

SUPPORTING CHRISTIAN EDUCATION IN TODAY'S NIGERIA

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Abstract

Christian schools and theological colleges are facing special challenges and dynamics in terms of funding despite the usefulness of this type of education in Nigeria today. Churches do not see the need to take up the responsibility even though they desire a morally free society. Books, journal articles and personal observations combined to serve as the Sources for the work. The major question addressed relates to how Christian Education can be supported in our contemporary society. In an attempt to answer the query, the meaning of Christian Education is examined, and the advent, necessity and why Christian education should be supported in Nigeria are discussed.

Keywords: Christian Education, Education, Missionaries, Nigeria

Definition of Christian Education

The term “Religious Education” has been variously defined. On one hand, it is seen as the teaching of a particular religion and its varied aspects, its beliefs, doctrines, rituals, customs, Rites, and personal roles. DE Hoff, on the other hand, explains that Christian education is based on the sound principles of God and that it is the duty of the parents to “train their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, to give them sound teaching in a wholesome environment in the home, in their social Life, at play, and wherever they may be (237-238). It is that holistic training of man based on God’s ideals that makes Christian Education a unique and desirable type of education.

The Advent of Christian Education in Nigeria (1842-1900)

Missionary activities and the introduction of Western education in West Africa can be traced to the 15 century. Schools were established by these voluntary agencies and

maintained. Since the nineteenth century, mission schools, which were founded by foreign missionaries promoted Western education that was offered free or highly subsidized in most cases. According to Offiong, the curriculum of these mission schools at the time was restricted in nature. Pupils and students were taught English Language, Moral instruction Arithmetic handwriting, Shorthand, Book-Keeping and Penmanship. The aim was to produce men who could read and write, interpret and evangelize the Locals (37). Financing education during this period was in the hands of the Christian Missionaries who owned and controlled schools. For a long time, through school fees paid by parents, subscriptions from churches and grants from Missionary Societies. School fees were, however, extremely low during this period. The Wesleyan Missionary Society, for example, established and financed Nigeria's first elementary school at Badagry in 1842 while the Church Missionary Society was founded by C.M.S. Grammar School, Lagos in 1859

and financed it for a long time (Adesua, 115,122). The colonial government did not consider education as a priority until 1882. As such, it did not take part in financing education in the colony. However, the 1882 Education Ordinance made provisions for the financing and maintenance of schools established by the colonial government. The Ordinance also made provision for assistance through a system of grants-in-aid to schools established by the Missions and private individuals. Likewise, schools established by voluntary agencies were maintained by school fees, voluntary subscriptions, grants from Missionary Societies and grants from the government. It was however noticed that voluntary agencies spent more on education than did the colonial government for most of the period (Adesina, 10, 24, 129). In 1970, the Federal Government took over mission schools as education was regarded as a huge government venture and no longer a private enterprise. Part of the reasons for the take-over was to provide stability, satisfy people's basic educational and national needs, combat sectionalism, religious conflict and disloyalty to the cause of a united Nigeria' (Fagbunmi 1-7; Imam, 187-190). This policy however did not last long, although, the takeover of schools by the government was not essentially a bad idea because of the initial successes registered. But the failure of the government to adequately fund education and improve the condition of the schools created a burden, including the failure of moral standards and discipline. New private schools were opened by individuals and religious groups, and they were no laws working against it, somehow introducing complexity in the school system in Nigeria. Interest groups mounted pressure on the States to return schools to their former owners. As a result, Lagos State pioneered the return of private schools to the owners in 2001

followed by: Imo, Ogun, Plateau, Anambra, Abia, Delta etc.

Relevance of Christian Education in our Contemporary Society

Nigeria as a nation seems to be both morally and spiritually bankrupt thereby requiring an urgent remedy. According to Shishima, the following negative vices characterized our society today.

Corruption: This is the use of public office for private gain. This includes bribery, dishonesty, rottenness, destroying the purity of, perverting, debasing, spoiling, and introducing errors into systems etc. The World Bank describes corruption as a form of dishonesty or a criminal offence which is undertaken by a person or an organisation which is entrusted with a position of authority, to acquire illicit benefits or abuse power for (one's) private gain. This deadly virus crept into the national scheme of things as a result of the changing values witnessed in the late 1970s when Nigeria abandoned positive values and opted for negative ones. Corruption characterizes wealth in the hands of a privileged few. For instance, even though, Nigeria is endowed with a lot of human and natural resources but a few individuals in power have bluntly refused to allow the larger populace the use and benefit from the proceeds of these resources. Ugwu observes that: Economically, the situation has become so bad that even amid plenty... a country which has been blessed with an abundance of human and natural resources capable of making it the pride of Africa is no longer able to provide daily bread for its citizens because all that is needed to live and survive are corruptly concentrated in the hands of the ...vampires that are sucking the blood of the nation (20) This is true as many of our leaders are very corrupt and continue to tantalize the poor masses with the products of their loot from the national economy. In July last year, the EFCC arraigned the former Accountant General of the Federation, Ahmed

Idris, alongside three others over ₦109bn fraud charges at an Abuja court. (Kunle Sanni, July 21, 2022) This woofing amount of money was corruptly embezzled by only four officers, The case is never heard of any more, This is the situation in which the nation is passing through. This has encouraged the helpless citizens to perpetuate the practice in their small measure thereby ruining the economy of the nation.

2. Political Violence. In politics too, Nigeria has witnessed a lot of problems ranging from the problems of godfathers in politics to kidnapping, electoral malpractices and violence. For instance, the Vanguard newspaper reported that Violence marred the 2023 elections, (<https://www.vanguardngr.com/2023>). The paper alleged that many observers condemned the February 25th Presidential/National Assembly Elections and the March 18th Governorship and State House of Assembly Elections following the widespread violence and electoral irregularities that accompanied the elections.

Some described it as the worst in the history of the electoral process in Nigeria. The elections held so much promise with the introduction of technology by the Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC, which was generally believed would solve the problem of rigging and the assurances by the Commission's chairman, Professor Mahmood Yakubu that the election results would be transmitted real-time to the commission's central server where everybody would have the opportunity to see it.

However, INEC failed to deliver on its promise as the result of the Presidential election was not uploaded as promised giving room for manipulations and falsifications of figures. The worrying part of this scenario is the fact the court instead of holding INEC accountable for this action rather comments

that it was the prerogative of INEC to decide how to transmit the result. It means that the moral level of our leaders has gone so low that they cannot be trusted with their promises. The violence that was recorded during the polls took place in virtually all the states of the federation.

In Cross River state, an Adhoc staff of INEC, Miss Glory Effiom Essien was hit by a stray bullet after some gunmen opened fire while she was in a boat heading to Bakassi for election duty. The Resident Electoral Commissioner of the Independent National Electoral Commission INEC in Cross River state, Prof. Gabriel Yomere who confirmed the incident said the victim was taken to the University of Calabar Teaching Hospital, UCTH, for treatment, thanking God that the bullet didn't touch her spinal cord.

Also, more than 50 political thugs at about 2.15 am on Sunday, March 19 invaded INEC collation centre for the Ogoja State Constituency disrupting the collation of results, vandalising the place, carting away election materials, and phones and inflicting injuries on many ward Collation officers. An injured Collation officer Mbube East, Dr Paul Bassey told Vanguard at the Police Clinic, Ogoja where he was being treated for injuries inflicted on him by the invaders that the thugs also attacked one of his colleagues with heavy stones and planks and prayed he survived it.

The Electoral Officer for Ogoja Local Government Area, Mr Peter Kolo said the hoodlums broke all security barriers to disrupt Collation to destroy election results The Ogoja State Constituency Collation Officer, Dr Timothy Ellah of the University of Calabar said he was beaten heavily by thugs who carted away some result sheets while he sustained minor injuries. Prof. John Undie, the Governorship Collation Officer for Ogoja Local Government said everyone inside the

hall was beaten mercilessly adding that they were lucky to be alive.

In Kogi, 101 INEC officials and ad-hoc staff of the Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC while on their way from Kupa North and South Wards to the Constituency Collation Centre in Lokoja were kidnapped by armed hoodlums at about 2 am on Sunday, 19th of March, 2023 at Obajana junction which is less than 20km from the state capital. 99 of the abducted staff were later rescued by the police. Three of the rescued victims who were injured during the rescue operation were evacuated to the Federal Medical Center Lokoja for treatment while two of the abducted staff were yet to be accounted for.

In Lafia, the Nasarawa State capital, protesters took to the streets protesting the alleged rigging of the governorship election by INEC in the state. The protest turned violent during which one person was killed and several others injured. The protesters also engaged in acts of vandalism and destruction of public and private property.

In Kano, the residence of a popular singer and chieftain of the All Progressives Congress, Dauda Rarara was set ablaze by political thugs after the announcement of the gubernatorial election results by INEC. A resident in the area, Malam Yusuf said the thugs invaded the house and started destroying valuables before setting the house on fire.

Yola, the Adamawa state capital was in turmoil late on Sunday, March 19 after political thugs and miscreants unleashed terror on the citizens following the stalemate arising from the failure of the Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC to declare the governorship election results. Trouble began at the Collation Center at the INEC headquarters moments after the Returning

Officer of the poll, Professor Mohammed Mele announced the shift of the declaration of the results to Monday morning at about 1 am. When news of the postponement filtered into the capital city, thugs in their hundreds took over strategic locations to attack innocent citizens and passersby, motorists and other commuters.

The hoodlums who were armed with guns and other dangerous weapons burnt disused tyres, trees and sorts on the streets. Politicians, journalists, INEC staff and others at the Collation Centre were held hostage at the INEC headquarters as nobody dared to drive out of the premises.

In Aguda, Surulere, Lagos, a woman, Mrs Jennifer Efedu was stabbed in her face by thugs who disrupted the voting process. The political thugs who were armed with dangerous weapons went about snatching ballot boxes, attacking voters and preventing those suspected to be opponents from voting. Sporadic gunshots also erupted in front of the palace of Alamuwo of Kuje Amuwo, Mazamaza, and old Ojo Road leaving voters running for dear lives. The thugs ordered the people should leave the polling booths for their safety, warning that they would come back. Many voters could not return to the scene despite assurances from security men who rushed to the scene to restore normalcy.

Armed thugs also invaded the Governorship and State House of Assembly elections, polling unit 003 in Bestford/Ganiyu Yusuff Street, Oke-Afa, Ejigbo in Lagos State. The thugs, who brandished the identity tags of a major party, stormed the polling unit and attempted to cart away election materials and ballot boxes and in the process damaged several thumb-printed papers. The rampaging thugs also destroyed chairs and tables used by officials of the Independent National Electoral

Commission and attempted to seize the BVAS machine.

No fewer than six persons were killed while many were injured in Benue state during the Governorship and State House of Assembly election. Security personnel were said to have shot dead six persons in the Gboko area of the State for allegedly snatching ballot boxes. The six persons, who were killed at different locations by the security personnel, stormed polling units to snatch the ballot boxes.

In some parts of Agatu and Ukum Local Government Areas of the State, there were reports about the disruption of the electoral process. Benue State Police Command announced the arrest of 26 suspects for various electoral offences and recovered various arms and ammunition during the elections. The police public relations officer (PPRO) Catherine Anene explained that the suspects were arrested across the state for various offences including political thuggery and illegal possession of firearms, snatching of ballot boxes and intimidation of voters.

The February 25th Presidential Elections ended up in violence in most parts of Rivers State, as angry youths allegedly protesting against attempts to manipulate the results of the presidential election took to the streets in the late hours of the day. There were sporadic shootings and vandalization of properties and vehicles along the busy Igwuruta-Elele-Airport Road at the Igwuruta axis of the Ikwerre local government area. The angry youths who were shooting sporadically alleged that a prominent politician in Ikwerre local government area carted away ballot boxes at the collation centre to frustrate further declaration of results. Three youths suspected to be political thugs were said to have been killed during a clash at Ogbakiri Community in the Emohua Local Government Area of Rivers State. The thugs were allegedly hired

by two leading political parties in the community.

The election violence in Edo State claimed the lives of Festus Idahosa, 33 years old, and the late Mrs Elizabeth Owie, a 43-year-old mother of three. They were killed when political thugs stormed their polling units where they had gone to exercise their civic rights during the Presidential and National Assembly elections in the state.

Amid a seeming low turnout and apathy of voters in Delta State during the Governorship and State House of Assembly elections, three persons were reportedly shot dead, and a building was set ablaze in Mosogar, Ethiope West Local Government Area of the state. The two young men were shot dead by military personnel as they allegedly tried to flee a polling unit with snatched ballot boxes. It was gathered that at Amukpe, Sapele, one of the youths lost his hand during a clash in one of the polling units in the area.

Another thug who disrupted the polling exercise at Utagaba-Uno in Ndokwa West Local Government Area was also reportedly killed. Some hoodlums also ambushed and snatched voting materials from INEC officials in the Tuomo area in Bomadi Local Government Area. Further electoral violence continued as rampaging thugs invaded and destroyed electoral materials, including the BVAS machine, at the Ewerni community in the Ughelli North Local Government Area of the state. The thugs disrupted the exercise in all the polling units in Ewerni.

A team of journalists monitoring the elections were prevented from entering the community by the rampaging thugs. Some of the corps members and other electoral officials, who scampered to safety while security agents looked on, were attacked by the thugs, with

some sustaining injuries, why about three BVAS machines were smashed.

3. Ethnicity: This is seen as unfair, illegal and illegitimate discriminating behaviour in ethnic relations (Ogban-Iyam 22). Nepotism which is the root of ethnic discrimination is the tendency to take care of relations before any other. Ethnicity is responsible for discrimination in appointments in some key offices. Some ministries are considered as. Grade A" is the exclusive reserve of some ethnic groups in Nigeria. During this incumbent administration, (2015-date), certain ministries were Fulanised and Hausanised in Nigeria and no one from other ethnic groups could occupy them. If one looks at Nigeria, no matter the focus, everything one sees bears the frightful eyes of a dichotomy. The North-South Dichotomy, the East-West dichotomy, the Men-Women dichotomy, the Literate-illiterate dichotomy, the military-Civilian dichotomy, the Proletariat-Bourgeoisie dichotomy, the Youth Elders dichotomy and the Christians-Muslims dichotomy. Indeed, all these dichotomies have not given room for peace and development in Nigeria. The issue of ethnicity has to be done away with in our national scheme of things if we are to develop and live in unity as one nation.

Communal/Religious Crises: communal crises have a long history. There are both interred/intra-communal crises witnessed in Nigeria. Some of these include those between the Tiv and Jukun in Taraba State, Hausa and Birom in Plateau, Tiv and Azara in Nasarawa State, Hausa and Yoruba in Shagamu-Lagos State, the Ife and Modakeke in Osun etc. (Jooji 10). It is not gain stating the fact that these crises have religious undertones as can be seen in the Sharia Mayhem in Kaduna in the year 2000 as well as the Maitatsine religious uprising in the 1980s which saw many lives

destroyed, many churches, and mosques and property worth billions of Naira destroyed. The recent cases of Boko Haram, the uprising and the Shiite crises in Abuja are very worrisome. These crises give room for Suspicions and misunderstanding which are not healthy for peaceful co-existence.

5. Immodest Dressing: This practice is especially prevalent on campuses of tertiary institutions. The trend is another worrisome thing in this dispensation. What do people hope to achieve when they dress to kill or appear naked? Are we going back to the Stone Age? Is this a psychological problem or a sexual malfunction? Moral education has to provide an answer to the problem of unfashionable fashion in our society and the campuses of our tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Other ills besetting Nigerian society are commercial sex, child abuse, thuggery, human trafficking, drug abuse, abortion and so on.

9. Sexual Harassment: This is another problem that affects many of our Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria. In his work on Sexual Harassment, entitled "Sexual Harassment on the University Campus: who is Harassing Who?" Shishima Says: Sexual Harassment is a situation where the opposite sex (mostly in a privileged position) demands sex from the other persistently with threats in which sexual submission or refusal affects decisions on one. This could be either a man or a Woman (45). Both men and women harass each other on campus. The main cause of sexual Harassment is the interest of the individuals. Female students who are dull are more likely to be harassed than the brilliant ones because the dull ones would "do anything" to pass their examinations. Also, male lecturers who appear to be interested in ladies by their looks and behaviours are more prone to Sexual

Harassment than those who "do not understand". Also, women/men looking for jobs stand the risk of being Sexually Harassed. Sexual Harassment in Tertiary Institutions takes different forms: This could be the use of sexy perfumes, well-treated artificial hair, with its appealing texture, the use of soft skin-shining cosmetics, invitations for outings, lunch, dinner, birthday parties, or may ask questions such as "When shall we cruise in your car? "Where is your joint?" etc. Female students harass male lecturers for cheap marks in examinations, for financial gains or simply to satisfy their sexual urges. Sexual Harassment through indecent dressing by female students is one of the causes of rape in our institutions of Higher learning in Nigeria. Sexual Harassment and rape occur even in primary/secondary schools, Government offices, marketplaces, dark corners of the streets, hospitals, war fronts, prisons, police detention, etc. Sexual Harassment and rape have socio-psychological and physical effects on its victims. Just as rape, those sexually Harassed feel humiliated, ashamed, angry and sad.

10. Apostasy in the church: According to Francis Schaeffer, the Church is reeling under the onslaught of doctrinal errors and secularism. Waging an all-out attack to win people's hearts and minds, secular forces are winning on many fronts including education. Our public schools are devoid of professors who are Christians. As a result, the knowledge imparted by our children is not filtered thereby influencing the morals of these young ones negatively. Stressing this fact, Martin Luther once said:

I advise no one to place his child where the Scriptures do not reign paramount. Every institution in which men are not increasingly occupied with the Word of

God must become corrupt...I am much afraid that schools will prove to be the great gates of hell unless they diligently labour in explaining the Holy Scriptures, engraving them in the hearts of youth.

Religion is a veritable tool for teaching and inculcating moral values. Orebanjo was right when he argued that moral values can be accomplished only with the teaching of religions, either formally, informally or non-formally; which is why religious education is part and parcel of all religious practices (Orebanjo, 434). The exclusion of religion from education would place a big question mark on how good morals could be inculcated in society. Also, UA Ajidagba opines that Nigeria as a country is in dire need of moral regeneration and religious rebirth, hence, the successive Nigerian governments, through various educational policies, have recognized the importance of religious education (1) Our Society is fast drifting into a point of no return if adequate measures are not taken to address this problem of moral and spiritual decay. Christian schools offer a refreshing, biblical alternative. Not only is the Bible taught for what it is - the inspired Word of God but it forms the foundation of all other texts, in math, in social studies, in biology, all academic roads lead to God, in whom all knowledge has its origin. Our children won't travel these roads in our public schools.

Benefits of a Christian Education

In a world where Christian beliefs seem under assault from all quarters, parents can place all the more value on quiet enclaves of effective education. Simple faith holds its ineluctable power, but it's always helpful to review in detail why Christian education is indispensable for our children.

- Individual attention. Public schools tend to suffer from inadequate teacher-to-student ratios while private schools tend to offer better individual attention to their students. At the School of Biblical Studies Jos, the student ratio in each class is as low as 5-10 and as high as 35 per class. This gives the Lecturers enough time to attend adequately to the academic needs of the students.
- Superior academic achievement. A private Christian school tends to attract dedicated Teachers who are motivated to teach students who themselves are motivated to learn and excel. Rather than muddle through the lowest common denominator set by a bloated public bureaucracy, teachers and their students flourish in congenial surroundings that encourage advanced studies in mathematics, physics, electronics, chemistry and other hard sciences along with the classical liberal arts.
- No uncontrolled bullying. Not to put too fine a point on it, but a substantial number of public schools are not known for their peaceful learning environments. Longstanding social and legal trends have led to what can only be called chaotic, uncontrolled settings that encourage casual bullying and occasional eruptions of violence. The moral character and strict rules of conduct of a Christian school make this sort of unacceptable behaviour a rarity.
- Emphasis on shared values. Being surrounded daily by like-minded individuals experiencing the same Christian education helps greatly with maturing your child into a responsible adult who understands how to live every day in God's love with equally moral neighbours.
- Social interaction with peers. Quite apart from the formal aspects of Christian education, being able to interact and make friends with other practising Christians is less lonely than struggling through the daily challenges of dealing with ignorant or even outright amoral individuals with no understanding of the message of the Bible and no respect for the supreme sacrifice made by Christ.
- Immersion in the word of God. Needless to say, daily exposure to Biblical lessons reinforces the moral development of growing children who need steady leadership from their teachers, a feature sorely lacking in public schools.
- Christian educational materials. Public school materials typically lack a Christian viewpoint and may even actively disparage Christian values. A private school can and Will choose curriculum materials that are at least friendly to Christian values, and the school's library can exercise greater care in avoiding inappropriate books.
- Respect for family values. Unlike public schools, which increasingly seem to arrogate unto themselves the Biblically ordained role of parents in raising their children, Christian schools recognize the critical role of parents and will keep in close touch with parents over issues arising from their children's moral and educational development.
- Disciplined environment. Clear rules and an expectation of self-disciplined behaviour from students doe's wonder in encouraging inner reserves of dignity and respect for other people.
- Amplification of faith. Children learn from what they see and hear. While steadfast daily Faith by parents accounts for the great bulk of showing children by example

how to live well, regularly encountering a large number of other people openly exhibiting the tenets of Christianity in all the ways of life deepens the message of hope and faith in God's word and His beloved Son.

Supporting Christian Education

Ozigi argues that no organization could carry out its functions effectively without adequate financial resources at its disposal (70-73). Money is needed to pay staff, maintain the plant and keep the services going. This argument supported earlier findings that finance is of vital importance to education and economic growth (Sheehan, 4, 11-16; Eaton, 135-137. and Nofsinger, 99-110; Taggert, 72-76).

Sources of Finance: Considering the sources of financing education, (Vaizey⁵⁹) raised the question, "How can education be financed?" Answering the question, he argued that the financing of education can be derived from fees paid by parents, repayable loans to parents, local government taxes, general budgetary funds, gifts and remission of taxes. In as much as these sources depend on how public schools are funded, Christian education equally needs to be funded since the government doesn't fund private schools although such institutions are providing qualitative education to the citizens. This work proffers among others the following sources through which our schools and Colleges can be supported. The sources include Fees to be paid by parents, good spirited individuals, through fundraising and donations from both government and non-governmental organizations, monthly contributions by members of the church/churches, an endowment from alumni associations, the

establishment of secular programs, partnerships from interested persons and organizations, the establishment of viable ventures such as feeder schools, hostels for rent, poultry and fishery farms, water processing plant, shopping complex and investment in personnel and cultivation of economic trees among others.

Conclusion

The paper discussed the importance of sponsoring Christian education in our contemporary Nigeria, the place, benefits and ways of sponsoring Christian education were also discussed I want to appeal to your conscience that the call for sponsorship of Christian education is a divine task. If Christians fail to do it, it is an appalling failure of the church how can we strive in our personal businesses, careers; homes etc and leave our Father's business undone? Like Nehemiah would say, "Come let us build for God."

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