

THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN FOSTERING SUSTAINABLE EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Well over a hundred years ago, the missionaries brought western education to where we know today as Nigeria. They inculcated in their students moral education. Many of the students grew to become not just clergies but teachers in schools. These teachers produced by the missionaries, as well as their students became nation builders. In recent times, the church has proven to be formidable factor in providing qualitative and sustainable education in Nigeria. Christian churches have played a pivotal role in the provision of primary, secondary and higher education in Nigeria. However, the participation of the church in education appears to be increasing but more efforts are required in this regard. This study is set out therefore, towards establishing the role of churches in the provision of sustainable education in Nigeria, that is, as an alternative source to supplement the efforts of the government, parents and local communities. The main objective of this paper is to establish a relation between the church and sustainable education in Nigeria. This will be done through qualitative observation of the various roles the church has played and still playing at fostering sustainable education.

Keywords: Education, Nigeria, Church, Missionaries, Sustainable.

Introduction

The contributions of Church in fostering qualitative and sustainable education in Nigeria have been described by different scholars on a different platform, with different perspectives, relying on different sources. But, this paper will focus on the impact of the church on education in Nigeria, anchored on the principle of saving souls by reconciling man with his Creator through preaching and practicing the good news. Most importantly, the church over time has proven that it has an additional mandate in providing qualitative education. The church has done this through the establishment of private schools including institutions of higher learning.

However, it is vital to note the efforts of Henry the Navigator and the Portuguese Roman Catholic priests who, in the 15th century, accompanied traders and officials to the West African coast, including Benin and Warri in Nigeria. The priests, with the support of the Oba of Benin's palace, built several churches to serve the Portuguese community and a small number of African converts. It is important to note that these missionaries also built schools no matter what the argument is that it served their interest in training interpreters which they needed desperately, the fact undoubtedly is that those schools also served the educational needs of Nigerians to some extent. Till date, these missionary schools and many modern ones have continued to prove they have a peculiar mandate in providing qualitative education for Nigerians. In Northern Nigeria, the Mission was resisted in planting Mission schools, while it was easily accepted in Southern Nigeria; where people saw the mission school as 'messiah' towards an end to their mass illiteracy. Apparently, poverty and illiteracy are highly correlated or associated, this may explain the high level of poverty in the North, when compared to the South as the people reject western education..

Before launching into the deep, it is imperative to attempt conceptualizing the following variables: education and church:

Education

In Nigeria and probably many other parts of the world, when people talk about education, especially in relation to western education, they almost invariably refer to the learning which takes place in school resulting in the acquisition of knowledge and skills, passing examinations and obtaining certificates. They tend to equate the quality of education with the level of performance and achievement of learners. Education is, however, much more than the acquisition of knowledge, skills and certificates.

The UNESCO International Standard Classification of Education defines education as comprising organized and sustained (or durable) communication designed to bring about learning.

Unfortunately, educational philosophers and educational professionals disagree among on a common definition of education. They tend to define education from different perspectives although in the end analysis, they end up saying the same thing from their differently perspective. It is not the intention in this paper to undertake a philosophical definition of education as stated by secular

educationists and philosophers of education. Since this paper is concerned with the role the church play towards fostering sustainable education. Therefore, a simple clarification of the concept will suffice.

In the Encyclical Letter of 1929, probably the most authoritative document on Catholic education; Pope Pius (XI) defined education as the sacred task of forming the character of the child and aiding him/her to attain the purpose of existence. It is stated in CAN.795 of the Code of Canon Law that “education must pay respect to the development of the whole person so that all may attain their eternal destiny and at the same time promote the common good of society. Children and young persons are therefore to be cared for in such a way that their physical, moral and intellectual talents may be developed in a pleasant manner so that they may attain a greater sense of responsibility and a right use of freedom and be formed to take an active part in social life.” These two definitions have said more or less the same thing, except that the definition in the Canon Law is more elaborate (Encyclical 1929).

According to Francis Cardinal Arinze (1965) education has to do with “the development of the whole man; soul, body, intellect, will, emotion, and physical well-being.” The Catholic Bishops of Nigeria in 1972 described education as consisting “not only in the aggregate of all experiences that enlighten the mind, increase knowledge and develop abilities, it includes moral and religious education which help to develop attitudes and strengthen the will.”

Education according to Afe (1995) is a tool used for the integration of individual into the society so that he can achieve self-realisation, develop national consciousness, promote unity and strive for social, economic, political, scientific, cultural and technological progress. Education involves the process of teaching and learning and for it to be qualitative and sustainable, basic infrastructures must be provided and put in place. It is in view of this that the role of the church in this regard cannot be overlooked.

The Church

It will be pertinent to note that the concept “church” and “Christianity” will be used interchangeably by the researcher in this study in view of the fact that without Christianity there would not have been the church. “The church” in this research is defined in two perspectives, one as an institution and two as an organism. The Church as an institution has been described by Van Reken as a

“formal organization that sets out to accomplish a specific purpose”. According to him, it is an agent which can do things; and can say things because it has its own voice. The Church as an institution has its own purposes and plans, its own structure and officers, and its own mission. It has its own proper sphere. In many ways it parallels other institutions, like governments or schools.(Van Reken 1999:198).

It is from this perspective that Iwe (1979) understands the term ‘Church’ to mean an organised people of God, a spiritual and moral force to be reckoned with. The Church as an organism refers to “the church as the body of believers, the communion of believers” corroborating this twofold view of the church; Jim Harris’ has this to say: “By church I mean both the individual believer and the institutional entity” (Harris <http://thebigpicture.homestead.com/ChurchinPolitics.html>).

According to Kanuku (2007), a church is a local assembly of believers as well as the redeemed of all ages who follow Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord; it is a community of Christians who believe in and follow Christ without reference to locality or limits. People see the church as a social organization with good moral values and are able to extend a helping hand to the needy. It is a social organisation whose membership is voluntary.

Purpose of Education

This phrase although rhetorical is pertinent to this research because when the purpose of a thing is not known, abuse is inevitable. Thomas Aquinas stated that “the purpose of education is to aid man to attain the purpose of existence and the purpose of man’s existence God. In the Second Vatican Council declaration, it was stated that “true education is directed towards the formation of the human person in view of his final end and the good of the society to which he will, as an adult, have a share.” The document further stated that “the purpose of education is to help children and young people to develop harmoniously their physical, moral and intellectual qualities. They should be trained to acquire gradually a more perfect sense of responsibility in the proper development of their own lives by constant effort in the pursuit of liberty, overcoming obstacles with unwavering courage and perseverance.” The purpose of education is to aid man to attain the purpose of existence and the purpose of man’s existence with God. Pope Pius (X1) affirmed this purpose of education when he stated that “there is no true education which is not totally directed to the last end since the whole

purpose of education is to shape man in this mortal life that he will be able to reach the last end for which his Creator has destined him.”

Education no doubt is a means of perfecting the individual for life, perfecting society and leading the individual to God. Therefore, religion should be the core and the center of the education of the child. In other words, since the Church is the custodian of theological truths and the moral values which follow from them and which is the purpose of education to inculcate in man, it follows that the teaching of the Church should constitute the basis of any education of the child. Core to the purpose of education is the acquisition of skills necessary for man to effectively exploit and explore his environment.

Ecclesiastical Perception of Education in Nigeria

The National Policy on Education(FRN, 2004), talks among other things, about the integration of the individual into a sound and effective citizen and equal educational opportunities for all citizens of the nation at all levels of the nation’s education system.

The purpose of religion in education is not just to make converts. Rather, it is intended to make good citizens of learners. Religious education will make learners to grow up to behave in accordance with the norms of society. Pope Pius X11 pointed out in 1946 that if children were deprived of knowledge of their faith, they would be hindered in their moral development and would be led astray in their spiritual development (Obemeata 1995).

It has been pointed out by Obemeata (1995) that religion is a means of implanting its recipients in the society of which they are members and it provides them with standards by which they can become good citizens. If religion is removed from the school curriculum or if it is badly taught, children will be ignorant of those standards which will make them good citizens. They will, therefore, be deprived of firm roots in their society and they will behave without regard to any norms. It is, therefore, important that religion should form the basis of Catholic education.

To the church, the National Policy on Education seems not satisfying in view of the desire that religion should be core in education. In its philosophy and purpose of education, the National Policy on Education is silent on the place of God in education. The emphasis is more on secular education. To the Church, the current Policy on Education is inadequate. That to some extent informs the desire

by many churches to establish their own schools. For instance, the Catholic Church maintains that there should be no separation between secular subjects and religious education and that if the two are separated the education which will be received will be incomplete because for the total development of the individual and to lead man to God, education should be a combination of both the secular and religious aspects of education. (Obemeata, 1995)

Sequel to this inadequacy observed by the church view of the National Policy on Education to provide a satisfactory Christian education, therefore, the Education Committee of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria produced The Catholic Church Policy on Education in Nigeria which combines the secular aspect of education as emphasized in the National Policy on Education and the philosophy of education of the Catholic Church (Obemeata, 1995). It is not intended to supplant but to complement the National Policy on Education which has been found to be inadequate for the provision of education. Besides, the church has also discovered the cost intensive nature of private schools which is usually beyond the reach of many parents and intends to compliment government efforts at providing not just qualitative education but also to subsidising the fees hence making education more affordable to many.

The Role of the Church in Fostering Sustainable Education

Given the above background on the purpose of education, it has become important to establish the role of Christian churches in the provision and fostering of sustainable education in Nigeria as a supplement to the efforts of government, parents and local communities. The nation Nigeria is home to many churches that include Anglican Church, Catholic Church, Pentecostal and spiritual churches whose contribution to education are worth studying.

In order to perform her role effectively in Nigeria educational sector, the Church requires the establishment of schools. CAN. 796(1) states: "Among the means of advancing education, Christ's faithful are to consider schools as of great importance since they are the principal means of helping parents to fulfill their role in education." The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education has defined school as "a place for integral formation by means of a systematic assimilation of culture." It further states that the school should not be merely a place where values which are being actively lived are presented but also be a community whose values are being transmitted through the interpersonal and sincere

relationship of its members and through individual and cooperative adherence to the outlook on life that permeates the school.

Up to 1970, many of the schools in various places in the Nigeria, especially in Southern Nigeria were either established or managed by the Mission. Like in other parts of the world, it has always been a thing of pride to associate with a Mission owned or run school. Without the Church, it would not have been possible for Nigeria to have made the stupendous progress it has recorded in education. The Mission impacted on the Nigerian indigenous system of education. They were after formal training of the mind, for this reason they encouraged boarding accommodation so as to supervise, control and direct the learner along proper lines (Nnamdi 2002).

It is also important to unequivocally state that over time successive governments and administrations have found out that they cannot do the job of providing education alone hence the policy of handing over of missionary schools to original owners as well as liberalizing the licence for the establishment of private universities. Since then, Nigeria has witnessed tremendous increase in the establishment of private institutions of higher learning such as Redeemer University, Madonna University, Covenant, Veritas, Caritas, Gregory and Evangel Universities to mention a few. In spite of institutions of higher learning, a number of nursery, primary and secondary schools have been set up to cushion the educational need of the Nigerian teeming population. Hardly is there any church in Nigeria without a school or more.

Each of these churches has made different contributions towards fostering sustainable education in Nigeriathrough their schools. The role of the church in early childhood education includes, but not restricted to employing teachers and support staff. The overall supervision of administration composed of a committee of church members under a pastor which managed the school accounts; provided physical facilities including buildings, furniture and repairs; promoted spiritual well-being of the teachers and pupils; and sponsored children who were disadvantaged through payment of fees, buying uniforms and provision of meals.

Specifically, the Living Faith Church went into the establishment of schools early, unlike some other Churches that ventured into education. The Living Faith Church has to its credit a conglomerate of Nursery, Primary, Secondary and Universities. The nursery and primary schools are under the name Kingdom

Heritage while the Secondary section is named Faith Academy. These schools are found in all the nooks and crannies of Nigeria. The church's first University was named Covenant University and was established in Ota in 2002. The second University was named Landmark and was established in Omu-Aran, the native town of Pastor David Oyedepo in 2010. The Universities have also complemented the efforts of Federal and State Governments in providing admission to many applicants who are seeking admission to the Universities in Nigeria. We also believe that the missionary orientation of the schools would minimize cultism and moral decadence in the Nigerian Universities. Apart from providing jobs for teeming Nigerian populace, scholarships are usually provided by Pastor Oyedepo for indigent students, most especially in the Covenant and Landmark universities. He was once quoted saying that "All school age children, not in school, due to inability of parents, will be fully taken care of by the church" (Opoola, 2010).

Another Christian church that has recorded some landmark achievement in the area of education in Nigeria is the Assemblies of God Nigeria. There is hardly any of her branch without an Evangel school. Most of their secondary schools are among the best in the country with boarding houses. This denomination has also succeeded in establishing a University with modern facilities.

Living World Academy is a group of schools owned by Living World Church. There is no doubt about the impact this church owned school is making in the educational sector in Nigeria. Apart from providing employment for Nigerians, the church schools have a stable and standard academic calendar and programmes that cannot be compared to government owned schools. This church among other churches is making tremendous and qualitative impacts towards sustainable education in Nigeria.

Odumuyiwa (2006) observed in his study that the tuition fees being paid in the Christian Universities are too exorbitant and beyond the reach of the common man in the society. He opines "A situation in which churches established private universities, charge exorbitant fees should be replaced with technical colleges that can be maintained within the resources of the church." Education anywhere in the world is costly especially private university education. It is the nature of the government owned institutions of higher learning that have necessitated the establishment of private universities at least to provide quality and stable education for the teeming population - most of whom are travelling outside the

frontiers of this nation even to neighbouring African countries in search for quality education.

A voyage into the history of Nigeria confirms the axiom that Christianity the mother of the church and education are intertwined. Olawoyin (Ajayi, 1965), observes that before, during and after colonisation, Christianity has been involved in the making of a new elite through education in the area now known as Nigeria. Before private universities are allowed in Nigeria in 1999, Christian Missions and churches had been involved in the establishment of primary, secondary (including modern and high or grammar), teacher training, vocational and theological schools. It is also, a well-known fact that the quality of education produced by these schools when the missions and churches were running them was high, academically and morally. The graduates of the schools were disciplined, hardworking and brilliant. The high quality that the missions and churches gave education then is what is spurring the state governments to return the schools to the churches and even allowing private universities. The Christian churches had been in the vanguard of establishing these private higher institutions in Nigeria.

The involvement of the Church in education as seen in Nigeria, both at lower and higher levels, is a reflection of what had been going on in Christian history whenever and wherever Christianity becomes entrenched. In fact, the modern university system is Christian in origin. For example, Bologna, Paris, Oxford and Cambridge, were originally Christian Catechetical schools. Similarly, the best universities in the world today, which are mainly in the United States such as Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Columbia and Brown, were Christian in origin. Without doubt, the ethos contributed by Christianity and the European Enlightenment contributed to making these universities the best (Olawoyin, 2005).

The inseparable union of Church and education can only be explained by one underlying philosophy of Christianity that Jesus is the logos, the organising and governing principle of the world. The same truth is affirmed in Colossians 2: 3 when the author writes that, all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ.

It is significant to note that the Mission needs not just a school for the purpose of carrying out her obligations to children and the wishes of their parents, the Mission requires schools in order to inculcate basic moral principles as well as

Catholic teachings on children as was advocated by Pope Benedict (XVI). Pope Benedict (XVI) in an address in Washington DC (April 2008) to heads of colleges stated that colleges must be unwavering in their commitment to Catholic teaching in everything they do, from the classroom to the dormitory and that academic freedom in a Catholic college must be informed and tempered by the Catholic faith and the teachings of the Church.

Pope Benedict (XVI) stated further that students must receive authentic Catholic teachings. Colleges, he stated, have the duty to ensure that students receive instruction in Catholic doctrine and practice. This requires that public witness to the way of Christ, as found in the Gospel and upheld by the Church, shapes all aspect of an institution's life, both inside and outside the classroom. Divergence from this vision, he concluded, weakens Catholic identity.

The Church feels responsible to contribute concretely towards the progress of the society within which it finds herself; for example the church in the face of incessant strikes by government owned institution, is capable of providing a stable, qualitative and accessible education in order to discourage Nigerians traveling abroad seeking for quality education. It is not enough to establish schools that ordinary church members cannot afford to send their wards; hence making the purpose for which the schools were established elusive.

Conclusion

This paper has succeeded in conceptualizing the role of the church on Education in Nigeria especially in fostering sustainable education. The church has contributed so much to the educational and social development of Nigeria both in terms of human development and physical transformation. It is some of such education-oriented developmental facilities that one of the militant Islamist sects in the country popularly known as Boko Haram is currently poised to destroying. Despite the contributions of the Church to fostering sustainable education in Nigeria which remains unparalleled. But a lot more is needed to be done.

The implication of the findings in this research to the church is that as a kingdom of priests, the Church is to demonstrate to the Nigerian society what God expects; the Church is to be exemplary. In other words, Christians are to be the light of the world; they are to be the salt of the earth (Matthew 5: 13, 14). The task now is to spell this out in practical even if short terms in relation to the university

education in Nigeria. This involves both the Church as an institution and the individual as a Christian.

Having x-rayed the contributions of the Church as an organisation towards fostering sustainable education, through their involvement in establishing schools in Nigeria which is a welcome development, it is hoped that the Christian ethos that had been brought to bear at lower level schools will similarly be brought to bear on the Christian universities. Universities are not primary and secondary schools neither are they theological seminaries. Hence, it is important for the administrators of the Christian schools to judiciously follow Nigerian University Commission's standard. By so doing they will be contributing to sustainable education in Nigeria. By now, the administrators of church schools must have known that it is costly to run private institutions especially those of higher learning. They must not because of this admit candidates more than the capacity of facilities available; this will automatically defeat the purpose for which those schools were established. Similarly, the qualities of teachers employed have to be carefully watched. The qualification of teachers expected to teach must not just be a born-again Christian with a higher degree. We must encourage excellence in producing quality art, outstanding literature, great music, serious scholarship and first-rate research, while developing Christian scholars and students who can be salt and light in the academy.

The sorry state of most public schools and Nigerian universities are challenging that it has attracted the attention of the church. This study has given a detailed picture of what the church has done and can do in fostering sustainable education in Nigeria. However, it has also been demonstrated that the Church has contributions to make in reforming the system. The church as an organisation is already contributing by establishing schools and universities as earlier noted. But, the administrators of Christian university should be careful of the rot that had pervaded government schools-moral, intellectual and spiritual. The most important of this is that, they should always be conscious that by their living, their teachings and their writings because they are deciding the future of the Nigerian society.

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