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Effective Teaching of Christian Religious Knowledge at the Senior Secondary School Level for Curbing Insurgency in Nigeria: Some Impediments

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Abstract

The paper starts by stressing the importance of CRK and its conceptualization. Peculiarities of CRK are presented with a view to realizing how they affect teaching of the subject. The organization of Senior Secondary School Curriculum of CRK is presented in order to bring to the fore its relevance to the problem of insurgency in Nigeria. An overview of insurgency is discussed as well as how to curb it via CRK. This is presented in a table showing the relationship between content areas of CRK and topics that relate to insurgency. Finally, some impediments to the teaching of CRK as a means of curbing insurgency in Nigeria are reviewed.

Key words; Christian Religious Knowledge; Insurgency; Curbing of insurgency.

For effective teaching to take place adequate considerations must be given to the teacher's skill, the learners' preparedness to learn, the teaching / learning environment, and the curriculum in addition to such external variables as government education policies, supervision/ monitoring exercise. These factors combine to give rise to effective teaching of any subject at whatever level of education.

Effectiveness of Christian Religious Knowledge (CRK) teaching becomes very important when one considers the indispensable position of the discipline in human socio-cultural, economic, spiritual and moral development. This feat is acknowledged by Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) which placed Religious Studies as one of the core subjects in Group A at the Senior Secondary level. This is probably because Religion goes a long way to determining individual behaviour and aspiration, which in turn determines not only developmental strides of the society but also its internal harmony.

Christian perspective to Religious Studies does not deviate from the general functional roles of religion in the society, such as its efficacy in transcending personal and divisive forces in human society. Through shared symbols, values, norms and doctrines, religion, including Christian religion, provides a forum for people to unite to form integrated groups based on seemingly unfathomable mysteries of human existence.

Specifically, CRK teaching is believed to be capable of instilling in the Nigerian youth the required and desired knowledge, values, behaviours, attitudes and skills that would ensure their effective adaptation in an ever-changing multi-faith and multiethnic society, Nigeria, (Eluu, 2011). Obilom in Eluu (2011) equally holds that CRK curriculum is designed to teach not only the content of the holy book but also the moral lessons desirable therefrom.

It is thus extremely necessary that any impediment to the effective teaching of this all-important subject should be identified and thoroughly studied with a view to surmounting them. This is the thrust of this paper.

Concept of CRK

The term religion in its pristine form was derived from Latin words, 'Relegere' (which means to read again, to observe), 'Religare' (which means to bind again) and 'Religio' (which means relationship) (Asalu, 2005). Explaining further, Omoregbe in Asalu (2005:6) asserts that, "religion is essentially a relationship; a link established between two persons, namely, a human person (the religious man) and a divine person (the worshiped deity) who is believed to exist". This forms the basis for understanding religion in general.

More specifically, CRK according to Omali (2001) is a subject concerned with the up-bringing, instructing and informing students on Christian beliefs and practices as found in the Holy Bible and Christian traditions. Eluu (2011) adds that the curriculum of CRK is made up of the experiences which are derivable or obtainable from Biblical personalities, Biblical virtues and great church leaders who had devoted their lives to the work and ministry of the church and humanity. Christian Religious knowledge (CRK) teaching therefore seeks to inculcate in individuals how to become useful to themselves, their community, the nation and the entire human race devoid of insurgency, with Jesus Christ as the prime model.

Peculiarities of CRK

Religious studies in general emphasizes the affective or emotional aspect of man and often de-emphasizes logical thoughts and scientific proofs, hence the usual injunction that religious matters should be accepted by faith. Christian Religion is derived mainly from the Christian Bible whose content unfortunately has been subjected to variety and versions of interpretations. This has given rise to emergence of numerous Christian sects, movements and denominations with each guarding its philosophy and followership jealously. This, no doubt, has found its way into the pedagogy of Christian religion. Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004:10) in avowing that “opportunity shall continue to be made for religious instruction” quickly adds the caveat that, “no child will be forced to accept any religious instruction which is contrary to the wishes of his or her parents”

Another peculiar nature of religion is that it possesses the capability to integrate and disintegrate the society at the same time. Religion contributes to order in society by creating conditions for social well-being, self-discipline, social cohesion and continuity of culture and traditions, at the same time, religion is a source of conflict between groups. Presenting this ambivalent nature of Religion, Ezeh and Okonkwo (2011:2) hold that,

although Christian evangelization exhibited certain negative tendencies, it is still right to say that it accelerated the pace of development in Africa in many ways. This is true especially from the perspective of Christian education and health services it provided to the people. Even certain negative policies of the early missionaries gave impetus to growth and development.

DeFleur, D’Antonio and Nelson, in Eluu (2013:207) add that, “there are still tensions between believers and non-believers, between Protestants and Catholics, among some branches of Protestantism, within some protestant denominations, and within the Catholic Church, and Christians clash with Muslims”. This dysfunctional role of religion has adversely affected its teaching and learning since the lofty ideals as

propounded in the curricular content often differ remarkably from the actions and utterances of the practitioners in the real-life situation.

Teaching of CRK at Senior Secondary School Level

Teaching of CRK at Senior Secondary School level is aimed at achieving the objectives of the discipline at that level which include, preparation for useful living within the society, and, preparation for higher education. (FRN, 2004). The National Curriculum of Bible Knowledge (or CRK) for senior Secondary Schools (1985) listed the objectives to guide the teaching of the subject as follows:

- i. To provide more opportunities for the Nigerian youths to learn more about God and thereby develop their faith in Him;
- ii. To enable the youth to accept Christ as savior;
- iii. To enable the youth to recognize Jesus as the founder and sustainer of the Christian church;
- iv. To enable the youth to accept the guidance of the Holy Spirit in their daily activities;
- v. To help the youth to understand the basic teachings of Christ and to apply these to their daily lives and work, and
- vi. To develop in the youth Christian attitudes and values such as humility, respect, love, kindness, justice and fair play, spirit of forgiveness, obedience, devotion to duty, orderly behavior and selfless service to God and humanity.

The Senior Secondary School Christian Religious knowledge curriculum further emphasizes the relationship between Religion and morality, between God and Man, and presents God as the creator of all mankind, the sustainer of human lives and the sources of the Christian belief, joy and hope. The content is organized in years of study, while the learning experiences are organized in themes. The curriculum is also organized in specific format of six vertical columns, namely, unit, objectives, content, teaching methods and activities, suggested teaching aids and evaluation. This arrangement is aimed at making teaching of CRK effective for curbing insurgency in Nigeria.

Different strategies for classroom pedagogy of CRK consist of a combination of certain specific operations such as carefully developed lecture methods, questioning technique, project method, discussion method, inquiry method, field trips and assignment method. CRK, as a result of its peculiar nature, goes beyond affective domain to touch on man's spiritual realm, eclectic approach is thus recommended for its pedagogy, that is, variety of methods should be employed in a given lesson period, (Ekpunobi, in Eluu 2011).

Inquiry method is another teaching that is very important in CRK. NTI (2000) notes that this method overrides the indoctrinatory method of teaching CRK. Planned and organized visits to places of worship, as are undertaken in field trip method are also indispensable in CRK teaching.

Insurgency in Nigeria

Insurgency, according to Alemika (2013;239) refers to “the use of violence by an organized group as a means of changing existing political and economic structures and social relations in society”, it is a political struggle or armed revolt aimed at taking over power from an existing government or for change of the political order in society. Barnaby (2007) adds that insurgents are people who take part in an armed uprising or a revolt against an established regime.

Insurgency is not a new phenomenon in Nigeria. It could be traced to Tiv land insurgency of 1960 and electoral and political violence in Western Region in 1964 and 1965. Presently, the country is experiencing Boko Haram violence in Borno, Bauchi, Yobe, Adamawa, Kano, Kaduna states and other parts of the country. The insurgents are said to be averse to Western education and vow to force other Nigerians to buy their views. This has resulted in immeasurable loss of lives and property in the affected areas.

Curbing Insurgency via CRK

CRK as a discipline can be used to curb insurgency since one of its major objectives is to provide more opportunities for the Nigerian youths to learn more about God and thereby develop faith in Him. The content areas of CRK have direct relationship with some attributes that are at variance with insurgency, this is illustrated below

	Content areas of CRK	Topics for pedagogy in relation to insurgency
1	Humility	Accepting others views, Empathy.
2	Civic responsibility	Respect for public utility(avoiding destruction of property)
3	Dignity of labour	Self employment, contentment.
4	The family	Sanctify of lives(avoiding destruction of lives)
5	Impartiality	Justice and fair play, good governance.
6	Christian living in the community	Honour, dignity, truthfulness.
7	Leadership	Leadership by example, good governance.
8	Parental responsibility	Childhood care, showing love.
9	Disobedience and consequences	Avoiding crimes, punishment for criminal behaviours.
10	Greed and its effects	Causes of insurgency, consequences of insurgency.
11	Concern for one’s nation	Patriotism, avoiding insurgency.
12	True religion and social justice	Oneness of religion, mutual co-existence

The content areas and the topics as outlined above are relevant to the issue of insurgency in Nigeria.

Their effectiveness however, are hampered by some impediments which are presented below.

Impediments to Effective Teaching of CRK for Curbing Insurgency in Nigeria

Despite the laudable objectives of CRK and its role in effecting positive changes in the learners and the society as well as in curbing insurgency, its impact has been impaired by such factors as:

i. **Misconception of the Discipline**

In spite of the fact that religion as a course of study predates most of the current curricular offerings since its origin is associated with the origin of man, it could pass for the most misunderstood discipline. CRK extends beyond the Christian bible and includes Christian writings philosophy and practices both in the ancient and modern times. Worse still, some aspects of the traditional religion form its constituent part. Furthermore the discipline dwells on both mundane and spiritual aspects of man with their attendant superstitious beliefs and fanaticism, thus complicating the conceptualization problem further.

The weirdness of content of the discipline as well as its contents' ever-changing interpretations combine to cause misconception of CRK which in turn makes its teaching a herculean task.

ii. **Who Should Teach CRK?**

Another impediment to effective teaching of CRK is the unsettled question of who is best qualified to teach it. Ordained priests of different denominations who are versed in religious rituals and other sacerdotal functions but bereft of formal training in pedagogy engage in the teaching of CRK in public and private schools. Worse still, theologians and philosophers equally claim to be best qualified to teach the subject. Presently, controversy persists as to the suitability of a specialist in CRK with no training in Education to teach the subject at secondary school level. One cannot over-emphasize that knowledge of Philosophy of Education, teaching methodology, and proper use of instructional materials are indispensable in the teaching of CRK.

iii. **Misuse/Misapplication of Religious Teaching**

Religion, probably due to plethora of its interpretations and confusing conceptualization of the tenets of its teachings, is prone to misuse by the adherents. Religious fanaticism and bigotry and their attendant vandalism and destruction of human lives and property resulting from terrorism or insurgency have combined to relegate positive value of Religion to the background. Asalu (2005: 135) thus laments that "religious bigotry (intolerance of other faith) has

remained a canker worm eating deep into the fabrics of the life of our nation, Nigeria.”

IV. Onslaught of Science and Technology

Science is an enterprise that focuses on inquiry about natural phenomena, while technology is the designing of things and processes to achieve practical purposes, (NCSS, 2000). Both science and technology have had a profound effect in shaping human experience and expectations as well as the world around us. Mason, Berson, Diem, Hicks and Dralle in NCSS (2006: 330) note that “science and technology have a complex interrelationship with society. While technology is the impetus to advancements in human development, technologies also contribute to the perpetuation of existing imbalances and inequities in power and diffusion of knowledge”.

The impact of science and technology on communication, information processing, medicine and healthcare has helped to demystify certain myths in Religious studies. This creates doubts and confusion in the minds of learners thereby making the task of achieving the objectives of the discipline more onerous.

Conclusion

The importance of CRK is captured in the statement of the goals of both primary and secondary education in Nigeria. For the primary education, one of the goals is to “mould the character and develop sound attitude and morals in the child”, (FRN, 2004; 14) and at the Secondary education level, the broad goals include “to prepare the individual for useful living within the society”, (FRN, 2004: 18). These goals if pursued would curb insurgency in Nigeria.

There is the need to ensure effective teaching of CRK in our institutions of learning especially at the secondary school level for, by developing in the youth Christian attitudes and values such as humility, respect, love, kindness, justice and fair play, recourse to violence and terrorism would be reduced remarkably. Peculiarities of CRK must be taken into account not only in the preparation of teachers for the discipline but also in its application to real life situation to achieve a peaceful society.

Recommendations

Based on the foregoing discourse, the following recommendations are made:

1. All efforts should be made by the government at all levels and religious bodies to discourage religious fanaticism and bigotry.
2. Christian Religious Knowledge should be taught by only the qualified personnel, it should not be viewed as ‘a field for all’ discipline.

3. Content areas of Christian Religious Knowledge need to be reviewed regularly to take care of the emergent needs and problems of the society.
4. Efforts should be made by Christian Religious Knowledge specialists to deemphasize indoctrination and subjectivity in the teaching of the subject.

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