

**THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN THE  
SANITIZATION OF NIGERIAN SOCIETY.  
THE CHALLENGE OF THE 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY**

**BY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Sanity does not come automatically, it is imparted and this is usually done through teachings in various ways. Religious education has been recognized as one of the surest way through which a desired society is realized. Unfortunately, the danger of paying too much attention to the acquisition of knowledge at the expense of character training is facing Nigerian schools today. Studying to pass prescribed examinations has eroded quality attention needed for character training and this to some extent, is responsible for the rottenness witnessed in Nigerian society today. This paper recognizes the fact that Nigeria is being engulfed by several social His, which can be crushed under carpet through intensive teaching of religious education. The paper gave a brief summary of the history of religious education in Nigeria, and the provision of the National policy on Education on religious education. The paper also examined some factors that are responsible for student lukewarm attitudes towards religious education at the Senior Secondary level of education in Kwara State and the possible effects of these attitudes on the general tone of our schools and on Nigeria as a whole. The paper concluded by looking into what can be done to ensure effective teaching of study or religious education in order to allow for a sanitized and befitting nation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Religion is as old as man on earth. As man found himself on earth he was faced with diverse questions as he reflected on his daily bewildering experiences, which led him to the issue of a supreme being who is in control of man and the entire universe. Metaphysically different societies believe in the existence of the supreme God the creator and the sustainer of man. The Atheist however, frowned against this notion because they do not believe in the existence of any power outside what can be seen and perceived by man.

But the fact remains that most Nigerians professes a strong belief in God and would want to go to any length in ensuring that His injunctions which are life transforming are firmly embraced by all the sundry.

It is the transforming nature of religion, the harmony and the will for success embedded in it, and its worth-whileness in all ramifications that led to the inclusion of religious education in Nigerian school curricula. The need to impart and solidify religious education in the citizens of Nigeria has always been stressed. Banjo (1980) Akanbi (1991) Akande (1999), etc. Since education (religious education inclusive) has been recognized as the instrument par excellence for national development there can be no meaningful development, except what seems to be the most crucial means of effecting the development is given favourable consideration. Man will never be truly human outside religious education because the rawness in man can best be taken care of when the spiritual aspect of him is given prominent attention. Man will continue to be irrational and erratic in all forms when devoid of the basic education necessary to sanitize him and the society where he lives.

Since Religious education is the main pointer to the creator who demands and-gives the power for living a morally acceptable life, it follows that as a subject taught in our schools, if the government is ready to intensify its teaching, Nigeria will become a better place for us all. Undoubtedly, our society, today, in all walks of life, exhibits unhealthy attitudes. There is lack of commitment to a viable moral integrity. This is being reflected in various ways such as stealing, robbery, cultism, fraud, forgery, examination malpractices, materialism, embezzlement, lying, cheating, dishonesty etc.

To revamp the situation, there will be the need to instill the fear of God more into the younger generations who are recognized as leaders of tomorrow. This can best be done through an effective teaching of religious education in Nigerian schools.

### **BRIEF HISTORY OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN NIGERIA**

With the introduction of Islam to Nigeria in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>Lh</sup> centuries, the adherents of the religion were taught how to read the Quran through the teaching of simple Arabic language. With time, in Kano, Kastina, ana some other prominent hausa states Quranic schools namely the Makaranta Allo 'Tablet School' and makaranta Ilmi-higher schools, were founded where young ones were taught everything they needed to know about Islamic religion. Today, apart from the home, Islamic studies is being taught in several Nigerian primary and secondary schools (Fafunwa, 1974).

With the coming of the Christian missionaries in 1842, western education was introduced first to people living along Nigerian coast. It has to be noted however, that it was not the primary motive of the Christian missionaries to make Nigerian educated. The motive was to preach the gospel message to the people. They embarked

on western education as they saw the need for the production of interpreters, cooks and the necessity to produce converts who would be able to read and teach the bible.

Religious education was therefore given prominent attention in the early missionary schools. Other subjects which the missionaries and later the colonial government felt were necessary for the production of literate and law abiding Nigerians and such that would equip men women that were needed to facilitate the spiritual mandate of the missionaries as well as the economic exploitation of the colonial government were taught subjects such as British history, British geography, Latin, German, French, English, (Reading, Writing) Arithmetic, Elementary sciences, needlework etc.

Religious education was seriously intensified because the missionaries saw it as a major way of turning the hearts of the people to God and also as means of encouraging a united community.

When Nigeria became independent, she was the need to give more encouragement to the teaching of religious education in our schools because the need to build a morally upright society was a task that was seriously recognized by the entire society. Provisions of the National Policy on Education on Religious Education Religious education along with other subjects being offered in Nigerian schools was reviewed during the National curriculum conference held in 1969. The review took place to ensure the relevance of the subjects to our local needs. This review culminated in the provision of a new policy on education produced in 1977 by the Federal Government of Nigeria.

The National policy on education (1981, ed) as a document, stressed the importance of teaching religious and moral education in Nigerian schools. In section

1, number 3 of the policy, under the philosophy of Nigerian education, it says that the quality of instructions at all levels has to be oriented towards inculcation of the following values:

1. Respect for the worth and dignity of the individuals
2. Faith in man's ability to make rational decisions
3. Moral and spiritual values in interpersonal and human relations
4. Shared responsibility for the common good of society;
5. Respect for the dignity of labour; and
6. Promotion of the emotional, physical and psychological health of all children. (FGN. 1981:7).

The above listed values have moral undertone, which shows that religious and moral education will have to be intensified for these values to be fully inculcated into learners. The National policy also stressed that opportunities will continue to be made available for religious and moral instruction. No child will however be forced to accept any religious instructions which is contrary to the wishes of his/her parents.

Hence, one can say that Nigerian government has given room for the teaching of religious and moral education in our schools. Since religious and moral education forms the bedrock of other subjects that required discipline, the worth whileness or the subjects cannot be under estimated.

It is now the duty of Nigerian schools to ensure that workable strategies are adopted in the teaching of religious education so that the desired virtues will be imparted into learners. According to the Policy document, religious and moral instructions are compulsory for all pupils/students up-till the junior Secondary School level. Both Bible Knowledge and Islamic studies are also given elective status at the Senior Secondary School level.

## **The Goals of Religious Education in Nigeria**

Religious education is out to build honest, truthful, dependable, loyal, patriotic, and tolerant and God-fearing Nigerian citizens. The aim is to lead the recipients to live in accordance with the law of the land and the teaching of God in a society where there is low premium on upright living and integrity.

To produce men and women who will take it upon themselves to live in accordance with the word of God, which they read and learn daily.

To produce citizens who will work towards the progress and stability of the society.

To acquire necessary Certificates needed to pursue one's education for a successful living. Unfortunately, too much emphasis is laid on certificates at the expense of moral lessons today. Passing examinations is held as the highest goal of acquiring formal education so that when children are exposed to religious education especially at the secondary School level, the main goal being pursued is the success in the anticipated examinations.

As expressed by Banjo (1980) this attitude is dangerous because knowledge that is not established on a sound character will ultimately breed disaster.

## **Importance of Religious and Moral Education**

The importance of religious and moral education to man cannot be over-emphasized. As Banjo (1980) stressed when Quoting the Duke of Wellington "educate men without religion and you make them clever devils'. This is to show the role religion stand to play in the life of man. No society will want to build devils because the devil is anti progress and anti stability. Whatever will enhance sanity will be preferred above what derails. It is only what has to do with God that a can stamp

out devil-initiated-ventures. Hence the vital role religion can play in making good citizens and a society a better place to live in.

Reflections on the spiritual undertone of the topics taught in religious education classes will help in curbing the evil tendencies in man.

Metaphysically, man is believed by nature to have a dual composition. He is both Biological and spiritual. A thwarted development will take place when the spiritual is neglected. The spiritual, according to Plato should be given better attention because only that aspect of man can be said to be ultimately takes. Hence the body should be developed for the sake of the soul. Catering for man eternally real. Premium over the temporary gains. This simply shows that while all efforts should be made to build man for his benefits and the benefits of the society, his eternal relationship with God should also be considered. This will guide his relationship with God and the way he relates with others that he interacts with.

Realizing the importance of Religious education and the virtues embedded in it, the prominent Greek philosophers Socrates, Plato and Aristotle stressed that virtue, an off-shoot of religious education is the only source of true happiness and ought to be taught in our schools.

John Herbart another prominent philosopher once stated that " the foundation and end of education is morality". To him, the worth of a man should not be measured by man's intellectual ability, but by his will, his character and his personality. The main avenue for shaping children's character is to give the religious education that will stagnate the social ills that militates against their development daily.

One of the aims of education as recommended by the idealists is to develop the soul of the child and assist him to fear God.



The magic of hating evil and working for the progress of others comes upon a man only through exposure to God's injunctions. This is catered for through religious education.

As the salient portions of religion are made available to the recipients of religious education in Nigerian schools, there is the tendency for them to put into practice these salient issues already imbibed, such as tolerance, love, sympathy, honesty, faithfulness, devotion to duty as unto God, obedience etc.

### **General Attitudes of Students to Religious Education: A Case Study of Some Selected Schools in Kwara State**

Good as the teaching of religious education is, there is a general lukewarm attitude to it at the senior secondary level in Kwara State and this is likely to be so in other parts of Nigeria. Several factors have been identified by scholars as being responsible for this negative attitude.

The table below shows the number of students that registered for religious studies (Bible knowledge and Islamic studies) in two schools in Kwara State from 1994 to date.

SCHOOL A			SCHOOL P	
	Total number of students	Those that offered Religious Education	Total students population	Those that offered religious education
Session		B.K ISS		B, K ISS
1994/95	280	84+31=115	204	33+19=52
1995/96	361	106+43= 149	262	68+18=86
1996/97	305	70+39=109	211	108+48=156
1997/98	298	94+40=134	199	75+32=107
1998/99	240	64+51=185	285	100+44=144

Except in school B where in 1996/97 and 1998/99 sessions more than half of the entire final year students registered for religious education, it is observed that for other years less than half of the students graduating read religious studies at senior secondary level. No wonder, the problem of cultism is being traced to secondary schools today.

The senior secondary students tend to feel matured and do not want to be seriously dictated to especially on the issue of doctrine hence many of them have the feelings that they needed to be liberated from any rigid control that comes through religion.

Other factors identified to be responsible for these lukewarm attitudes include:

1. The nature of religious education. The two subjects (CRS and ISS) are art subjects which are not so much favoured at this jet age when majority of the students are settling for scientific and technological oriented subjects which they hope to pursue at the university Level. Except for students offering arts and other related subjects, religious education is not too popular among the senior secondary school students.
2. Students have little interest because they feel religious education is not important compared with other subjects like mathematics English, Biology, etc which are compulsory subjects.
3. Poor teaching methods. This was recognized by Oso (1979) as being responsible for student's lukewarm attitude to the study of religious education in Nigerian schools. The presentation is usually not too challenging and inspiring.
4. The implications of the doctrinal issues learnt at the Senior Secondary Level were not seriously hammered by the teachers. No lasting impression was

created upon the hearts of the students even at the Junior Secondary Level, such that will cause them to look forward for better lessons from religious education come senior secondary experience.

5. Lack of counseling: Students are not given needed counseling to know the importance of religious education.
6. Parental influence: Some parents discourage their wards from registering for religious education. They would prefer courses that will lead to reputable professions like medicine, law, Accountancy etc.
7. Lack of appropriate Teaching materials: This contributes to lack of interest in the subject. Instructional materials such as films, tapes, and religious books to enrich teaching are not available in Nigerian schools.
8. Abstract nature of religion: What is being taught cannot be experimented like subjects such as chemistry, physics, Biology etc. The existence of God, hell, heaven etc cannot be seen, but believed dogmatically; only imaginary stories are committed to memory and believed by faith.
9. Many do not count religious education to be important because of its elective status.
10. The character of some of the teachers is not in harmony with what they teach. Hence, the students could not attach any seriousness to religious education, etc.

**Effects of these Lukewarm Attitudes on Nigerian Citizens and the entire Society  
are Enormous.**

1. Moral laxity in Nigerian schools in form of cultism, disobedience, pre-marital sex and pregnancies, absenteeism, rudeness etc.
2. Disruptions of socio-political and economic activities in the society. The recipient would not be good enough to lead the society forward.
3. Increase in criminal and nefarious activities in Nigeria. Many students have turned themselves into armed robbers today.
4. Lack of religious tolerance, which is crippling Nigerian Society Today. Tolerance simply means the quality of allowing or enduring others without protesting. (That is, enduring the opinions, beliefs, customs, behaviours of others).

### **How to allow for Effective Teaching of Religious Education in Nigerian Schools.**

If the next millennium will be anything to write home about, Nigerian schools will have to intensify the teaching of religious education by taking the following steps:

1. The Federal Ministry of education should go the extra mile in making religious knowledge compulsory in all secondary schools in Nigeria just like English and Mathematics.
2. The school authority should ensure that teacher's emphasizes the moral aspect of religious education along with the preparations of the students for senior secondary examination.
3. Government should provide all the facilities and qualified man power (academically and spiritually) to handle the teaching of religious education.

4. Parents and guardians on their part should see that their children or wards are given adequate religious training at home and are encouraged to offer religious education at senior secondary level.
5. Hooliganism and all forms of indiscipline derailing Nigerian society today will be eradicated when teachers of religious education and other teachers begin to live according to what they teach.
6. Teachers salaries and allowances should be paid promptly to allow for devotion to duty on the part of teachers. This will lead to thoroughness in classroom work.

## **CONCLUSION**

If the suggestions enumerated above are given favourable consideration, the problem of bribery, sexual infidelity, drug abuse, nudity, stealing, intolerance, looting embezzlement that are serving as a cog in the wheel of our Nation's progress will be totally forgotten come the next millennium. Religious education will do the magic when properly and effectively handled.

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