
Christian Theological Education in Nigeria and the Imperative of National Rebirth

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Abstract

Today, Nigeria is facing serious challenges such as rising insecurity, poverty, kidnapping, banditry, terrorism, abduction, oppression, disregard for laws and order, bribery and corruption in diverse ways and other unethical activities. These realities underscore the fact that national rebirth is imperative. The various news media are replete with the news of the evil and vices being unleashed on Nigerians by Boko Haram insurgents and bandits. The Theological institutions in Nigeria are to train those who are called by God, such as pastors, evangelists, teachers, prophets, apostles and those in other forms of Christian Ministries to be spiritually, morally and intellectually unified for national rebirth. The focus of this paper is to discuss the essence of theological education and national rebirth through the Christian Church. Lack of theological education, loss of vision and lustful pleasures, as well as disunity among Christian clerics is part of the factors negating national rebirth. Diligent study of biblical hermeneutics and exegesis, religious interactive discussions that leads to peaceful co-existence and proper upbringing of children from homes are panacea to national rebirth. Historical method was used to achieve this purpose. The paper concluded and recommended that the clerics should teach sound biblical doctrine without looking for any personal financial gain and the light of Jesus Christ should shine through Christians to the darkness of the world.

Keywords: Theological Institutions, Theological Education, National Rebirth, Christian Church and Nigeria.

Introduction

It is an undeniable fact that theological education is necessary in the light of Nigeria's experience: such as poverty, insecurity, nepotism, kidnapping, murder, banditry, terrorism,

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insurgency, cheating in diverse ways and other unethical activities which have made life difficult and hard for the average Nigerian citizenry. Lack of respect for dignity of labor, lack of recognition for merit (favoritism), commercialization of religion, manipulations of people by using religion and tribal differences, and fake prophecy among others are the by – products of corruption. It is sad that majority of the populace are not enjoying commensurate benefits despite the fact that Nigeria ranks among the richest countries in the world in terms of material and human resources (Dada 1).

Nigerians live in a troubled and fractured world; in fact, the country is seated on a keg of gun powder and these challenges deserve serious attention and most especially from the Nigerian Christian Churches. As clerics, the individual who has received theological education should understand and experience what God did through Jesus Christ for humanity. The partakers of this experience are expected to focus on getting the life and light of God into the Church members, however, they will shine the light through their exemplary lives and the congregation in turn illuminates the societies at large. Theological education should focus on national rebirth, but not to describe the church as theologically and biblically ignorant (Kato 11). The focus of this paper is to discuss the essence of Theological Education and National Rebirth in the Nigerian experience. Historical method was used to achieve this purpose. The paper concluded and recommended that the general populace, Christian witness and ministry especially, should take its cue from Jesus’ ministry.

Conceptual Clarification

Perhaps the most obvious approach to take in dealing with the title “Christian Theological Education in Nigeria and The Imperative of National Rebirth” is to analyze the term by breaking it down into its constituent parts. We could, therefore, focus on the meaning of the word “Christian,” Rebirth and “Theological Education”.

Christian: The formation of the word ‘Christian’ seems to be Latin, where plural nouns ending in –iani may denote the soldiers of a particular general. In the late 1st century AD at least ‘*Caesariani*’ was used of Caesar’s slaves and clients and in the Gospels we found the Herodianoi, who may have been partisans or clients of Herod. Christian (o) i, therefore, may have originally been thought of as ‘soldiers of Christians’ (Christ) or ‘the household of Christus’ or the ‘partisan or follower of Christus’ (Olatunde 19). The Latinized Greek term *Khristianos*,

found only three times in the Christian Greek Scriptures, designates followers of Christ Jesus, the exponents of Christianity. Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16 (Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania International Bible Students Association, 439).

Bible writers in addressing fellow believers or describing follower of Christ used expressions such as “believers in the Lord”, “brothers” “disciples” (Acts 5:14), “Chosen ones” and “faithful Ones” (Col.3:12), “slaves to God and “slaves of Jesus” (Rom. 6:22. “Holy ones,” “congregation of God”, and “those who call upon the Lord,” (Acts 9:23; 20:28; 1Cor; 1:2; 2Tim.2:22). (Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania International Bible Students Association, 440). In support of the above assertion, Olatunde’s definition is adopted in this work, which says, Christian is a person who has a personal living relationship with God through Jesus Christ (John 17:3), or somebody who have repented from sin and personally accepted Jesus Christ as his or her Lord and Savior (John 1:12-13;3:3) (Olatunde 18).

Theological Education: It is a special kind of education whereby teaching about the Bible is carried out formally with the aim of helping individuals to be Disciples of Christ. The major source of theological education is the Bible and all other sources are supplementary (Kolawole & Oladeji, 78). Adetunji’s and Akinbobola’s definition of Theological Education is adopted in this paper, which says:

Implicitly, theological education is the process of preparing for a religious vocation as seen in the ministers of the good news revealed in Christ Jesus. Explicitly, theological education is the process of providing God-called men and women with knowledge, skills, competence or usually desirable qualities of behaviour or character or being so provided by a formal course of study, instruction or training in a school provided for such. Such schools where such trainings and molding of lives are going on are called, “theological seminaries or theological colleges (134-135).

Theological education therefore, is an effort to bring up or develop people by fostering varying degrees of growth, involving a process of expansion of knowledge, skill, wisdom, moral balance, and general competence within an individual’s religious faith (Adetunji & Akinbola, 135). Coupled with the above definitions and explanations, it should be understood that to qualify education as “theological”, it means it is related to theology, the study of God. It would be a misconception, however, to believe that a kind of education is “theological” only because it

has the study of God as its content of instruction. Rather, it is theological because its philosophical underpinnings and its goals are Theo-centric, in relation to its content (Scott 80).

Rebirth: Is the regeneration of something that is destroyed, regeneration of something that has died or has been destroyed. It also means the revival of important ideas or forces usually as part of broad and significant change. It typifies renaissance, reawakening, return to resurgence (Muhammed 1). It also means the revival of important ideas or forces usually as part of broad and significant change (Rebirth Nigeria). It is by means the Christian Church can be regenerated from corruption, banditry, insurgency, bad economy, insecurity, and other unethical activities in the nation.

Christian Church: Is the group of believers who accept the Bible as the only source of true Christian faith and practice baptism by immersion.

History of Theological Education in the Bible and Nigerian Society

Theological education has its origin in God as He was involved in teaching and giving specific instructions to Adam and Eve (Gen.2) through nature and direct discussion. There are several agents of theological education in the Old Testament which include family, priests and prophets among others (Adware. 53). As for the family; each of the leaders was involved in the training of their children. Specifically, God had confidence in Abraham that he would train his children. Gen. 18:19 says:

For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him. Parents were expected to teach the Law of the Lord to their children on a regular basis (Deut.4:9-10; 11:19-20.cf Exod.12:25-28).

There was a kind of convocation of the Israelites every seven years when the Law was read and explained to every member of the congregation including children (Deut. 31:9-13). Jehoshaphat, one of the good kings of Judah sent out his leaders to teach the book in the cities of Judah (2 Chro. 17:17-10 cf 15: 3).

In the Old Testament, the most outstanding theological education is connected with the frequent use of the title or phrase “sons of prophets”. This had its origin with Samuel and the group of prophets that he trained. In other words, the schools of prophets were founded by Samuel to serve as a barrier against the widespread of corruption in the land (Ogunkunle, 2) and to provide for the moral and spiritual welfare of the people. Schools of prophets are located at various centers in Old Testament. Instances include Bethel (2 Kings 2:3), Jericho (2 Kings 2:15), Ramah and Kirjath-jearim. Theological training at times, takes the form of the older prophet discipline the young one as noted in the case of Elijah and Elisha, and in the case of Apostle Paul having much influence over Titus and Timothy, among others in the scripture.

Jesus Christ, the greatest of all the teachers was fully involved in the theological training of his disciples. It was his custom to attend meetings in the Synagogue (Mark 1:29, Luke 4:16) where on one occasion he made his first specific statement of the purpose of his life (Luke 4:18-27). Jesus Christ had a very high regard for the scriptures as noted in his several references to the Old Testament. His new method of teaching is understood in his use of the phrase “You have heard that it was said to those of old... But I say to you that...” (Matt.5:21-22; 27-28; etc.) (Ogunkunle 3).

It is very important to note that Jesus Christ called each of the disciples primarily to be with him and to be theologically trained (Matt. 5:18-22). Even Apostle Paul had to spend days with the disciples in Damascus to receive theological training (Acts 9:19-20). The disciples used a similar mentoring type of education for passing on the theological truths that they had learned from Jesus Christ. Barnabas taught some things to Paul who worked with him. Later, Paul invited Silas, Timothy and Luke to follow him and learn from him (Ogunkunle 4).

As at today in this Nation, Christianity came after Islam by the way of the sea in the early period of the nineteenth century through the missionaries and the repatriated Negro slaves (Ogunkunle 5). The Mission Churches planted branches and institutions all over the town. Besides the primary and secondary schools, they established also mission colleges for the training of teachers and sub-pastors. For instance, in 1901, the Wesley College, Ibadan was established by the Methodist Church, Elekuro. The College produced teachers, sub-pastors to impart Christian education in Methodist Schools and Churches throughout the Nation. Later, the

Immanuel College of Theology and Seminary of S.S. Peter and Paul, Bodija developed for the training of Church ministers (Adewale 72).

The missionaries reached Oyo between 1852 and 1857. The transfer of Church Missionary Society (C.M.S.) Training Institution first from Abeokuta to Lagos and then from Lagos to Oyo took place in 1896. The training Institution which was essentially re-named St. Andrew's College in 1920 was the first Teachers' Training College in Nigeria that produced teachers and pastors for schools and churches (Adewale 72). The city of Ogbomosho received missionaries between 1852 and 1857 and M. L. Stone, a Baptist came to the city in 1876. In addition to Churches, a Theological Seminary for the training of pastors for all Baptist churches in the country (Adewale 72) was built. To corroborate Adewale on the establishing training schools for the pastors, Storm submits the bible schools established by United Missionary Society (UMS) in Nigeria thus:

Linked with the day schools are the Bible schools where classes are held in the vernacular. The Yoruba Bible School began in 1942 at Igbeti, it was moved to Share in 1952. The Hausa Bible School was opened at Salka in 1951, and the Nupe Bible School, also at Share, were all commissioned in the same year. In 1956 the Theological College was opened in Jebba but later relocated to Ilorin (245).

A major purpose of these Schools (Theological Seminary) was to help prepare men for the ministry (Walker 514) and make positive impacts to the society at large.

The Purpose of Theological Education

The theological education can mostly be obtained at the theological institutions. The purpose of most theological institutions can be found in their mission or vision statements as well as objectives or aims. These can be found in their administrative and governing documents like catalogue and prospectus. The purpose of the United Missionary Church of Africa Theological College Ilorin is to train Pastors, Evangelists and Christian Religious Knowledge Teachers. In keeping with this purpose, it is the desire of the College to prepare young men and women to be effective witness for Christ (UMCA Theological College Prospectus 6).

Producing such caliber of men of God is in line with the first objective of United Missionary Church of Africa as a Church, the proprietor of the College. One of the functions of

Theological Institutions in Nigeria in particular, and Africa in general, is to promote the advancement of Christianity in all ramifications through the study of the word of God. Some of the vision and mission of Theological institutions in Nigeria include:

- To lead each student to a fuller experience of Christ as a savior, and to the development of a true Christian character.
- To give students a love for, and a dedication to the church and to show them their place in its worldwide commission.
- To guide each student into a thorough knowledge of the word of God and to equip him or her with the methods to continue personal study.
- To train effective Christian Religious knowledge teachers for primary, secondary schools and other level of education.
- To train pastors and evangelists to serve effectively in their pastoral and prophetic ministries.
- To make students aware of the relationship between the Church and the society (UMCA Theological College Prospectus 6).

In the local, international and even global at large, Seminary has what it takes to provide training for men and women that are called to serve God. This is not only in Nigeria or other parts of Africa but for the whole world indeed. In support of this assertion, Nihinlola gives instances of other theological institutions in Nigeria that give theological education objectives thus:

The first objective of Theological College of Northern Nigeria is “To train students for a pastoral, teaching and evangelistic ministry, particularly related to the African context”. The need is to combine international best practices with local relevance, this also reflected in the second objective of Baptist College of Theology, Lagos (BCTL) thus: “To make available to Baptist and other Christians theological education that is bible-based, of international standards and relevance in the African Context”. Theological Christian programs usually need to be both international and local and this call for meaningful relationships (121).

It is necessary to explain that, our society-based success on material flamboyance. Material success has become yardstick for measuring godliness of priests, while poverty is the result of sinfulness. Sale of anointing oil for personal gain is the loss of vision, lust of flesh and lack of proper theological education are some of the causes that led to National Rebirth in Nigerian Churches.

Essence of Theological Education and National Rebirth for the Christian Church in Nigeria

The Nigerian society is deeply religious and pluralistic in nature. Christian denominations in Nigeria have a common heritage in Jesus Christ in whom all Christian values and ideals reside (Akanmidu 1). As it has been repeatedly observed by scholars, the Nigerians were living with a religious sense of purpose and direction before the coming of Christianity. In Africa generally and Nigeria in particular, the continent is facing an unexpected crisis in many areas today as a result of Christian church expansion. The fact remains that, the Church in Nigeria is suffering from theological anemia due to the failure of theological education. According to Mbiti quoted by Kato in support of this, stated that:

Mission Christianity was not from the start prepared to face a serious encounter with either traditional religions and philosophy or the modern changes taking place in Africa. The Church here now finds itself in the situation of trying to exist without a theology... (Kato 11).

If Nigeria has been so much blessed by God, why are corruption and other unethical activities prevalent in our society? Essence of Theological education and National rebirth for the Christian Church in Nigeria include the following:

Promotion of Economic System by Training Church Members

To fight poverty, employment in various ways should be available to all Church members to prosper. The Christian church should endeavor to support and promote economic systems that meet human needs which will consider the poor as they are the objects of poverty. Therefore, training of members who do not have jobs in the Church will go a long way in meeting their spiritual and physical needs (Oke, 473). Service to God does not affect economic activities in the developed countries of the world as God does not bless an idle person. In support of this, Apostle

Paul says that if anyone is not willing to work, neither let him eat (2 Thessalonians 3:10). What Apostle Paul wants us to understand is that Christianity is a behavioral principle of life, but not just a doctrinal belief. In the principle of this verse, it is a behavioral principle of life that the Christian must work. If he/she can work when work is available, but will not, then the church is under no obligation to give him food. It is the responsibility of the community of disciples to teach every disciple how to be responsible in carrying out one's life on earth (Dickson, 1600). If this was the responsibility of Apostle/disciple of old, it means that the Christian Church of 21st Century must strive to promote economic system by training church members who are poor, they should be equipped, so as to contribute wealth to the society.

End of Domestic Violence

Many families are persistent victims of domestic violence in Nigeria. It is the responsibility of Christian church to stand up against domestic violence in the nation. Christians should transform themselves and their society at large by applying Biblical principles. This is because, there is a Chinese saying as quoted by Samuel Laraiyetan that "No man can change the world. If a man succeeds in changing himself, he would succeed in changing his family and the family will change the community and the community will change the state and the state will change the country. The change will move up till it gets to the continent and the world" (Laraiyetan 68) at large.

Good Knowledge of Hermeneutical Interpretation of the Scripture's

Theological Institutions or Seminaries is one of the Institutions where basic proper understanding of Biblical hermeneutics can be taught. In the field of biblical studies, there are general and specific principles, guiding interpretation such as symbols, parables, prophesy narratives and interpretation of types among others. It is through the theological education that all this can be taught to set the congregation free from biblical ignorance that can lead to untoward attitude. The Bible is not an ordinary book but an embodiment of revelations from God and tells us the truths and facts that God wants us to know, it cannot be interpreted just as any other book. It has valid standard and principle. Hermeneutical interpretation of the scriptures knowledge is to help the bible interpreter to become very competent in analyzing the scriptures (Baba, xii). The Church in Nigeria is facing a claimant demand for an interpretation of the Christian faith, in a cheerful and confident hope that such an interpretation, when produced, would provide a means

of bringing home to Nigerians, the truths of the Christian gospel in a way related to the Nigerian culture and situations.

Religious Interactive Discussions Leading to Peaceful Co-existence

The Nigerian constitution recognized three major religions: African Indigenous Religion, Islam and Christianity. A good knowledge of inter-religious relationship in a religiously pluralistic society like Nigeria will bring peace to the Nation. The study of interaction of religions in theological institutions enable the Pastor to see serious concerns that arise when people of different faiths met and live together, and the consequence of the impact of one religion on another (Adewale 10). Adewale supports the above assertion that, when Christianity was introduced to Nigeria initially, a large number of the European related Churches and Muslims participated in traditional religious offering aimed at promoting peace in the society (Adewale 34). The knowledge of religious interaction leads to accommodation, peaceful co-existence and survival as well as toleration.

Participation of Christians in Politics

Many Christian Churches are against participation in politics because of their belief that it is a dirty game. It should be understood that politics itself is not dirty, but involvement of dirty people in a dirty manner makes it dirty (I Samuel 24:13). Preaching offers a sophisticated argument in favor of political participation by Christians, often it does so by asking congregants to participate not as Christians but as ordinary citizens and stewards of civil society who serves by partly leaving behind their particularistic identities when they enter the public square (Mathews 556). A coin has two sides; some people argue that this sort of activity is not really political, but a necessary preface or prolegomenon; for them, the term “politics” must be restricted to activities directly relating to governing the nation, setting its policies, fixing its laws (Mathews 556).

Conclusion

The resultant effect of corruption in Nigeria has made the Nation to become the capital of poverty in the world and this has necessitated for National rebirth. The Shepherd of each denominational church should strive for theological education, so as to teach sound biblical

doctrine without looking for any personal financial gain. A minister without proper theological education will remain superficial and irrelevant in the 21st century. The Shepherd with his church that goes deep into the study of the word of God will be able to withstand the storm of life and articulate relevant principles to respond to the societal specific challenges.

The Church has ample privilege to become the agent of transformation. The Church has the responsibility and mandate. The Church should rise up to the challenge, so that our spiritual and physical actions will lead to National Rebirth in Nigeria. The paper therefore recommends that, in matters of faith and morals, every Christian doctrine which is biblical, systematic and practical must be taught in all denominations of Christian Church in Nigeria, which should be applied to everyday life.

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