

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY NIGERIAN CHURCHES: CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

In the beginning, Christian education was highly regarded in the Christendom because it is regarded as the gateway soundness of mind, hand and heart. In fact, it was viewed as the bed-rock for a meaningful and successful life. However, it is unfortunate to note that little or no attention is giving to Christian religious education. The little attention it seems to be enjoying is being threatened by the government officials, with the intention of removing the--Christian Religious Studies from the National Curriculum. This therefore, serves as a clarion call for the Nigerian churches and her leadership who rose to challenge the move and fight against the complete eradication of the subject from Nigerian curricula. Education without soundness of mind, heart and hands breeds in most cases moral backwardness and hardly can it contribute to national development. To this extent, the bugging questions are; how can Christian education be used for the all-round development of the person? To what extent, are Nigerian churches paying attention to the development of Christian education and national development? These questions are pertinent because without soundness of mind, heart and hands, it becomes impossible for national development in all spheres. Since the Nigerian churches are not exempted from the challenges facing Christian education, what steps are the churches taking to combat these challenges? These are the premises on which the paper built. The paper is an attempt to examine the challenges facing Christian religious education in the 21st century and solutions proffered. The method adopted was historical so as to be able to trace the origin of Christian education in Nigeria. The paper concluded that social ills in the society can only be reduced through sound quality religious education. The paper recommended that effective Christian education in the church is a panacea for national development.

Keywords: Education, Church, Christian Religious Education, Challenges, Solutions, Nigeria.

Introduction

Christian religious education is a term that is loosely used in Christendom owing to the fact that many Christians themselves do not understand what the term really stands for. Owing to this, many churches, church leaders and government officials have not really given its

adequate attention not until recent time. In the submission of Kure (1995:3), he highlighted the importance of Christian education thus:

Christian education, a church oriented ministry, is the work of the church and not for method. The church pursues Christian education in response to the Great Commission where Jesus instructed His disciples (Matt. 28:18-20). It is a ministry that aims at corporate as well as individual growth of Christians, to be active rather than passive, in the church and the society.

The above statement shows clearly that Christian education in a local church helps people to grow into spiritual maturity and to participate actively in influencing positively the churches and society at large.

Suffice it to say that the emergence of Christian “religious” education in Nigerian National Curricula was not accidental. Rather, it came up as a result of the needs and aspirations of the Christians in Nigeria. According to Maiture (2016:278), the developers of the National Policy on education included religious education as part of the subjects to be taught in schools in order to meet yearning of all religious and ethnic groups in Nigeria. Ebele (2006) opined that teaching moral and ethical behavior through religious studies amount to religious education, for it is the type of education which targets the all-round development of the students spiritually, morally and intellectually.

Regardless of the existence of Christian “religious” education on National Curricula, Falola (1998:1) observed that the country has become theatre of religious violence and aggression, gross corruption, ethno-religious conflicts, terrorism, kidnapping and banditry have become the order of the day. These social vices could be easily traced to lack of sound development of the mind, heart and hands. The question therefore is; in what ways can Christian education be used for the all-round development of the person? The challenge to Christian education in Nigeria is to develop structures that are rooted in a biblical world-view and the indigenous culture. Christian religious education should move away from emphasizing academic/cognitive only. It should emphasize not only how we think but also how we should act (Blomberg, 2008, 7-26). It should be integrated, holistic and collaborative. This approach is required in the kind of world in which we live.

Literature Review

Christian

The term “Christian” (Donald, 2001: 227) refers to anyone, man, woman, or child, who trusts in Jesus Christ and who strives or adheres to Christianity, a monotheistic Abrahamic religion based on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. The term “Christian” used as an adjective is descriptive of anything associated with Christianity or Christian churches, or in a proverbial sense, “all that is noble, and good, and Christ-like” (Wilken 2012:26). Therefore, the word means “like Christ” or “to be like Christ.” It is something totally different from being religious (MacKenzie 2011:186). Being religious is the same as being interested in religion, or having religious inclinations. However, being a Christian means to follow in the steps of Jesus Christ and to be a He was in the world.

Education

The word education comes from the Latin word *educare* meaning “to lead out” (Webster, 1979:576). However, the general meaning of education is training and learning process. This is because, it is the process of training and developing the knowledge, skill, mind, character especially by formal school (Snapp, 2007:2). Education can be viewed as the submission of the values and accumulated knowledge of a society. Danjuma (1997:3) submitted that;

Education is the provision of opportunity for an individual to realize his potential goals and abilities in. The realization of such abilities and goals will in turn make the individual a useful and happy citizen in the society.

Thus, education can broadly be defined as the transmission of values and accumulated knowledge of a society, both within it or from one generation and society to another. It is essentially a societal instrument for the expansion of human culture (Miller, 2003:34).

Christian Religious Education

According to Ilori (2005:39), Christian education is unique and distinctive because it is a “bibliocentric” kind of education. Christian religious education can therefore be described as an-all-round education. It aims at shaping the learners mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually. It is the type of education that empowers because it tries to make the learner to add value to his/her life and existence. Similarly, Christian religious education is the process whereby Christian learning takes place. It often involves “teaching which enables practicing Christians to adopt and deepen their Christian belief, values and dispositions to experience and act in a Christian way” (Haward, 2002:8). Therefore, it depends to a greater extent on how this process is adopted and practiced in different churches. In the opinion of Eavey (1991:7);

Education that is truly Christian subscribes to the following doctrines held originally by the majority of protestants, the Bible as the inspired word of God is the supreme authority in everything pertaining to faith and conduct; there is one God, Creator of all things; eternally existing in three persons—Father, Son and the Holy Spirit.

Origin of Christian Religious Education in Nigeria

It is grossly inadequate to approach Christian religious education without acknowledging the role played by the Hebrew educational system in its early development. The Old Testament teaching includes instruction and admonition that involved informing persons of God’s truths and demands. It was centered in the *torah*, and first communicated orally and then written in the scriptures. Among the Jews, education in its widest meaning includes both individual and social developments (Haker, 2008:293). It is a process of change undergone by humans as they interact with their environment. However, with the acceptance of Christianity as a legal religion by Constantine in the Middle Ages, the roles of Christian education changed. The church no longer required intensive training for those joining its fold (Benson, 2003:39). Rather, church leaders had to find new ways of teaching and nurturing the large number of people that were joining its fold on daily basis.

In the contemporary society, Christian religious education is more necessary than ever owing to high rate of social maladies and moral backwardness among the youths and adults alike.

In fact, the early missionaries who brought the gospel and western education to Nigeria knew the importance of education to their converts. As such, they established schools alongside their primary goal, that is, the spreading of the gospel. Their primary aim, according to Fafunwa (1974:92) was to 'convert the "heathen" or the "benighted Africans" to Christianity via education.' Fafunwa (1974) further opined that formal education in Nigeria is traceable to the efforts of European missionaries from around 24th of September, 1842. During this period, education was regarded as the fundamental importance to the spread of Christianity. Owing to this, the earlier forms and formation of Christian education were interwoven with Christian evangelism. The missionaries established and ran schools in Nigeria (Jegede and Rahila, 2014:51). Not only that, they also designed the curriculum for such schools and devoted their meager resources to the opening of such schools for young Nigerians (Ajayi, 1963:40). To a large extent, early mission schools were founded and funded by the Methodist Church of Scotland Mission, the Church Missionary Society (CMS), and the Roman Catholic Church among other denominations.

The Methodist Church was followed by the CMS, basically for evangelism and education. By the 19th of December 1842, CMS had started serious educational work in Nigeria, championed by Henry Townsend and assisted by C.A. Gollmer and S.A. Ajayi (Page, 2009:62). As they build churches, schools were being established. Specifically, two schools were built when CMS entered Abeokuta. The two schools were CMS Grammar School for boys and another one for girls. The Presbyterian Church paid more attention to the Eastern part of Nigeria and established a school called Hope Waddell College in Calabar. In 1853, the Southern Baptist Convention opened a school at Ijaiye and another one at Ogbomoso in 1855 (Ajayi, 1963:59). In 1857, the Niger Mission established two schools at Gbebe and Onitsha. The school at Idda in Kogi was established in 1864 and others were founded at Bonny and Akassa (Fabunmi, 2013:139).

In the aspect of higher education, suffice it to say that much was not done until recent times when Christian missions took a radical intervention in the university education in Nigeria (Binga, 2003:94). In the process of this, the increasing need to cater for specialized church leaders and lay leaders gave rise to the establishment of Christian religious education and Christian higher education interdependently. This started with the launching of the famous Yaba College in Lagos in 1931 (higher, 2011:14). The Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso, Nigeria's oldest degree awarding theological institution was established prior to that time in 1898 to cater for various degrees of training for church leaders and interested members of the community. The establishment of church owned higher institutions could be attributed to the perceived rot in government owned universities which is characterized with incessant strikes, lack of adequate funding and facilities.

Thus, at present, the Baptist Church has been able to establish Bowen University, McPherson University by Four Square Church, Methodist Church, Babcock University by the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, Joseph Ayoola Babalola University (JABU) by Christ Apostolic Church, Redeemers University by the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) and a few other Christian missions have established and are running higher institutions and are running them within their meager resources in support of the quest for formal education in Nigeria. To this extent, Christian education has a rich and robust historical antecedent which places it on a pedestal of religious, social and other dimensions of transformation. Proper articulation

of its ideologies ensures a very possibility that the world can look in the direction of Christian religious education to chart a course for human and societal emancipation.

Importance of Christian Religious Education to the Church and Nigerian Society

Moral Development

There is no doubt that the Nigerian society needs men and women that are morally sound with high self-esteem and integrity; men and women that are well equipped to face the daily challenges in the troubled society. This becomes imperative owing to high level of moral backwardness both in the church and the society at large, the ever increasing rate of immorality not only among the teeming youths but the elderly, sexual perversion and gross corruption and bribery. Therefore, the only cure for these social vices is sound development of the head, heart and hands. The head should be developed so as to make it the right sense of judgment that is not only beneficial to the person alone but the entire society. The heart, on the other hand, is the centre of intellectual and moral facilities. It is the place whereby the processes of self-consciousness, self-evaluation, self-examination and self-control are carried out. To this extent, the development of the heart produces the desired attitudinal change for the benefit of the church and the society. In affecting the hands, it means that Christian religious education should be life-centered. It should be bore in mind that when transmitting education to the learners, it is expected that it will be translated into life situations that can impart positively on their lives. This approach will lead to the development of sound moral character (Korb, 2014) and moral revival of the Nigerian people can only be achieved through purposeful Christian religious education.

Human Development

In the attempt to train the clergy men, different denominations in Nigeria are making education key to spiritual, physical and intellectual development. As such, more colleges and seminaries where ministers of God are being trained keep emerging on a daily basis. This, in a way, shows their contributions to the training of man-power for the nation in that not all these graduates end up in churches but also in some governmental employment. A good number of them are seen as Chaplains in the Army, Navy and Nigerian Police. Others are performing well in other fields thereby contributing to national development (Oladeji, 2014: 119).

Nation-Building

Nation building in Nigeria is a phenomenon tied to the dilemma of a people characterized by diversities but bound together by a common historical experience. Owing to this, nation-building is about participation, in which all citizens regardless of ethnicity, religious and political affiliations, and social class cooperating with the government in order to maintain law and order. Historically, the church in Nigeria has reasonably done well in social ministry. They have been involved in providing affordable education, healthcare delivery, establishment of orphanages and skills acquisition centers across the nook and crannies of the country. The church has been able to effectively do this through the introduction of Christian religious education at all levels of education alongside the preaching of the gospel and by investing in the life of the individuals who contribute their quota at different levels of nation building.

Peculiarities of Christian Religious Education in the 21ST Century Nigerian Churches

Christian education has very important peculiarities that should be a thorough knowledge of every Christian education therein; education is a catalyst that gingers people in carrying out most of life's activities better than formal instruction. However, what Christian religious education does to the church and the larger society is far greater than what education in general does (Asonibare, 2014:194). This distinction, in itself, suggests the need for a better handling of all the duties which make Christian education a reality.

A comprehensive Christian religious education should encompass far much more than most people like to credit it to. Failure to readily admit the comprehensiveness in this godly learning makes people talk of secular and religious education as though they are totally different. The goal of Christian religious education is to develop the total man so he/she can fit into God-given duties for his/her life in general. In recognition of the vital role of Christian religious education in the society, Taiwo (1980:58) reported that;

Lugard's formulation policy reforms prescribed that, "a time shall be set aside daily for religious instruction, whether in Christian or Muslim (sic) schools, in order that the compelling power of religious sanctions may be enlisted in the formation of habits of discipline and self-control."

Suffice it to say that Christian religious education brings biblical truths to bear in ways that will help every human being understand his/her position in this world of flux. The disconnection between the biblical teaching and the way it is lived out is a world-wide problem. Many profess to be Christ followers and agree that the Bible is the word of God, yet, they do not view reality or live their lives as if Christ were Lord, and the Bible is true. It is therefore the task of Christian religious educators to develop the individuals mentally, intellectually and spiritually so as to be useful to himself, the church and the entire society (Oyekanmi, 2014:261).

It is interesting to note that Christian religious education, at all levels, also enables students with skills they need for articulate citizenship, for participation in politics and social responsibility and moral instruction to create conditions for peace, harmony, unity, stability, progress and prosperity (Ilori, 2004:13). Apart from the ethical and social need for the right type of values and attitudes, there is an increasing, deplorable spiritual and moral climate within the Nigerian society. Couple to this is the lack of discipline while the inordinate desire for material possession is on the increase on daily basis. There is also lack of commitment in personal and public life and disregard for civic authority. There is, in addition rampant sexual immorality and abuse of drugs. Therefore, a way out of these social maladies is the development of sound Christian religious education that will go a long way in providing the right type of values and attitudes that can bail out the Nigerian society of social evils and bring about mature, disciplined and patriotic individuals who will contribute meaningfully to church growth and national development.

It is imperative to say that Christian religious education is not simply a type of schooling rather it is a way of life. According to Oladeji (2014:117), it offers a glorious opportunity to examine, clarify and isolate the needs and problems of the society, through proper understanding, implementation and utilization of the knowledge of religious education

received by the society. In essence, religious education touches the very heart of the society. It deals with the important problems of national unity and economic development as well as ethnic tolerance.

Challenges of Christian Religious Education to the Nigerian Church and Society

Religious education in Nigeria is grappling with a number of challenges that are inimical to its sustenance and relevance in the presence of ever increasing socio-economic and religious realities. For this reason, it became essential to institute a formidable platform through which such challenges are dealt with. Yet, the success of this effort is hinged on the ability of persons involved in institutions of religious education to identify the said challenges and formulate specific strategies in handling them. As clearly observed in this paper, the system of education in Nigeria was designed with a view to improving the lives of the citizens and the socio-economic development of the country. A few of these challenges are discussed below:

Funding/Finances Challenge

The growth in the productivity and efficiency of students is dependent on the availability of funds at the disposal of the students of the institution. Adequate funding is *sine qua non* to qualify religious education. Therefore, no amount devoted to such exercise is too much (Ajuzie, 2001:136). It is rather unfortunate to know that the lofty aims and goals of religious education in Nigeria is being watered down owing to financial constraints. The change of government from time to time has become a stumbling block in this wise, since proper execution of educational policies could not be guaranteed simply because the outgoing government officials would empty the government treasury before handing over to the incoming government. Non availability of funds to implement such programmes became a bottleneck to educational development (Akano, 2015:36). To this extent, quality arising from a vigorous policy for the development of staff and infrastructure cannot be achieved where poor funding is prevalent.

Man-Power Challenge

One of the undeniable factors confronting effective Christian education in the church and the society at large is shortage of man-power. Lack of enough Christian educators to enhance the rapid spread of Christian teachings and values in the church and in the various levels of education has led to high rate of immorality with its attendant effects on national and spiritual developments of the Nigerian citizenry. The inadequate numbers of teachers in Christian religious studies possess threat to moral standard and cultivation of Christian values. This perhaps, is partly due to professional/trained teachers on this field leaving for other greener or lucrative professions thereby creating vacuums that are difficult to fill. The Christian religious educators must be fairly treated like their counterparts in other fields. There is the need to frankly ask how much PhD holders are earning. Therefore, welfare/remuneration packages needs to be upgraded to reflect contemporary economic realities if the brain-drain being witnessed in the field must stop. This will have positive effect on the delivery and quality of teachings of the staff members will improve drastically (Odetunde, 2004:3).

Information and Media Technology Challenge

In the view of Carpental and Greenhill (1965:128);

We live in the midst of an electronic revolution. Rapid advances in communication equipment and data processing since World War 11 have had a profound effect on education more especially Christian education. The effect is most noticeable in the development and new applications of teaching instruments used singly or in combination as “system of instructional instrumentation.”

In the contemporary time, there are developments in the use of televised instruction, programme learning, language laboratories, and instructional films. In a nutshell, there is a revolution in communication and information technology. The media and technology have assumed an increasingly unqualified and un-qualified role in the instructional process tests and examinations, audio tapes, moderate-cost video tape recorders, and large-screen televisions are available to facilitate teaching-learning experience (Ola-Ojo, 2015:64). However, the cost of achieving this level of information and technology is very enormous and highly capital intensive.

Economic Challenge

There is presently a mounting cost of education and this has led to emphasis on economies in education. The contribution of higher education to economic growth is broad and multi-faceted. One key aspect is its contribution to the economy’s innovative capacity which underpins economic growth (Ola-Ojo, 2015:62). Christian religious education, at whatever level, has as its focus on developing skills and benefits beyond economic growth. At the same time, its values lie in both the economic and social benefits to the church and to individuals in the society. This is because it improves individual’s opportunities and life chances, thereby creating community and society’s cohesion. Therefore, there is significant demand for graduate-level skills, since employers cannot provide the adequate incentives needed for acquisition of skills due to economic crunch. Hence, there is a strong rationale for highly skilled Christian religious educators to develop their skills further through higher education.

Competence Challenge

There is a growing awareness of the desirability of increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of religious educators in teaching and of the students in learning. There is the need to recognize the requirements for improving the quality of instruction, focusing attention on the enormous tasks of selecting, organizing, producing, recording and distributing instructional materials. Religious educators should focus on competenceso as to match the specific requirements of a particular learning situation (Carpenter and Greenhill, 1965:150-1). On the other hands, McCain (2009) opines that in learning to ‘get by,’ we have sometimes excused sloppiness and carelessness in ourselves. This could be attributed to the fact that we have not had enough funding to do all that needed to be done. We sometimes allowed our standard to slip and this has at times encouraged a rather unprofessional look and feel about Christian religious education.

Curriculum Development Challenge

The existing curriculum does not succinctly reflect interconnectivity with global trends and a preparedness to address Christian education at all levels, church administrative and liturgical concerns within the Nigerian context. There are some courses in the present curriculum in higher Christian education that have outlived their purposes. Apparently, there has not been any deliberate attempt to formulate theologies, doctrines and liturgies that perfectly connect with the Nigerian society and church. Thus, the need for relevant appraisal and contextualization is pertinent (Okoli, 2013:12-16).

Solutions to the Challenges of Christian Religious Education in the 21st Century Nigerian Church and Society

Availability of Funds

The growing need of Christian religious education in the contemporary time can be met in a number of ways. These growing needs require adequate funding but unfortunately, the resources to satisfy them are very limited. Tidwell (1985:159) submits that, “financial resources are the knowledge, skills, the attitudes and the commitment which help to make available those human and physical resources needed to implement the ministries of a church and Christian religious education. In order to effectively finance Christian education, funds can be sourced through gifts, grants, aids and a host of other means. A gift is a freewill donation to enhance or ameliorate the challenges occasioned by a lean purse. Gifts could come in various shades and kinds. Individuals and corporate bodies/organizations can freely donate from time-to-time for developmental purposes. Likewise, a grand-in-aid is money coming from the central government for a specific project. This kind of funding is usually used when the government has decided that the recipient should be public funded but operate with reasonable independence from the state. In like manner, funds can be generated through the active participation of the alumni. Alumni associations have been a formidable force today in making positive and significant contributions to their Alma Mata. Thus, through these means, funds can be raised for effective running of Christian religious education. Kunhiyop (2009:174) submits that effective fundraising calls for a clear understanding of the vision and mission of the institution. Goals and objectives for the expected donations must be clearly and feasibly presented in order to meet the challenges being encountered in funding Christian education.

Having the Right People/Personnel at the Right Place

Putting the right people in the right place, doing the right things at the right time goes a long way in shaping the standard of religious education and in education policy implementation. From this perspective, the autonomy of Christian education at all levels in terms political interference has to be reduced if it cannot be completely abrogated. This is particularly necessary in the area of appointment/selection of key principal officers and in curriculum development. Where a non-Christian serves as a chairman of the Council for Christian higher education, there is bound to be bias owing to religious affiliation in the implementation of policies. Recently, in Nigeria, attempts were made to completely phase out Christian religious education from the national curricular of education while retaining Islamic Religious Studies and introducing a new subject like Arabic studies, to be enforced on all students in secondary schools irrespective of religious affiliations (Jaiyeoba, 2006:34). The problem could be attributed to the fact that the Board of Education members responsible for this unwholesome

development were mainly Muslims hence, their decision was religiously motivated. The issue of tribalism, religious identity and political interference should be eliminated in the Constitution of Nigeria and appointment of Education Board members and heads of religious institutions.

Encouraging Remuneration Package

The ever increasing rate at which qualifying religious educators are leaving religious institutions, no doubt is traceable to poor incentives. Poor incentives therefore create vacuums that are being filled by unqualified teachers. To this extent, and in order to prevent Christian religious educators from leaving their jobs, welfare packages need to be upgraded and improved upon to reflect contemporary economic realities and also improve their living conditions. This, on the long run will help to improve their output and commitment while discharging their responsibilities.

Conclusion

Religious education at whatever level is *sine qua non* to national development. It is rather disheartening to observe that there are many challenges militating against it from achieving its lofty goals and among such challenges are non implementations of educational policies, political interference, inadequate man-power, as well as poor remuneration or welfare packages for religious educators. In other for Christian education to be attractive, the education system requires a complete reformation for its to be relevant to the needs of the church and the society at large. In as much as it is generally believe that education holds the key to growth and development of the heart, mind and hands, and without which no nation can grow, it is therefore pertinent that grants must be made available for its sustainability. It is very important to note that the quality of Christian religious educators in any higher educational institutions, be it private or public, is directly proportional to the quality of the institution and the programmes its offers. Owing to this, religious educators must be adequately motivated to give their best when called upon.

Recommendations

Judging from the foregoing, the paper recommended that;

1. There is the need for creation of awareness of the essence of Christian religious education among Nigerians. The awareness created can therefore motivate the government and other stakeholders to see the need to give priority to Christian religious education in the country. Once the awareness is created, all stakeholders will be willing to make available finances for its smooth running.
2. Christian education should be taught at all levels of education in Nigeria. This will aid in educating he youths on Christian ethics, issues of peace, national security and how to manage and prevent violence.
3. There is also the need for constant evaluation and re-evaluation of the curriculum of Christian religious education. These evaluations and re-evaluations will take into consideration the technological age if we are to enhance and make religious education attractive to the society. Similarly, religious educators should be given more training to enhance teaching/learning processes and service delivery in the course of discharging their duties.

4. Christian education can serve as a platform for meaningful inter-faith dialogue with people of other religions and faiths, as it is capable of bridging the gap between the faiths through purposeful interactions and goal-oriented discussion.

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