

Christian Religious Education for Character and Skill Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

Religion touches the most important aspects of man's life as that of the nation. It is the single factor that jolts the unfortunate boundaries of the nation, cutting across distinctions of tribes, sex and class thereby touching the secret places of people – their emotions and psyche. These in turn are catalysts to character and skills acquisition and development. Thus, in Christian Religion otherwise known as Christianity, all these are apparent. In this work some values in Christian Religion are highlighted as proponents for character and skills development in Nigeria especially when they are inculcated to the people via the instrumentality of education. Literatures were reviewed amidst guided observation.

Key Words: Christian Religion, Education, Character, Skill Development.

Introduction

Nigeria is a nation that has over the years been looked down as ‘under developed’ by ‘other’ nations. This is probably because of the character and skills exhibited globally in the economic, political, philosophical and social spheres by some miscreants wherein the nation is tagged corrupt, fraudulent and a terrorist zone.

Whatever the case may be, Nigeria is a developing nation blessed with many mineral resources that needed to be adequately tapped and managed through the instrumentality of people that are skillful and of good character.

One realizes that the key which opens the door to adult man is his development as a child. For a child to be developed, he needs to undergo a process whereby character and skills will be implanted in him. This process must of necessity be through education of which Christian Religious education will be include.

Key Conceptual Clarifications:

Christian Religion: School Dictionary 3 (1993) defines Christian Religion in the eyes of Christianity as: “The religion based on the teachings of Jesus” (p. 213).

Education: Hornby (1979) defines education as systematic training and instruction (especially of the young, in school, college etc) “ [p. 280]. Fafunwa [1974] opines that education is the aggregate of all processes

through which a young member of the society is initiated to future tasks by developing the abilities, attitudes and all other positive forms in man which are of value to the society”. [p. 17].

Character: The New International Webster’s Dictionary of the English language [2004] explains the word character as; “The combination of qualities distinguishing any person or class of persons; any distinctive mark or trait ... the individuality which is the product of nature, habit and environment” [p. 223].

Skill: Hornby [1979] defines skill as “ability to do something expertly and well”. [p. 820].

Development: The word development has many dimensions to it as it goes beyond the act of developing or the process of being developed. Nevertheless, Webster’s Dictionary [2004] sees development among other things as: “the series of changes by which an individual plant or animal passes from a lower to a higher state of being or from an embryonic condition to maturity”. [p. 350].

Having seen the meaning of some key words in this work, it is worthwhile to note that Christianity as a religion has all it takes to make a person develop good character as well as skills. To this effect, a look at some Christian values would be necessary.

Some Christian Religious Values Necessary for Character and Skills Development:

In Christianity, there are many values which the adherents hold tenaciously to their own benefits. Some of them are: love (agape), truth, peace, justice, mercy, dialogue, equity, patience, self-control, holiness, accountability, to mention but a few.

Values as we know can be perceived as things desirable, worthy or sight as a belief, standard or precept [Webster's 2004]. Let us now consider the issue of love [agape] as touching our major discourse. The bible has this to say about love: [1 John 4:7-9]:

Beloved let us love one another, for love is of God: and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested towards us ... [p. 1733].

The sacrificial love as advocated in the Christian faith is for all and sundry, it is for Africans and the entire world. It is the type of love that seeks and cares for the interest of neighbours, nations, continents, leaders irrespective of creed or colour. This type of love houses many other values as: patience, peace, self-control and many others. Hence in the Bible – [1 Corinthians 13:4-6]:

Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no

evil; does not rejoice in iniquity but rejoices in truth. [p. 1634].

The agape love in the Christian religion houses other values like endurance, humility, truthfulness, patience and others. All these when actualized make room for good character and development of skills.

Considering the value known as truth, which the whole world is clamouring about, Kirk [1992] submitted thus:

The question of truth cannot be resolved by a general quest for truth. To believe that truth is something we can discover, starting from where we are, is wishful thinking. By ourselves we do not know in which direction to look, nor what to look for; nor would we recognize the destination when we arrive. Of course, truth has to be tested by experience and in action, for by its nature it is a comprehensive interpretation of all that is. Nevertheless, a universal fact, its origin must lie outside us, coming to us from another realm of existence [p. 65].

Kirk submits that the truth that must be fully utilized is the one that has been tested and experienced in action and must be outside us coming from another realm of existence. The truth that comes from Christ, the initiator of Christian religion fits into place. We will recall that the nation Nigeria was once in 'utter darkness' wherein parents suffer the terror at which their twin children were

killed, did human sacrifices, engaged in some forms of obnoxious practices, wallowed in abject poverty merely because they believed in the truth that was contrary. With the Gospel of Christ coming into Nigeria as in all other nations of the world with its mode of agape love, the truth in Christ was laid bare. It was tested by the people, experienced in action, their eyes of understanding were opened via the light in that truth and they were liberated from the shackles of ignorance and were freed. Thus, the terror that followed losing twin babies ceased in Nigeria and beyond. No wonder Jesus says in (John 8:32) “and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”.

It is important to mention here that the missionaries that brought Christianity to us in Nigeria did it sacrificially out of the love of Christ. They were patient enough to sell the truth of the gospel as embedded in Christian Religion with patience, humbling themselves amidst diverse molestations and oppositions. No wonder they were able to have breakthrough in their ministry. [Chinwuba, 2013].

Character is a trait which distinguishes a person or class of persons. A person, who loves himself and others, speaks the truth and is humble and amongst other values can equally be skillful. The question then is how can these Christian principles or values be impersonalized so as to yield the necessary results? It is only by applying the principles of education. To this end, the Christian Religion Education as a tool is worthy to be discussed.

Christian Religious Education: A Tool for Character and Skills Development

Laska (1976) holds that education is one of the most important activities in which human beings engage. It is by means of the educative process and its role in transmitting the cultural heritage from one generation to the next that human societies are able to maintain their existence. It is also one of the ways through which people try to change or improve their societies.

Thus, considering Christian Religious Education, this can be transmitted in schools, in homes, churches and the society either formally or informally. The transmission of the knowledge of Christ and the many values in the religion to the young and the old makes room for good character development and skills acquisition in Africa.

In this regard, teachers [Christians] in schools, churches as agents of socialization, parents and guardians in homes should be involved especially in transmitting these Christian values to the young as they are the ones that will graduate into adulthood. To support this idea, Obasanyo [2007] in addressing teachers in Nigeria on religious education said; "... making religious instructions compulsory in the first nine years of education would provide basic moral knowledge and all Nigerians have a lot of work to do in this regard" [p. 35]. Knowledge, we know makes room for character and skill. Acquiring the right knowledge in society especially in our own African nations would make room for acquiring the right values

which will in turn make room for character and skills development in Africa.

Conclusion

It is worthy of note that in both the development of character and skills in Africa, man is the compelling force. Human development according to Uche [2007] does not refer to material things alone but includes the right values, norms, attitudes, feelings, habits, orientation and proper moral conduct. Through biblical teaching, preaching, and worship, religion brings about inner conversion, transformation and reforms that reduce moral decadence in Africa. Also, when the Christian Religious Education is applied in early childhood, the structures of proper development in character and skills can be formed which are sufficiently stable and definitive to endure or re-emerge in later years.

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