

Christian Religious Education in Nigeria: Programmes And Goals for Sustainable National Development

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Abstract

The teaching of Christian Religious Education in Nigerian schools is intended to lead the students to develop a critical mind and to imbibe the basic Christian religious belief as tenets considering the relationship in Christian religion. It is a call to transmit acceptable moral and ethical standards and to inculcate spiritual values in interpersonal and human relations in the society. In order to sustain sound human society, the survival of values in Christian Education becomes imperative because of the nostalgia of the Nigerian's past experience, Homesickness disappointment of the present situations and hope for the future generations in Nigeria. Every human society craves for sustainable development and this is true also of Nigeria. On this note, this paper examined the programmes and goals of Christian Religious Education in attaining sustainable National Development in Nigeria. Christian Religious Education is a means through which the individual is trained and reformed through qualitative training and retraining of human souls and capital, who are agents of national development. This study viewed Christian Religious Education as a vital force to drive sustainable national development in Nigeria. The paper recognises factors affecting sustainable national development, and suggests Christian education as a determinant factor for the national development of any nation or society. Again the paper found out that the right values are integrated in the educational system through religious teaching. It demonstrated that the right change of persons is through moral value and ethical value which is the prerequisite for developing in any nation. No nation that can rise above the quality of her education. Religious education determines national development. The programme and the goals of Christian religious education should be put into practice in the country in order to benefit national development. The paper concluded that Nigerian can be mobilized and inspired through religious education that drives development in the country.

Keywords: Christian Education, Development, Programmes, Goals, Moral Values

Christian Religious education has a major role to play in sustaining the goals for national development in Nigeria. Okunoye, (2015) posited that the true test of a sustainable national development is the extent to which the quality of Christian religious education has contributed in the programmes and school curriculum. However, there is unfortunate decline in the teaching and learning of Christian religious education in Nigeria. This has aggravated corruption, dwindling economy, political violence examination malpractice, and irregular elections in the country as a result of moral degeneration, moral perversion and so on. Effective Christian religious education has the potential of bringing the “change” and “sustainable national development that Nigerians are clamouring for. Indeed, it is an instrument “per excellence” for effective national development. This study therefore examined the programmes and goals of Christian religious education for sustainable national development in Nigeria.

Concepts of Christian Religious Education

Eluu (2016), sees Christian religion as an instrument for the development of spiritual, moral and mental growth of the pupils or students. In essence Christian religious knowledge imparts in children an understanding of the universe and the interpersonal relationship between human beings and the Supreme Being. The importance of Christian religion in sustainable national development is found in the claim of personal and spiritual knowledge of God through Jesus Christ, the son of God. It is a stabilizing factor in the individual personality. Moral and spiritual behaviour of individual are the aims of teaching Christian religious education in Nigerian schools. Christian religious knowledge trains the students morally and instils in them the desire to do good and be virtuous. This is also one of the goals of the programme. The programme in Christian religious education helps in correcting the character of individual in the given society.

Eluu (2016) affirmed the aims and objectives of Christian religious knowledge and stated that the aim of teaching Christian religious knowledge is “to educate the Nigerian children both morally and intellectually, and instil in them the desire to be good citizens”. It occurs through the guidance and supervision of their conduct, the children are encouraged to develop a right attitude towards life, their environment, interpersonal relationships and community living.

This is in agreement with the stated objectives of the programme and goals of sustainable national development in Nigeria, hence the teaching of Christian religious knowledge in schools which gives impetus to national development in Nigeria leads students to raise and develop their spiritual and moral life relating to the teachings of

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Jesus Christ. The transmission of acceptable moral standards and in the society cannot be over emphasized, hence through the teaching of the subject, children are encouraged to express their faith and to develop their talents and thus prepare themselves for useful living in society (Eluu, 2016).

Iwenofu (2010) argued that the goal of religious and moral education is for national development. She observed that the teaching of religious education influences peoples' lives every time and every place. To her, religious education prepares men for life as a perfect man and a finished man in character. She also explained that religious education creates in man the sense of sacred and his purpose on earth and where he will end his life. Religious education helps the individual to understand himself as well as his tradition and appreciates the faith and traditions of others. It builds in men spirit of contentment and faith to a discerning encounter with the surrounding culture and seeks for its transformation. Religious education is the ground work of all subjects. Onuvughe & Mordi (2017) added that Religious Education is informative, gives understanding and the meaning of religion which helps people to know their culture, and their origin.

Religious Education is a veritable tool for nation building. This mind-set will help us to appreciate the impact of religious education in enhancing sustainable development in the Nigerian society. This is because in Nigeria, religion and religious education explain our cooperate social living and practice in all sphere of our national life. The influence of religion and religious education on the cultural, economic, socio-political and spiritual activities in Nigerian society is both pervasive and powerful. This is why the fact cannot be denied that religious beliefs and practices are fundamental to nation building, since these beliefs and practices establish a kind of link or connectedness between the divine and the human, the mundane and the spiritual, the neumena and phenomena, the transient and the lasting, the natural (material) and the spiritual (Onuvughe & Mordi 2017). With this, Obiekea (2015), also averred that this connectedness or link can be sustained if rules and regulations, norms and values, and covenant agreements have to be put in place, so as to forestall rewards and punishment of man and his society.

Religious Education helps to train religious functionaries who discharge religious duties to their members. In this way, they help compliment the efforts in nation building. In pursuing religious education for national development, religious bodies establish and run schools where people are trained to take up developmental projects in the society. These schools apart from the secular education they offer also incorporate religious values and discipline which helps individuals later in the society for peaceful co-existence and national development. Religious education teaches people to be patriotic and committed to building the nation. For instance, Christian Religion teaches

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civic responsibility which is summarized as serving one's country, commitment to one's society and contributing to the development of one's society (Uche, 2011).

Religious education is a means of evangelization through the media of schools, hospitals, church activities and the building of macro-business outposts, all geared towards the development of the Nigerian nation. Akila (2010), observed that those who have moved the nation in the past and some in the present were products of mission schools where religious education were upheld. Moral education has always been the goal of religious schools and this explains why some states in Nigeria have begun the process of handing over schools back to the missions who owned them ab-initio, in order to restore morality to our morally decadent society, which is the focus of religious education.

Though division in Nigeria has caused much harm to the social coexistence of the Nigerian people through undue rivalry and unjustifiable religious killings and fanatical dispositions, engineered by seeming political interests, it has none the less tried to uphold and display some spiritual charisma in Nigeria. By upholding religious education which forms people into good citizens of the Nigerian nation and nation builders, religion has become an agent of mobilization in complex social engagements in Nigeria. Uche (2011), agreed that religious priesthood which is a social product of religious education functions as a nation builder by restoring peace and order between the visible and the invisible, between the spiritual and the mundane, settling quarrels, presiding over festivals and coronations. Some of them are counsellors and psychotherapists who operate faith clinic and prayer houses to help people who have spiritual and psychological problems. Mordi (2012), opined that religious functionaries, who are products of religious education are moral requisites and mediators in the society and since the Nigerian society needs leaders with such esoteric power and knowledge for national development, religious education therefore is a tool for nation building. Once these leaders are in place, religious education would help them offer explanations and solutions to the problem of the meaning of life and other mysteries associated with human existence. This is why Attah (2009), suggested that ignorance of the power and impact of religion has led Nigeria to the state of developmental backwardness in which she finds herself today.

Concepts of Sustainable Development

The concept of sustainable development is the efforts at improving the socio-economic and ecological status and at exploiting and processing the environment or natural resources for the purpose of improving the quality of human life in such a way that the needs of the future generations are not jeopardized. The "Word Conservation

Strategy”, published by the World Conservation Union, publicized the concept of sustainable development in the 20th century. The term became more pronounced and received greater attention in the report of Brunted Commission, which the United Nations General Assembly assigned to propose long-term environmental strategies for achieving sustainable development by the year 2000 and beyond (Onovughe, & Mordi, 2017). The report spelt out the definitions given to the concept “development” as a process of change in the social structure, attitude, institution, and general acceleration of economic growth through reduction of inequality and poverty. Going through the multifarious definitions of the concept, Onovughe, & Mordi (2017) identified three important facts on it namely:

- i. Increasing the availability and widening the distribution of basic life sustenance, such as food, shelter, and protection.
- ii. Raising the level of living in addition to higher income, provision of jobs, better education, and greater attention to cultural and humanitarian values, all of which serve to enhance material wellbeing, but also to generate greater individual and national self-esteem, and
- iii. Expanding the range of economic and social choice to individuals and nations by freeing them from servitude and dependence.

From the above, some indices of development, which are no doubt prerequisites to sustainable development, are identified. According to Onovughe, & Mordi (2017), the level of human development could be measured by the Human Development Index (HDI), whose components are health, education, and income. To them, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which is the total output of the economy, is a major determinant of development. Other indices of development, identified include: improved standard of living in terms of availability of decent accommodation, improved nutritional standards, qualitative health care and education services to the majority, life expectancy which is mainly influenced by the standard of living, availability of health services, literacy level, and income of the people. From this, it could be observed that all the identified indices of development could hardly be attained in an atmosphere of moral decadence and social vices. The Health Services, education, and Nigerians economy are jeopardized and adversely affected as a result of moral decadence) corruption etc (Onovughe & Mordi, 2017).

Onovughe, & Mordi (2017) have broadly classified resources into four categories namely: common, definite, acquirable, and possessive resources. To him, common resources are resources that are common to all nations, people, and tribes which on one prevent-s anybody from being used. Such resources are air, sunlight, moonlight, rain, weather, wild animals, forest, and time, among others. Define

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resources, as the name implies, have terminal features, hence the need for speedy, effective, and efficient utilization. Examples of these are lifespan, target, completion, and strategy. Acquirable resources are acquired to change from one status to the other. Examples are skills, experience, and orientation. Possessive resources are obtained through exchange by customary rights and other legal forms of ownership which can be used, neglected, sold, or transferred by way of gift or control. Money, assets, technology, territory, and independence are examples of possessive resources. These resources put together are ingredients of development, which sustainability depends mostly on their effective utilization and which under-utilization and misuse could be a great loss and catastrophic. The point is, how can these resources be managed or even harnessed where moral decadence prevails. The highlight of this is that a pseudo development could only be attained in an atmosphere where religious education is used as an instrument of vendetta and blood feud between families (Onovughe & Mordi, 2017).

Religious education is a very potent tool for nation building. This is observably clear from the study of European history. From the period of the scholastics to the beginning of the 18th century, education and politics and other socio-cultural institutions of human endeavour were in the hands of the church. The church encouraged and promoted learning, built schools and learning centres where religious and secular education was taught. The classical and Greek philosophies of Plato, Aristotle and other oriental writers were promoted and preserved by the church. The writings of churchmen like St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Bonaventure, Albert the Great and a host of others are still relevant today. On the moral front, the church functionaries served as both moral guides to kings and legal consultants. Bad and despotic kings were deposed and excommunicated by the church to give a sigh of relief to the masses. The church also championed technology (as it was known then), monks wrote and copied the biblical manuscripts and other ancient writings with hands and preserved them. The church equally promoted the act of painting, drawing and sculptor-ship and other artistic ingenuities that modern technology has not rivalled (Onovughe & Mordi, 2017).

. In Nigeria today, religious education promotes and sustains development through the media of religious values and ethos. It is a truism that religious values have permeated the social fabrics of the cultural life of Nigerians. In this way, it contributes to the dynamic belief systems which preserve the awe-inspiring aspects of Nigerian cultural heritage. The teachings of taboo by religious education and its use help integrate the Nigerian integrative value system. In a complicated pluralistic society like Nigeria, human actions, conducts and behaviour could affect the wider society negatively. The negative influence it may wield on the society could hamper the growth of and endanger

sustainable development (Onovughe & Mordi, 2017). This is why religious education can step in to cohesively teach and encourage people to be morally responsible.

Religious education promotes social norms that keep the society together and review social commitment to the socially desirable behaviour, which in the long run creates sustainable behaviour in Nigeria. It also compliments sustainable development by conscientizing Nigerians to act according to their filial obligation.

In Nigeria corruption is on high gear, especially among those at the corridors of power and this poses a big challenge to both religion and religious education. If religious education must be relevant to the Nigerian nation, religious leaders must brace up to the expectations of their responsibility of providing moral guidelines and spiritual checks and balances. Religious education must articulate vividly, functional ways of addressing the immoral dispositions of Nigerians and in this way, it would be able to address the moral decadence in Nigeria.

Religious education conceived and understood as a powerful instrument of social change and liberation, can still transform the most criminal of all men in various societies through the teachings of religious beliefs, values, morality and ethics. Nigerian men and women could become better citizens through religious education.

Since religion is an instrument of social control, religious education in Nigeria should encourage this through the activities and pastoral duties of priests and religious functionaries. Priests are instruments of social control through their pastoral care programmes, praying for members, counselling, pastoral visitation and other pastoral activities.

Religious education is also an instrument of social order. Through the teaching and promotion of religious traditions, restrictions are made; prohibitions and peace drives are encouraged. In this way, law and order are maintained and these are essential ingredients for sustainable development. No country can develop under tension, disorder and chaos. By preaching peace and obedience to the law of the land, religious education promotes order which snow-balls into a favourable atmosphere for business to thrive. In this way, religious education helps to bring about sustainable development in Nigeria.

The provision of social welfare like schools, hospitals, orphanages, and care for widows and the poor, old people's homes are all evidences of the usefulness of religious education in Nigeria. Christian religious education teaches and fosters forgiveness, promotes truth, confidence and commitment among people. These moral values do not only promote peaceful coexistence but are instrumental to nation building and sustainable development in Nigeria. They are the goals and objectives of Christian religious education in Nigeria. These values are to be taught in the schools in order to inculcate the spirit of peace, tolerance and obedience in the country.

Objectives of Christian Religious Education in the school curriculum in Nigeria

There are specific objectives that the curriculum developers and government want to achieve by including Christian Religious Education (CRE) in the national educational curriculum. According to Okunoye (2015, 7.), these objectives include the following:

- To understand the totality of man's existence
- To explore the intrinsic meanings and values of life
- To curb excess of negative propensities in human nature
- To assist man to have an intelligent understanding of his role in the contemporary society
- To stimulate man towards personal and rigours reactions to the changes and challenges of his time.
- To provide man with the knowledge of God, as well as, the ways of achieving fellowship with him.
- To transmit spiritual inheritance, culture and creed.
- To focus on God as the centre of man's activities
- To understand that man has supernatural destiny
- To teach the strengthening of the will in the pursuit of morality and habits of restraints and modification that will make him virtuous.
- To train in the development of deep sense of responsibility and respect for authority, whether spiritual or temporal and sensitising them to respect the rights and privileges of others.
- To internalize the teachings of Christ to reform the world and restore all things in Christ.
- To make Christianity the centre of gravity and not a peripheral activity that is external, remote, detached and unrealized.

From the above points, one can deduce that Christian Religious is designed to produce well-ordered personalities, men of strong character for the nation and to meet the goal for sustainable national development in Nigeria . The Nigeria Educational Research centre (2004) following the above asserted that CRE helps the youths in making three types of preparations. These are preparation for useful living, preparation for sustainable national development and preparation for higher education.

The Importance of Christian Religious Education in Nigerian Society

Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013, 14.) in the National Policy on Education, also specified the importance of CRE as:

- To provide more opportunity for Nigerian youth to learn more about God and thereby develop their faith in him.
- To enable the youth to accept Christ as saviour.
- To enable youth to recognize Jesus as the founder and sustainer of the Christian church.
- To enable the youth accept the guidance of the Holy Spirit in their daily activities.
- To help the youth understand the basic teachings of Christ and to apply these to their daily lives and works.
- To develop in youth Christian attitude and moral values such as humanity, respect, love, kindness, justice and fair-play, spirit of forgiveness, obedience, service to God and humanity.
- To prepare the youth for higher education and for service with the community.

Again, Okunoye (2015), opined that CRE has also as its duty the formation of personality and character in the students for the sustainable development in Nigeria. The curriculum has been designed with intent that students should be given a complete theory of life; a philosophy which emphasizes that God should be the joy of their youth, the strength of their age and the life of their immortality. Okunoye (2015) stressed that CRE is expected to fulfil the student's great solemn mission of making spiritual values the principle of permanence in this world of change, the wellspring of sanctity in the midst of evil, the beacon of idealism in an age of cynicism, and a ground hope in the face of discouragement and mounting fear. Furthermore, CRE strengthens awareness of students' personal dignity. It drives deep into the consciousness of the students the idea of the dignity to each soul, the inviolability of each conscience, and the reality of individual destiny. Okunoye (2015) reiterated that besides that, it creates for the students the concept of personal responsibility and the philosophical idea of individual vocation and the appreciation that Jesus Christ came to this world out of love and died, for our salvation. Moreover, CRE inculcates conduct so as to bridge the gap between creed and deed, ideals and action (Okunoye 2015). This means that students should be equipped to live in the world guided by moral ideals of loyalty to God and of charity and justice to their neighbour. Its effective teaching and learning would help the students to give the best mode of action in given circumstance. It is designed to compel interests to beget habits and to influence behaviours (Ikechukwu & Ugwuozor 2014). No doubt, CRE makes one truly a citizen of his nation by inculcating in him the required civic

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responsibilities that can promote a sustainable national development. It mounts campaigns for better citizenship through its curriculum offerings containing lessons and topics which seek to make righteousness prevail, to make justice reign, to spread beauty, gentleness, wisdom and peace; to widen opportunity of increasing goodwill, to foster industry and, thrift, education and culture, reverence and obedience, purity and love, honesty, sobriety, and devotion to common good (Ikechukwu & Ugwuozor 2014).

It is crystal clear from the foregoing that CRE as entrenched in the secondary school curriculum in Nigeria has the potential for fostering sustainability in Nigeria. These are the goals in the found in the study of Christian religious education in Nigeria. Meeting these goals will produce a sustainable national development in the country.

Christian Religious Education as a Tool for Sustainability in Nigeria

It is important to stress here that Christian religious education takes place in non-formal settings where people gather for work or leisure through socialization, initiation process in the community, conventions and so on (Uche 2012). Christian religious education at this level should stop preaching only for health and wealth, which are common features of most churches today. Rather, CRE should go on preaching honesty, fair play, sustainable development and contentment which are all actual virtues of true sustainability and peace. Similarly, there are many children who are not opportune to attend the formal educational system where CRE is being taught. The Christian denominations can organise children into Sunday school to educate them on the need for peace and respect for national development. Christian parents at home could also stress the importance of religious unity, conformity and believe by ignoring differences within their religious backgrounds (Uche 2012). As they grow, there must be clear understanding and blending of Christianity, peace and sustainable national development in the country. In this way, children can grow to understand their full role in the sustenance of peaceful programme and goals for national development in Nigeria.

Moreover, CRE has the potential of helping Christian students to interact and to live in peace with people of other religious faiths. It can also encourage dialogue, friendship, good leadership traits, Christian principles of democracy and governance (Uche, 2012). In this way the products of CRE can contribute their quota in the sustenance of national development and peaceful co-existence.

Christianity has teachings on peace entrenched in the Holy Bible. This can easily be used as an instrument of peace and sustenance of national development among young persons and adherents in Nigeria. The religious teachers/educators must exhibit sustainable virtues in their day-to-day activities with students. Teachers must avoid authoritarian approaches to teaching, since such approaches are least likely to instil in

students the desire to participate and be effective in political discourse later (Uche, 2012). In the formal educational system, CRE uses proverbs, poems, anecdotes, parables, songs or hymns, Holy Bible and other subject fields which have to do with personal and economic problems. All these are put into the curriculum of CRE with a view to making it life centered (Uche, 2012). This is in line with one of the major objectives of CRE where sustainable national development and education are also emphasized. Besides, the Decalogue in the Holy Bible can best describe the major doctrines of morality; it warns against act of stealing, adultery, fornication, false oath, false witness, cheating, libellous words, killing and parental disrespect.

Good neighbourhood, kindness, truthfulness and maintenance of justice and equity are strongly taught in the Bible (Okunoye, 2015). All these are carefully entrenched in the CRE curriculum in Nigeria purposely to emphasize and nurture a child who will grow to be a responsible citizen. It is certain that effective teaching and learning of all these “dos” and “don’ts” by young and old will enhance peaceful co-existence, national development and sustainability in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Christian religious education is a determinable factor for sustainability in Nigeria community. This is because the right values are integrated in the teaching of religious education in the country. It is believed that the right change of a person is through the moral values and the ethical values which is the prerequisite for developing any nation that can bring a sustainable national development. Since all these are ingredients for development, religious education by implication fosters sustainable development in Nigeria.

Therefore, if our concern is to sustain national development in Nigeria, effective handling of Christian Religious Education at all levels of education becomes a very useful instrument in this direction. Nigerian youths need this effective teaching in their life. If we embrace justice, human rights, peace in all ramifications and equity in our dealings with all men, irrespective of tribe, language, faith, colour or religious affiliations then there is an assured hope that true sustainable national development has come to stay in Nigeria.

Recommendations

The study proffers the following recommendations for the possible sustainable national development in the country:

- a. Christian religious education should be encouraged in all levels of training in Nigeria since it is a panacea to the problem of sustainable development in Nigeria.

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- This is because it brings growth to the society through the media of schools, hospitals, health care services and other humanitarian services.
- b. Religious education teaches social and peaceful coexistence by preaching the brotherhood of all human beings, love and respect for human persons. It fosters peace, understanding, love and unity among people. They are very essential ingredients for sustainable development in any society. For this reason it should be encouraged.
 - c. Christian religious education should be allowed to thrive in Nigeria in order to allow man to know the right values in life.
 - d. Christian religious leaders should review the content of their religious education and doctrines to reflect the present needs of the Nigeria nation.
 - e. Since no religion preaches and encourages evil or immorality, Christian religious education in Nigeria should condemn vehemently the immoral and corruption dispositions of Nigerians that are evident today.
 - f. That some religions are dysfunctional in nature, this should not be used to discredit the functional relevance of religious education in Nigeria against all the religions. Generally, religion is not to preach violence and disorder, though some misguided and unscrupulous religious fanatics may encourage such in their confused understanding of religion. The actions and activities of these religious fanatics should not be generalized.
 - g. We should create an environment that will discourage corruption at all level of life in Nigeria.
 - h. Moral value and ethical value should be the guiding principles of lives of all Nigerian, meet all level as the life which will facilitate all round development of the people.
 - i. All forms of corruption such as examination malpractice, election or political malpractice, maltreatment in the family, nepotism, favouritism, religious or ethnic segments should be discouraged.

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