Socio-Religious And Pedagogic Constraints Impinging On The Study Of Christian Religious Education In Nigerian Tertiary Institutions

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Abstract

This paper focuses on socio-religious and cultural constraints impinging on the study of Christian Religious Education in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Christian Religious Education is a life-transforming academic discipline that centres on the inculcation of God consciousness in growing persons by regaling them with doctrines and teachings anchored on the life and character of Jesus Christ in order to equip them with the competency and ability to contribute constructively for the benefits of themselves and the society. Thus, the paper examines among others, the relevance of Christian religious education in a crisis-ridden society; socio-religious and pedagogic constraints facing christian religious education in our institutions*; and placing Christian religious education at the centre of education: an issue of serious concern. It concludes by stressing that Christian religious education is needed for holistic development of growing persons and for helping adults to make rational decisions for peaceful and meaningful co-existence in Nigeria. No nation that plays down the moral development of her citizens makes meaningful progress in national development efforts. It recommends, among others, that Christian religious education should be taught with appropriate teaching methods and instructional materials in our schools.*

Keywords: Socio-religious, pedagogic, Christianity, religion, education, Nigeria

Introduction

Christian religious education, though reputed to be a life transforming academic discipline, has been a victim of constant oppression and unremitting struggle for survival in the stifling hands of insidious factors which fight to undermine its

capacity to find a niche for itself within the top echelons of important courses taught and learned in our tertiary institutions. Christian religious education, thus, needs new impetus and total emancipation from every constraining factor in order to reposition it for meaningful contributions to sustained national integration and national development in our crisis-ridden nation. A retrospection in the development of Christian religious education in Nigeria school system shows that its history tallies with the period of the development of higher education in Nigeria and indeed from the early period of the achievement of independence. As observed by Okpaga (2013), the type of education introduced to Africa and in particular, Nigeria reflected the educational traditions of the colonialists. Thus our future needs and national development and integration needs were not put into consideration. The curriculum of their education did not in any way reflect the African or Nigerian settings. Since they aimed at teaching the traditions of the colonial masters who introduced Western Education to the country, they neglected knowledge about Nigeria socio-political and cultural traditions (Okpaga, 2013). Even in the primary and secondary schools, the texts used were those brought from Europe as students and pupils were exposed to the writings of English and European scholars generally. This was done to the detriment of the acquisition of knowledge about African (Nigerian) history and the socio-cultural aspects of their lives.

If the curriculum of Christian Religious Education can be revolutionized to reflect the Nigerian context, it will go a long way to help the nation to achieve its educational, social, moral, religious, political and cultural development. Christian religious education when properly revolutionized, has the capacity to inculcate in citizens knowledge that will make for their sound, mental, physical, social, moral and intellectual development. It is a potent tool for instilling fear of God, obedience, discipline and fundamental Christian norms and values in Nigerian pupils and students for their holistic development (Tamida, 2010).

No nation or society which consciously aspires for the attainment of rapid future greatness in terms of socio-political, economic, cultural, technological and human capital development trivializes issues, that border on the welfare of the Youth who are said to be leaders of tomorrow. Youth are repositories of a galaxy of potentials which when fully developed will help them outlive and outshine today's adults

and leaders (Oluwasanjo, 2013:64). The Youth need moral guidance and that must start from the grass-root via Christian Religious Education in our various schools to enable them contend effectively with the force of the morass of modern moral morbidity and its subverting influence.

Today, the general situation in our nation as seen along the broad spectrum of general moral decay, corruption in high and low places, greed, political violence insecurity and social disorder has had a serious spillover effect on our education system making its policy formulators to lose sight of the necessity of placing high premium on the morally, and behavioural development of students. The resultant effect of this is untrammeled increase in deviant behaviours, juvenile delinquency, and various forms of antisocial behaviours among the Youth who passed out from the school system.

Capacity building and other commitments to enhance Youth employability which is placed at the pinnacle of our contemporary education curriculum planning and development will certainly be ineffectual if nothing serious is done to take care of the fast declining moral lives of the Youth. One sided development is no development at all. Intellectual and technological skills acquisition and development devoid of sound, morality are tantamount to sophisticated hooliganism and bestiality which soon snowball into digitalized criminality and constitute colossal disservice to the nation at large.

The provision of a conducive atmosphere that will make possible the coalescence of intellectual, technological, and social-economic development with the moral development of the Youth, will, no doubt, make for a quantum leap forward in "Nigerian National development efforts. Christian Religious Education in our school offers the Youth opportunity for moral, emotional and spiritual development which facilitate their smooth ascendancy to responsible and behaviourally balanced adults.. It is, therefore, against this backdrop that this paper seeks to examine Emerging Issues in Christian Religious Education in Nigeria with the aim of Ridding it of Factors that make it inefficient in our School System.

Concept of Christian Religious Education

Christian Religious Education is an academic discipline designed for the inculcation of fear of God, good moral life and fundamental Christian norms and values in students for their holistic development (Awusaku & Onu, 2015). It is a programme for the development of a conscious God fearing individual rooted in Jesus Christ, with the competency and ability to contribute constructively for the benefits of himself and the society (Esthons, 2010).It is aimed at making up deficiency in family up-bringing and socialization suffered by most children from poorly constituted homes. Family, no doubt, is the arena for children's basic character formation, which is not done by chance but by a conscious, deliberate and sustained effort (Kitause & Gemade,2020). Christian Religious Education synergizes with the family for efficient and effective performance of the above role in the society. Christian Religious Education dates back to the time of the early Missionaries whose missionary education was aimed at spreading the gospel of Jesus and also to convert Africans to Christian. Another aim of missionary education according to Uruakpa (2004) was to inculcate a high level of morality among its recipients. Missionary education was characterized by undue emphasis on rigid discipline for pupils and teachers in the system. Uruakpa observes that for all missionary agencies, there was policy of "spare the rod and spoil the child" in the moral up-brining of the students and pupils (Uruakpa, 2004).

The present day Christian Religious Education borrowed a lot from the old missionary education system in terms of ensuring that discipline, good morals and strict obedience to rules and regulations are enforced among students and pupils. Christian Religious Education is structured to reflect the belief system of Christianity which is majority found in the four gospels and other New Testament Books. Christian Religious Education seeks to present the life of Jesus Christ as a model to students. According to Okere (1983) the entire Christian moral system flows from the belief system of Christianity in the form of the life of Jesus as model.

Madumere and Awusaku (2019,p201), summarizes basic teaching of Christian Religious Education as follows:

i. God is the creator and sovereign Ruler of the universe
ii. God wants everybody to fear and obey Him
iii. God wants all persons to worship Him alone

iv. God wants everybody to do what is right always**.**

All these are believed to have a profound effect on behaviours and attitudes of students and Youth to things around them. The aim of Christian Religious Education is to reform people morally and instill in them the desire to always do what is good and avoid what is bad. The view of Okebukola (2008) corroborates the above when he states that religion seeks to transform the world and its people and points them to God. Christian Religious Education teaches that justice and peaceful co-existence should be pursued by all Christian.

Its teaching on justice and peaceful co-existence is supported by the "golden rule' which emphasizes that one should do for others what one wants others to do for oneself. According to Awusaku (2013) Christian motion of justice is predicated upon the fundamental belief that all men are equal before God. Williams (1982) cited in Okabukola (2008) summarizes the above when he observes that religion seeks to promote social justice and righteousness among all men.

The Relevance of Christian Religious Education in a Crisis-Ridden Society

The role of Christian Religious Education as a potent force in transforming the lives of the Youth and in providing useful guidance that helps them face numerous challenges of life cannot be underestimated. Christian Religious Education inculcates fear and consciousness of God in students and growing persons (Esthons, 2010). Christian Religious Education brings to the awareness of growing persons, the awesome nature of God, His power and supremacy over all creatures. The teaching of Christian Religious Education that sinners will be judged and punished on the last day by being thrown into the hell fire evokes godly fear and sentiment of self-control in growing persons. This has profound effect on behaviour, on motivation even on subconscious reactions (Okere, 1983)

Any Youth who has fear for God will certainly not commit murder, kidnap,-steal, rape, or engage in related antisocial activities. Also a Youth who has fear for God will have respect for parents/ teachers, those in authority and for his ' fellow students or Youth. Flagrant disregard for rules and regulation in school and in the larger society will be a thing of the past when God consciousness has been fully inculcated in our students and the Youth. God consciousness and fear bring to their awareness that every sinful or unrighteous action must attract judgment and

penalty from God therefore to avoid God's judgment is to desist from sinful, deviant and criminal actions. The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 1: Vs 7) It is the bedrock of sustainable moral development and transformation in all ages.

Christian Religious Education applauds love for one's neighbor. It emphasizes love as the cardinal and greatest Christian virtue that should be pursued stringently. As a Youth recognizes and loves God with all his/her heart, he/she should also love his/her neighbour made in the image of God. Since he/she does not see God physically, he or she is now bound by the law of love to see God in the person of his or her neighbor. Thus one cannot kill or terrorize one's neighbor whom one loves as oneself. A growing person who has embraced the virtue of love must conform to the popular saying "be your brother's keeper"

Other virtues such as forgiveness, kindness mercy and tolerance will be easy to practice by a Youth or any growing person who has through Christian Religious Education acquired the virtue of love for neighbor. Love and forgiveness make tolerance possible in time of serious provocation that might result to a break in relationship. This will make it difficult for the Youth to make themselves available to be used by unpatriotic and selfish elements in the country to unleash terror and destruction on any group of people in the name of religious, ethnic or communal violence.

Deviant and antisocial activities related to the above will be nipped in the bud when the Youth imbibed teachings on love for neighbours.

Kwasau (2005) in Esthons (2010,pp 69-70) identifies the objective of Christian Religious Education as follows:

i. To foster in growing persons a consciousness of God as a reality in human experience and a sense of personal relationship to him.
ii. To foster in growing persons a progressive and continuous development of Christ-like character.
iii. To develop in growing persons the ability and disposition to participate in and contribute constructively to the building of a social order throughout the world.

Christian Religious Education inculcates in growing persons the virtue of selfless service to humanity. As observed by Jando and Ngutswen (2020), the life of a Christian is necessarily a life of service to humanity in accordance with the standard set by Jesus when he was on earth. Christian Religious Education emphasizes hope, trust and faith in God as the best and most potent way of confronting life challenges. It also recommends that hope, trust and faith in God must be backed up by hard work on the part of the person who needs God's divine assistance to overcome socio-economic, educational, political and financial challenges. It seeks to raise hope in the lives of the Youth from parents of lower income status and broken homes that their future is very bright if they can hope, trust and have faith God and also commit themselves to hard work. Christian Religious Education affirms that God is loving and caring and rewards every good and honest effort with success. These hope-inspiring-, teachings of Christian Religious Education recover and morally reinvigorate the Youth who are under pressure to resort be deviant or criminal activities because of their parents or families socio-economic status.

In similar vein, Christian Religious Education plays important role in socialization process by helping growing persons find the most adaptive niches for their abilities and temperament.

Socialization does not just happen in childhood; it is the lifelong process of shaping individual's behaviour patterns (Zimbardo, Johnson and Weber, 2008: 153). Christian Religious Education authoritatively guides, directs and disciplines erring children by pointing them to the right course of actions which help them conform to norms and values of the society. By so doing, Christian Religious Education fills the gap which indulgent and permissive styles of parenting created in child's socialization process (Madumere, Awusaku & Uzoagba, 2020). Such gap results to deviance and moral deformation in growing persons.

Moreso, properly socialized Youth who have imbibed Christian virtues via Christian Religious Education will hardly succumb to negative environmental cum peer group pressure. Such Youth take Jesus as their role model and hence stand firmly on doing always what is morally right and avoiding what is morally wrong. Indeed, well socialized Youth are equipped with the knowledge of

religious, cultural and social norms, values and skills that enable them grow into responsible adults with full potentials of contributing meaningfully to national development.

Placing Christian Religious Education at the Centre of Education: An issue of Serious Concern

The need to bridge the existing gap between Christian religious education and education in our school curriculum should not be underscored. Christian religious education should be placed at the centre of all learning to make learners morally balanced in terms of being worthy in character and learning. As some people erroneously think, the critical inquiry involved in education may not be of relevance to the religious effort of initiating young people into religious communities. Christian religious education does not only aim at initiating young people into religious communities but also help to make them fit properly into the socio-religious, cultural and moral complexities of modern societies. There is the need to articulate and bring together the practices of religion and education under a single academic discipline; and also the need to wade through the murky waters of religious absolutism and somehow find our way to the sort of open-minded inquiry that genuine education requires.

This is an intriguing task for students of religious education. But one thing is certain. The current global violence and bloodshed being perpetrated by people in the name of religion is actually a product of religion without education. But again, the equally prevalent efforts in our secular age to advance education without religion are equally leading to the commodification of knowledge, the attempt to use it as an instrument for economic or political control. Religion without education can lead to various forms of extremism or fundamentalism, the manipulation of individuals under the guise of a religious interpretation that is nothing more than political radicalism. But education without religion is equally morally vacuous. Religious resources are needed as we try to negotiate the everyday demands and challenges of life in general.

Religious education represents a synthesis of faith and inquiry, a blending of the healthy appreciation of the place of religious traditions in human life with an open and rigorous inquiry inherent in the process of education. Michael Meyer-Blanck

(2003),cited in Schluss (2009), contends that education without religion is incomplete and religion without education is dangerous. For Schluss, the statement is first an indication that enlightened religions are less likely to embrace absolutist and fundamentalist positions than religions that avoid education. But the inverse is also true that education without religion is dangerous. We need religion within education to develop competences not only on religious issues but on everyday life as a whole.

Schluss (2009,p.68-70), makes an important distinction between education in religion and education about religion. Education *in* religion means that students are taught to uncritically accept all aspects of a religion and limit critique to fundamentalist interpretations of religious subject matter. This approach to religious education is essentially confessional, excluding others who do not participate in the same religion as oneself. Advocates of this approach to religious education compare the activity of education here to that of language instruction. A language is not learned simply by understanding grammar or the history of the language, but in its very use. In language classes, teachers require students to practice reading, writing, and speaking the language, so also ought the teachers in religious education to train the students to be able to practice the fundamental values, teachings and doctrines of certain religious denominations.

Education about religion is a more open-minded approach to religious education. This approach does not side with a particular religion. It rather has the ability to promote a critical perspective or attitude towards all religious subject matter. A metaphor to compare the educational activity that goes on here is that of sex education. In a sex education class, sexuality and the body are examined in an educational manner, but the practice of using the body in a sexual way is not part of instruction and learning. The students are merely informed about aspects of their body anatomy and sexual orientations.

This is the approach that is best suited to religious education in our contemporary pluralistic dialogue about both religion and education. A pluralistic approach to religious education is needed today for the successful coexistence within a multi-religious society. The essence of this dialogue is not to unify all religions, but to promote awareness of and reflection on the similarities and differences of the

various religions and philosophies. 'Recognizing and respecting similarities and differences between different religions is one way to promote tolerance. And since education is one important way to respond to the need for understanding and supporting differences in society, religious education is one crucial way to learn how to deal with and bring together all the different, and even contradictory aspects of religious life and expressions. Such a heterogeneous experience of religion provides the student with the opportunity to position himself or herself with a specific religious identity within these differences.

Socio-Religious And Pedagogic Constraints Facing Christian Religious Education In Our Institutions

Some of the factors constraining the teaching and learning of religious education in Nigeria can be summarized as follows

i. **Wrong Conception of Christian Religious Education by students and parents:** This issue is another impediment constraining effective teaching and learning of Christian Religious education in our contemporary schools today. Most parents and their wards see the subject as subject meant for pastors, Reverend fathers and Sisters, and church founders, and this wrong perception influences their patronage of the subject either as a main course or a borrowed course in the school system. (Akama 1997). Similarly wrong conceptions of the subject exist with teachers and parents outside the department of Christian religion education, it is bothering and challenges to teachers of the subject to put these misconceptions right.

ii. **Problem of Indoctrination and Proselytization:** Most Teachers of Christian Religious Education often make conscious and unconscious attempts to foist their personal religious beliefs, feelings, perceptions and ideas on students without following the content and basic Christian values integrated in the curriculum. The curriculum of Christian religious education which is based on the shared Christian norms and values and tradition should not be an issue of a particular Christian denominational beliefs and perceptions of the society and the Divine Being-God with the exclusion of other denominations beliefs and perceptions. This is inimical and contradictory to the main objectives and aims of Christian Religious education in Nigeria educational system.

According to Obanya (2007) the emphasis on instructional aims has just shifted from just acquisition of factual knowledge to, the acquisition of relevant skills and competences necessary for decision making in this fast changing Nigerian society, while that of instructional process should shift from teaching for examination to teaching how to learn, how to communicate and how to perform effectively. Similarly Akudolu (2012) remarks that Nigerian need to evolve and embrace educational values that will guarantee an all-round education for the learners, equipping them with the necessary skills and competences (moral competences) for effective life in knowledge dominated society. Education and policy is serviceable and viable when it is geared towards special needs and aims of a nation. It must produce men and women who will not be out of place in a technological age; a system which will ensure uniform standards, a system which will blend science and technology with culture and spiritual enrichment (Offurum, 2014). No study or subject in our school curriculum plays the above role of spiritual enrichment of students except Christian religious education.

iii. **Inappropriate teaching methods for classroom instructions:** Most teachers who handle the subject are inept and inexperienced as such lack knowledge of appropriate teaching methods and pedagogic skills required for imparting Christian Religious Knowledge in students. Teaching and learning Christian Religious education with inappropriate methods connotes miscarriage of effectiveness and efficiency in classroom instructional delivery as far the subject or course is concerned in our school system. Teaching is a profession that requires proper skills and requisite competencies.

According to Isiozor (2015), teaching is regarded as one of the oldest human activities or occupations and as requires appropriate high level competencies in its performance. This is because teaching is aimed at bringing about some desired change in someone's behavior (Agigbaka & Emealo 2011). What distinguishes school teaching from indoctrination, preaching, advice, propaganda is the use of appropriate methodologies (Okafor, 2008)

iv. **Lack of Instructional Materials:** Appropriate instructional materials for teaching and learning Christian Religious education are after in dearth supply. Most of the ones available for use are outside and obsolete.

v. **Global emphasis on Science and Technology:** Today, every nations of the world, including Nigeria is shifting emphasis from arts, humanities, social sciences and business management to science and technology oriented courses as way of enhancing national development striving. This current wave in contemporary educational pursuit in Nigeria makes Christian Religious Education to be seen as course of no consequences with little or no socio-economic values in the labour market. This is regardless of its tremendous social, moral, spiritual and all round contributions to human development, national peace and integration.

In most schools, especially tertiary institution, they hardly include Christian Religious Education as a course of study in their institution.

Conclusion

Christian religious education plays enormous role in shaping and molding the character and behaviour of Nigerian students for meaningful contributions to national development. The growing person is saddled with the skills, knowledge, norms and values that are relevant for his holistic development and transition into responsible adulthood by Christian religious education. The adult person in the society is provided with the moral blue print, insight, guidance and direction that will enable him or her make rational decisions, embark on legitimate and lawful activities that will make for peace, good neighbourliness effective and good social interaction and integration in a culturally and religiously pluralistic society like Nigeria. Thus, relegating it to the margin of our school curriculum and national development plan is an indirect way of calling on evil days and invoking moral, socio-cultural, economic and political failure on our dear nation. No nation that plays down the moral development of her citizens makes meaningful progress in national development efforts.

Recommendations

This paper therefore makes the following recommendations as the way forward.

1. The government at local, state and federal levels should partner with the management of higher institutions to launch regular awareness campaign and public orientation on the importance of Christian religious education in the life of a growing person in Nigeria and its contributions to national peace, security, unity, national integration and inter-ethnic cooperation.
2. Lecturers/Teachers of Christian religious education should stop using the subject as a means of indoctrination or converting students to their personal churches as this negates the principles of teaching profession and the objectives for which the subject (course) incorporated in our school curriculum.
3. Christian religious education should be made a compulsory General Studies (GST) course for all students in our tertiary institutions
4. The subject should be made part and parcel of our educational system by making it compulsory in our primary, secondary and tertiary education systems.
5. Lecturers/Teachers who are qualified and who have requisite professional discipline should be employed by the schools to handle teaching and facilitates learning of Christian religious education in our tertiary institutions/ schools.
6. The use of appropriate teaching methods and instructional materials should be emphasized by the government and school authorities in order to make teaching and learning Christian religious education efficient and effective in our tertiary institutions/schools.

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