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The Pretence Of Western Religion And Education In Nigeria: A Sociological Perspective.

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The introduction of Western (Christian) Religion into Nigeria was the first step in the process of introducing the whole of Western pattern of life in Nigeria. This dates back to the 15th century when the Portuguese Merchants and adventurers came into contact with Nigeria in 1472. From the activities of the missionaries some schools were opened which was why Ezewu (1990) described the Western Religion and Western Education as twins.

The main aim of the missionary education was to reach Christianity and thus convert all those who came within the four walls of the mission house. The British colonial Missions set up norms of religious education that progressively colonized the converts. Religious education primarily meant carrying out civic duties which enabled Nigerians to adopt the Western culture at the expense of their own.

Prior to the coming of Western religions and education, Nigerians were very religious and also functional in their education. They acknowledged the presence of God in whatever they did. Their religion therefore cut across their entire lives in farming, fishing, dancing festivals, eating, travelling etc. Virtues such as honesty, truthfulness, love for one another, morality were highly prized. On the other hand their kind of education was not seen as the ability to read and write. It meant to prepare the individual to live a meaningful life by being useful to them and contribute effectively to the development of the entire society Fafunwa (1976) described this type of education as functional because the child develops his abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour which are of positive value of the society.

Idowu (1965) and Kosemani (1992) had argued that Western religion is after all a European institution which has no beneficial relevance for Africans but imposed upon them as engine of colonial policy for the purpose of promoting European domination on Africans. As the saying goes, it is possible what you do not possess. The missionaries failed to set up true moral values since their morality was bureaucratic rather than Christocentric. Christianity did not sufficiently penetrate into Nigeria religiosity primarily because it simply imposed on them a set of rules to be observed. The credibility of these comments is obvious from the fact that religion and education by the missionaries created some distrust and also dichotomy in the lives of the Christian converts. Consequently the motives for accepting Christianity more often than not had nothing to do with the content of religion. Hence Rodney (1982) concluded that to the Africans, the church as a promoter of education was more attractive than the church as a dispenser of religion and morality. Even at that, the education offered in the mission schools was more dysfunctional than functional. Hence it can be argued that both the religious activities and the education of the missionaries are a mere pretence.

The Concept of Religion

Most religions are motivated by man's limitation in the universe. According to Thomas (1975) man having found himself in a universe full of mysteries like disease, death and natural disaster beyond his explanation became jittery, fearful and powerless. But in spite of his bewilderment and inadequacy in
the midst of these harsh realities, he was nonetheless willing to adapt to his environment, while desiring peace, happiness and other possible comfort. When he had no explanation for phenomenon beyond his control, he postulated the higher being with the hope that someone or something regardless of name would always give him the necessary protection as long as he acknowledged and did the bidding of the superior higher being. Religion from this perspective sprang from the threshold of fear.

From this position, religion can be seen as a man’s response to power which seems to conduct him in his experience. Therefore every nation or society has a claim to religion which may depend on the sociological structure and climate of the ‘being’ since nobody, has been able to see him. Today in Nigeria, there is a very clear and obvious discrepancies between what the Western religion and its teachers preach and how they act in the society. Equally there is a discrepancy between what western education claims to offer and what the products of the education actually are in the society.

Western Religion And Christian In Nigeria

In contemporary Nigeria, there is a culture of regular worship attendance and belief in God which obtains simultaneously with the culture of corruption and moral decadence. For instance the survey of peoples religious belief conducted by ICM (SIC) for British broadcasting Service (BBC) in 2004 on what the world thinks of God shows that 100% of Nigerians believe in God, pray daily and would even die for God as against 91% of USA citizens, 67% of UK, less than 10% of the Russians. For regular Church/Mosque attendance, Nigerians again tops the list with 91% as against 21% of the UK and 7% of the Russians. But there is a higher incidence of moral decadence in Nigeria (the 2nd most corrupt country in the world than any other country studied). Thus as the index of religious behaviour deceases. Hence one finds most Nigerian men and women, boys and girls, dancing almost 24 hours in the churches, temples and mosques, yet the rate of crime is on the increase. Ekpe (2005) reported vanguard stories of how most priests, bishops, deacons, and elders in the churches are engaged in moral depravity. He further stated that Western religion and Christianity as practiced in Nigeria does not enforce strict adherence both in thought and in practice to the moral tenets of the traditional set up. Contemporary Christian religion in Nigeria preaches and wealth, prosperity and miracles. The numerous spiritual churches which proliferate daily are constantly advertising miracles as avenues for wealth and longevity. The teachings in this churches have degenerated to a situation in which our social value consists solely of wealth and materialism and it has also promoted the false belief that God approves of the frenzied accumulation of wealth no matter what how it is obtained. Hence when corrupt officials appropriate huge funds through fraud, or get a political position through massive rigging and these are clearly known to the churches, they approve thanksgiving service with the priests, deacons and elders dancing and praising God, of course the Bible states “In everything give thanks”.

So many of the western Religious bodies pretend to be preaching moral values but in the main preach money values. In deed the activities of the western churches in Nigeria fulfil the prophecy in 2nd timothy 4:3-4 as follows:

The time will come when people will not listen to sound doctrine, but will follow their own desires and will collect for themselves more and more teachers who will tell them what are itching to hear.

The time is now when the congregation like listening to only those who preach the miracles of wealth and prosperity as in most Pentecostal churches; and the preacher themselves it appears, leave no
stone unturned in a bid to enrich themselves by exploiting their helpless victims of circumstances. Amadi (2003) reported the irrelevant things which the preachers say and do for money. In his words they have descended to the lowest level of depravity in the way they hound the congregation for money. Without denying some positive aspects of Christian morality preached by the missionaries, it is very significant to note that their inability to relate Christian morals to the culture of Africans has resulted in manipulative morality which portrays the religion as mere pretence.

Western Education In Nigeria

Nigeria can be said to have benefited a great deal from the introduction of Western education into the country by the missionaries. Among the nations of the Africa Nigeria stands out as the most ambitious in the pursuit of education Tahir (1994). According to Ekpe (2005) Nigeria’s first effort towards providing education for all was in 1976 when the universal primary Education (UPE) programme was launched. In 1982 when the first set of the UPE programme graduated, the Junior secondary school programme was launched. It was aimed at achieving one hundred percent transition rate from primary school to JSS. Resulting from this programme, Nigeria witnessed a proliferation of universities, polytechnics, colleges of Education, school of basic studies and secondary schools. The result is that from only one University College in 1960 when the country had her independence, Nigeria now has fifty six universities including federal, state and private universities. With this number, the total number of student enrolment can better be imagined.

But the question is this: to what extent are the products of these institutions functional? The products of an educational institution are said to be functional when they exhibit desirable knowledge and character, skills, attitudes and value which enable them to operate effectively and positively in their society. If for any reason the products of such institutions show undesirable attitudes and bad character, or do not possess sufficient skills to be gainfully employed, then such institutions are said to be dysfunctional in their operations and service. A closer look at the products of the institutions introduced by the missionary schools shows that both the contents and schools depart considerably from the employment needs of the people. The method of instruction too is also alien to them. The result is that there are far more dysfunctional tendencies than functional tendencies in the Nigeria educational system.

Ezewu(1986) and Okpilike (2002) had highlighted certain areas where school education in Nigeria had failed to produce the expected results. These are;

a The Nigeria school system produces people who may possess the academic qualification but are bankrupting character and so are unable to fit into the several institutions of the society. One Major feature of the western education is its emphasis on certificate to the detriment of good character. To this end, measurement of success is based mainly on the ability to pass examinations. The result is that one finds most of the products of the school system unable to manage honestly the social institutions of the Nigerian society. Chief executives of companies, principals of schools, managing directors of Board and parasatals, security officials, etc are all engaged in one form of dubious behaviour or the other in an attempt to survive. The indigenous education emphasized dignity of labour, truthfulness, fair play and the spirit of live and let’s live in all its ramifications. The missionaries only pretended to educate the people since no education can take place in the absence of the people’s culture.
b The overproduction of manpower in many disciplines in the universities with the result that so many of
the graduates from the institutions are without gainful employment. On a yearly basis the admit
thousands of students in the some disciplines most of which are theoretically based. Tai Solarin citied
in Ezewu (1983) summarized in this way;

"I have sat painfully working out testimonials for some young Nigerians who are going to join the labour
market. They were all terribly anxious to get into one or the other of the ministries… some of their
predecessors have been hawking their Grade I certificates for many years. They all cry-we have no
jobs. There are literally hundreds of jobs in Nigeria. The adolescents are jobless not because they are
no jobs, but because they are unskilled"

The situation had become so because the colonial orientation did not emphasize self employment. The
educational system of the missionaries therefore did not prepare its products for useful living
sufficiently.

c It is an irony that in a country where plenty of graduates are produced yearly, certain areas of the
economy do not have manpower to manage them. One can attest to this by the number of vacant
positions advertised in the newspapers especially in the technical areas. The short supply of man
power in the areas cause the foreign masters to dictate what happens in those areas of our economy.
Nigeria had her independence forty five years ago yet it is not near economic independence.

Conclusion

The type of religion and education introduced into Nigeria by the Missionaries did not take into
consideration the interest of the people for whom the education was intended. Rather, it was the
interest of the colonial masters that was of paramount concern. Today the churches provide miracles
which distract people from their real problems. Consequently many of their members particularly
women are also seeking miracle or bearing crosses which tempt their faith. With the deterioration of
the Nigeria economy and political situation caused by the poor orientation to education that came
along with the churches, the number of people turning to the ‘spiritual’ churches has increased
tremendously. Since social welfare is non-existent of Nigeria, the churches provide a community that
may at best satisfy the needs of ailing members and also distract them from the real issues. While
pretending to be introducing civilization into Nigeria the Missionary churches and their education
indeed neglected and distorted the original values and culture of the people. Their religion cannot be
said to be necessarily moral and their education cannot be said to be necessarily functional.

Recommendation

Religious education must be patterned after the values and interests of the people for whom it is meant
to serve. To this end it must take into cognizance the culture of the recipients. Secondly, school
education in Nigeria should emphasize functionalism. Enough of the conventional universities that
merely emphasize white collar jobs. Emphasis should shift to technical and technological areas where
products of the institution can become self employers of labour. Most importantly, the value of system of
the country should shift from money values and return to those traditional values of Africans which
emphasized hard work, honestly, fairplay, love for one another, dignity of labour, truthfulness, unity and
of course, the real fear of God.
Reference


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