

Religious Atonement as a Response to Indecent Dressing among Christian Youths

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Abstract

The increasing prevalence of indecent dressing among Christian youths has become a pressing concern for the church and Christian communities worldwide. Influenced by global fashion trends, peer dynamics, and a decline in moral standards, this phenomenon challenges traditional Christian values. It signals a more profound crisis in spiritual identity and formation. Scholars contend that immodest dressing is symptomatic of a spiritual disconnect from the principles of discipleship and holiness. In addressing this issue, this paper proposes religious atonement as a viable theological and pastoral response. Grounded in biblical teachings on repentance, confession, and reconciliation, atonement fosters inward spiritual renewal that influences outward behavior. This study argues that when embraced as a lived reality, the concept of atonement can catalyze behavioral transformation and spiritual growth, guiding Christian youths toward expressions of identity rooted in modesty, dignity, and reverence in alignment with scriptural values.

Keywords: Religious Atonement, Indecent Dressing and Christian Youths

Introduction

In recent years, the rise of indecent dressing among Christian youths has sparked significant concern within the church and wider Christian communities. This trend, often influenced by global fashion culture, peer pressure, and weakened moral standards, challenges traditional Christian values and raises questions about young believers' spiritual formation and identity (Adegoke, 2015; Okon, 2017). Many scholars and clergy argue that the visible expression of immodesty in dress is symptomatic of a deeper spiritual malaise: a detachment from the core tenets of Christian discipleship and holiness (Ayantayo, 2009).

In response to this moral drift, religious atonement emerges as a potent theological and pastoral framework. Rooted in biblical concepts of repentance, confession, and reconciliation with God (cf. 1 John 1:9; Romans 12:12), atonement emphasizes the restoration of the believer's relationship with God through the acknowledgment of sin and commitment to spiritual transformation (Wright, 2006; Stott, 1986). By redirecting the focus from external conformity to internal spiritual renewal, atonement encourages young Christians to reflect on God's holiness in all life aspects, including their dress (Grudem, 1994).

This paper explores religious atonement not merely as a doctrinal concept but as a practical response to the challenge of indecent dressing among Christian youths. It argues that when effectively taught and internalized, atonement can catalyze behavioral change and spiritual

maturity, helping to realign youthful expressions of identity with the values of modesty, dignity, and reverence promoted in Scripture.

The Concept of Religious Atonement

At its core, religious atonement refers to the process by which a person seeks to restore a broken relationship with the divine through repentance, confession, and moral renewal. In Christian theology, atonement is primarily understood through the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which reconciles humanity to God (Romans 5:10-11; 2 Corinthians 5:18-19). According to John Stott (1986), the cross is the central symbol of atonement, representing both the gravity of sin and the depth of divine grace. Through atonement, the believer acknowledges personal wrongdoing, expresses genuine remorse, and accepts God's forgiveness as a basis for transformation. This process is not limited to a one-time event but is an ongoing spiritual discipline that encourages ethical living and conformity to the character of Christ (Wright, 2006). Atonement thus functions as a theological foundation and a moral imperative for Christian living.

Furthermore, religious atonement encompasses a profound inward change that affects external behavior, making it especially relevant in addressing moral concerns such as indecent dressing among Christian youths. Wayne Grudem (1994) argues that atonement not only restores spiritual fellowship but also renews the believer's mind, enabling them to discern and pursue godly conduct (cf. Romans 12:1-2). This transformation is rooted in sanctification, a process by which the believer becomes progressively more like Christ in thought, word, and deed. In this light, atonement serves as a counter-cultural response to the permissive values of contemporary society by calling Christian youths to modesty, self-control, and reverence (Ayantayo, 2009). When taught effectively within the church, atonement becomes a powerful tool for reshaping moral consciousness and guiding young people toward lifestyles that reflect spiritual integrity and social responsibility.

The Concept of Youth

Youth is a transitional phase between childhood and adulthood, typically marked by rapid physical, emotional, psychological, and social development. Scholars such as Mehta & Arnett (2023) describe this period as emerging adulthood, where individuals explore various aspects of identity, including career, relationships, and values. Youth is a crucial time for developing personal autonomy and establishing long-term goals, but it also presents vulnerabilities to external influences such as peer pressure, media, and cultural shifts (Duell, N., & Steinberg, L. (2021). In the African context, Nkomo (2023) highlights that youth are often seen as both a source of innovation and a group facing systemic challenges like unemployment and moral crises. Understanding youth as a dynamic and influential demographic is essential for any developmental, educational, or spiritual intervention to shape a stable and productive society.

Indecent Dressing and Its Challenges Among Christian Youths

Indecent dressing among Christian youths has become a growing concern within religious communities, as it reflects broader cultural and moral shifts in society. Indecent dressing is generally characterized by clothing that reveals too much of the body or is deemed inappropriate within religious and cultural norms (Aziz, 2024). For Christian youths, this form of dressing often contradicts biblical teachings on modesty and the sanctity of the body. According to 1 Timothy 2:9, the Apostle Paul encourages believers, especially women, to dress modestly and with self-

control, reflecting godliness rather than worldly values. Scholars such as Olarewaju (2022) argue that the trend of indecent dressing among Christian youths results from the increasing influence of secularism and Western fashion, which prioritize self-expression over modesty and spiritual discipline.

One of the significant challenges of indecent dressing among Christian youths is the tension it creates between cultural norms and religious expectations. Many youths adopt modern fashion trends promoted by celebrities and social media influencers, often without considering their alignment with Christian values. Buheji & Founding (2021) point out that peer pressure to "fit in" and be accepted frequently leads youths to compromise their spiritual convictions. It creates identity conflicts, where youths struggle to balance their faith with the desire for social acceptance. The church, in turn, faces difficulty addressing this without appearing judgmental or disconnected from contemporary realities.

Furthermore, indecent dressing can affect the moral and spiritual atmosphere within Christian fellowships. It may lead to distractions during worship, affect interpersonal relationships, and raise concerns about sexual temptation or misconduct. According to Ekwunife et al. (2023), inappropriate dressing among Christian youths can erode mutual respect and introduce unhealthy dynamics into Christian gatherings, potentially undermining spiritual focus and fellowship. Church leaders are often challenged to address this issue sensitively, ensuring that correction is offered in love rather than condemnation, fostering spiritual growth and transformation.

In response to these challenges, Christian education and discipleship programs must intentionally teach about identity in Christ, modesty, and the human body's purpose. Scholars like Boaheng (2021) advocate for a contextual theology that addresses issues like dressing within the lived realities of African Christian youths. Christian youth ministries should create safe spaces for dialogue and mentoring where youths can explore the tension between faith and fashion. Ultimately, the goal is not merely behavioral modification but heart transformation that leads to a lifestyle honoring God in all aspects, including appearance.

Religious Atonement Responses to Indecent Dressing with Relevant Authors

Religious atonement responses to indecent dressing among youths, particularly within Christianity, are rooted in the doctrines of repentance, forgiveness, and sanctification (Boaheng, 2021). In Christian theology, atonement involves the reconciliation of humanity with God through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ (Romans 5:10-11). In the context of indecent dressing, the church views such behavior as a moral deviation that can be restored through sincere repentance and a return to godly values. According to **John Stott (2006)** in *The Cross of Christ*, the cross represents the foundation for all moral restoration, including personal conduct like dress. When youths acknowledge the immodesty in their appearance and seek spiritual renewal, the church offers forgiveness and guidance through pastoral care, discipleship, and teaching on holiness.

Atonement also emphasizes transformation rather than condemnation. Christian educators and pastors often stress the transformative power of grace to change lives, including appearance and self-presentation. Tiénou (2023) notes that in African contexts, theological education must embrace a holistic approach to transformation, where cultural norms and Christian values intersect. Thus, youths who once conformed to worldly fashion trends can, through spiritual renewal, adopt modest dressing to express their inner transformation. This response includes teaching the body as the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) and encouraging youths to view dressing as a spiritual act of worship and respect for God.

In addition, religious atonement responses involve the communal responsibility of the church. The church serves as a moral compass, guiding and restoring erring members without shame or ostracism. According to Afrilsah (2024), the role of communal mentoring and accountability in correcting moral behavior, such as indecent dressing. The church is called to create spaces where youths can learn about Christian ethics in dress without fear of judgment. This restorative approach aligns with Galatians 6:1, which urges believers to restore those who fall with gentleness. Youth leaders, teachers, and pastors are instrumental in modeling modesty and offering support as youths grow spiritually.

Finally, atonement responses are forward-looking, aiming to rebuild identity in Christ. Instead of simply condemning immodesty, Christian responses call for a renewed understanding of self-worth and purpose. Nzuki (2023) argues that the African church must help youths redefine their values not through shame but through rediscovering their dignity in Christ. When youths are taught to see themselves as image-bearers of God, they are likelier to make choices, including dress, that reflect this identity. Therefore, atonement responses to indecent dressing are not punitive but redemptive, offering hope, healing, and holiness as youths journey toward Christlikeness.

Religious Atonement as a Catalyst

Religious atonement catalyzes behavioral change and spiritual maturity by offering a transformative path from moral failure to spiritual renewal. In youth and indecent dressing, atonement invites young individuals to reflect on their conduct in the light of God's holiness and redemptive love. According to **John Stott (2006)** in *The Cross of Christ*, atonement is about forgiveness and moral transformation—it draws individuals away from self-centeredness and toward Christ-likeness. For youths whose dressing may reflect rebellion or misaligned identity, the message of the cross becomes a turning point that redirects their outward expressions to align with their renewed inner values in Christ.

Atonement also deepens spiritual maturity by fostering repentance and sanctification. In Scripture, repentance is not merely an emotional regret but a deliberate change of mind and behavior (Romans 12:2). As youths encounter the grace of God through the atonement, they are compelled to renounce behaviors that conflict with their spiritual identity. **In Renovation of the Heart, Dallas Willard (2002)** emphasizes that spiritual growth involves reshaping the heart, mind, and will. When youths are disciplined within a framework of grace and truth, their choices, including in clothing and appearance, begin to reflect spiritual discernment, modesty, and respect for the body as the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

Furthermore, religious atonement reorients youthful expressions of identity toward Scripture-based values such as modesty, dignity, and reverence. In many cases, indecent dressing among youths is a manifestation of a deeper search for validation and identity. However, the atonement message affirms their worth in Christ, independent of external appearances. In *The Mission of God*, Christopher Wright (2006) contends that identity is ultimately found in God's redemptive plan, not cultural trends. When youths embrace their new identity in Christ, they are empowered to express themselves in ways that honor God, uphold their dignity, and reflect reverence for themselves and others.

Lastly, religious atonement catalyzes long-term behavioral change by nurturing a community of accountability and spiritual formation. The church plays a vital role in this process by offering mentorship, teaching, and pastoral care. As Madu, Chukwudebelu & Osigwe (2024).

n *Religion and Moral Development*, behavioral change is reinforced in communities that practice love, correction, and spiritual guidance. When youths are surrounded by positive role models and are taught biblical principles in a supportive environment, they are more likely to sustain godly behaviors. Therefore, religious atonement is not only a means of reconciling with God but also a powerful tool for reshaping lives, values, and expressions of identity among the youth.

Conclusion

The challenge of indecent dressing among Christian youths reflects not only external influences such as fashion trends and peer pressure but also a more profound spiritual disconnection from the foundational values of Christian discipleship. This trend signals an urgent need for a response that transcends mere dress codes and addresses the core of spiritual formation. Religious atonement, emphasizing repentance, confession, and transformation, offers a compelling framework for restoring spiritual integrity and guiding behavioral change. When rightly understood and implemented within Christian education and pastoral care, atonement can inspire young believers to embody the virtues of modesty, dignity, and reverence, thereby reaffirming their identity in Christ and promoting a lifestyle that honors biblical values.

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