

The Role of the Church in Stamping out Indecent Dressing in Nigeria

Okobia Faith Nkem Ph.D

Lecturer, Department Of Christian Religious Studies
College Of Education, Agbor.
Delta State, Nigeria.

Abstract

This study examined the role of the church in stamping out indecent dressing in Nigeria. Indecent dressing is the dressing code that deviates from the acceptable societal norms. It offends man and God and provokes sinful thought and desire that leads people to danger or destruction. Every dressing is a language and it speaks to people about who the wearer is. More so modesty in dressing and behaviour is a sign of being responsible. Therefore one should dress the way he or she should be addressed. The church as the moral of the society, a corrective voice in the society, which praises what is good, condemns what is evil and sets standard upon which she passes judgment, should preach against indecent dressing and inculcate the right moral values into the citizens to bring sanity to our dressing code. Parents and church leaders should join hands to eradicate this destructive vice.

Keywords: Church, Stamping out and Indecent Dressing

Introduction

The Nigerian society is experiencing decline in morality, because the moral laxity on our dressing code these days is nothing but a show of shameless generation, and lack of value for modesty. The moral decadence in the nation is shown in what some people wear in public, half naked, to display their private parts, pants and brazier to attract the opposite sex in the name of fashion and modernity. Most females both young and old in Nigeria today dress in such a sexually alluring manner to expose some vital female anatomy in order to seduce men. They wear skirts that are one inch longer than their pants, which make them struggle to sit down, find it difficult to cross gutters as well as picking anything from the ground. Apart from the short and tight fitting nature of their dresses they are transparent revealing certain parts of the body that under normal circumstances ought to be hidden from the glare of people. The boys are not left out as they look dirty and unattractive with unkempt hairs and dirty jeans having holes around the knees and waists of their trousers are lowered (sagging) to reveal their boxers or pants.

Conceptual Framework

Church: Okwueze and Ononogbu (2010) defined church as a community of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. It represents a part of the larger society to which it is called to show the love of God as demonstrated in the death of Jesus. The church is also called to serve humanity through the love of God that it has received and shares with other members of the society. Njoku (2008) posits that church is the whole body of Christian believers which comprises of the priest, laity and religious men and women. The church has its origin in the Old Testament and was consummated in the New Testament on the day of Pentecost. Bashiru (2009), states that the word church is used to translate the Greek word 'ekklesia', the word ekklesia means an assembly of people. The term is derived from two Greek word 'eke' meaning out from and 'kales' which means to call. The church can therefore be defined as the

called out ones. The definition of church as used in the new testament can be extended to describe the universal church as composed of the genuine Christian believes of all ages.

Indecent Dressing

Indecent: Is behaviour or clothes that are likely to shock or offend people because they show parts of the body that are usually covered (Hornby, 2005).

Dressing: Is an act of putting on clothes. While indecent dressing is every dress code that deviates from the one acceptable by the community especially as it affects the set moral standard or judgment of the community.

Meaning and Types of Indecent Dressing

According to Omede (2011), dressing code may vary according to culture. Despite this variation, one thing is certain and that is that every culture has an acceptable dress code. So every dress code that deviates from the one acceptable by the community especially as it affects the set moral standard or judgment of the community is termed indecent. The terms-decency and indecency-have so much to do with the morality of the individual person and as judged by others. A dress is therefore, said to be indecent when it has provocative or stimulating influence on almost all those that happen to view it on the wearer. It is any outfit that shows too much skin. Egwim (2010) referred to indecent dressing in a more specific term as the attitude of someone, male or female that dresses to show off parts of the body such as the breasts, buttocks or even the underwear that need to be covered. This exposure is obviously a deliberate act to lok sensuous, tantalizing and stimulating so as to draw the attention of the opposite sex and is more prevalent among singles (unmarried women and men). This form of dressing is provocative. Improper and unacceptable. These dress patterns are morally offensive and reveals the high rate of moral decadence in the society (Olori, 2003).

According to Nnadi (2010), it is palpable that our nation is suffocating in the hands of various shades of ethical aberrations fashioned by morally bankrupt deviants who enthrone moral depravity over virtues of our traditional systems and the teachings of religion. The moral laxity in form of indecent dressing in our society today is as a result of evil craze for fashion. Onoyima (2006) states that, dressing code is often treated with disdain, as people put on whatever they like in the name of fashion or dressing. Dressing tells much about someone's personality and suggest what one can do. In our society today, along the street, in the house, market, office or school, it is very common to see some people go almost naked in the name of modern fashion. They parade themselves without being ashamed as they expose the vital organs of their bodies to lookry.

The Purpose of Dressing

1. The original purpose of dressing is to cover ones nakedness. As God did to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden in (Genesis 3:21).
2. To provide warmth and protection
3. To indicate people's tribal identity
4. To identify the wearer, by providing information about sex, age, occupation and status
5. To make the wearer appear more attractive.

These purposes of dressing are important as they form major part of a person's personality which indecent dressing destroys, as they dress to kill, seduce and show fashion and the best existing fittings which is contrary to the original purpose of dressing by God in (Gen. 3:21).

Types of Indecent Dressing

Female

The female indecent dressing are as follows:

1. Sleeveless tops
2. Body hugs
3. Short knickers
4. Transparent clothes
5. Spaghetti tops
6. Of shoulders
7. Wicket straps
8. Mono straps
9. Mini skirts
10. Dress and skirt with slit above the knees
11. Tight trousers and dresses
12. T-shirts and jean which carry immoral messages
13. All clothes that reveal sensitive parts of the body such as the burst, chest, belly, upper arms and buttocks

The Indecent Dressing among Male are thus:

1. Shirts or any wear revealing the armpit
2. Rugged jeans
3. Head ties
4. T-shirts and jeans which carry immoral messages
5. Kaftans without trousers

Possible Reasons why People Dress Indecently

Dressing indecently is not just a behaviour that developed overnight, but an accumulated behaviour pattern that could be attributed to the home or poor parenting, the effect of globalization arising from wrong values' exploration and importation, high rate of moral decadence in the society (corruption and high rate of indiscipline among the leaders and the led), peer pressure and the desire to belong as well as fading values and demonization or demonic influence. Each of these points is discussed in details below:

Poor Parenting

Every child in a community whether good or bad has a home as well as parents. The influence of home environment on the development of a child is not in any way doubtful (Omede and Odiba, 2000). The home is every child's first window to the outside world. What the parents do with the child at this level in terms of training and orientation go a long way to determining what the child becomes tomorrow. (Gushee, 2004). It is from the parents that the child learns about values, beliefs and other forms of behaviour acceptable to the community. The child is taught these through instructions, observations and practices from parents and other siblings particularly the senior ones. The implication of this is that parents must be seen to be morally exemplary. They are, according to Whitehurst (2004) the most important people in their children's lives. But how many parents model good moral character? How many of them give good attention to their children? Children are kept incommunicado as a result of the perpetual and prolonged absence of either or both parents from home for business and other engagements, social or spiritual (Omede and Omede, 2004). As a result, the children are left to themselves, without guidance become uncontrollable or under the tutelage of nannies. Most parents have no time to check their children's wardrobes and the implication of this is that they can wear anything in the form of dress.

Apart from this issue of neglect, many parents especially mothers buy anything in the form of dresses for their children. They did not see the need to be modest in the choice of

dresses they buy. A little female child of less than three years was adorned with hair attachments, rosy cheeks, and eye shadows so lavishly that she becomes an embarrassment to onlookers. This little girl will grow with this form of dress pattern and when she becomes of age, she finds it difficult to depart from this way of dressing. Most ladies today do not own or tie wrapper apart from the one they use to cover in the night. Improper home upbringing is a factor responsible for this moral problem. When right values, beliefs and attitudes are concretely laid at the childhood stage such a child is more likely to dress decently later in life. Trains up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it (Proverbs 22:6).

The Society

The child leaves in a community and so he/she is influenced by what goes on in the community either directly or indirectly. The display of moral decadence in the forms of inherent excessive corruption, indiscipline, prostitution, bribery and other forms of vices in the community at the full glare of youths and children call for great concern. Not even parents, teachers, government officials and community leaders including some spiritual leaders have the moral rights to challenge, correct and discipline erring youths and children because their slates are not clean. No section of the society-from the leadership to the led can be exonerated from morality problems.

Wrong use of Interest

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has helped to revolutionize the community tremendously. It has via the use of internet, satellites, mobile phones etc, helped to bring people together, distance, culture, or language notwithstanding. Through the activities of home videos, satellites, and other media agents, modern, modest and immodest fashions are traded across cultures and nations. In as much as ICT enhances societal development, the rate of abuse and the un-regulatory ways they are used called for great concern. Most of the people that are exposed to some of their negative contents such as indecent and immoral practices are relayed through videos, pornography, and music as well as advertisement and fashion parades. In as much as ICT is good and beneficial to humanity, the associated evils need to be checked and resisted.

Peer Pressure

Peer pressure is a force that gravitate friends together and most times for evil or negative tendencies. The desire to belong and the fear of rejection have led many youths into evil or immoral acts sometimes against their will. Some of them lack the strong will to say no to evil for fear of being isolated. And apart from isolation, peer conformity could be the result of faulty foundational home training. A child with healthy home training should be able to do the right thing and avoid the wrong no matter how the wrong is colored and maintain his/her integrity and the good name of the family. It is obvious that a mango tree will not bear orange fruits. The pressure of peers will be inconsequential when there is healthy parental upbringing and the fear of God in the life of any body.

Fading Value

Africa has a very rich culture that she needs to be proud of and preserve for posterity. But the unfortunate situation is that most cherished African values are fast fading due to non-patronage and modernization or acculturation. Today's youths cannot tell very well what these values are. For instance, the beautiful hair braiding typical of African ladies are being

traded for hair “roasting” in saloons, modern and dignifying dress patterns are given ways to the skimpy, transparent and provocative dresses found all around today. Many people that dress immodestly may not even know what is wrong with the way the dress because nobody condemns it. Their parents applaud them in those dresses, do not even ask how they came about those dresses, and when they appear in public, they are cheered by their mates and friends and to make the matter worse, all around them, what they see on people is not reasonably different from what they wear.

Demonic Influence

This is a strong factor that accounts for the stimulating and provocative ways some people dress today because they are agents of the devil on a mission to lure many people into immorality in order to waste or uselessly their lives and away from God. This matter is spiritual and we may tend to oppose it as academia. But if we must be sincere, we should know that some people are in different cults and their operations are sometimes mystical, magical and devilish. Several of them that have been confronted with a higher spiritual power had confessed to their evils and the origin of such powers.

The Effects of Indecent Dressing

Indecent dressing is a social vice that has negative influence on Nigerian society, because it makes those involved in it to be irresponsible, gives them wrong identity and send a wrong signal to the public that they are either prostitutes, armed robbers, cultists or insane.

The effects of indecent dressing are as follows:

1. It leads to sexual harassment such as rape or manhandling.
2. It leads to untimely death through murder by ritual killers, HIV/AIDS or abortion
3. It also leads to poor performance in school and school dropout as a result of unwanted pregnancy and lack of concentration in school
4. It leads to seduction
5. It also leads to God’s destruction as 1Corinthians 3:16-17 says “Don’t you know that you are the temple of God and God’s Spirit lives in you if anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him because the temple of God is holy and you are that temple”.

THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN THE SOCIETY

Kalu (2011) posits that the church is the conscience of the society. As a conscience the church is a vigilant watchman against the sources of evil, the church is responsible for wakening people from their moral complacency, the church is to give direction and restrains people’s action. The church praises what is good and condemns what is evil. She sets standard upon which she passes judgment. She is a corrective voice in the society. The church is the moral of the society. Umalaka (2008). States that church is the bearer of moral vision and moral force by bringing into the public arena the revealed truth of Christ” the church sets standards and preaches the essence of the sound morality, through the light which comes to her from the gospel she continues to provide the principles for the correct organization of social life. The virtues of honesty, integrity, hard work, modesty, humility are all beacons of morality preached by the church. The church is able to mould the character of individuals that make the society. So that the society becomes ideal. Njoku (2008) avails that to achieve this “the members of the church must distance themselves from, character and behaviour that are scandalous and embarrassing. The society in which people live needs moral values. The church therefore is in its nature harbinger of the moral values. Suffice it to say that the church is the custodian of morality in a society and the mission of the church is not complete without firm, morality.

The Role of Church Leaders in the Eradication of Indecent Dressing

According to Ebede (2013), the eradication of indecent dressing by the church leaders cannot be over emphasized as many leaders such as Pastors, Evangelists, Reverend, Fathers, Prophets, etc preach against it during sermon and revealed the consequence that is likely to occur when one indulges in such an abnormal act. According to Eboagwu (2010), Christian literatures, magazines, textbooks, tracts, pamphlets etc are used to checkmate this issue of indecent dressing. The church leaders go to radio and television houses to preach against it so that the message against indecent dressing can reach majority of people in the society who are involved in it, in order to stop it. The church will continue to do her best to make sure that the society is free from such vice. Boniface (2013) states that before any member of any denomination becomes a worker e.g. usher, prayer warrior, chorister, deacon or deaconess etc. the person must be disciplined in all ramifications and such person cannot dress indecently because if found in such dress will be suspended or asked to leave the work force.

Ukponu (2009), states that the church as a custodian of moral virtues has taken a very hard stand in this direction. In the Catholic Archdiocese of Lagos and other dioceses, it is impossible for any lady to walk into the church indecently dressed. In recent times, proper dress code has been prescribed for worshipers. In all churches which are strictly implemented. The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Catholic Bishops, Baptist convention, the Anglican Synods, the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) have taken up challenges in their own spiritual ways because the society believes strongly in the church to normalize the situation. The enforcement of decent code of dressing in the churches is in motion and majority of worshipers have complied positively.

According to Olukoya (2019) the departure of the glory of God from Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden as a result of disobedient to God led to the covering up of the body by God. Therefore the purpose of dressing is to cover one's nakedness. Pastor Olukoya D.K. the General overseer of Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministries often preach against indecent dressing and anyone coming to his church indecently dress is always given another clothe to wear by the ushers to correct him or her. He went further to say that dressing that exposes one's breast, belly, pubic hair, and the contour in the body should be discarded to avoid provoking God because it an attire of a harlot that seduces men and no serious minded man should sag because it destroys the persons image and destiny. He went further to state that indecent dressing is a sin against God, because sin is seen to be the transgression of the law. Every society has a code of conduct. There are moral and penal codes. A violation of any is always sanctioned. A lady that dresses to lure men into immorality whether the act is practiced or imagined in the heart is guilty before God. Prostitution, rape, and ritual killing which are associated with indecent dressing are all sins against God and humanity.

The senior Pastor of Dunamis church Abuja pastor Paul Enenche always preach against indecent dressing by asking his members to dress as if they are going to see God physically at that moment and any one indecently dressed is always giving a wrapper to cover her nakedness. Enenche 2020 states that there is the attire (dressing) of a harlot, in proverbs 7:10 which says "Behold, there met him a woman with the attire of a harlot, and subtle of heart", Commercial organizations market their products extensively through advertisement. In the same manner, the attire of the harlot is the attire that merchandises or advertises the human flesh as a product to be exploited. In this end time, there is the shameless exposure and showcasing of the flesh even in church. It is impossible to differentiate a jezebel (immoral and seductive woman) from a Christian woman or lady. They wear dresses that are very revealing and tight on their bodies, yet, they come to church to sing and clap. The question is: who are they deceiving? Instead of advertising our spirituality, we live in a generation that seeks to advertise carnality. The truth is, each time you dress in a seductive

manner, you are only advertising your body and you seem to be saying, ‘everybody see me, look at how physically endowed I am: look at my chest, look at my back, look at how big my hips are; just take a look’. If you are such a person, the only thing that appears to be your most important asset is your body. One of the worst things that can happen to a person is to become a tool in the hands of Satan unknowingly. The challenge is, many children of God have joined the children of the devil in fulfilling Satan’s vision by directing people to the path that will lead them into damnation with their looks. Endeavour not to become a tool in the hand of Satan. Stop marketing the flesh. Advertise spiritually, not carnality.

Onoyima (2006), states that any lady coming to worship in the church should wear good clothes to cover herself well. Whether you have hairs on your chest or not irrespective of your status to avoid embarrassment in the church. If a woman so decides to wear long gown, she should do so but not the one to tight her so much. For the young ladies, who can tie rappers are free to do so but if any want to wear gown it must be long enough to be reach below the knees and not the one with open at the back to show inner wears. There is no show back or show chest or bra or pant in the church. Girls are not allowed to wear trousers into the church. Every woman should cover her hair very well. Boys should not wear such shirts that are too tight on the body or the type to show hairs on the chest or wear such trousers that only cover half-buttocks. No cap for boys inside the church and this runs across the whole men. No transparent wear is allowed for both male and female within the church premises and outside.

Nnadi (2007) Posits that sexual self-consciousness, and covering up of the body followed the fall of man in the Garden of Eden which made God to use animal skin to cover Adam and Eve’s nakedness (Genesis 3:1 – 21). Bible says women should dress modestly to avoid seducing men. Nnadi (2010) states that, the chaplain of St. Peter Chaplaincy Rev. Onoyima and his fellow priests are merciless enemy of indecent dressing. He never tolerated low necked dresses, short and or tight fitting skirts, and forbade his spiritual children to wear any transparent clothes. In the church, the ladies who are not modestly dressed are refused to receive Communion. Ladies who wear show back or show chest or see my bra are also affected because they will not be allowed to enter into the church and if any sneaked inside and was seen by the church warders, will be embarrassed. Many people have been embarrassed and the lessons learnt. Rev. Onoyima have in several occasion asked some bridal train in a wedding to leave the church premises for him because they chose to wear sleeveless and low-necks gown or blouse. He used to be disappointed and always order them out of God’s house until they are able to dress properly. It is not only in the church service or wedding that women or ladies were embarrassed. They receive the same treatment even during the infant baptism. Some mothers on several occasions were asked to cover their opened chest or get their children out of the baptismal arena. He will ask the ladies not to teach their children how to dress indecently.

CONCLUSION

Nudity or half naked dressing is not a norm but a practice of morally bankrupt deviants who enthrone moral depravity over virtues of our traditional system and teachings in the church. Indecent dressing offends God and provokes sinful taught and desire that leads people to danger or destruction. Every dressing is a language and it speaks to people about who the wearer is. Therefore modesty in dressing and behavior is a sign of being responsible, clothes should hide the contour of the body rather than expose it.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Parents should train their children on how to dress decently.
2. Church leaders should preach against indecent dressing and immorality.

3. The religious bodies should inculcate the right moral values into the citizens through crusades, seminar and workshops to eradicate indecent dressing.
4. The church leaders should emphasis on the consequences of indecent dressing so that people will avoid indecent dressing.
5. The members of the church should distance themselves from behaviour that are scandalous and embarrassing.
6. Parents and church leaders should join hands to eradicate this destructive vice.

References

- Ebede, L. N. (2013). *Indecent Dressing on Campus*. Benin: Forward Ever.
- Gusher, D. P. (2004). *Getting Language Right. Realistic Counsel for Saving and Strengthening Relationships*. Benin. Mindex
- Nnadi, F. U. (2007). Religion and Moral Values among the Igbos of Eastern Nigeria in Ugwu C. O. T. (ed). *Nigeria Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 1(22) Nsukka Nigeria: Great.
- Nnadi, F. U. (2010). Indecent Dressing in the Catholic Church a Misdirected Enthusiasm. *Journal of Religion and Human Relations* 1 (3) pp 105-113.
- Nwabuisi, E. M. (2000). *Values and Education* Enugu: Snaap.
- Olori, T. (2003). Culture-Nigeria: Indecent Dressing Banned on the Campus: *African International Journal* 2(4) pp 20-28.
- Omede, J. and Odibia P. (2000). *A Handbook on Developmental Psychology for Colleges of Education and Allied Institutions of Higher Learning*. Ankpa.
- Omede, J. (2011). Indecent Dressing on Campuses of Higher Institutions. *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies* 2(4): pp 228-233
- Onoyima, T. (2006). *Immodest Dressing: Talk Delivered to Catholic Women Organization (C.W.O.) Awka Diocese Nsukka: Oguson.*
- Ukponu, T. O. (2009). *The Priesthood and African Synod*: Lagos: Wisdom.
- Okwueze, M.I (2004) *Religion and the decaying moral values in contemporary Nigeria society in Okwueze M.I Religion and societal development in contemporary Nigerian perspective*. Lagos: Merit International