

## **QUALITY CHRISTIAN EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: A CHALLENGE TO THE CHURCH TODAY**

BY

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### **Introduction**

Christianity is steadily making some head ways in Nigeria. This dramatic growth of Christianity is primarily due to power inherent in its nature of education which is yet to be matched with other type of education in the globe. Through divine guidance and providence, the Christian missionaries have been able to use Christian education early enough to establish and consolidate the Christian faith in Nigeria. Christian education as a matter of facts remains the unbeatable means through which mass conversion to Christianity occurred. It is through this type of education that Christian ideals, ethics and values are percolating and permeating the Nigerian society with their overriding influences on individuals and the society. Christian education is not only a known change agent but a force to be reckoned with in any society of the world. Through it, formation, reformation and transformation of life are fast evolving in Nigeria. Christian education plays pivotal role in promoting spirituality and morality engendering the civilization of the human society. The deepening influence of Christian education in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. It is on this premise that this paper humbly attempts to beam its search light to unravel the capacity Christian education has in generating meaningful changes in our churches as well as in the society. It equally seeks to identify the challenges hampering the evolvement and sustainability of an enviable quality Christian education in Nigeria.

### **Christian Education Conceptualized**

Different concepts of Christian education have been put forth by different religious scholars. Ivorgba (2006) sees Christian education as process of developing a person's mind using the word of God as central to all other aspects of knowledge or skills acquired in a particular setting. This idea suggests that the word of God is paramount and is the most potent instrument to employ in the development of a person's mind. Bamidele (2006) defines Christian education as "a process by which individuals are brought to an understanding of and commitment to the

Christian way of life” (P.56). This implies that an individual need to be properly trained to be able to comprehend Christian ways of life which is quite different from worldly lifestyles. Perhaps, the most outstanding definition of Christian education is the one put together by Ilori (2002) which is quite comprehensive, and which seems to sums up what Christian education truly stands for. To him, Christian education is:

The process of training and developing knowledge, skill of mind and the life and character of the learner, whether in matters sacred or secular in an environment and in a manner that is truly Christ-centred, and in harmony with His will. Christian education is the type of education that helps a person to obtain the goals of life set by Jesus Christ. It leads to the development of the whole individual in relation to his God, fellow man, and environment (P.36).

This paper aligns itself to the foregoing because it is all-encompassing. Any education that cannot affect people’s relationship with God, fellow man and the society is not worth its study. While most people are studying what God created like animals, plants and rock among others Christian educators are proudly studying God - the Creator Himself. That is simply great. The perspective captured in the above definition truly expresses the cardinal target of Christian education which is the development of the whole man – mind, heart and emotions. That Christian education seeks to develop the mind means that it focuses on individual’s intellect and character formation. Christian education concentrates on reforming an individual’s life by recreating it to enable him become a new man in Christ so as to be useful to other people and his society. This recreation is the process whereby the DNA or blood line of Christ is infused into an ordinary man to make him a divine person. This is why Christian education is Christ-centred and life-applied. Its main target is to make an individual’s spirit to be recreated with the help of the Holy Spirit. This change which takes place inwardly manifests itself physically in a new lifestyle. Christian education concerns the physical as well as the spiritual dimension of man’s growth. This is what makes Christian education quite unique from other types of education in the world. I am proud to be one of the products of Christian education in Nigeria which simply explain the reason I am standing here today. If Christian education had not transformed my life, there is no way I can be standing here to present this lecture. I am proud to be a Christian educator.

### **Quality Christian Education in Nigeria: Its Beginnings and Development**

Christian education has a very long and rich history in Nigeria. This can be traced back to the arrival of Christian missionaries in Nigeria beginning from the 14<sup>th</sup> century which consolidated itself in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is informative to note that missionary enterprise in Nigeria went side by side with Christian education. According to Kalu (1978), the type of education offered to the pupils in the missionary schools was Christian oriented - with its basis on Scriptures. Education was used then by missionaries as a tool for evangelism. Hence, the main contents of the mission school were Bible-based with greater influence on human life. The main purpose of education in the early stages was to teach Christianity with a view to

converting all those who came within the four walls of the mission house (Ilori, 2002). It is in line with this that Mbiti (1971) declares:

Missionaries established and pioneered school everywhere and these schools became the nurseries for change: They sowed the gospel; they sowed Christianity and perhaps unaware and unintentionally they sowed, also the new revolution. It is the young men and women in these schools who assimilated not only religion but science, politics, technology and so on, and the same young people are the ones who became detached from tribal roots. Those attending school also became the vehicles for carrying the new changes and introducing them to other villages (P.217).

As expected, many mission schools sprang up in different parts of Nigeria then. The first known school in the west was founded by Mr. and Mrs. De Graft, Methodist missionaries in Badagry in 1843 and was named Nursery of the Infant Church (Babalola, 1976). Hope Waddell Institute was established at Calabar in 1895 by the Church of Scotland Mission (Onwubiko, 1973). In the North at Lokoja, the first school was established in 1899 (Fafunwa, 1974). In all the locations where mission schools were established in Nigeria, Christian Religious knowledge was taught with perceived educational aim clearly defined 'Africa for Christ' (Ilori, 2002).

By 1890, government began to take interest in education. Government appointed inspector for schools and started giving grant to mission schools. By 1921, schools expanded with 59 government schools and 91 mission schools in Nigeria (Fafunwa, 1974). In fact, it is held that as late as 1942, mission controlled 99% of Nigerian schools and over 97% of Nigerian students were attending mission schools (Onyenchehie, 2008). In 1976, the Federal Government in Nigeria took over all the mission schools and made them public schools. Regrettably, this is where Christian mission missed it in Nigeria. God in His wisdom gave us the destiny of Nigeria, but somehow, we betrayed it at that point by handing over all the mission schools to Government. As it now stands, we are just battling over the soul of Nigeria with the Moslems. The Christian mission would not have allowed Government to take over the schools. By now we would have been controlling everything – education, politics, economy and every other sector freely in Nigeria. As it happened, the immediate resultant effect of taking over of schools was the stoppage of the teaching of Christian Religious Knowledge in many Northern states in Nigeria (Ilori, 2002). This ugly development coupled with other factors such as deemphasize on moral and character development as well as over emphasis on science and technology led to serious moral decay in Nigeria. The aftereffect was the introduction of bad leadership and endemic corruption which has become a monster in the country.

Well, hope is not yet gone completely. The good news this paper has for you is that Christian education is once again resurfacing in different parts of Nigeria with vigor. It is evolving and striving by the day. Many spirited Christians as well as churches alike are busy

now establishing many citadels of learning of high repute here and there in the country. Christian education is bouncing back as a force to be reckoned with in Nigeria. In view of the quality and standard of education in these Christian institutions, even Moslems are patronizing them by rushing their wards to be trained in those schools also. Their lives are once again being influenced positively.

Omotoye (2010) confirms that the lists of these Christian Universities, Colleges and Seminaries in Nigeria are almost endless now. Mentioning are worth of Madonna University, Okija, established by Reverend Father Professor Emmanuel Ede; Igbinedion University, Okada, established by Gabriel Osawaru Igbinedion; Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo, established by the Anglican Church; Caritas University Enugu, and Catholic University of Nigeria Abuja, founded by the Catholic Church; Bowen University Iwo, established by the Baptist Church; Wesley University of Technology Ondo, established by the Methodist Church; Babcock University Illisan, Remo, established by the Seventh Day Adventist Church; Crawford University Igbesa, established by the Apostolic Faith Church; Bingham University Abuja, established by ECWA Church; Covenant University Ota, established by the Living Faith Church founded by Bishop David Olaniyi Oyedepo; Benson Idahosa University Benin, established by the Church of God Mission; Salim University Lokoja, established by the Foundation Faith Church oversees by Sam Amaga. Others are Theological College of Northern Nigeria Bukuru, Jos ECWA Theological Seminary (JETS), and ECWA Theological Seminary Igbaja Kwara State among several others in Nigeria. These are called Christian private Theological Colleges, Seminaries and Universities. These Christian institutions are being established and managed by churches and individual Christians without any support from Government or donor agencies but they are functioning very well. At the moment, many Christian Universities are in the pipeline, being proposed by Pastor Williams Folorunsho Kumuyi, Bishop Francis Wale Oke, Prof. Daniel Kolewole Olukoya and the like to the glory of God.

That apart, in their struggles to improve the quality of Christian Education in Nigeria today most Theological Colleges and Seminaries are busy getting their institutions affiliated to conventional Universities in Nigeria.

### **Quality Christian Education for What in Nigeria**

The Christian missionaries from the onset prioritized Christian Education for its benefits to mission work as well as to other aspect of their work. To achieve this, they quickly clarified on what should be the main target of Christian education in Nigeria. To their thinking, Christian education should be distinctively Christian in nature and must be Biblebased, Christ-centred and life-applied (Ilori, 2002). In the perspective of the missionaries, Christian education should be tailored towards enabling individual to recognize the relationship between God and man. For this reason, Christian education as clearly spelt out by Ilori (2002), should be able to first bring about the consciousness within the learner of his personal need of Jesus

Christ as Saviour. Secondly, it should be able to provide favourable conditions under which the learner should grow into a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Thirdly, Christian education should be made to lead an individual to the consecration of his life to God for service.

In the view of Briggs (2005), education is to prepare us for a changing society and should itself generate social change. Interestingly, education generally aims at developing the individual mentally, spiritually, physically and socially. Christian education fulfils this objective by developing man spiritually, socially and morally (Kwasau, 2005). Ilori (2010) acknowledges that the major goal of Christian education is to reveal that God is one. The role of Christian education is to make people to recognize Jesus Christ as Lord and to show that the Creator and Redeemer are one. It is to reveal that the world of nature, history and human society is the product of God's creative wisdom, and the object of his redeeming love.

In addition, Christian education seeks to develop effective knowledge of the basic facts of what Christianity stands for as expressed in the Bible, in Church history, liturgy and worship (Ilori, 2002). It is emphasized that such knowledge implies basic Christian concepts and values that are necessary for personal growth towards maturity, taking into account the basic characteristics of the successive stages of growth and the values and needs of society. Christian education apart from bringing many to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ establishes the gospel of truth in the hearts, minds and social life of the people so that truth and righteousness may remain and flourish among them (Cox, 1966). This provides an allround development for the individual in the society.

Added to this is the fact that Christian education aims at making individual become aware of his gift of faith and the need for him to worship God in spirit and in truth especially in liturgical action. It makes individual to surrender his personal life completely to the image of Christ according to the new man, created in justice and holiness of truth so that he develops into perfect manhood in Christ (Cox 1966). Christian education transmits Christian heritage of faith by imparting such vital knowledge and skills that will make the learner to grow into an intelligent Christian (Kwasau, 2005). To achieve this, Christian education exposes the learner to a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures by studying the various doctrines of the Bible.

### **The Implications of Quality Christian Education on the Nigerian Question**

Qualitative Christian education has far reached effects on individuals and the Nigerian society at large. Education must impact life. It must be influential and functional enough to produce positive results capable of bringing desirable change in any society of the world. Christian education has the capacity to influence life and everything in the society.

Christian education is perhaps the best answer to the Nigerian moral problems of kidnappings, banditries, endemic corruption, indecent dressing, divorce, rigging, skyrocketing

of commodities, looting of Government properties, siphoning of money, poverty of all sorts, materialism, prosperity preaching, tribalism, examination malpractices, unfaithfulness, inflation, incessant strike actions, Child trafficking, cultism, murder, rape, assassination and judicial manipulations among so many other vices. This list is almost endless in Nigeria. There are lamentations for moral decay amidst religiosity of the Nigerian people. People daily perpetrate evil with impunity without conscience. It is disturbing to observe that:

Everywhere in Nigeria today there is uneven development, injustice and inequality even as most things now appear unfair and ungodly. Everywhere there is sadness in the midst of joy, poverty in the midst of plenty, destitution in the midst of affluence, hopelessness in the midst of abundance. In Nigeria, everywhere the poor man goes, he becomes face to face with roadblocks mounted by that seven-letter word called 'poverty' (Nzekwe, 2005, P.2)

This ugly picture of the Nigerian state if view against the backdrop of the desires of the founding fathers of Nigeria; is something that intrigues the minds of the right-thinking people of Nigeria. Can it be frankly said that Nigeria is making head ways amidst these malaises? The response is, of course, no. The point is that moral deterioration has continued to pose a big challenge in Nigeria. The dream of becoming a great nation is now a mirage. In fact, this retrogression of Nigeria is not unconnected to the rapid moral decay of its citizenry.

This is disturbing. It is indeed heart-rending and mind-boggling. Nigerian values and morals have been seriously undermined which is fast crumbling. Misdeeds are increasingly becoming common features of social life in Nigeria. It is therefore apt to ask: What have become of the good moral foundations which the early missionaries had laid in Nigeria? The high moral discipline which informs good habits, sound character and behaviour had now been replaced with material acquisition at whatever cost (Esthons, 2010). What should we do to get rid of this moral problem? This paper thinks that Christian education remains the best panacea to the Nigerian question.

According to Schumacher (1975),

The work of nation building solidly hinges on the way the state enjoys true goodness. The building of the nation is first and foremost the building of the people that make up the nation, which in effect boils down to the building up of the individuals themselves - justice, love and peace, which are essential ingredients for nation building, and are products of the human heart; these cannot be imposed by the force of arms (P.140).

One thing is certain about this assertion: that the formation of man through education, is very crucial to evolve a virile, viable and enviable nation. Christian education has the capacity to develop the spiritual, moral, social and even economic life of mankind. It affects "the head, heart, and hands of the learner" (Ilori, 2002). It focuses on human capacity building (Mature, 2010). It establishes a centre for moral authority in the individual's life. It gives a sense of value and direction as well.

Christian education does influence human behaviour positively (Lebar, 1995). Human behaviour is something that could be transformed either positively or negatively, depending on what was used to mould it. It is Christian education that sharpens human behaviour and character to make them useable to God for the sustenance of the society. Iron sharpens Iron, it is said (Prov. 27:17). The word of God is like fire and like hammer which can break even the rock to pieces in Nigeria (Jeremiah 23:29). The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword (Hebrew 4:12). What can the word of God not do in Nigeria? It can break and softens men's heart. It is held that "no country can rise above the values, conscience and morality of its citizenry" (Bamigboye, 2010, P.7).

The fear of God is said to be the beginning of wisdom or knowledge (Proverbs 1: 7). According to Ilori (2002), "where there is a living religion, there is religious education" (P.115). It is in such education that there is the moral code, the cult practices, and the beliefs, which make their impact on any given society and generation. This paper declares without mincing words that it is only quality Christian education that can salvage the Nigerian situation by revitalizing the Nigerian moral life. Implanting Christian truth via Christian education in the hearts of Nigerian learners will help in restoring the fear of God in Nigeria. This rare virtue is the exclusive product of Christian education in Nigeria. On this Bamigboye (2010) concurs that:

In the days when missionary schools flourished and were managed by the missionaries, religious instructions and practices were strictly enforced. Prayer, Bible study and quiet time formed part of the school's curriculum, and the result was a generation of God-fearing citizens and leaders (P.7)

It is this fear of God implanted in the hearts of men that brings about the wisdom that enabled people to eschew evil. Righteousness exalts a nation but sin has always been a reproach to it (Proverbs 14:34). Thus, the fear of God implanted on the hearts of people via Christian education produces results that are capable of transforming the total man and his society. One key effect of Christian education has always been the inculcation of the spirit of faithfulness, hard work, tolerance, patience, and endurance in the lives of the citizenry. Hard work pays. Hard work is divine and pays off handsomely even in this life.

Be that as it may, this paper acknowledges that even though the Christian missionaries have done their best in fostering in Nigeria many progressive ideals which culminates into the advancement of the Nigerian state, they equally unconsciously propagated some sort of rivalries and destructive elements among the Nigerian Christians. The spillover effect remains the endless interdenominational tensions, divisions, schism, unhealthy competitions, proliferation of churches and hypocrisies that characterized Christianity in Nigeria today. This situation to some extent slowed down the pace of progress in Nigeria (Ekechi, 1972).

## **The Challenges of Quality Christian Education in Nigeria Today**

There is virtually nothing on earth without challenges. Education, whether it is Christian, Islam or traditional education is being hampered by myriads of obstacles that beg for immediate attentions from all quarters. Some of these challenges are being unveiled in the independent studies of Edokpolo (2011), Sarki (2013), Soweto (2014), Adeyinka (2016) and Nigerian Finder (2016) to include the following:

### **(i) The Increasing Costs of Christian Education in Nigeria**

There is an upsurge in the numbers of Theological Colleges, Seminaries and Christian private Universities in Nigeria. Critics of these Christian institutions complain that education from these schools is unnecessarily too exorbitant and beyond the reach of the common man. This claim of high school fees charged from these Christian institutions may not be completely untrue considering how high everything is currently skyrocketing in Nigeria now.

### **(ii) Issue of Responsibility of the Funding of Christian Education**

There has always been a serious conflict between many Churches' leadership that own schools and the College itself as to who fund the institution. The truth of the matter is that education is such a money-guzzling-project which leaving the funding of such institution in the hands of the school alone cannot work. The Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) can go nowhere in shouldering the responsibility of funding an institution. Every institution needs to be financed properly for it to function well.

### **(iii) Unavailability and instability of Lecturers**

Manpower is highly insufficient in most of our Christian institutions in Nigeria. Even in most of the well-established and celebrated Christian institutions where people pay through their nose to educate their children, most of those institutions still hire lecturers from conventional or public Universities to service them. Even the few ones available in a particular institution are becoming very unstable due to poor remuneration and backlog of many months' salaries. Is it different here? This is the singular and most strong reason why most lecturers do lose interest in the jobs. It is due to poor condition of service. Hence, many of them tend to look for better alternative because to them teaching profession is just a stepping stone to a more lucrative job.

### **(iv) Non-Challant Attitudes of Christian Leaders towards Christian Education**

Many people and church leadership are no longer demonstrating the right attitudes towards Christian education nowadays. That lack of right attitudes to Christian education jeopardizes and cripples its growth and expansion. Sometimes this lukewarmness is exhibited as a result



of the fact that the person who is heading the institution is not the choice of the Church leadership.

**(v) Politic in Christian Education**

There seems to be politic in appointment of Principal Officers and in the transfer in and out of lecturers in most Christian institutions. It happens sometimes when it is suspected that one is no longer in the good book of the Bishop In-Charge, he transfers such ones to an institution as a punishment. This has been the trend in many institutions. Politic destroys education.

**(vi) Inadequate Infrastructural Facilities**

Infrastructural facilities in our institutions of learning are eye sores. There are grossly insufficient administrative office accommodations, lecture halls and theaters for both lecturers and students in our schools. Most of the buildings have become dilapidated and are in dire need of renovations. This is not healthy for quality Christian education in Nigeria.

**(vii) Inadequate Learning Equipments, well-furnished Libraries and Recreational Centres**

Most Christian schools in Nigeria lack enough teaching aids, learning equipments such as well-equipped libraries, sport facilities as well as recreational centres. In school libraries, maps, current books, journals and magazines are far cry. This retards the development of Christian education in Nigeria in no small way.

**(viii) Institutionalization of Examination Malpractice and Misconduct**

Most secondary schools in Nigeria that feed or graduate students for theological colleges' intakes have literally been turned into something else. Planned or organized examination malpractices are daily common experience of schools as most parents or guardians join force with their wards to carry out systematic examination malpractices by shamelessly scouting around for miracle examination centres to register their children there without any prick of conscience just for the purpose of enabling their children to come out in flying colours at one sitting in any examination. Thus, such children armed and parade themselves with results which they can hardly defend. It is possible that some of those results are used here to admit students into this college. Most Christian school proprietors and principals do connive with external examination bodies to perpetuate these acts. Examination malpractice has almost been institutionalized in the present-day Nigeria. If stolen results were used to admit these types of students here to be trained as Christian educators and pastors, what hope do we have for the future of Nigeria? This is food for thought.

### **(ix) Miscellaneous Challenges**

There are so many other miscellaneous challenges that just worth mentioning here which time and space could not permit this paper to examine. Such challenges include: (i) Most Christians are only being religious and who preoccupy themselves with lots of religious activities without necessarily being spiritual enough to train up their children in the ways of the Lord. Quality Christian education is lacking in their homes. Such children lacked spiritual foundations to make them fit to mind the things of God later in life. (ii) Church founders having large followership without discipleship. (iii) Preachers shouting and making lots of unintelligent noise without really preaching. (iv) Pastors always giving exhortation without actually teaching the word of God. (v) Parents and guardians raising their Children without parenting them. (vi) Proprietors of Christian schools given to materialism that breeds secularism without really imparting quality Christian education in schools.

### **Towards Ensuring Quality Christian Education in Bible Colleges and Seminaries**

The inerasable legacies of the Christian missionaries ought to be sustained in Bible Colleges and Seminaries. This does not come by mere wishes. It comes through collective reasonable actions of the christains in the globe. To achieve this fate, all hands must be on deck. Every godly minded Bachama should contribute their quota towards making colleges and Seminaries a university of its own in the near future. So, the business of evolving and building quality Christian education is the business of all. Divided we fall. United we succeed and stand. Together we can make it happen gloriously in all our schools in Nigeria. Make sure you sustain the affiliation which our schools have secured from Federal and State University in Nigeria. Be informed that there will be routine accreditations from National Universities Commission (NUC) to verify what you claimed to have every five years. Do prepare adequately for this in good time. This paper prophesy that through your sacrificial efforts, our Colleges and Seminaries would soon metamorphose into a full-grown University of its own with many Faculties and Departments in Jesus name. Amen! Having said this, the paper recommends that the following strategies should be vigorously pursued with the determination to leaving behind you an enduring legacy of quality Christian education in our Bible Colleges and Seminaries in Nigeria.

- (xi) There should be adequate annual budgetary allocation from the Churches that have Colleges and Seminaries during their Synod, being the sole proprietors of the colleges and Seminaries to augment the Internal Generated Revenue (IGR).
- (xii) Bible College and Seminaries should be granted a kind of autonomy so as to avoid undue interference by the Church leadership in the areas of appointments of qualified staff.
- (xiii) There should be constant infrastructural repairs and renovations of facilities in the College and Seminaries.

- (xiv) Remuneration and motivation of staff are key factors to success in any organization. So let attractive salary structures and pension scheme be put in place for staff of Colleges and Seminaries.
- (xv) Staff of Colleges and Seminaries should be ranked and promoted in line with the policy of secular institutions in Nigeria.
- (xvi) Spirited individual Christians and NGOs should be encouraged to take active part by making generous contributions to Colleges and Seminaries by sponsoring meaningful projects that have direct bearing on the lives of both the students and staff of Colleges and Seminaries in Nigeria.
- (xvii) There should be an increasing enlightenment campaigns during your various church conventions for people of other professions to enrol for Diploma or Degree programmes. This should be on part-time basis on theological courses in the Colleges and Seminaries so as to increase enrolment in the College.
- (xviii) Appointments and transfers of lecturers and Principal Officers of the Colleges and Seminaries should not be politicised. Such appointments should be based on merit in the College.
- (xix) Lastly, there should be training and retraining of staff in Bible Colleges and Seminaries in Nigeria. What this means is that the Board should recommend to Church leadership staff of Colleges and Seminaries to be sent for training. Those who have started school already on their own should be supported financially to finish up their programme in good time. The Colleges and Seminaries needs them to be on ground.

## **Conclusion**

Christian education is a sine qua non and a sure tool for the consolidation and further expansion of Christianity in Nigeria. It has produced and will continue to produce God fearing and responsible citizens that are capable of raising the banner of Christ in Nigeria. The paper submitted that it is high time we made Nigeria great again by maintaining the good legacies of the Christian missionaries through the sustenance of quality Christian education in Nigeria. This will go a long way in promoting more of the fear of God, godly attitudes and moral uprightness in Nigeria.

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