

RELIGION, EDUCATION AND AFRICAN CULTURE: THE CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract

Christianity, Education and African Culture are a wide topic that has no limitations. Despite the fact that Religion and education worked hand in hand in order to penetrate African culture, African culture still have her effects on the doctrines and system of Religion and education. The purpose of this study is to investigate the connection between Religion and education on African culture. This study is based on Africa as a continent and Nigeria as a country. The research looked at Religion from the perspective of Christianity. Hence, a brief history of the connection between Christianity and education in Nigeria was considered. More also, the effects of African culture on Christianity and education in Nigeria and also the challenges of Christianity and education on African culture were discussed. No doubt, Education has become a prominent process today; it could as well be traced back to the Christian mission's establishment of primary and secondary schools in the 1800s. The work then explains the foundation of Christianity and education with the effects of the duo on African culture. Historical and phenomenological methods were employed in carrying out this research and it is our belief that justice would be done to this topic in this regard.

Keywords: Religion, Christianity, Education, African Culture

Introduction

Religion and education go hand in hand in the enlightenment and proper formation of the human mind. They have a substantial affinity that one might lose its meaning and place in the society when detached from one another. Their essences, values and impacts on any society are dependent upon the extent to which they are approached simultaneously. Religion and education are vital tools which, when fully harmonized, could liberate the contemporary man from irrational propagation of false ideologies. Therefore, there should be a purely academic exercise of understanding the intersection of religion and education, (Matthew, 2015).

Religion and education are two of human beings most ancient endeavours. The two had long relationship history and can hardly be separated from each other. Hence, Education is defined as the oldest discipline in human history, which deals with the art of imparting, acquiring knowledge through teaching and learning, especially at school or similar institution. This definition is adopted in this paper because it is precise and it also assimilates key points about formal education. Education is certainly one of the sectors given the highest priority by any government for the all-inclusive development of a society. It is the central nub where other sectors like economy, health, tourism, industry, aviation, energy/power, etc. revolve and through which they find their place in the society. However, the morality and sanctity of education determine the extent to which education can attain its goal of shaping the entire aspects of the

life of any society. On the other hand, when the issue of the sanctity and morality of education is raised, religion is rightfully invited to play its indispensable role.

The role of religion is very vital to the advancement of education and the impingement of educational values in the entire life of peoples. Since education is the basis of development, it seems that the Nigerian educational system needs radical religious intervention. The reason for this intervention is clearly seen in our day to day experience of the dysfunctional nature of education at all levels in the Nigerian nation. On the daily basis, the Nigerian educational system displays an increasing rate of moral decadence and corruption that destabilizes and stagnate the developmental efforts of well-meaning Nigerians. Examination malpractices, plagiarism, forged educational certificates backed-up by educational institutions, internet fraud and cultism have destroyed our educational system in Nigeria. All these constitute threat to the future of the African continent. It is a clear manifestation of the declination and decadence of the educational system and its inherent values in our contemporary societies especially in Nigeria.

Understanding African Culture through African Religion

Culture is a major identification of any African community. It is well respected among other ways of identification. Africa is well known for her culture of crafts and arts, folklore and religion, clothing, cuisine, music and language. African culture is well expressed, though, there is diversity of culture. There is diversity of culture found not only in different African countries but also in each country. The Africans respect their culture and will not for any reason trade it on the altar of any religion. But unfortunately, Traditional African Religion was, and is still in many quarters, rated terribly low by the missionaries such that they are not seen to be capable of having an authentic concept of God. Idowu (1977) quoting Emil Ludwig asked the question, for instance: "How can the untutored Africans conceive God? How can this be? Unfortunately, this type of teaching has convinced many Africans who will never see anything good in whatever is indigenous to Africa. Any good thing found in Africa, whether a material object or an idea, must have, according to such Africans, come from the Western world, forgetting that Africa even before the advent of European civilization is replete with many good things and full understanding of Africa Religion is the only key to unraveling these mystery.

But some of the reasons for the ignorance of many modern Africans about their traditional culture can be traced to some historical antecedents, principal among which were the advent of colonialism and the introduction of both Christianity and Islam. Susanne Wenger(1998), observes that, "The literate Africans, Nigerians were educated to hate and despise their own culture," whereas, "In Muslim way or Christian or traditional way, there is no difference for the real African, because religiosity and belief and acceptance of the fact of God is the same". In the same vein, Ulli Beier reminded Wole Soyinka, in an interview which the latter granted him:

You were living in the Christian school compound, that was surrounded *by* a high wall and when the Egungun masqueraders were passing *by* outside, you had to ask somebody to lift you unto the ladder, so that you could watch the procession going on outside. Your upbringing was designed to shield you from the realities of Yoruba life

The reality is that many Christians have not liberated themselves from narrow forms of Christianity. They therefore see life as either white or black, rather than seeing life holistically, as being both black and white, body and soul, as Soyinka observes in the interview." (Abioje, 2005)

According to Abioje (2005), when one mentions Yoruba divinities, some people's mind will not only think of mysterious beings, but also of evil and devilish beings. For Yoruba traditionalists, however, every being and everybody comes from God, even a deified person comes from, and receded his her talents from God, in Yoruba understanding. The Yoruba traditionalists may not have conspicuous shrines dedicated to God, but that is not to say they do not acknowledge Him as their Creator and as the Creator and Lord of every other being. More importantly, God does not absolutely require a shrine or a special altar for his worship. As Bolaji Idowu already notes, the divinities (or *Orisa*) are conceived as God's ministers. Ogun is the minister for iron and steel; Orisa-nla is in charge of moulding physical bodies, for God to breathe life into; Sango is the minister for justice and execution of God's anger through lightning and thunder; Orunmila is the counselor appointed by God for the other divinities and human beings, etc. In a culture where kings, such as the Alaafin of Oyo, could not be directly approached, except through his chiefs, it should not be difficult to understand why God is not worshipped, but through the divinities as Idowu explains. In other words, the Yoruba cultural background affects their approach to God, for whom they have a very deep regard. It is through education that the reality about African culture could be known and one would be free from the wrong nomenclature given to African Religion and culture.

It is now being realized in many quarters, that it is not prudent to abandon all our traditional heritage, and live like a river without an origin or a source As Professor Adeoye Lambo laments:

I think many things were wrong with Nigeria in that the value system has collapsed, and we've got no other substitute. We've been dangling between the traditional and the so-called sophisticated Western mores and value system and we had not even got to the other end before the traditional one collapsed, so we are in a total vacuum (Punch, 1996).

Some theologians, even some Western theologians, such as Eugene Lapointe, actually think the situation would have been avoided if missionaries had not condemned *en bloc* the people traditional religion. Lapointe, for instance, sets St Paul as an example of a missionary who condemned only what was bad in the traditional religion of his mission communities. He also points to the fact that at the beginning of the Church, Christian continued to go to worship in the synagogues and in the Temple of Jerusalem, meaning, as he explains, that they did not abandon the Jewish worship although they had their own peculiar celebrations, such as the baptism and the breaking of the bread (as in Acts 2).

The Special Assembly for Africa, of the Synod of Catholic Bishops (Rome. 1994) would seem to have taken a very positive step by showing recognition for the religion of African forebears, as mentioned earlier (above). In his post-synodal apostolic exhortation, following the special assembly on Africa (1994), Pope John Paul II, notes that "the Church certainly respects and esteems the non-Christian religions professed by very many Africans, for these religions are the living expression of the soul of vast groups of people." Today, we realize that there are true values in every culture and there are also negative elements. Africa has a great wealth of cultures and values to be shared with other nations. The great task of Christian Churches in Africa today is to encourage the members to express their African and Christian values in a fully African way, (AMECEA, 1995).

The Missionaries and Western Education

After the ugly occasion of the slave trade, the missionaries came to pacify the Africans by their introduction of Christianity and her twin sister, Education. Realizing the fact that Christianity could not thrive without education, (since the religion is that of book), Western education came together with it. The aim of the Christian missionaries was to use education as a weapon of evangelism while the colonial government was interested in education for their own personal benefits. Though, the colonial government funded mission schools, provided efficient security and also gave scholarships to Christian missionaries, but their collaboration with the Christian missionaries made the Church been viewed by the natives as a foreign institution, where missionaries pretend to care about evangelistic mission (Tongshinen, 2005).

Though, the establishment of Christianity in the Yoruba land was not that easy. The reactions of the traditional leaders also matters in the mission movement in Yoruba land. The traditional rulers then reacted positively or negatively to the missionaries, based on their personal interest. First, the negative reactions to the Christian missionaries were from the anti-missionary rulers. In the Yoruba land, there are some anti-missionary rulers who opposed Christian missionaries, believing that the Christian missionaries are enemies to the Yoruba land. Hence, the anti-missionary rulers have their different reasons for the indifferences to Christianity. Some traditional rulers were scared of losing the value of their position. Kosoko of Lagos was also an anti-missionary ruler who saw the Christian missionaries as obstacle to his withholding of the throne (Tongshinen, 2005).

Slave trade was the business that brought a lot of money to the traditional rulers of the Yoruba land before the visit of the missionaries, but when the missionaries came and was against slavery, the traditional rulers saw the Christian missionaries as an enemy of the Yoruba because of their stand against slave trade. The money traditional rulers were getting from their illegal business could naturally be a reason for their resistance towards Christian missionaries and Christianity in general. It was also the belief of the Africans that the white men belong to the spirit world because of their colour, the Yoruba also see white men as the people that brought evil to their land. Then, it was believed that any town that accepts the missionaries would experience calamities like famine, and other terrible diseases. The traditional rulers of Yoruba land were also feeling unsecured about their role in their community. The traditional rulers did not want the white to carry out their responsibilities for them in their various towns. The traditional rulers saw Christian missionaries as intruders who have come to intrude their cities. The missionaries claim to bring good news to the Africans, but this anti-missionaries saw nothing good coming from them. The traditional rulers were angry and reacts negatively towards the teaching in which the missionaries were giving to the people of the land. An instance was the Christian doctrine of all men are equal, which was the cause of the citizens of Creek town in the Old Calabar who resisted the authority of their ruler because of this doctrine in 1854. The major reason for the traditional rulers negative reaction towards Christian missionaries was the claim that Christianity was superior to African Traditional Religion (Tongshinen, 2005). The traditional rulers were not satisfied with the way in which the Christian missionaries regard their religion.

But invariably, when they were given the space, they succeeded in the provision of:

- Schools and hospitals were built. Each denomination try to make the schools and hospitals opened to everyone in the Igbo land for free, in order to win more followers.
- School subjects were updated. The Roman Catholic added English Language and Sciences to their school's discipline.

- The Church missionary society also provided learning of Agricultural works. Christianity and Agriculture then go hand in hand.
- The Roman Catholic gave the people free medicine, in order to entice them to their denomination.
- The Roman Catholic generous way of attracting the Igbo people earned them the ability to boast of strength with the Anglicans in the Igbo land, despite the fact that they came after 30 years of the establishment of the Church missionary society in the Igbo land.

The Challenges of Christianity and Education on African Culture

Christianity and education has great impact on African communities, in fact, it is of great influence on African culture. Despite this fact, there are some challenges of Christianity and education on African culture. The basics of Christianity and education in Africa as a continent and Nigeria as a country has been considered, and as well-known that education is a powerful weapon Christianity has used in order to be established in Africa. Education in this case is now recognized as a vital tool for the survival of Africans and also for the development and reconstruction of Africa. The Christian missionary that brought about the establishment of Christianity in Nigeria could have been said to have come basically to evangelize the gospel, but they also saw a very good reason to educate the people. The converts could not read their Bible daily if they are not educated. So, the missionary used education as a benefit for understanding Christianity and understanding one another, (Johan & Johan, 2014).

Christianity and Education were brought to Africa by the European missionaries, which made it look like a foreign activity. Churches are built then by these European missionaries and Africans were attending the churches. Africans then see themselves as adherent to a foreign religion but the fact still remains that they are Africans. African hereby seek the establishment of African Churches where the true nature of Africa will be shown in worshipping God (Coertze, 2005). This was like a difficult task for Africans, despite the fact that the Europeans were ready to hand over the duty of the Church activity to Africans. Though, there are some Africans who wanted an African founded Church. It is as a result of this that the Africans wanted a denomination in which they can speak on the same frequency. It is the exposure the Africans now have as a result of education that they can make good their plans in having African Indigenous Churches. But as can be seen today, many of the African founded Churches later had some challenges, (Coertze, 2005). For instance,

- The churches suffered and struggled for recognition. Several African founded churches were not recognized in the society, some even see the churches as Non-Christian, but a gathering of pagans who practice African Traditional Religion with some elements of Christianity in it. In a nutshell, some of the Indigenous Churches are not recognized in the society.
- The indigenous Churches are seen to be practicing enculturation. They adapt Christian teachings to suit a non-Christian culture, that is, African Traditional culture.

In spite of the achievements recorded through education, in Africa education is undergoing some basic challenges. These include:

- Poor quality environment. In this case, poor quality environment could be lack of adequate infrastructures, overcrowding, sanitation or violence.
- Poor quality content: Here content is referring to the standard of educational institutions which could be outdated curriculum or inadequate materials.

- Poor quality processes: The poor quality processes can be the platform in which education is being taught or learnt. The poor quality processes are caused by untrained teachers and poor school management.
- National legal framework: That is, the way educational system is being carried also matter a lot in eradicating educational problems. The national legal framework could be lack of compulsory education requirement.

At the entrance gate of a University in South Africa the following message was posted for contemplation:

Destroying any nation does not require the use of atomic bombs or the use of long range missiles. It only requires lowering the quality of education and allowing cheating in the examinations by students. Patients die at the hands of such doctors. Buildings collapse at the hands of such engineers. Money is lost at the hands of such economists and accountants. Humanity dies at the hands of such religious scholars. Justice is lost at the hands of such lawyers and judges. Governance is lost at the hands of such legislators. The collapse of education is the collapse of the nation.

This is a food for thoughts. Our government must here this. Our Federal and State ministries of education must here this. All the stake holders in education must here this. All our teachers in Primary, Secondary and Tertiary institutions must here this.

The place of Religion in Education

By a research by Putnam (2015), “youth who are involved in a religious organization take tougher courses, get higher grades and test scores, and are less likely to drop out of high school.” Moreover, churchgoing youth have better relationships with their parents. They are more involved in sports and extracurricular activities. They are less likely to abuse alcohol and drugs that inhibit learning. That is to say, the moral formation influenced by religion provides the framework for students to flourish.

Even more surprising is the finding that religion is not the domain of the unenlightened lower classes of society as is often insinuated. In fact, students from affluent families are now much more likely to be involved in religion than those in poorer families. Religion is a major part of the mix that allows many of them to attain later success in life. If that were not enough, students enlightened by religion tend to seek higher education. Putnam cites studies that show that a child whose parents regularly attend church is 40 to 50 percent more likely to go on for a college education than a similar child of parents who do not attend church.

Based on such evidence that clearly shows a positive impact, schools should at least recognize that religious involvement in the home helps the educational development of children. The sad fact is that while religion is good for education, education is not good for religion. The educational establishment treats religion as if it is a deadly disease, not a blessing, upon the child. Putnam actually cites many such studies and the evidence is overwhelming. His conclusion is that religion has not only a good impact, but even a great effect upon the success of a child’s education.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it could be seen that the place of religion in Education even in our culture cannot be overemphasize. Religion and education can hardly be removed from African culture; in fact, education has now become invariably an African culture. But unfortunately, while

religion tends to help shapen the society, get students into college, college tends to get religion out of students. It is a sad fact that many students find an atmosphere on campus which corrupts their morals and erodes their faith. Educational establishment is hostile, attack and ridicule Christian principles and beliefs. It has almost become a rite of passage that many African students lose their faith at the University, (Ango & Oladejo, 2014).

The welfare of the student should be a major concern for educators. All positive influences upon the child should be encouraged, not banished – especially if the influence is proven effective. In this sense, how much better education would be if it were at least not hostile to God and religion, and how much better it would be if education policies were to be based on facts, rather than prejudices? But there is hope. The hope is not to be found in public schools but in the establishment of “faith based” Universities and schools; where religious tenets are enforced. The only problem is that not all will be privileged to have their wards in such schools because of the cost. However, the Government should take a cue from this latest development coming from private institutions and do the needful. Encourage religion, make the teaching of Religion compulsory in schools; right from Basic the Secondary School and even include the teaching of religious moral in the General Study Programmes of all higher institutions. By this, the desire for criminality and criminal tendencies among our youths will be drastically reduced.

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