

Return of Schools to Missions: An Overview

By

Jones Ugochukwu Odili

Department of Religious and Cultural Studies, Faculty of Humanities,
University of Port Harcourt P.M.B. 5323, East-West Road, Choba, Port

Harcourt, Rivers State Nigeria

+1238055313264; +1237038133706

jonesuodili@yahoo.com; jonesuodil@gmail.com

Abstract

It is a fact of common knowledge that among Christian missions, education and evangelization were inseparable. This constitutes the school apostolate of mission churches in Nigeria. Using the literary research approach, this paper presents an overview of the story of missions and educational development in Nigeria. Attention is given to the introduction of western education in Nigeria, government take of mission schools and agitations for the return of such schools to their parent churches. The study reveals that Mission schools provided low-cost qualitative education and that there was a collapse in the standard of education in the country following the takeover of mission schools by the Nigeria government in 1970. The study recommends that faith based organisations should be encouraged to establish schools in the country. This would help the country to achieve her millennial goal of providing education for her ever growing population.

Keywords: Mission Schools, School Apostolate, Government Takeover of Schools, Return of Schools to Missions, Western Education in Nigeria

Introduction

Formal, western-type of education was introduced by British missionaries in the 1840s. The Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS) started several schools in the mid-1800s. The colonial government gave the church financial aid, but in the early twentieth century the government began building primary and secondary schools. By the time the British combined the northern and southern regions into one colony in 1914, a total of 11 secondary schools were in operation, all but one run by missionaries. There were also 91 mission and 59 government elementary schools.

At the end of the Nigerian Civil War in 1970, government seized and nationalized all schools that were hitherto owned by the missions “in an attempt to defuse tribalism. With the government take-over the standard and quality of education fell. Fees were introduced and hiked, which kicked millions of children out of school. School infrastructures deteriorated. Libraries and laboratories disappeared in the schools. The welfare of teachers was ignored, etc. Strikes, examination malpractice, truancy on the part of students and teachers became the order of the day. The concomitant effects of these were a water-washed quality of education in Nigeria. The sudden takeover of the schools by the government brought about the collapse of education in schools that were hitherto reputed for high standards. Morality and character building also collapsed. It is the concern of this paper to re-tell the story of the missions and educational development in Nigeria. Attention would be given to the introduction of western education in Nigeria, government take of mission schools and agitations for the return of such school to their parent churches.

Missions and the Advancement of Western Education in Nigeria

According to Jones Odili (2010) it is a fact of common knowledge that among Christian missions, education and evangelization were inseparable. As it was the objective of the early Christian missionaries to

convert the 'heathen' or the benighted Africans to Christianity via western education, this was promoted right from the beginning. Even though the various missions adopted different approaches to the implementation of their policies, they all regarded literacy education as an indispensable tool in the course of evangelization. It was due largely to their singular contribution in this respect, which inspired a writer to remark that 'of all the agents of imperialism, it was the missionary who made the most revolutionary demand on the Nigerians'. Yet it should be grasped that missionary education was designed to aid religion – to enable converts to read and have greater understanding of the Bible. But even then, parents favoured the schools established more than the religion because of the opportunity of learning useful skills such as reading and writing of English and Portuguese, Arithmetic etc. which the schools provided. The first contribution of the missionaries towards the development of western education in Western Nigeria was the linguistic study and reduction to writing of the two major languages – Yoruba and Edo – and the translation of the Bible into these languages. Samuel Ajayi Crowther of the C.M.S. was foremost in reducing the Yoruba language to writing and he pioneered the translation of several books of the Bible into that language. The pioneer Baptist missionary to this area, Thomas Jefferson Bowen, spent the first 18 months of his missionary career sojourning in Abeokuta where he studied the Yoruba language. By the mid-nineteenth century, therefore, the language had grammar books and dictionaries. In this way the missionaries were able to teach their converts how to read the Bible in vernacular and thus produced the first widespread literate class in Western Nigeria. To further promote the study of these languages, some of the missionaries established printing presses with which they published newspapers. Henry Townsend was said to have brought the first printing press to Nigeria in 1852 and started the first Yoruba Newspaper in the country – the *IweIrohinin* 1859. That journal, published fortnightly, was not only a news bulletin to church and state, but helped to educate the

growing reading public through didactic essays in the areas of history and politics.

Odili (2010) goes further to note that closely connected with their literacy development of the indigenous languages was their other contribution namely, the promotion of education through the opening of primary and secondary schools as well as training colleges for the training of teachers, and trade schools for the training of craftsmen. While the Methodists should be credited with establishing the first school in this part of the country, it was the C.M.S. Mission that was to make the most important contribution to education in the early period. The various missions also established hundreds of primary schools for boys and girls all over Western Nigeria. As this writer has demonstrated elsewhere, consequent on the missionary venture, over 95% of the schools in Western Nigeria were, as late as 1945, owned by Christian Missions. By the same token, no less than 97% of the pupils/students of school age were attending these mission schools during the same period. From all available evidences then, the Christians missions have, not only charted the course of Western education in Western Nigeria but have as well laid a firm foundation for mass education on which later agencies built.

Ademola S. Ajayi (1997) in, "Christian Missions and Evolution of the Culture of Mass Education in Western Nigeria" notes that The genesis of Western education in western Nigeria could be traced to the era of the Christian missionaries who had established contacts with this part of the country as early as the 15th century. This early effort began with the Portuguese who ventured into the coastal areas in about 1472. Indeed, the Portuguese missionaries operated in the kingdom of Benin between 1515 and 1538 at the invitation of the *Oba* of Benin. However, these early efforts in the area failed completely to displace the traditional religion. Though the Portuguese missionaries achieved some measure of success in Warri where, from the 1570s, they began to make considerable impact on the *Olu*, that is, the paramount ruler of Warri, this early missionary effort did not endure. For, in spite of the fact that the religion operated there for

about a century or more, it never spread beyond the court. Even at the court, true Christianity was confined to the king and princes as well as the sons of important chiefs. The others merely paid lip services to the religion in order to please the king. Consequently, at the end of the 18th century, the missionary efforts of evangelism in Western Nigeria had failed. The only impact was that a few citizens had their secular lives influenced to some extent by European ways and that was because of economic, political and social advantages. On the majority of the populace, they could not make any impact.

The history of modern education in Nigeria could be traced to the efforts of private organization especially the Christian mission. Although Fafunwa (1974) affirms that "the missionaries without exception used the school as a means of conversion". There is no doubt that the schools established during these periods served as a springboard for the emergence of nationalized government schools in Nigeria. The issue of government's neglect of educational sector is not a new phenomenon. As Fafunwa (1974) postulates that "up to 1882, the colonial government in Nigeria paid little or no attention to the educational needs of the people, and the field was left entirely to the mission.

Ani, Kelechi Johnmary (2010) study "Catholic Education Policy in Enugu State, Nigeria and Human Capital Development" reveals that the Catholic Church is one of the most popular orthodox and oldest Christian Churches that exists in the contemporary world. She has not only contributed to the growth of pious behaviour amongst the citizenry of the globe but has also remained an active player in the educational development of many countries across the different continents of the world. Nigeria is one of the countries where the educational-wind of the Catholic Church is blowing. The history of Catholic education in Nigeria is traceable to the colonial era when the missionaries came with "the bible and their pen" as tools for the indoctrination of the Christian faith. They began to build missionary schools in all knobs and crannies of the country.

While the Muslims in the Northern part of the country resisted the planting of missionary schools in the North, it was easily planted in the Southern part of Nigeria; where people saw the mission school as 'messiah' towards an end to their mass illiteracy. In between the post-independence years and the civil war years, Catholic primary and secondary schools grew in their large numbers in Enugu State. It had very high patronage across all the social strata of the society.

Unfortunately, the pull and push effect created by the civil war affected the Catholic Church and her educational system in all states of the federation. Igboaja (2010) wrote that when the civil war broke out in our country, education in this part of the world went on an enforced long vacation as all the schools from primary to tertiary were closed. The situation was compounded when the government took over missionary school with the promise of transforming it from its dilapidated state, during the civil war. He further reiterated that immediately after the civil war, the then government of East Central State of Nigeria, with Enugu as the capital, forcefully took over the mission schools and so initiated the death of sound moral, academic education in our state in particular and Nigeria in general. Many years after the government took-over the missionary schools, the educational system of every level in the country is presently suffering from all manners of pedagogic diseases that have affected human capital development. There is an unimaginable-intellectual collapse in the quality of education in Nigeria.

Consequently, the government of Governor Jim Ifeanyichukwu Nwobodo took a bold step in an attempt to resuscitate sound education in the then Anambra State, which included the present Anambra, Enugu, and Ebonyi States. He allowed the major religious denominations to appoint clergy representatives who would be employed in the State School System as supervisors for special duties. Their duty was to plan, organize and supervise the teaching of moral and religious education in all state schools. He also went further to return about two schools each to the major religious denomination (Igboaja, 2010). More than thirty-six

years after the forceful takeover of Missionary schools by the government, Barrister Sullivan Iheanacho Chime's-led administration in Enugu State courageously returned all missionary schools to the original missionary owners in the state on September 1, 2009. The Catholic Church was the major owners of the returned schools followed by the Anglican and Methodist Churches etc.

Consequently, the Catholic Bishops of the three dioceses of Enugu, Nsukka and Awgu, which make up the political milieu called Enugu State came-up with *The Catholic Church Policy on Education*. This work is a study on the issues there-in and the challenges of implementing *The Catholic Church Policy on Education*, which would directly impact on human capital development in Enugu State in particular and Nigeria in general. At a glance, studies were carried out on human capital development and their implications on firm performance were widely covered and obviously, human capital enhancement will result in greater competitiveness and performance (Iman, 2003).

Faith Organizations and the Management of Education in Nigeria

Agi, Ugochukwu K's (2013) paper, "The Challenges and Prospects of Managing Private School System in Rivers State" states that Rivers State as part of the South had a fair share of the experience of mission schools. Names such as St. Aquinnas Secondary School, Elele, Sancta Maria High School, Omoku; Ascension High School, Eleme, Stella Maris College, Baptist High School, Port Harcourt, Holy Rosary Secondary School, Port Harcourt, etc. suggest early missionary ownerships of school and contribution to educational development. They had remained so till after the war, when Government through Policies took ownership, control of administration and mass provision of education. He further postulates that Education policy in Rivers State directly derives from the National Policy on Education. Curricula, structure, programmes and administration of education in Rivers State are similar to what happens elsewhere in Nigeria. Variation may only be noticed in the peculiar

emphasis placed on vision, values and principles of provision. The Rivers State vision of education is to produce globally competitive, functionally literate and self-sustaining scholars and citizens. Again the enduring values of education in the state remain people, knowledge, integrity, excellence, peace and commitment. The principle of education emphasizes effective policy implementation and productive delivery. Massive expansion to facilities provision of free books and uniform and recent allocation of 20.7% of total state budget to education is a clear manifestation of the vision, values and principles of education in Rivers State.

Agi (2013) further remarks that for more than four decades now Private schools have run as profit oriented enterprises, often owned by an individual, cooperating individuals, voluntary agencies or faith based organizations. Private ownership of schools as earlier noted, dominated the education landscape of the country during the mid-Nineteenth Century leading up to the later part of that Century. The missionaries were predominantly responsible for those schools. Private schools have persisted since then. In Rivers State, there are 451 recognized Private Primary Schools and 514 recognised Private Post Primary Schools. Private schools can be categorized according to fee regimes, as Low Fee Paying (LFP) and High Fee Pay (HFP). The fee regimes are directly determined by owner's defined standards and characteristics and not subject to government regulation. Fee payment determines access and sometimes quality of programmes available in each school. Private schools are run on the basis of cash for provision.

It is pertinent to note, according to Agi (2013) that while some private schools in the Rivers State rate highly in terms of academic performance, good facilities, discipline, and good school climate, others are usually poorly rated and scarcely sought after, because they exhibit those characteristics that neither promote excellence in learning nor make contribution to education delivery. Here lies the challenges that confront not only the Private schools alone but also education delivery

management in Rivers State. The Nature of ownership of Private schools and the purpose for which the owners have set them up present a herculean task in having Private schools lend themselves to inquiries and administrative cooperation from external bodies. For these reasons the major challenges in managing Private schools would border on the following (IAARR 2013): *www.afrrvjo.net* 347 *Indexed African Journals Online: www.ajol.info*:

- (a) Quality Assurance
- (b) Facilities / Equipment
- (c) Environment
- (d) Funding
- (e) Condition of Service/Motivation
- (f) Manpower Development/Capacity Building Programme
- (g) Creating Board of Governors
- (h) Merger Plans

Chima Sebastine Ugwulashi (2011) in his study, "Parent Teachers Association (PTA) Roles and Funding of Private School Administration in Nigeria" remarks that the establishments of private schools have made it easier for even small communities have access to quality education which the public school cannot assure in the locality. Education has been communalized by this process that even the lower class competes with the middle class and middle class with upper class on choice of schools for their children. Notwithstanding, the size of private schools, they have narrowed the gap and improved the system to a great extent in standardizing educational derivable which the public schools failed to provide for the nation at large because of decaying state in the management of education. Today, parents can afford private education in Nigeria despite the high cost because of these derivable accruing from the private school system.

He also states that in spite of the exorbitance of most private schools, this effort is highly appreciated by many parents for creating

standard considering the messy situations public educational institutions are faced mostly at the primary and secondary levels. The deteriorating state of public school has led to critics about its future by the society. Most of the public schools have the best teachers but enthusiasm is lost because of the place of teachers in the society. Also there are no funds and cannot properly generate funds for its management, meeting school demands became extremely difficult thus affecting organization performance. Finance is one problem that crumbles effective administration of public school and is important before establishment of private schools. Unlike public schools that depend on government in the face of dwindling economy, private schools are sole dependent on private finances. Elekwachi (1999) in Onuka and Arowojolu, (2008) reviewed the cost incurred on private education asserted that Government should aid voluntary agencies with funds to avoid craze for profit in the subsector. The study reviews that most investors in the education industry were more interested in the net present value of the return on their investment. This cost of private education needs subsidization as to give the society opportunity to enjoy consistent learning. The problem of fund in the public schools led to Parent Teachers Association (PTA) formations as avenue to raise funds to augment government subventions. It is here, that the role of PTA in the private institutions in Nigeria context is examined whether it is justifiable in terms of fund raising.

Stressing the importance of non-public schools he said the sporadic emergence of private schools especially at the primary and secondary levels signified world over that there is serious crises which the public schools cannot contain. This hunger for education has increased pressure on the existing public schools that more schools are required to accommodate this demand in both developed and developing societies. Establishment of private schools evolved to accommodate these growing needs and in search for quality education. Most of the private schools do not only lack infrastructural and instructional facilities development but also fund directed for recruiting qualified teaching staff except few

schools. Among the few private schools in Nigeria that met this status are either owned by wealthy individuals, corporate bodies and missions.

Evidentially, larger numbers of these private schools are poorly managed, but have done substantially to sustain the hunger for education. They maintained high quality standard and disciplinary measures even with the calibre of staff or infrastructural and instructional facilities at their disposal. They strived to maintain standard as many prominent scholars passed through these mushroom private schools found in corners and crannies of the world today. The conceptualization of private schools required due process in its establishment. There is a legitimate conception that school must meet the stated requirements before its establishment especially private institutions (Igwe 1999; Igwe and Obasi, 2005).

Studies have proved that parents' patronage of private schools are influenced by: teachers' dedication to work, high level of discipline among the teachers and pupils, early opportunity to train a child, good physical facilities, teaching and use of appropriate medium of instruction for which reasons high fees did not deter parents from patronizing them (Onuka and Arowojolu, 2008). The embracing of private school proves the true perspective of this study result as evident today. Despite these reasons among others adduced in many volumes today, private school establishment needs to be controlled even though; it lies within the constitutional provisions of freedom of ownership of property. But in as much as the so – established school intends giving the inmates the academic substance required for intellectual growth for national development without prejudice, minimal requirements must be met in standardizing education process, so long the school provides and promotes educational accessibility to everyone which is fundamental despite the location or place. Obviously the establishments of private schools have helped in solving the many problems encountered in public school mapping that creates spatial disparities. In effect the educational disparity among tribes, states, regions and or geographical clusters is

adduced to uneven interests in political determination and influences on education world over.

School mapping process most at times is politically driven as it has become tool to garner political power and support in most developing countries. Demography is another factor which has made certain areas over crowded with basic amenities attracting resourceful staff like urban areas while rural-rural areas are deprived. Onuka and Arowojolu (2008) important pointed out seventeen factors for parents patronage of private schools which include : (i) Avenue to train a child properly (ii) Children are trained to be inquisitive (iii) Availability of educational activities (iv) Secures future standard of children education (v) Children develop more academically, socially and morally (vi) Smooth transitions from home to school (vii) Children inculcates social norms and values (viii) Beautiful uniforms (ix) Children are more disciplined (x) Classroom environment encourages learning (xi) Immediate environment are made attractive (xii) No strike (xiii) No shortage of teachers (xiv) Opportunity of admission into the best secondary school (xv) Qualified teachers (xvi) Workbooks are checked and (xvii) Each pupils is given attention. These factors favours the establishment of private school since the activities in public schools have become discouraging that many think they no more constitute good place for knowledge acquisition.

And that most investors in the education industry were more interested in the net present value of the return on their investment. This cost of private education needs subsidization as to give the society opportunity to enjoy consistent learning. The problem of fund in the public schools led to Parent Teachers Association (PTA) formations as avenue to raise funds to augment government subventions. It is here, that the role of PTA in the private institutions in Nigeria context is examined whether it is justifiable in terms of fund raising.

Conclusion

This paper has re-told the story of the missions and educational development in Nigeria. Attention was given to the introduction of western education in Nigeria, government take of mission schools and agitations for the return of such school to their parent churches. Findings from this paper show that although there is the popular saying that mission schools are instruments of making converts to Christianity, parents favoured the schools established more than the religion because of the opportunity of learning useful skills such as reading and writing of English and Portuguese, Arithmetic etc. which the schools provided. The paper further reveals that mission schools provided low-cost qualitative education until 1970 when the schools were seized and nationalized by the government. With the government take-over the standard and quality of education fell. Fees were introduced and hiked, which kicked millions of children out of school. School infrastructures deteriorated. Libraries and laboratories disappeared in the schools. The welfare of teachers was ignored, etc. Strikes, examination malpractice, truancy on the part of students and teachers became the order of the day. Based on our findings we recommend that faith based organisations should be encouraged to establish schools in the country. This would help the country to achieve her millennial goal of providing education for her ever growing population.

References

- Agi, Ugochukwu K's paper, "The Challenges and Prospects of Managing Private School System in Rivers State" *An International Multidisciplinary Journal, Ethiopia Vol. 7 (1), Serial No. 28, January, 2013:340-351* ISSN 1994-9057 (Print) ISSN 2070--0083 (Online) DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/afrrrev.v7i1.23p340-351>
- Ajayi, Ademola S. (2006). "Christian Missions and Evolution of the Culture of Mass Education in Western Nigeria" *Journal of Philosophy and Culture*, Vol. 3, No. 2 June 2006 p33-54.

- Ani, KelechiJohnmary (2010) Catholic Education Policy in Enugu State, Nigeria and Human Capital Development, *Lit Academic Journal*, 1, 2,
- Chima, SebastineUgwulashi. (2012). "Parent Teachers Association (PTA) Roles and Funding of Private School Administration in Nigeria" *Asian Journal of Management Sciences and Education*. Vol. 1 no 1 (july 2012). Pp103-110
- Fafunwa, B. A. (1974). *History of Education in Nigeria*. London: George Mien & UnwinLtd..
- IAARR (2013): www.afrrvjo.net 347 *Indexed African Journals Online: www.ajol.info:*
- Igboaja, Ugonna (2010) "A Welcome Address Presented by the Enugu State Catholic Education Secretary on the Blessing & Formal Opening of the Enugu State Catholic Education Secretariat and the Launching of *The Catholic Church Policy on Education*" in Enugu, pp. 22-24
- Igwe, L. E. B &Obasi, F. N. (2005).*Legal Doctrines, Principles and decided cases: Implications for Effective School Administration*.Ogoni: Fredsbary Printers and Publishers.
- Igwe, L. E. B. (1999). *Fundamentals of school community relations management: Political and Legal Dimensions*.Port Harcourt: Pam Unique Publishers.
- Imam, H. (2003).A Survey of Pre-Colonial Almajirci Education in Kanem-Borno and Hausaland.*SAPHA- Journal of Historical Studies*,1(1), 1-6.
- Odili, Jones U (2010). "The Roles of Pastoral Agents at Indigenising Anglican Chruches in Ukwuaniland, 1841-1941". A Ph.D. dissertation submitted to the School of Graduate Studies University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt.
- Onuka, A. O. U and Arowojolu, A. F. (2008).An Evaluation of Parents' Patronage of Private Primary Schools in Abeokuta, Nigeria.*International Journal of African & African*.