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CONTENTS

African Traditional Religion in an Hiv/Aids Environment, Ushe Mike Ph.D	1
Challenges of Nigerian Married Christian Women and their Coping Strategies, Gana, Emmanuel	12
The Morality of Corruption in Nigeria, Awajiusuk, Finomo Julia Ph.D	21
Religious Education: A Possible tool for Enhanced National Unity and Integration in Nigeria, A.Z. Apenda Ph.D & T. K. Anjov Ph.D	28
The Sinaitic Covenant Relationship: Its Ethical Implications, Awajiusuk, Finomo Julia Ph.D	33
The Challenge of Christian Religion in Nation Building: Implication for African Religion, Anthony Z. Apenda Ph.D & Lydia Akande, Ph.D	45
A Socio-ethical Analysis of the Effects of Tin Mining on the Ecology and People of the Jos-Plateau, Maina, Ali Danladi	50
The Effect of Globalization/Transnationalization on the Culture of Rivers State, Grace Lawrence-Hart Ph.D	60
Children's Pretend Play and Creativity, Mnena Abuku	65
Tiv Religion: Antidote to Environmental Degradation, Benjamin Tyavkase Gudaku	70
Marital Conflicts and its Impact on the Family, Edward Kuruku	76
The Library and Learning in the Age of Information Technology, Nyam Samuel S.	80

CONTENTS

Identity, Emancipation and Spiritual Renaissance: The Case Study of <i>Ombatse</i> Tradition, Benjamin Tyavkase Gudaku	86
A Philosophical Case For Proportionate Representation of Women in Governance in Africa: The Nigerian Example, Okpanachi, Idoko Anthony	94
Globalization and the Challenges of Tiv Traditional Medical Health Care System, Terna Afella Ph.D	102
Some Reflections on the Relevance of the Philosophy of Education of Rabindranath Tagore on Nigeria's Education, Okpanachi, Idoko Anthony	117
Islamic Laws of Inheritance and its Socio-economic Implication among Yoruba Muslims of South-Western Nigeria, Lateju, Fola. T. Ph.D & Oladosu O.A.	124
The Challenges of Ethnicity and Religion to Federalism: The Nigerian Experience, Agba Terna P. Ph.D	131
The Presentation of Women as Character in Contemporary Nigerian Drama, Annas Ngunan Ashaver	142
Female Trafficking in Nigeria: A Modernise Slavery in Perspective, Janet Ngumaren Amiseh	148
Thinking Philosophically about Death, Felix Ayemere Airoboman	155
The Impact of Akombo Rituals on the Tiv Economy, Grace Vandefan Aoo	164
A Reflection on the Islamic Concepts of Justice and Fairness in the Face of the United Nation's Charters and Operations, Sani Mukaila Akanni	168

The Challenge of Christian Religion in Nation Building: Implication for African Religion.

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Introduction

Nigeria like other nations of the world had adopted education as instrument for use in the inculcation of Religious values, attitudes and norms for the achievements of national objectives of the country. In virtually all educational institutions in Nigeria, religious studies had experienced tremendous support including the National Policy of Education (NPE). The fact that religious studies is the purveyor of moral values, attitudes and norms is impressively demonstrated by the continuous existence of departments of religious studies in Nigeria tertiary institutions.

Today, however, Christian religious studies which should have incontestable right of place among other subjects and disciplines which most school and tertiary institutions of learning exist to pursue appear to lack contemporary relevance. The question that borders on the minds of many today is the extent to which the declining morality in Nigeria schools have been blamed on non-influence of religious studies in recent time. It is against this background that this paper seeks

to examine the challenges of Christian religious studies in Nigeria educational system.

Christian Religious Studies and Nation Building

Christianity per se is not easy to define. Neither is there any definition that is generally accepted among religious scholars. This question looks naive, but it is very difficult to answer. Gbenda (1997) expresses this difficult when he says that the definition of Christianity is virtually impossible, for the faith is too manifold, so that any individual definition is apt to be one sided, and therefore wrong. We may subscribe to the description of Christianity as the religion generated by faith in Jesus Christ as the supreme revelation of divine mystery. Therefore, Christianity which is a derivation of Christian is an integrative principle adhered to by someone who follows Christ, the founder of the Christian faith and his teaching; believing in or professing or belonging to or in harmony with the Christian Religion. Nielsen (1962) also expressed the same line of argument when he said that:

The Christian religion is centered on the will of God who reveals himself and is to be obeyed in faith. This God who comes to man on his own initiative is holy, personal, not an impersonal force. He is an ethical deity who demands purity of life.

Christianity is essentially living a life of Christ and following the path he laid for the salvation of mankind. Love is the core of Christ's teaching of man's relationship with God and his fellow human beings. Justice and peace also are features of the teaching of Christianity.

Generally speaking, therefore, one of the objectives of the Christian Religion is to proclaim the good news of salvation through faith in Christ. It is pertinent to say that it is this same religion which was called upon to proclaim its message in Nigeria. However, its proclamation does not only involve spiritual, it involves also freedom from ignorance, poverty, greed and allied tentacles. In other words, the teaching of Christian Religion does not only seem to take care of the spiritual needs of the people but also sees that the individuals in the society have sound minds in sound bodies. The power and objective of Christian religion is demonstrated by its contribution to national morality capable of engendering nation building.

This is an obvious indication that Christian religion seeks to promote a healthy and egalitarian society through the inculcation of attitudes, belief patterns and practices of the religious experience. It is basically to enhance the goal of producing good and morally upright citizens that would be in a position to further promote national ideals of society. Ifemeje (1995) points out explicitly that, religious education attempts to inculcate to the young the skills, knowledge, integrity and uniqueness as a vehicle for national unity and stability.

It is evident that Christian religious education is important in the development of Nigerian society. Through this, the individual is trained morally in order to assimilate the desire to do right and be virtuous. Balogun (1981) notes characteristically that:

Some cardinal principles and values that Christian religious education is trying to impact in our society is an attempt to develop character, inculcate respect for elders, and those in position of authority; develop a sense of belonging and to participate activity in family and community affairs; and to understand, appreciate and promote the cultural heritage of the community at large.

Thus, Damson (1995) in enumerating the objectives of Christian religion in nation building observes that it serves as efficient tool for the inculcation of positive social norms, attitudes and values of co-operation, participation, interdependence, open-mindedness, honesty, integrity, trustworthiness, obedience and other necessary virtues that could facilitate the fostering of nation building.

However, as laudable as such objective appears to be achieved through educational institutions, the expectation today is more elusive as the foundation upon which Nigeria must build her very existence and nation building seems apparently to have been affected negatively because of the conscious neglect of the study of Christian religion in our tertiary institutions.

Contemporary Attitude towards Christian Religious Studies

There is always an objective for the undertaking of an enterprise. Therefore the establishment of, and the teaching of Christian religious studies in our colleges of education and universities also have laudable objectives. As we have noted earlier, for a community to grow, advance, or develop, she needs aspirations that must be anchored on the nature of education which forms and transmits moral character to her citizenry. Education is therefore the foundation upon which the character development of such community must strive and flourish. Without a sound system of education the community will lack the necessary structures for inculcation of such religious values that are expedient for its development. It is obvious today that the role of

education in facilitating the study of Christian religious studies appears grossly inadequate or absolutely neglected.

However, the issues plaguing this development in Nigeria and its associated negative effects can best be understood if the history of the problem will be understood, particularly in this present time when every nation is yearning for anything that can re-orient the direction of their society that seems to have lost its moral identity and value for nation building.

It is in this direction, that the Federal and State Education Laws and Policies of different times uphold the teaching and study of Christian Religion as a discipline in our higher institutions of learning. And the right to study it is part of the fundamental human right. The Federal and State Governments also award scholarship for all fields of education including Christian Religious studies. Approval was also given for the establishment of departments of Christian Religious Studies in all government controlled institutions. Besides, the National Education Research Council (NERC) also serves as agent for the government in the teaching of this subject. A notable example, is, the first Nigerian National Curriculum conference (NNCC) of 1969 organized by NERC which advocates the re-introduction of Christian Religious Studies in all institutions of learning.

Most Colleges of Education and Universities offer programmes in Christian Religious Studies to train Christian Religious teachers for both primary and Secondary Schools as an attempt to produce useful and morally upright and well behaved citizens to meet the desire of middle and high level man- power requirement for a balanced development of country. In spite of this, however the relevance of Christian Religious studies today is increasingly not becoming a thing of pride, as it was earlier on considered as an indisputable source of human activities in Nigerian society. Abenga (1986) rightly notes this development in the educational system of Nigeria in recent times. He therefore, observes that:

This declining interest in Christian

religious education may be viewed as a situation whereby the education received by the individual seems to fall short of what the society expects regarding the way he conducts himself and his performances in public affairs.

Therefore, if viewed in this perspective, the moral education in primary and secondary schools has definitely fallen, and the dominating factors attributable to the pitiable experience are not farfetched. Firstly, unprecedented changes in government policies have contributed immensely to the declining moral quality taught in educational institutions in Nigeria. The constant disruption in the educational system has led to most children becoming undesirables, who only wait to be examined and given certificates without qualitative moral teaching.

Secondly, there is complete absence of adequate school inspection and supervision in our primary and secondary educational institutions in recent times; hence Wilde rightly points out that human nature is such that most people do not usually performed optimally unless they are directed, controlled, guided, managed or supervised.

In view of this neglect, circumstances have taken their turn in threatening the foundation of the existence of Christian religious studies even in institutions that are owned by Christian faith based churches like Covenant University, Bowen University, University of Mkar, among others. This plight has become so considerable that in our circular universities today, candidates don't necessary opt to study Christian Religious Studies among its counterparts.

Orebanjo (1991) discovers that parents hardly want their children to offer Christian Religious Studies as a course. They preferred them to offer the more professional courses like Accounting, Law, Business Studies, Medicine, Engineering, or those that would eventually lead to professional positions that attract more pay, or are considered highly in society. This lack of parental support and motivation are challenges to the study of Christian Religious Studies in our higher Institutions.

Besides, prospective candidates into the Tertiary Institutions, specifically the universities also feel that only those who cannot make the sciences or the so-called tougher ones offer Christian Religious Studies as the only alternative to cope with life. Conversely, however, this experience is disappointing because in the early days of missionary education, there was no discrimination as people freely took the sciences as well as the humanities as complementary for nation building.

The Challenges of Christian Religious Studies in Nation Building: Lessons for Afrel

If we judiciously consider the lack lustre and un-sustaining interest in Christian Religious Studies in nation building through educational system, we may say in the highest sense that, African religion needs to be introduced for sustainable morality in nation building.

African Religion is identified as one primary source for the building of moral character. African religion is an important source of morality because the being that is at the center of religion is a higher moral being. This means that all the adherents of the religion drive moral growth from this being. Besides, the religion has become an index for the purposes of making some political decisions in Nigeria. If there is any department of human existence in which most authors seem to agree to the letters, it is the religious consciousness of Africans. It is no longer fashionable to raise doubts about the existence of African religion among Africans generally.

Thus, in African belief, the concept of morality does not only cover what disrupts man's natural and physical existence but also what affects spiritual realms. Crime is both anti-social evil and anti-supernatural evil. Ekei notes therefore, that in Igbo social life, religion and morality are integral elements of their total cultural experience which aims at self-realization which consist in harmonious living in favor of the human element.

There is the need for the integration of African religion into the Christian religious studies departments to enhance the level of human development through African values.

This is important because it is only, when a discipline of this nature is serious with itself that it could be taken seriously by any other. Therefore, Christian religious studies need to build up attractive structures with a view to challenge the monopoly of other disciplines. That means that Christian religious studies and African religious studies must integrate as better chances of development for nation building in Nigeria. In other words, African religion must therefore wake up, and write the books to occupy the gap of Christian religious studies in our institutions of learning. They must ensure that more doors are carved out, doors that will invite knowledge seekers into the beauty of both Christian and African religious studies.

Conclusion

We are aware of the low placement of Christian Religious Studies in the nation's scheme of things in contemporary times; and have come out with suggested alternative of introducing African religion that would buttress the strength of morality for nation building. A cursory look at our discussion indicates that though the teaching Christian religious studies over the years have received low keyed interest in Nigerian schools curriculum, it is evident that its objectives to impart values through educational system can much more be achieved if African religious studies is introduced along side Christian religious studies to complement each other in fulfilling the national objectives of nation building.

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