

# MORAL PROBLEMS AMONG THE YOUTHS AS A CHALLENGE TO RELIGIOUS AND MORAL EDUCATION IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

*Ezeme Pius C.*

## Abstract

The paper focuses on innumerable acts exhibited by the youths today and takes the stand that their perpetuation is a result of neglect in the teaching of religious and moral education in schools. Efforts are made to explain what is meant by religious and moral education and some of the vices discussed with a view to pointing out the level to which the youths have been immersed in them. In the conviction that proper moral education is sine qua non for the raising of sound leaders of tomorrow the writer proposes avenues for the inculcation of meaningful religious and moral education in the schools.

## Introduction

The 21<sup>st</sup> century is witnessing an upsurge in tire rate of indiscipline, cultism, drug abuse, examination malpractice, rape, violence, nudity and so on among youths in Nigeria. The society at large is immersed in innumerable unwholesome acts such as embezzlement of public funds, bribery and corruption, fraud and other forms of crime which in the year 2000 earned Nigeria the second position as the most corrupt nation in the world according to transparency international index assessment. The general elections of 2003 were characterized by massive riggings and thuggery at all levels which made Odey to write a book on it entitled *This Madness called Election 2003*. A look at these ugly experiences show that the present adults who are the leaders of today have failed the nation. For a better future, religious and moral education (EMR) has a task before it. This is the task of re-directing the young ones to the path of moral rectitude. The Imo state ministry of education is already taking the lead in this direction through what she calls the Ethical Re-orientation committees formed in post-primary schools to address moral problems.

In this paper, the writer tries to point out some unwholesome attitudes among the youths which he sees as a challenge to RME. In his opinion, proper handling of RME in our primary and secondary schools nation - wide will make for a better Nigeria in this 21st century.

## What is Religious and Moral Education (RMR)?

Religious and Moral Education (RME) is the religious instruction which concerns itself with denominational doctrines, morals and catechism. Its prime aim is to ensure sound moral upbringing of children and youths in our educational institutions especially at primary and post - primary levels of the nation's educational system. In fact, as a result of the decay in all facets of our youths life style, the Hon. Minister of Education, Professor Fabian Osuji, recently, at the convocation ceremony of Bankok University Ilesha Remo, Ogun state, advocated the introduction of REM to the tertiary level of the nation's educational system.

This kind of instruction was dropped between 1971 and 1976 when the government took -over the management of schools from the missionaries across the nation. However, some years after the forceful takeover, people who could read between the lines started realizing the importance of RME in the proper upbringing of children. This need made Ibiam (1982:3) to cry out thus, "Please let this subject, MORAL AND RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTIONS get back to our schools with no further delay". It is unfortunate that this cry has not even at present received the desired attention. This is because in some states, two hours only are allotted to RME weekly without proper effort made towards its implementation. This attitude, no doubt, contributes towards the unabated increase in the rate of crimes among our youths, the leaders of tomorrow.

## **The Value of Religious and Moral Education**

The Federal Government of Nigeria places RME as one of the core subjects in the Junior secondary school curriculum. This is because it is felt that moral upbringing of the young ones is of paramount importance to the nation. As a matter of fact, intellectual training without moral training is incomplete, hence, the saying that education without morals is no education at all. Nigeria as a multi-faith nation needs to expose the young ones to the tenets of their individual faiths to avoid misunderstanding of one another in matters of religion.

In highlighting the overall value of RME, Obilom (1987:43) observes thus:

Conflicts may be minimized if not completely avoided if the schools are made to teach the basic knowledge in religious and moral education. Religious and moral education seems to form the bedrock of other subjects that require discipline because a child who is not disciplined or well behaved would certainly pose a problem to the teacher of Chemistry, Physics, Biology or Geography. The teaching of this subject in schools helps to inculcate discipline in the Nigerian child.

Obilom's observation makes it clear that RME is a character moulder and as such the silencer of undesirable tendencies in the youths. Also, a look at the Christian Religious Education Curriculum shows that much care has been taken in designing it, to ensure that the Nigerian child grows up properly.

The Objectives of that document are:

- i. to provide opportunity for the student to learn about God and thereon grow in faith in God;
- ii. to help the students apply the teaching and explanation of Jesus Christ in their daily lives, and
- iii. to develop and fasten in the students Christian attitudes and values such as respect for life and for all men; selfless service to God and humanity (NERC, 1983: Page).

In spite of the above laudable objectives, our youths exhibit numerous vices in and out of school. This state of affairs is a challenge to the RME coordinators and instructors at educational headquarters and schools respectively,

### **Delinquent Act of the Youths**

The focus of RME, according to Ibiam (1982:3), includes the inculcation of goodness, gentleness, selfless - service, Christian/Moslem concern for others, patience, temperance, self control, loyalty, fair - play and punctually in the youths. In place of these virtues, the youths swim in such ugly acts as drug abuse, cultism, rape, prostitution, murder, theft, examination malpractice, armed ' robbery, nudity, and destruction of school property and violent crimes of all sorts. These unwholesome acts are unabated as they have become acceptable ways of life. For instance, armed robbery operations involving the teenagers are reported every now and then. Most public examinations are made meaningless by examination malpractices. In July 2004, the Registrar/Chief Executive of National Examination Council (NECO), Professor Dibu Ojerinde, told the nation with regrets that the cankerworm (examination malpractice) has finally made its way into the primary school. A report in *The leader* newspaper captioned "Murdered by Classmate" has it that a student of Obazu Community Secondary School, Mbieri, Kelechi Okorochoa was hacked to death by a fellow S.S. II student of the school on February 4, 2005 following a mere argument.

Related to prostitution is immodesty in the name of fashion. Some of these immodest dresses include mini skirts, one hand blouse, off shoulder blouse, chin-chin blouse, leggings, flyover, spaghetti blouse, gate-way, indomi, kiss me and so on. These are seductive dresses which promote proscumunity in schools and elsewhere. Nnabueze (2004:16) blames the culture of nudity on authorities in schools who, according to him, show unconcerned attitude towards the moral, mental, social and psychological development of the youths.

It is an acceptable fact that all the unwholesome acts of the youths emanate from the neglect of RME in our schools. Adibe (2004:2) supports this view by pointing out that the neglect of RME is the neglect of moral norms. These moral norms include truth, honesty, love, peace, respect and sacredness of life which we all know are a far cry in the youths<sup>1</sup> life style these days.

### **The Way Forward**

I. The vision and mission of education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century can only be achieved if moral rectitude or moral rearmament is given the desired attention in the affairs of the youth. People clamour for return of schools to the mission and other voluntary agencies because products of schools formerly run by them were academically sound and morally balanced as against the indiscipline and immorality of all sorts which have taken over the chalk and the cane today (Udotia, 1999). Remedy to our problem in this regard does not only lie in return of schools to voluntary agencies, rather, concerted efforts towards effective inculcation of moral education to youths, no matter where, will lead to the achievement of meaningful outcomes.

II. The Ethical Re-orientation programme initiated by Imo State Ministry of Education should be adopted nation -wide. It aims at catching the leaders of tomorrow young and redirecting them through what she called moral rearmament and ethical re-orientation. This outfit has a committee made up of the Parent Teacher Association (PTA), board of governors, teachers, school functionaries, guidance counsellors and principals. It is hoped that through this forum

a future egalitarian society will be given birth to where good manners, obedience to rules, respect for customs and tradition, God-centred life and a trustworthy generation will be put in place (Ajaero, 2005). This as a matter of fact is a deviation from the old system of looking up to the church or religious ministers for matters relating to morals.

- III. The attitude of teachers towards the teaching of RME has to change. Ezeme (2003:128) points out that some teachers who handle RME execute the assignment with levity because it does not attract any allowance. This attitude denies the children of the vital opportunity of knowing about the doctrines of their religions. Allowances should therefore be attached to the teaching of RME as an incentive to the instructors.
- IV. The RME instructors should be trained and re-trained to keep them abreast with the moral needs of the time. The RME units of the Education Commission/Boards should be well funded to be able to tackle the spiritual needs of the growing children.
- V. Religious retreats should be organized for the students from time to time. Seasoned men of God should be invited to talk to the students during such retreats. Such retreats from experienced people afford students the opportunity of coming out from cult groups as well as declare for Christ and also amend their ways of life.
- VI. A teacher is a role model who influences the behaviour of the child. The way the teacher dresses and renders service is photocopied by the mental faculties of the child and played back in later life (Ajaero, 2005). The teacher therefore should not be guided by the pharisaic principle of "Do what I say and not what I do," because whatever he does is a model to the educands. It therefore follows that where the teachers are morally sound the children are morally good because like teacher like student.

#### Conclusion

The unwholesome acts of the youths are traced to neglect in the teaching of Religious and Moral Education, Everything possible lies to be done now to correct this ugly trend in the interest of the future. It is a thing of joy that Imo State of Nigeria has taken the lead in this direction by her introduction of Moral Re-armament and Ethical Re-orientation in the secondary schools which involves all stakeholders in education.

#### References

- Adibe, G. (204). Teaching About God to Save Nigerians From Decadence. Onitsha: Omega Dreams Ltd.
- Ajaero, A.I. (2005). The Task Before the Ethical Re-Orientations Committees in School. *The Leader* Jan 23, 12.
- Ezeme, P.C. (2003). The Challenges and Future of Religious and Moral Education in Nigeria. Eriba (ed) *Multidisciplinary Journal of Research Development* I (3). 128- 131.
- Ibiam, F. (1982). Preface in *Moral and Religious Instruction Book 1*. Enugu: Sonkar Pub. Com.
- National Education Research Council (1983). *Draft Christian Religious. Education Curriculum for Junior and Senior Secondary Schools*, City Publisher.
- Nnabueze, C. (2004). Youths and Celebration of Nudity. *LUMEN* 4 (7) 16.
- Obilom, J.E.C. (1981). Religious Education and the New National Policy on Education. *The Source* XII40.
- Odey, J. (2003). *This Madness Called Election 2003*. Enugu: SNAAP Press. Udotia, P. (1999).
- Still on Return of Schools. *The Guardian* Date Month July 25. 35. *The Leader* (2004). Exam Malpractice Spread to Primary Schools July" 25. 4. *The Leader* (2005). Murder by Classmate. Feb. 20.1.

