

RELIGION AND HUMAN VALUES: A COMPULSORY COURSE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Religion flourishes in a rich diversity in a country where many social and political issues contain a religious dimension and in communities where issues are charged with religious undertone, such as human relationships, abortion, fundamentalism, human rights, enculturation, economic status, western education, ethnicism, violence crime, war and so on. There is ignorance of the role of religion in the society, as a result of ignorance misunderstanding and manipulation, religion has been blamed and condemned by many as a major cause of societal chaos and crises. Many people have erroneously concluded that without religion, the society would have been a safer and more peaceful place. University graduates as a matter of acquired knowledge in learning ought to enlighten the lay people on the need, importance and role of religion as bedrock of peaceful existence in the society. There is need for every Nigerian undergraduate to stand in the position to religiously enlighten the general public in the sphere of influence on the relevance and importance of religion in the society. The aim of this paper is to expose the urgent need and relevance of the course religion and human values as a general course of study for every Nigerian higher education.

The value of higher education in Nigeria increases when graduates have better understanding of the present diversity and influence of religion in individual, corporate, ethnical, regional and global life. Indeed it is imperative that a liberal course programme such as religion and human values speak to why religion gives meaning to the millions of people around the globe, particularly in Nigeria and the need to produce graduates with such consciousness.

The purpose of higher education according to Enem (2013), is “to produce men and women with a deep, keen and lofty sense of dedication to the service of the Commonwealth, the immediate community of which they are members and thereby, to the service of the world as a whole”. This idea sums up the purpose of the objective of

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education in Nigeria according to the national policy of education. It is an acknowledgeable fact that service is a religious virtue of a religious being. Therefore, religion plays a very important role in the life of undergraduates. Its function if neglected or undermined in any capacity will render the graduate an incomplete product.

The major task of higher education according to Denny (2000) is, “providing educated and well-informed men and women for important professions for services to the state”. This will be realized by arousing the religious consciousness of the students.

Ikeke (2010), observed that, “the study of religion and human values builds on the already acquired values and norms of students either by changing their wrong views or strengthening already acquired right moral standards and attitudes”. Added to this Mohammed (2007), is of the opinion that “the course among other things engages the students in the study of moral values, ethics and norms required for a successful excellent university education and transition into the larger society for excellent service delivery”.

Nigerian undergraduates and graduates are faced with questions, dilemmas, fears, doubts and hopes. Through the study of religion and human values, students are equipped with the right attitudes and solutions to the above issues. They are prepared for a focused living and excellence in service delivery, wherever they find themselves.

Lack of true meaning of religion and its relevance among the general public, with its attendant misconceptions and abuse permeate every society. This research paper is limited to the contemporary Nigerian society. The focus is on the need to make the course religion and human values a compulsory course for higher education in Nigeria.

The Idea of Higher Education

The idea of higher education is observed in different angles by scholars. Wikipedia (2012), stated that, “the original Latin word university as refers in general to number of persons associated into one body, a society, company, community, guild, community, corporation and so on”. This is the idea of different things coming together to become one or a body comprising of different things. Though these differences can exist on their own, they find meaning in the whole. Ugwu (2003) stated that “a university graduate in an illiterate Igbo community is held in very high esteem”. This is because; he is seen as an epitome of knowledge, someone who has been endowed with great wisdom in possibly everything. As one of the bases of Nigeria’s philosophy of education the national policy on education (2004) stated that, “there be equal educational opportunities for all citizens of the nation at all levels both inside and

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outside the formal school system". Just as Gojeh (2004) observed that, "cultural exchange is an important ingredient in the idea of university". Therefore, admission and recruitment of staff in Nigerian universities should cut across every part of the country. This will help to bring national integration, cohesion and understanding and not a threats to national unity.

Nature of Higher Education Programme

It is quite unfortunate that many undergraduate do not know the nature of higher education studies. Some conclude that, the university is a higher institution of learning to what has already been learnt. Odey (1999), specify that "higher education programme are "higher studies" in two related senses in the sense that they are greater in quantity, and quality, and in the sense they are more perfect in their intrinsic organization". The first sense is a matter of progression, that is a movement from the known to the unknown, and simple to complex, just as Udienya and Ezema (2007) put it that "the primary school pupil becomes a student in secondary school and then a student in the tertiary institution". With that, at all new level, something is added into what already was. Therefore, the individual at every level takes on the quantity and quality of a body of knowledge relevant to his or her age as his intellectual capacity can accommodate.

Secondly perfection in intrinsic organization implies a system, form and internal structure. Ugwu (2002) established that "for higher education programme to have organization, system and form, it must posses' two indispensible qualities that are scientific and philosophical". These are the two pillars of higher education programme. The two terms: "scientific and philosophical" according to Agha (2003) means "science". In the other sense of the word; Agha (2003) stated that it means, "any effort to unearth or to answer questions about the nature and cause of things" with this wider sense, all fields of study can go by the name of science.

Every programme of study in higher education is scientific in nature. National policy on education (1998) stated that, "this can be achieved through teaching and research". Teaching according to Aiyede, Okojie and Akande (2012), "is a systematic activity deliberately engaged in by somebody to facilitate the learning of the intended worthwhile knowledge, skills and values by another person and getting the necessary feedback". Research means searching and searching again, a continuous search for the answer to a problem until at least a fair answer is attained. Added to this Aiyede, Okejie and Akande (2012) posit that, "this searching cannot just be a haphazard activity but an activity logical and systematized in carrying out an investigation. It is a methodical activity which often follows a formalized procedure in an inquiry into the unknown".

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Through these processes and activities people armed with deep systematized knowledge in a specific field, equipped with a scientific and philosophical mind with authentic intellectual are produced.

Religion and Human Values Course Content

Religion and human values refers to the theistic religions, that is, all religion where God is conceived as the creator and Lord of all things, who is the Supreme Being and ultimate reality. Religion and Human values builds on the already acquired values and norms of students either by changing their wrong views or strengthening already acquired right moral standards and attitudes. Onuh (2008), added that, “Religion contributes a lot to university studies. Even in science, the contribution of religion is a spirit of confidence in the possibility of knowledge and of a knowledge that develops and imparts the quest for truth”.

The purpose of religion and human values may differ among universities due to the fact that every higher education of learning has a distinct vision. Onuh (2008) specified that, “the vision statement of every higher education is embodied in its motto”. This is the driving force of the higher education of learning. Religion and human values alongside the vision statement of higher education as embodied in their motto plays in important role in the study of the course religion and human values.

Diara (2009) highlighted on topic taken in this course include the following, “religion and religious man, religion as the bedrock of higher education, values and norms, classes of values, relationship between religion and values, spiritual crisis of the undergraduate, training in character, excellence in service, importance of religion in conflict management, and resolution and the fundamental human rights” these topics are very relevant to the formation of an all round development of the individual. On the role of religion, Sesay (2014) observed that, “religion the worship of God, is the beacon which lights up all our human knowledge, our power of knowing is a reflection of the divine word”. Added to this Asadu (2015) is of the opinion that, “Religion is the ally of reason; of its very nature. It is on the side of intellect it has a predilection for philosophy; that is for disciplined thinking”. Going further, Rinfact (1999) posits that, “Religion demands honesty, insists that the mind should not function in artificial, capricious, or vacillating fashion; but generously, perseveringly and penetratingly”.

The researcher is of the opinion that, from the above, religion does not and will not admit any irresolvable conflict between what faith teaches and what science presents as proven and certain. Through the course, students are further made to understand and appreciate the functions of religion to higher education live. This function includes

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leading to the higher education and unity of knowledge creating dynamism and solving problems of cultism in higher education of learning and so on.

Religion and human values exposes students of higher education to a very important topic-Excellence in service. Agha (2004) has it that, “in our context, excellent teaching will lead to excellent studies, excellent school management will lead to excellent studies, excellent administration will lead to excellent studies, excellent higher education environment will lead to excellent studies and excellent services will become the fulfillment of the mission of the higher education”. The students under this topic are awakening to the realization of the event of higher education programme.

Religion and human values socializes in character training. This is a very important aspect of higher education training. Unfortunately, most higher education does not pay attention to this area of development in the life of the undergraduate. Adukwu (2006), posit that, “until you change the tree, you cannot change the fruit. Most of the higher education graduates have failed to contribute adequately and favourably to the growth of the economy because of lack of training in character. Therefore the end result of any good educational programme is the production of graduates of good character and learning. Through religion and human values moral values are taught. This includes values and norms, classes of values in Africa, and relationship between religion and values. They learn the meanings of the concepts and their applications in the society. Gaiya (2014) posits that, “the importance of values and morals cannot be overemphasized” added to this, Celestine (2011) emphasized that, “great emphasis is laid on them because they help maintain harmony in the society” contrary to the views of many, Filaba and Gojeh (2008) has it that, “values and morality cannot be separated from religion”, morality is a product of religion.

Spiritual crisis is a vital area that religion and human values addresses in the lives of higher education students. In the beginning of higher education, the students are faced with a spiritual crisis. Agha (2003), described this period as “a period of multi-faceted conflicts in life of the students, a process through which their spiritual values, personal dignity and responsibility calls forth their full conviction of a true idea of God” some students are conscious of this while some are not, consequently some survives this while others do not. Through religion and human values, the students become aware and conscious of the period. They become aware of what is going on both within and outside. The course makes the students to make the best decisions.

Character and learning are connected. Therefore training in character is another area religion and Human values specialize. Odey (1999) stated that, “through religion

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and human values students are taken through reflections on the subject of character formation with the view of helping them meet up with the need for an integrated character formation and learning”. Added to this, Eze, (2014) posits that, “Most of the higher education centers failed to contribute adequately and favourably to the growth of the economy because of lack of training in character”. Ugwu (2000) observed that, “the end result of any good educational programme is the production of graduates of good character and learning”.

Important/Relevance of Religion and Human Values towards Achievement of Higher Education in Nigeria

The national policy on education (1998) stated that, “the five main national objectives as stated in the second national development plan and endorsed as necessary foundation for the national policy on education are the building of: a free and democratic society; a just and egalitarian society; a united, strong and self-reliant nation; a great and dynamic economy; a land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens”. These from the driving force behind the government’s objectives of education.

The goals of higher education according to the national policy on education (2004) are:

To contribute to national development through high level relevant manpower training; to develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and society; to develop the intellectual capacity of individual to understand and appreciate their local and external environment; to acquire both physical and intellectual skills which enable individuals to be self-relevant and useful members of the society; to promote and encourage scholarship and community service; to forge and cement national unity and to promote national and international understanding and interaction.

Religion and human values reflects these goals and also work towards excellent service delivery. Religion and human values contributes to national development through high level relevant manpower training. The course trains the students on the importance and necessity of excellent service delivery. Having acquired this attitude, wherever and whenever they are called upon to function in one particular job or the other, they execute such service with an excellent spirit and in an excellent way.

Religion and human values build on the ready acquired values of the students by changing their wrong views or strengthening already acquired right moral standards and

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abilities. This objectives work towards developing and inculcating proper values in the students for the survival of individual and society. Inculcating and strengthening right moral values and standards in the students could be said to be the course lay much emphasis on the proper values orientation for the right values and norms to be given to the students.

Religion and human values is relevant in the acquisition of both physical and intellectual skills which enable individuals to be self –reliant and useful member of the society. It trains students on the necessity and honour of excellent service delivery. They acquired basic skills, critical inquiry, interpretation and competent oral and written expression that are essential. These skills equip the students to contribute as useful member of the society.

Religion and human values help to inculcate national unity, promote national and international understanding and interaction. It has been able to do this through religion as the bedrock of the society towards establishing peace and harmony in a heterogeneous society like Nigeria and the world in general.

Conclusion

The relevance of religion and human values towards the achievement of the objectives of higher education cannot be overemphasized. What should be uppermost in the minds of Nigerians is the survival of Nigerian as one indivisible entity in peace and harmony. Through its outline and contents, this course, learning objectives and outcomes are very significant and in line with the goals the government wishes to achieve through the instrumentality of higher education. Religion and human values adds that which is lacking in higher education. It is what makes the graduate complete. It is to establish a need, necessity based on the existing objectives of higher education as specified in the national policy on education. It is to further establish that for the objectives of higher education especially for national development, integration and cohesion to be achieved, religion and human values ought to be made a compulsory course for every undergraduate all Nigerian higher education.

Recommendation

Nigerian has reached a stage where there should be less talk about transformation of higher education but more being a Nigerian.

Curriculum developers and education bodies and agencies should work towards the inclusion of religion and human values as a general study course of programme.

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Having recognized this course to be very valuable especially in the achievement of the goals of higher education in the country, authority in policy making are called upon to see its necessity in the all round development of the students.

There is need to evolve a systematic programme designed for character formation and enhancement in the nation's education system.

Orientation of the members of higher education both academic and non academic staff is necessary.

An orientation seminar, workshop and symposia programme on religion and human values programme should be incorporated in the academic calendar annually. This is very important because the trainer needs to be trained.

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