

## **RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN PRIMARY AND POST PRIMARY EDUCATION SYSTEM: AN INSTRUMENT FOR ACHIEVING PEACE AND SECURITY IN NIGERIA**

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### **Abstract**

Religious dialogue and understanding have always been the dream of Nigerians, and the religious leaders of the three major religions in Nigeria. The achievement of religious dialogue is only imaginary. A proper understanding of these religions will enhance peace and co-existence among people of different religious background. Violence have overtime dwindle the progress of the country as a result of misinterpretation and misunderstanding of other religious beliefs and practices. This paper therefore, considers the need for the introduction of religious education at the primary and post primary education level. In Nigeria to enhance proper inculcation of the basic tenet of the beliefs and practices of the three major religions in Nigeria. This would enhance a successful achievement of the seven point agenda since a country without peace cannot achieve any set goals such as that set by President Yar'Adua.

### **Introduction**

Religion and culture are two viable machines for educational embibement and character molding. Overtime, African society has depended mostly on religion and culture to establish and maintain a peaceful and coexistent society without chaos and violence.

It is also observed that almost all religions serve as an advocacy for love and support good interrelationship among members as well as living in unity with neighbours, irrespective of their religion. It is also observed that religion helps to bring people of different ethnic backgrounds and race together to achieve one purpose i.e love and worshipping God. It can therefore be established that religion can serve as an instrument of peace if properly understood.

In this vein, Light and Keeler (1979) defined religion as being associated with the secret, that which is ideal and transcends everyday existence. It is the extraordinary, powerful, potentially dangerous and awe-inspiring. Again, Idowu (1973) is of the opinion that religion is as old as man's life, therefore, a necessary evil in the society. To some anthropologists, religion is the reciprocal relationship between man and spiritual forces which he beliefs in.

From the definitions of religion above, religion is part of a people's culture and reflects in their approach to life, world-view and ethos. It traces are viable in the political, social, educational and economic system. This means that religion affects every members of the society. Therefore, it is the reflection of what takes place in the society hence a society without religion is doomed.

Education on the other hand, is the systematic training and instruction (especially education of the young in schools, colleges, etc). Also education is knowledge and abilities, development of character and mental powers resulting from such training (Oxford Advance Learner's Dictionary of Current English, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition).

According to the National Policy on Education (2004) "education in Nigeria is an instrument par excellence for affecting national development". Therefore, religious education serves as instrument for achieving the Nigeria's seven point agenda. The World Bank Sector Review (1995) as quoted in Falade (2002) stated that "education is a major instrument for promoting economic growth and reducing poverty... more generally, education helps to strengthen the institutions of civil society and helps to build national capacity and good governance, critical elements in the implementation of sound economic and social policies.

Religious Education is therefore, the teaching of the various religions especially the different religions practiced in Nigeria, such as Christian Religion, Islamic Religion and African Traditional Religion side by side to the students or to the youth to help inculcate moral and ethical values to them at an early stage.

Against this backdrop, only one of these religions are taught in section of the country, that is the north teaches Islam while the West and East teaches Christian religion and the traditional religion is only taught at the higher institution hence, not giving room for a proper understanding of the three main religions. It is in this vein that the paper considers the use of religious education at primary and post primary education levels as an instrument for achieving the seven point agenda for national development. This is so because without building better citizen through religious education, the society will be made up of irresponsible citizens who cannot effectively actualize whatever agenda considered being the best for the nation.

### **Seven Point Agenda in Over-view**

President Musa Umaru Yar'Adua on assumption of office on May 29, 2007 unveiled a seven point agenda which he hoped would put the economy of the nation on track. The agenda was to be the platform on which his administration would spring off.

In his inaugural speech, Yar'Adua said, "our goal now is to build on the greatest accomplishments of the past few years. Relying on the seven point agenda that formed the basis of our contract with voters during the recent campaigns, we will concentrate on re-building our physical infrastructure and human capital in order to take our country forward".

The President enumerated the seven point agenda as:

- i) Power and energy
- ii) Food, security and agriculture
- iii) Wealth creation and employment
- iv) Mass transportation
- v) Land reforms
- vi) Security
- vii) Qualitative and functional education and pursuance of the rule of law

Yar'Adua added that his administration would focus on 'accelerating economic and other reforms in a way that will make for a concrete and visible difference to ordinary people'. Therefore, the seven point agenda now forms the cardinal role that has come to be known as the President's economic blueprint (Ochiama, 2008).

### **Beliefs Patterns of the Main Religions in Nigeria Christianity**

Christianity is the religion founded by Christ thus, the followers of Christ are known as Christians. This is an imported religion into Africa mainly by the European missionaries. The religion offered pleasantries, which attracted so many Africans into its fold such as medical services, education, social amenities and more. The main belief pattern of the Christian religion is to reconcile mankind to God and to one another, members are taught the virtues of godliness, truthfulness, obedience to God and love for God and one's neighbour, honesty, hardwork and forgiveness as well as obedience to those in authority and being law-abiding citizen (Lk 20:19-26).

### **Islam**

This is the Muslim religion based on one God and revealed through Mohammed as the prophet of Allah. Islam is also Muslims and Muslim countries in the world (Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary 6<sup>th</sup> edition). This is also a foreign religion brought into the country through the Islamic Jihad.

It teaches that Allah (God) is supreme in mercy, justice, power and forgiveness. Members are expected to submit completely to the will of Allah, hence, members are expected to demonstrate

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mercy, justice and forgiveness in their relationship to others. The Quran which is where their teaching spring from urges Muslims to have peaceful co-existence between Muslims and non Muslims.

It says thus:

“It may be that Allah will bring about love between you and those of them with whom you are at enmity; and Allah is all powerful... most forgiving and merciful and... bids that ye be kind to them and act equitably towards them” (Sura 60:7-8).

From the above quotation in the Quran, it could be said that Islam believes and teaches the virtue of love, godliness, truthfulness, honesty, forgiveness and peaceful co-existence.

**African Traditional Religion**

African Traditional Religion is the term that is used to describe the religion that was founded by the fore-bears of Africa (Anyacho, 2005). In the same vein, Mbiti (1969) defined it as the religion of the people before the coming of Christianity and Islam. The religion is embedded in its cultural and traditional pattern. It is a religion that has a deep sense of respect for the Supreme Being (God) who is the creator of heaven and earth and of all the people in the world.

The religion sees man in the context of his community, hence, Africans believe in striving for solidarity and peace among the people and between the people and their gods. According to Idowu (1973), there are some features which all forms of the traditional religion share in common. These features are the beliefs in God, divinities, spirits, ancestors and practice of magic and medicine.

From the above belief system, the religion fights against social and moral evils which threaten their peace and solidarity. Thus, the religion encourages love, unity, peace, justice and brotherliness among its members and neighbours.

**Significance of Religious Education in the Primary and Post Primary Education System in Nigeria**

Anwana (2006) writing on religious education asserted that “it is a means to transmit from one generation to the next, the accumulated wisdom and knowledge of the society and their active participation in its maintenance and development”. This suggests that religious education functions to reinforce the existing socio-ethical values and prepares the children for functional living within their society. We can then admit that religious education irrespective of the religion is ethically valued, functional, developed and generational. It is therefore, the functional and ethical teachings of each religion which is developed from one generation to another to preserve the cultural identity among other cultures.

More so, the understanding of religions would be achieved if only every individual in our country is given the chance to study and learn the basic tenet of other religions outside his/her own. By doing so, it will enhance the understanding and appreciation of other religions. In this vein, Knitter (1986) noted that “the new vision of religious unity is not syncretism nor is it imperialism or is it a form of lazy tolerance. Rather, punitive pluralism is a unity in which each religion, although losing some of its individualism; (its separate ego) will intensify its personality (its self-awareness through relationship). Each religion will retain its own uniqueness but this uniqueness will develop and take on new depths by relating to other religions on mutual dependence”. As observed above, Knitter is propagating the inter-relationship of different religions in the world to enhance peaceful co-existence and understanding among members of different religions. This therefore portrays the significance of studying the different religions in the primary and post primary education level for achieving the seven point agenda.

Nkem (1989) postulated the functions of education thus:

“It determines the type of citizens we shall have in future. It produces human capital by improving machinery to economic growth and increases the income per capita of the nation. education produces the skilled manpower and equipment for industrialization essential service and for natural citizenry without which a democratic society like Nigeria cannot succeed”.

From the above, it can be deduced what education has to do with the product of society. The total output of human resources for the benefit of society; it has to do with acquiring skills for the development of manpower in the society. These also apply to religious education as it helps to build the individual ethically, morally and otherwise.

Haar (1990) asserted to the above concerning Islamic education when he observed that the skill is applied by the teacher to produce ‘adapt’ which means the discipline of the body, mind and soul of the students. He puts it this way: “the total commitment to character building based on the ideals of Islamic ethics is said to be the highest goal of Islamic education”.

Similarly, in Christian education children were expected to receive tuition in English education at a suitable age, he apprenticed in useful trades/skills. The curriculum and methods of studies were almost similar to the Quranic schools, observed Fafunwa (1974) “Role-learning predominated and the teacher taught practically everything from the one textbook, the Bible, like the Quran, he continued was the master textbook and every subject no matter how remote had to be connected like Islamic education, served to build character and responsible people in the society.

In the same direction, traditional education is life long as it aims at equipping individuals with the necessary skills and attitudes that would help them function effectively in the society. The purpose of education in the traditional society was to set forth a man with functional skills that would help him live peacefully among others and contribute his quota to the general development of himself and his community. Thus, Fafunwa (1974) observed that ‘Society used to accord priority to the inculcation of values of social responsibility, political participation job orientation, spiritual and moral uprightness in the citizen”.

Therefore, the educational indoctrination by the three main religious indicates that all the religions have potential elements in building moral uprightness in the youths, hence, if inculcated at an early stage, will enhance great understanding and inter-relationship among members of different religious background and functions as an instrument for achieving the seven point agenda for national development.

### **Benefits of Introducing Religious Education in Primary and Post Primary Education Levels**

Nigeria as a country is indisputably heterogeneous in its geopolitics. In other words, the nation has many linguistic cultures and ethnocentric pluralism as well as divergent religions of which three religions are majorly considered. Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion. According to Agi (1999) “The issue of ethnic pluralism in Nigeria is the outstanding problem facing national building and integration in Nigeria.

In the same vein, Agbor in Ozumba (1999) noted that ‘ethnic groups constitute social formations which are identifiable by their communal factors which include mainly language, culture and religion”.

Religion in Nigeria on the other hand, has gained extreme pluralism. Different ethnic backgrounds gleaned to a particular religious group which constitutes some of the religious indifferences which often occur in the society. The observations above show that ethnic groups themselves are social formations and are based on communal languages and cultural identity. Also,

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religious understanding can best be achieved from the root and should cut across all boundaries irrespective of culture and ethnic background because cultural and religious identity distinguishes one group from other people's culture and religion. It is therefore, suggested that a proper religious understanding should be granted at the primary and post primary level to enhance the inculcation of the basic tenet of beliefs and practices of the different religions in Nigeria.

Furthermore, the benefit derivable from these advocacies may include that it will give room for proper understanding of the three major religions practiced in Nigeria, it will enhance religious tolerance, it will diminish the idea of religious fanaticism and extinguish religious violence often caused by misunderstanding of other religious teachings and doctrines.

It will further enhance harmony, inter-relationship among members of different religious groups. It will stamp out tribalism and ethnicity. It will bring about unity, brotherliness, equal right as each ember of a religion will recognize that all religions are from one God irrespective of the names of their gods. It will further enhance proper inter religious dialogue as well as give the understanding of other religious world view.

Again, it will give a new meaning and understanding to religious pluralism as Knitter (1986) puts, it, "the new perception of religious pluralism is pushing our cultural consciousness toward the simple but profound insight that is "no one and only way". The force of this realization applies not only to religions but also to culture, philosophies and economic systems".

In the midst of all these beneficiary factors derivable from religious education, it can be submitted that religious education with its characteristics unity in diversity, moral value orientation, homogeneity and great strength in motivation of its culture are well deserved example that will enhance the achievement of the seven point agenda for national development. Hence, when there is no peace among people of different religious background there will be chaos and conflict in the society and therefore, no meaningful achievement of any agenda so set by the government.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, it can be summarized that proper understanding requires proper involvement and participation, hence, the need to introduce the three major religious in the primary and post primary education system in Nigeria. This will undoubtedly give insight to all the religions practiced in Nigeria to the youths who are the future leaders. It is hoped that this will help to mould the minds of the youths towards achieving inter religious dialogue and understanding which is presently difficult to achieve, these will give room for successful implementation of the seven point agenda.

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