultural pluralism etc. it appears to be most prominent in the religious realm and thus the popular phrase, "Religious pluralism".

A number of misconceptions regarding religious pluralism are observable. Some consider religious pluralism and religious diversity to be synonymous. This rendition sees pluralism as recognition of the fact that there are many different faith groups active within a country. This makes religious pluralism the product of 'statistical fact according to data collected by census offices and public opinion pollsters (Wikipedia).

Another perception relates religious pluralism to "the most basic form of ecumenism, where individuals of different religions dialogue can learn from each other without attempting to convince each other of the correctness of their individual set of beliefs" (Wikipedia). Still another understanding of religious pluralism involves accepting the beliefs taught by religions other than your own as valid, but not necessarily true. This definition implies that religious truths are relative. This means that distinct cultural beliefs are true for that culture but not for cultures that operate out of a different paradigm.

From the foregoing it can be deduced that pluralism is a descriptive term. It describes a setting in which various religions, philosophies and ideological conceptions live side by side and which none of them holds a privileged status (Visser't Hooft :129).

Meanwhile, Mason is of the view that pluralism may be taken in two ways- negatively and positively. He avails that the negative sense of pluralism may be obtained in a society where people of different religious, cultural, ethnic and linguistic traditions are recognised, co-exist and interact without any form of discrimination as members because of such (73). Negative sense here does not connote pessimistic, uncooperative and non progressive tendencies. Rather it stands for harmless encounter with one another. Furthermore, it connotes a situation in which the diversities of different traditions do not impact on themselves in such a way as to bring any meaningful development. In such a society various religious traditions simply dwell together and recognise the presence of the other without any influence.

In pluralistic parlance however, this is considered unhealthy. This is owing to the fact that contact with people should help one know more about one's own tradition in such a situation as to seek improvement in

one's tradition where need be. Hence failure towards such a situation would be unhealthy.

Taken in a positive sense, Mason describes it as a situation in which the harmonious and enriching co-existence within a society of different at times incompatible views, interests and aspirations enhance their communality (73-74). It speaks of a situation in which people of diverse persuasions co-exist and explore the richness of their different traditions for the benefit of the larger society of which they are members. Such action is bound to have tremendous, practical, positive effects. Here again there is unity in diversity as the convergence of the different groups pragmatically promotes a greater dimension of life for all. The distinction between the negative and positive pluralism is seen in the fact that in the negative sense co-existence does not yield any results that are meaningful, while in the positive sense there is a pragmatic encountering of various traditions.

In another development a further distinction is made between factual and normative pluralism. The former refers to what is obtained on ground while the latter points to what ought to be, that is it points to the ideal situation. Normative pluralism describes the values and standards to be subscribed to by various traditions co-existing together. Such values and standards may include among other things the following: Respect, fairness, tolerance, patience, sensitivity (Mason, 74).

3.3   Religious Pluralism as a Problem

Religious pluralism is a situation where diverse religious traditions exist together sharing the status of equality. However, like we said before the mere fact of living side by side does not make for pluralism. Religious pluralism arises when the different traditions impact on themselves. We also alluded earlier in this work that religion is by nature pragmatic and dynamic. It affects its adherents in very strong terms. Religion can be liked to accidentals in music. An accidental affects the pitch of a music note where-ever it is found irrespective of the desires of the composer. Hence, religion at all times demands from its adherent's total and ultimate commitment irrespective of the feelings of adherents of other persuasion. This ultimate sense of commitment required by a particular religion can be injurious to others as it has the propensity of instilling jealously in others.

Secondly, since religion lays claim to truth, there is the tendency by adherents of other traditions to claim monopoly of truth and look down on the claims of others or take lightly the claims of other traditions. This can lead to unhealthy situations.

Religious pluralism also tempts to disloyalty, for instance, religious beliefs and practices are often times tenaciously held to, by their adherents such that even Government policies that contradict such beliefs tend to be rejected by adherents of such religions who tend to favour their religious practices and beliefs. Such compromises may be viewed as opposition to constituted authority.

Religious pluralism apparently seeks the co-operation of diverse traditions in a bid to foster unity and consanguinity. It however, over looks or undermines the particularities of various traditions which are considered invaluable and non-negotiable. Compromise over such particularities or uniqueness' would render useless the very essence of those traditions. For instance, the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the ultimate revealer of God to humans is a particular feature of Christianity. Aben avails in this as follows; "when Christians confess that Jesus Christ is the revealer of God's truth to us, they are generally asserting something more tangible than what, say, Islam or Judaism assert by positing that Mohammed and Moses reveal God to us" (56).

The tangibility of the assertion of Christians often times eludes non votaries. The distinction between the two assertions is only understood from a personal experience which though subjective bears the mark of objectivity in that it posits a fundamental truth about God. Aben continues:

> In that assertion Islam and Judaism are merely positing that Mohammed and Moses were prophets who spoke the word of God to us. But in confessing that Jesus reveals God to us ... Christians are essentially positing that Jesus Christ was the incarnate son of God, the second person of the Trinity, who assumed flesh to disclose God to us (58).

The above goes to show that Christians view Jesus Christ as the medium of God's revelation to humanity because in Christ, God himself took on human nature and became like us but certainly without sin. It is this identity of Jesus Christ as man-God, the second person of the trinity, which establishes Jesus Christ as the revealer of God to man. And it is the belief that Jesus Christ is God that sets Christianity apart from other religions (Religious pluralism: Wikipaedia.) In other words, the assertion of the deity of Christ by Christians as shown above debunks the claims of other traditions to the knowledge of God.

Should Christians then jettison the deity of Christ and concede his divinity in order to foster religious pluralism? This is the hall mark of the problem of religious pluralism.

In any case the sincere and genuine concern to forge a human community by reason of religious pluralism is recommended, inherent contradictions notwithstanding.

3.4   The Search for Corporate Existence

Human community is the desire for harmonious co-existence by men and women of different, diverse or better still opposing persuasions. It is the desire to relax the tensions and apprehensive agitations that too often arise from pluralistic encounters. The search for a truly human community where all things are held in common practices is an old one. In the book of Genesis chapter 11, we find an expression of the search for human community. But we also see in this pluralism at work. Perhaps, pluralism in its goal is a search for community. This is because religious pluralism seeks among other things to create awareness among diverse religious adherents and the integrity of other religious beliefs systems in the world. A proper knowledge and understanding of other religious traditions other than one's own will certainly cause one to be more mindful of the points of divergence and convergence with the avoidance of risk.

Indeed the world is becoming more and more fragmented. Here in Nigeria for example people are becoming more and more aware of their distinctiveness as blocks in the social formation and structure of society. There appears to be a renaissance of this awareness and the clamor for express recognition of particular identities in pluralistic Nigeria. The claim of marginalisation by several ethnic groups in Nigeria may be further articulation of the desire to be recognised and a claim to triumphalism. Such groups include, MASSOB, Afenifere, Ompadec, Niger Delta, Arewa Forum and others.

Significantly however, the clamor by ethnic groups in say a country like Nigeria to be recognised and their due share of the national cake given them may importantly be regarded as divergent responses to the stress and devastations that are common to all. Nigeria today is bedeviled by poverty, injustice, oppressions, violence, thuggery, thievery, cultism, discrimination etc. As can be seen the list is inexhaustive and pervasive affecting everyone in Nigeria without the slightest exception.

The above challenges and call for an organised Nigeria in the late 70^s culminating in the maxim 'Go on with one Nigeria' may be seen to be

part of the national search for a Nigerian community. The restiveness being experienced in the Niger Delta may also be an indication of Nigerian's refusal to injustice, oppression and discrimination which are a cog in the wheel of human community. The recognition of various religions in their diversities by themselves is a welcome development in the search for an enduring human community. This recognition, it is hoped, will provide the needed peaceful frame for fruitful dialogue beyond similar experiences of the past.

Rather than continue in the fragmented efforts by some as is common today, there is need to fashion out collectively a more enduring response that is pragmatic and powerful.

The realisation of a human community may have to begin with recognition of the different persuasions and the need to coexist together in the sharing of a common vision to the point of consciously relaxing the tensions that easily divide. It will also require the fostering of those necessities which enhance cooperation and unity.

Scriptures repeatedly enjoin Christians to love not just their neighbours, but their enemies as well (cf. Matt.6). Next to this is the injunction to be loyal to the authorities because all authorities come from God and so disobedience to any constituted authority is disobedience to God. Love and loyalty to constituted authority are basic values in the adherents of the various religions and which then gives the hope that the search for a human community shall be achieved. The setting up of global bodies like United Nations Organisation (UNO), the global concern towards the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals is the most practical approach towards the search for a global human community today.

3.5   Barriers to Corporate Coexistence

Religious pluralism is not just a theoretical concept, but a subject with practical relevance and hence, an impact that is undeniable. First, it tends to make religious groups or traditions lose their peculiarities and identities. It is also known that religious pluralism breeds the likes of syncretism and relativism.

Syncretism is the blending of all the important values of different traditions into one common belief system. As said before, pluralism undermines the particularities of different traditions. While other religions have nothing so particular in terms of belief and practices, Christianity has some fundamental beliefs that are not negotiable. Syncretism is an impediment to human community in that a universal synthetic religion cannot be fabricated (Samartha, 270). Rather, the

differences inherent in the various traditions should be respected and preserved. Sheshagiri Rao avails too that "to preserve and enhance the quality for human beings is the responsibility of all religious traditions" (48).

It acknowledges the truth and values of all religious traditions, but does not make commitment. Samartha says this of the relativists, "the relativist is likely to argue that pluralism is the natural corollary of religious liberty. The right of the human conscience to hold whatever religious one is disposed to accept must be recognized without seeking to persuade others to accept any other conviction than those they hold". (24).

Samartha however points out the frivolous and unintelligent understanding of this assertion. He says of it: this, however, is a very shallow approach to questions of fundamental importance in human life, and it is doubtful that it can provide a genuine basis for true human coexistence (24). Syncretism therefore, is seen to fail to account for human corporate existence.

Ethnicity is another divisive tendency that is harmful to human community. Ethnicity is the feeling of superiority and triumphalism of one particular ethnic group over others. It is the felling that one's group has mode of living, values and patterns of adaptation that is superior to those of other groups (Idachaba: 1). This feeling rather than calm and relax tensions provokes and exacerbates acrimony. Ethnicity may sometimes manifest itself in attitudes of superiority or sometimes hostility. Violence, discrimination, proselysing and verbal aggressiveness are other means whereby ethnocentricism may be expressed, and where these thrive, human community is eluded (Mazrui:76).

Ignorance is another factor that militates against the search and realisation for a true human community. Donald Dave holds that ignorance has been a breeding ground for many a wrong notion. It is true that ignorance and misconception have often led to indifference or even positive contempt (51). If we cooperate together, we must be acquainted with issues that divide us as well as unite us and this will enable us to acclimatise with the offensive and complementary issues of the diverse traditions among us for better coexistence.

Fanaticism is yet another point that removes all possibilities of responsible human community. In this too, Samartha lends a voice thus:

Historically, it is true that gap between profession and practice in any religion has been almost unbridgeable and that religious fanaticism has caused untold harm to responsible human community. One needs not to go back to the crusades to prove this point. The examples in recent years are obvious (17).

The fact of community is an irresistible one. We have communities of people of many faiths-workers in companies, students, teachers, market women, military personal etc. it will only be worthwhile and wise that we seek out those truths and values in other religions which are already making a positive contribution to the building of a virile human community at times relaxing our points of divide.

The situation of having various religions exist together has come about as a result of the current global trend of change in which traditional structures are giving way to new ones. The breaking down of old structures and the emergence of new systems has led to a variety of religious traditions and systems co-existing side by side with each other. Moreover, science and technology have facilitated the changing of the world from a homogenous society to a heterogeneous one. The result is the breakup of the monolithic structure of the world to a pluralistic one in which diversity is cherished, prized and valued.

3.6   Religious Pluralism and Interfaith Dialogue

This point needs stress here because of the misunderstanding it creates for many people. Religious pluralism is sometimes used as a synonym for interfaith dialogue. Interfaith dialogue refers to dialogue between members of different religions for the goal of reducing conflicts between their religions and to achieve agreed upon mutually desirable goals. Inter religious dialogue is difficult if the partners adopt a position of particularism, i.e., if they only care about the concerns of their own group, but is favoured by the opposite attitude of universalism, where care is taken for the concern of others. Interfaith dialogue is easier if a religion's adherents have some form of inclusivism, the belief that people in other religions may also have a way to salvation, even though the fullness of salvation can be achieved only in one's religion. Conversely, believers with an exclusivist mindset will rather tend to proselytise followers of other religions, than seek an open ended dialogue with them (*Wikipedia: file;/G:/Religious_Pluralism.htm*).

3.7   The Evolvement of Religious and Ethical Pluralism

In pre-modern societies, religion and social life were organised and given the same status. Religion so permeated and influenced the entire societal life that it was unthinkable to neither divorce religion from other aspects of society nor hold a dissenting viewpoint other than that upheld and taught by religion. Imo says of it that religion was able to place its stamp on the value system of the society in a total way and by so doing, it served as an agent of social integration and cohesion. Since religion has the tendency of commanding total allegiance no deviant, subscribing to another worldview was to be found in the pre-modern society.

With time however, the time honoured homogenous society began to experience certain modifications and transformations which had adverse effects on the entire social structures that had captivated members. As a result, the economic and political components began to disintegrate and disengage from the strong hold of religion. The sluice gates had only been opened; other social blocks also shifted their basis from religion such as marriage, initiation of new born, hunting, burials etc. The implication was that religion no longer dictated the tune or set the pace as before; there was a pragmatic paradigm shift which gave individuals the opportunity to construct other conceptions of the supernatural.

Other factors responsible for this disintegration may be traced to the scientific and industrial revolutions that characterised the west at a point in time in the social history of the world. Out of it came the dramatic growth of international contacts, a growth that is believed to bring about veritable social transformation across the globe. The revolution in transport, communication, commerce and such other segments of society have stimulated awareness not only of similarities but also of dissimilarities among peoples of various communities. In this age people are no longer shut in and restricted to their small world but are now exposed to the wider world. Moreover, people now travel widely and in the process encounter other religious or ethical traditions other than theirs and in the process become fascinated by them and hence sometimes get proselytised. This is responsible for people of other faiths coming to share things in common at very close limits such as schools, market, sports, business, office, etc. These give rise to religious and ethical pluralism.

Samartha (1981:16) equally subscribes to this view as follows:

> Recently, various factors have contributed to an increased recognition of the implications of this for Christian life and witness. The resurgence of national

cultures with a strong religious content, both in the colonial and the post-colonial era; the emphasis on human rights and liberty of conscience; the rapid means of travel bringing people closer together; the growing use of mass media and audiovisual techniques – these are among the more important factors that have contributed to the sharper emergence of religious pluralism in the world today.

This is certainly the case with nearly all modern societies where people – workers, students, teachers - of different faiths live side by side in different countries, Nigeria inclusive. Such a situation as described above certainly raises a number of religious and ethical concerns in terms of pluralism. For instance, whose religion is to be followed or adopted, or better still who's ethical or value system is to be followed, or whose culture should be discarded in favour of whose. These issues make for religious and ethical pluralism where members do not see their diversity as an opportunity for beneficial interaction. In situations like this, diversity has the tendency to become divisive because, says Denis Mason (1989:79), adherents of different persuasions have nothing to learn since they are too preoccupied with their distinctive perceptions.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The fact of religious pluralism is evident enough and beyond denial. In his paper we have looked at the varying shades of the pluralism. We have also looked at the strength or positive effects of religious pluralism. The negative traits of religious pluralism were also not left out.

We submit that religious pluralism can be used as a means to achieved corporate existence, the inherent difficulties notwithstanding. To this end Samartha remarks: The state of religious pluralism should not always be regarded negatively as one of dangers and temptation; it also carries the possibilities of fresh discoveries and mutual enrichment (33).

5.0 SUMMARY

Religious pluralism may not have hit the anticipated mark and may possess certain illogicalities but it is not without some use. Religious pluralism may be regarded as a process rather than as an end in itself. Processes may have their weaknesses but they are not all together without use. Therefore, rather than focus on the things that divide, it may be more beneficial to seek those areas that foster unity and cooperation. There are no doubt differences in the various traditions; each tradition should be valued for the difference it brings to the human

community. The various differences have very serious implications for human community but the search for human community can be achieved if all selfish and ethnicity based interests are sacrificed on the altar of society's good, fired by an altruistic determination.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

How can a common ethical standard be fashioned in a religiously plural society?

6.0   TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

i.   What do you understand by religious pluralism?
ii.   What are the problems of religious pluralism?
iii.   How is religious pluralism related to interfaith dialogue?
iv.   What are the challenges for corporate coexistence?

7.0   REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Aben, T. (1996). "Report on Religious Pluralism to REC Conference in Indonesia."*REC Theological Forum, vol.xxiv*, no.3-4 Nov.

Dawe, G.D. & Carman, B.J (Eds.). (1978). *Christian Faith in a Religiously Plural World.* New York: Orbis Books Printers. Pp 213-235.

 Kuper, (1993). Barkley University of California Press.

Mason, D. (1989). "The Morality of the Pluralistic Society."*Milltown Studies* No. 23, Spring.

Mazrui, A. (Ed.). (nd).   'Pluralism and National Integration.' In *Pluralism in Africa*.

Samartha, S.J. (1981). *"Religious Pluralism and the Quest for Human Community."* Courage for Dialogue-Ecumenical Issues in Inter-Religious Relationships Geneva: World council for churches.

Vissert, H. (1966). Pluralism–Temptation or Opportunity? *Ecumenical Review*, xviii: 2.

UNIT 3 RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AND CORPORATE EXISTENCE

CONTENTS

1.0   INTRODUCTION

It is very obvious that given the fact of globalisation many societies of the world today play host to various religious traditions that in some situations hold not only different views but opposing views. But this does not imply that such religious traditions cannot coexist. The fact is that there are more similarities in beliefs of these various religions than the differences between them and this situation can be cultivated and developed to foster unity and cooperation between the various religious traditions. Human nature is by itself pluralistic and this fact must be admitted. What needs to be done now is to seek the possibility for harmony and peaceful coexistence of the various cultural, religious, political and social groups within a given society that makes it pluralistic.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

•   identify the conditions for religious pluralism
•   explain religious pluralism and corporate existence.

3.0   MAIN CONTENT

3.1   Conditions for Religious Pluralism

Religious pluralism is a very complex concept to manage as in most cases adherents of the various religions usually claim absolute truth. There are therefore some conditions to be fulfilled in a religiously plural society. Freedom of religion encompasses all religions acting within the law in a particular region, whether or not an individual religion accepts that other religions are legitimate or that freedom of religious choice and religious plurality in general are good things. Exclusivists' religions teach that theirs is the only way to salvation and to religious truth, and some of them would even argue that it is necessary to suppress the falsehoods taught by other religions. Some Protestant sects argue fiercely against Roman Catholicism, and fundamentalist Christians of all kinds teach that religious practices like those of paganism and witchcraft are pernicious. This was a common historical attitude prior to the enlightenment, and has appeared as government policy into the present day under systems like Afghanistan's Taliban regime, which destroyed the ancient Buddhas Bamyan.

Many religious believers believe that religious pluralism should entail not competition but cooperation, and argue that societal and theological change is necessary to overcome religious differences between different religions, and denominational conflicts within the same religion. For most religious traditions, this attitude is essentially based on a non-literal view of one's religious traditions, hence allowing for respect to be engendered between different traditions on fundamental principles rather than more marginal issues. It is perhaps summarised as an attitude which rejects focus on immaterial differences, and instead gives respect to those beliefs held in common.

Giving one religion or denomination special rights that are denied to others can weaken religious pluralism. This situation obtains in certain European countries, where Roman Catholicism or regional forms of Protestantism have special status.

Relativism, the belief that all religions are equal in their value and that none of them gives access to absolute truth, is an extreme form of inclusivism. Likewise, syncretism, the attempt to takeover creeds of practices from other religions or even to blend practices or creeds from different religions into one new faith is an extreme form of inter-religious dialogue. Syncretism must not be confused with ecumenism, the attempt to bring closer and eventually reunite different

denominations of one religion that have a common origin but were separated by a schism.

The existence of religious pluralism depends on the existence of freedom of religion. Freedom of religion exists when different religions of a particular region possess the same rights of worship and public expression. Freedom of religion is restrained in many Islamic countries, such as in Saudi Arabia, where the public practice of religions other that Islam is forbidden, in Iran, where Bahais have no legal rights and are persecuted, and in Palestine Authority, where Arab Christians are frequently victims of religious persecution by Muslims (Wikipedia: file:/G:/Religious _Pluralism.htm).

Religious freedom did not exist at all in many Communist countries such as Albanian and Stalinist Soviet Union, where the state prevented the public expression of religious belief and even persecuted some or all religions. This situation has persisted till today in North Korea and to some extent in the Peoples Republic of China and Vietnam (Wikipedia: File:/G:/Religious_pluralism.htm).

3.2 Common Religious Beliefs as Basis for Religious Unity.

Religious pluralism purports the existence of many religious traditions in a society with divergent and even opposing views, but it is how ever interesting to note that there are many similarities among these religions which can be harnessed and developed to foster unity and coexistence among religious groups.

3.2.1 God/The Ultimate Being

All religions make claims to and believe in the existence of God who is the source of all things and to whom, all, including human beings are responsible. There are religions that do not believe in God, parse, but they believe in some supernatural powers beyond human control, which in the real sense, they too believe in God as well. If all religions and believers have one origin then, there should be no difficulty in coexisting as members of one family.

3.2.2 The Love of God and Man

Central to all religions is the teaching on the love of God and fellow man. In Islam for example, it attaches so much importance to the love of God and fellow man that it warns against too much of formalism. In Christianity, the love of God and man is the command given to all

Christians as a condition to faithful living. In all religions, the love of neighbour is an uncompromising article of faith.

3.2.3 Good and Evil

In all religions there is the recognition that good must be done and evil avoided and this can hold for a strong reason for unity among religions of the world. This principle is found in all religions to the extent that whatever is good which leads to the welfare of the individual or the society is morally good and must be done, this is a general command. Anyone who fails to perform a good act either by commission or omission is liable and guilty of sin. On the other hand, whatever is injurious to the individual or society at large is morally bad and must be avoided, this is also a command. All religious traditions of whatever kind stipulates for man a system of life based on all that is good and free from evil, by invoking the people not only to practice virtue but to establish virtue and eradicate evil, to bid good and forbid wrong.
There are many of these common religious beliefs than can be explored to foster religious unity and coexistence in a religiously plural society.

3.3   Religious Pluralism as a Means to Corporate Existence

It is becoming common knowledge that human society is a community and not collectivity. This is because we are bound inseparably together by the forces of nature as well as history. Moreover all men that belongs to particular communities share in the historical dynamics of those communities. Everyone is affected by the common ills of poverty, injustice, oppression and all the consequences of it.

Religious pluralism therefore ought to promote affinity of the diverse traditions seen that there is more in common than that divides. Moreover, nothing is without value hence religious pluralism may also have a value that can be tapped for the benefit of a human community. The Hindu belief system teach that all the great religions of the world are not only relevant but also necessary in the context of the diversity of human needs-if this is the case, religious pluralisms would be an opportunity of seeking to allow each religious tradition to address the problem that particularly suits it or the peculiar problems it can particularly address. The Hindu belief system sees each religion addressing a felt need in the spiritual progress of humanity (Huntington, 43).

Religious pluralism provides institutional frame by which the different values held in the different religious traditions are studied for a better appreciation and application to the needs of society (Mitri, 29). Under

this frame a common human ethic can be evolved for the guidance and regulation of conduct and life. If this is done possibilities and potentials of human community may be guaranteed. In addition, no man is an island hence we need each other to find fulfillment in our existence, since our individual existence depends on our corporations. Mason sums it up all; since no one is an island and all bear the stamp of incompleteness and dependency we can only pursue our individual and collective goals in dependency and in collaboration with each other (78). Dependency and collaboration can only be realised through the frame of religious pluralism. It is only then that communality can be truly achieved. Religious pluralism therefore provides the enabling environment for community to thrive. Also, our differences can be an opportunity for an enduring human community. Mason avails too that pluralism endorses our differences and values them highly. Adding that it accepts differences not for their own sake but for the role they play in building human community (18).

Religious pluralism can also serve as a means to human community by way of harnessing and utilising the relative peace preached by different religious traditions. For instance, the Hindu teach the unity of all life and the inwardness of true religion, the Buddhist emphasise ahimsa and its combination of disciplined meditation with compassionate service, and Islam consistently insists that peace within the human heart and nature can be the consequence only of man's total submission to the sovereignty of Allah. These insights can be properly harnessed for the building of a true human community.

4, 0   CONCLUSION

Religious and ethical pluralism are not divisive in themselves; they hold more for the benefit of society than ordinarily adjudged by the undiscerning person. Their value transcends local shades of opinion to which members of various traditions are sometimes slavishly enslaved. In these days of globalisation the fact of pluralism in all of its ramifications can no longer be denied as it is even becoming more poignant and hence cannot be ignored. The best response at this moment in history, writes Rosenak (1987: 20), our hold upon this world, upon human survival, is so precarious that we may even have to (grimly) tolerate *all traditions* however undesirable this is in principle.

5.0   SUMMARY

Religious pluralism is often viewed negatively as being responsible for divisive tendencies and relativising truths as well as encouraging syncretistic attitudes among adherents especially in matters of religion;

it can however be a useful means of fostering national unity and stability where people of diverse cultures and persuasions can live in complete harmony and peace with one another yet recognising their individual differences and respecting the state of being of the other person. This assertion is however, not oblivious of the fact that the realisation of a truly harmonious society appears to be a very difficult thing but that to a large extent some greater percentage could be achieved that would improve the living conditions of people with little or negligible divisive tendencies.

A lot of changes have taken place and brought with them major shifts in various fields of human endeavour. The entire globe is being fused into one single and unified system. The fragments of cultures that have been brought together have certain truths which have the potentials of unity as against destructive diversity. If these are taken in a positive sense a new direction would have been introduced that will pave way for a more enduring future of human progress. McGrath(1992:489-490) subscribes to this view when he spoke of it with reference to Christianity that the Christian gospel possesses resources, neglected by pluralists, that allow us to address the modern pluralist situation with integrity and confidence. Other traditions fused together in the pluralistic society possess other resources too which can be beneficial to the society.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

How can corporate existence be achieved in a religious pluralistic society?

6.0   TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

i.   What do you understand by the term religious pluralism?

ii.   How does religious pluralism enhance corporate existence?

iii.   Briefly suggest further ways in which religious pluralism can enhance peaceful coexistence among plural societies.

7.0   REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Huntington, S.P. (1996). *The Clash of Civilization and the Remaking of the World* Order. New York: Touchstone.

Mason, D. (1989)."The Morality of the Pluralistic Society". *Milltown Studies* No. 23, Spring.

McGrath, A. E. (1992). "The Church's Response to Pluralism" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* Vol.35, No. 4.

Mitri, T. (1999). Religious Pluralism in the Context of Globalisation: *Current Dialogue*. 33 July.

Rosenak, M. (1989). "The Religious Person and Religious Pluralism" *The Meaning and Limits of Religious Pluralism in the World Today*. Geneva: World Council of Churches.

Wikipedia: File:/G:/Religious_pluralism.htm.