



CONTRIBUTION OF CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION TO NATIONAL UNITY IN NIGERIA

Mrs. Anyebe Ada

Department of Christian Religious Studies, Federal College of
Education, Zaria-Nigeria

ABSTRACT

KEYWORDS:
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Christian religion is central to spiritual upliftment of man. It is meant to reconcile man to God and man to his fellow men thereby promoting unity. Why is it that this situation is largely absent in Nigeria. This paper, therefore, attempts to examine the contributions of Christian religious education to the promotion of peace and unity in the country. The study relied heavily on secondary data for its analysis. It was revealed that Christian religious education has made some contributions to nation building by promoting peace and unity especially through the products of the system but it could still have done more. It was therefore, recommended that Nigeria should buy into Christian religious education because no meaningful development can be attained without righteousness, peace and unity which this type of education offers.

INTRODUCTION

When Christian missionaries arrived the shores of Nigeria, they came with the best news human beings should not miss and a system of education that contains all requirements for the survival of man on earth and life after. Uche (2017), opines that at the time formal education started in Nigeria, Christian religious education formed part of the curriculum and was taught in all the missionary schools including public schools that were located in Christian dominated areas. This religious education was introduced into the system of education with the intention of inculcating religious beliefs and morals in the minds of the learners at all levels of education. The role of Christian religious education in promoting peace, and national unity in Nigeria cannot be over emphasized because it is geared towards the balanced growth of the learner and the society at large. It is a means through which the students are led towards progressive habitualization for social duties towards the society in which they belong. In the light of the above, therefore, Christian religious education is the process of leading the students towards the acquisition of human and Christian value by molding the character for successful living and acceptability before God in worship. It is a means of creating moral and spiritual consciousness in the individual leading to faith and actions that are righteous and as well as uniting the entire society. This paper, therefore, attempts to examine the contributions of Christian religious education to national unity in Nigeria.

CLARIFICATION OF KEY CONCEPTS Religious Education

In its ordinary sense, religious education is the teaching of a particular religion or teachings of religions in general and its varied aspects, its beliefs, devotion, rituals, customs, rites and personal roles. It implies a type of education which is largely separate from rigorous academia which guards religious beliefs as a fundamental tenet and operating modality. Mordi (2015), opines that religious education connotes the dominant academic study, and in typically religious terms, teaches doctrine which refine and define social customs and societal norms as law. Similarly, Irika (2014), defines Religious education as the norms, customs, ethos, social and ethical norms of any society. Religious education which forms an important part of Nigeria educational system according to Usman (2002) is that learning process that tends to promote the exploration of religion and experience as well as the development of attitudes. It is the type of education that is God centered, life applied and involves all those requirements which character is in general any genuine education that truly aims at at helping an individual to attain his full formation as a man. Religious education is a process of acquiring knowledge and disseminating it to the people, it also means the process of informing, directing and enlightening an individual on how to worship their creator and to live a useful life in the world. Religious education therefore, can be comprehensively described as that type of education that deals with the teaching of morals which makes an individual to fit properly into a given society.

Christian Religious Education

Christian religious education is the type that is aimed at leading the students towards the acquisition of human and Christian value by molding the character for successful living and acceptability before God in worship. It is designed and incorporated into the school curriculum. Alongside the teaching in school, it is taught at home as the home is the first school in human life. Christian religious education according to Okeke (2011), is a component of the holistic-oriented education, by means of which the student is led towards progressive habit for social duties towards the community to which he belongs and in which he has a share.

In the same vein, Christian religious education is viewed by John (2017), as a process of training the learner mentally, intellectually spiritually and physically. Through this education, peace and orderliness is established in the society by inculcating the Christian virtues which has to do with moral and ethical values into the learner.

Christian religious education based on the points mentioned above is a type of education that is aimed at inculcating discipline and good morals into the learner to help them understand and work together as a team to solve the numerous challenges such as peace and unity facing the society in which they are part of.

National Unity

Unity can be said to be a pattern of cooperation and understanding between major human groups in a society. According to John, unity is the state of being in agreement and working together. National unity, therefore, is a situation when citizens of a country subscribe to the same ideology or national objectives and they are at peace with one another, engineering nation-building and prosperity. Usually, their co-existence is based on justice, equity and mutual respect.

METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

This study relied heavily on secondary data which were obtained from the Holy Bible, journals, books and internet for its analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The word unity is important in Christianity, in the Bible and is at the centre of how God wants us to live here on earth with our fellow human beings. This can be seen in the following scriptural passages, blessed are the peace makers for they shall be called the children of God (Matthew 5:9), follow peace with all men and holiness without which no man shall see the Lord (Hebrews 12: 14) as much as it lies within you, live in peace with all men (Romans 12:18), and behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity...for the Lord commended the blessing, even life for evermore (Psalm 133:1-3). Religious education if properly inculcated in the hearts of the members through formal way definitely will promote peace and unity that will lead to collaborative effort among members of the society e.g. Acts 4:32-33 which state that all the believers were one in heart and mind...with great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all. Peace is a universal phenomenon that everyone desires to enjoy and an important ingredient that helps to promote growth and development in any nation. According to Okediji (2015), Christianity just like every other religion is a religion that is aimed at promoting peace and unity and that is why its primary aim is to teach the unity of God the father, son and the Holy Spirit and also

the well-being of human beings through equal treatment and respect for individuals, not minding their race, colour, age, and sex. This education prepares a man for life and creates in him the sense of sacred and his purpose in life and life after.

It is a known fact that Christian religious education is a veritable tool for national peace and unity and the well-being of human beings, which are protection of life and property individual freedom, education, social solidarity, absence of crime and tension. If these requirements are lacking in society, there cannot be unity. (Abbah, 2011). From every indication, lack of tolerance, love, peace is still some of the major factors that hinder national unity in Nigeria. So, in order to ensure unity in the country the following aims Christian religious education are inculcated into the students at all levels of education:

1. Developing children morally and spiritually
2. Nurturing obedient and law abiding children that will become good citizens
3. Having knowledge and understanding of God and obedience to his commandments
4. Promoting understanding among different religious groups and
5. Understanding the meaning of existence.

All these are design and inculcated into the learner through Christian religious education to produce students who are better trained and well behaved to bring about unity because the students will be fully aware that human beings are created by God irrespective of the colour and language (Abbah, 2011).

Through Christian religious education, students are introduced to the sense of responsibility, idea of right in relation to the surrounding world thereby imparting into them the necessary skills for life and service to the nation at large and develop a responsible attitude towards life and their God-given abilities. Obiekea, (2015) opines that to be a responsible member of any society, that person must have the understanding of the world around him or her and recognise what it needs. In this way, Christian religious education helps students to be able to discern between what is right and wrong by imparting this necessary skill in them. Christian religious education is the process that prepares young people for their social inheritance which involves development of knowledge, character and training of mental abilities. Products of Christian religious education have become agents of nation-building and promoters of peace and unity. For example, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, a one time President of Nigeria, and who went through CMS, Lagos contributed greatly to the integration and unity of the country by insisting that the proclamation, 'the Union shall be indissoluble' be inserted in the Federal Constitution and this has greatly helped to keep Nigeria as one country. Also, Gen. Yakubu Gowon (Rtd) who is generally, acclaimed as the 'Abraham Lincoln' of Nigeria, helped to unite the country after the civil war in 1970 with the declaration 'No Victor, No Vanquished' and the 3Rs, meaning Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Reconciliation. He is definitely, a nation-builder and is contributing to the unity of the country through his programme, 'Nigeria Prays'. President Olusegun Obasanjo who attended Baptist High School, Abeokuta is a nationalist and a nation-builder while Prof. Yemi Osinbajo is a typical promoter of peace and unity in Nigeria. This is just to mention but a few.

Moral and social development of youths is very important to peace and unity, this is because the development of moral character through moral lessons and instructions is a

remedy for social problems and lack of unity in the society. Through the teaching of Christian religious education, youths who are future leaders are trained morally and socially to have good character form in them. The good character has to do with moral responsibility, sound ethical and moral values such as love, justice, patience and peace. Christian religious education is the type in which the infallible truths of scripture is supreme and the foundation upon which all academic pursuits are built therefore, youths are better equipped to reach their full academic talent.

Christian religion education does not only emphasis relationship between God and man but also between man and his fellow human beings, this is seen clearly in the Bible where Jesus insisted that God's law could be summarized in two commandments and number one which is the greatest is love your neighbor as yourself. That is why every religion has code of ethics which guides man's relationship with other people within the society. Religion offers answers to fundamental questions raised by man and provides guidelines for the same man to live good life which brings about unity in the society. Mordi, (2015) asserted that the purpose of Christian education is to deepen spiritual understanding through belief in divinely ordered universe as a necessary means of understanding oneself and one's place in the world. It encourages students to interpret their lives, relate with others and engage in the world in a way that reflect their faith. Student are taught the risks and effects of disunity

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

No meaningful achievements can be recorded without peace and unity as supported by Acts 4: 32-33. This means that no tangible national assignments whether good governance or national development can be recorded if they are not based on righteousness, peace and unity. This paper, therefore, recommends that:

1. The way to go for Nigeria is to strive to develop on the basis of righteousness, peace and unity which Christian religious education attempts to inculcate in the youths specifically and the citizens generally.
2. Christian Religious Education teaches love, peace and unity by emphasizing brotherhood of all human beings, therefore, should be encouraged.
3. The youth should be taught respect for life and other people's religious views. This can only be done effectively through Christian Religious Education therefore, should be encouraged at all levels of education.

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