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Religious and Moral Education and Its Impact on National Development

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INTRODUCTION

This paper aims at addressing the issue of the impact of religious and moral education on national development. Religious and moral education introduced by the early missionaries in African countries has played a great role in their national development which the citizens are enjoying today.¹ Religious and moral education though distinct, they are harmoniously related and connected. The main objective of religious and moral education is to help the child to engage in a process of personal search for values, meaning and purpose in life, which helps in the development of a nation. Though biologically, a man is born with all the potentialities that make him morally a human being, yet his moral conscience needs to be formed properly and be shaped to make him a fully responsible human being. He needs direction in life that will help him to grow responsibly and in turn contribute positively to the welfare of the home, school, Church and society at large. Therefore, there is a great need of religious and moral education for a positive impact on nation building. For a better understanding of our topic, we begin by clarifying some key terms like: religious and moral education and the different bodies responsible for imparting religious and moral education. Thereafter, its impact on national development will be explored.

Definition of Terms

Religious Education

Religious Education is the term given to the education that is concerned with the teaching of religion; this includes the practices that influence people's lives in every time and every place.² It involves the forming of every human being to be a true child of God, a perfect man, in other words to be a finished man of character.³ Religious education is chiefly concerned with building the sense of Sacred in man, teaching him of where he comes from, why he is here on earth and where he is going. Therefore, it reveals to man what he must know and do about God, here below, in order to attain the sublime end which is God.⁴ It is a life-long process which involves fostering within every human being a growing understanding of his Creator, and relationship with Him. Again, it helps individuals to understand themselves as well as their faith and tradition, and appreciates the faith and traditions of others. It heightens each individual's commitment to bringing the light of their faith to a discerning encounter with the surrounding culture and thus working towards its transformation.⁵ According to a definition given by the Christian Council of Nigeria, Institute of Church and Society in Ibadan in 1976. It is says:

Religious Education is a process which seeks to convey the truths of the Christian faith to individuals so meaningfully that they will become Christian disciples and be built up to do the will of God in every relationship, at home, in the Church, in the society at large, and within the changing situations of each generation.⁶

¹ Cf. F. A. ARINZE, *The Greatest Investment*, Tabansi Press Limited, Onitsha 1974, 17.

² Cf. G. MORAN, "Religious Education", *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 12, 318-323.

³ Cf. PIUS XI, Encyclical Letter on Christian Education of Youth, *Divini Illius Magistri*, (13 December 1929), 682-762.

⁴ Cf. *Ibidem*

⁵ http://www.rcdow.org.uk/education/default.asp?library_ref=8&content_ref=827 6 October 2009.

⁶ INSTITUTE OF CHURCH AND SOCIETY, *The Continuing Role of the Church in Education*, Church and Society Papers, no. 2, Institute of Church and Society, Ibadan 1976, 8.

Religious education, therefore, is to make Christian disciples, leading to formation in Christ Jesus, “given to make faith become living, conscious and active, through the light of the instruction.”⁷ It supplies the best motivations for conduct and the noblest ideals for imitation, while it sets before the mind an adequate sanction in the holiness and justice of God. The Catholic encyclopedia notes: “Religious education is more than instruction in the dogmas of faith or the precepts of the law; it is essentially a practical training in the exercises of religion, such as prayer, attendance at divine worship, and reception of the sacraments. By these means conscience is purified, the will to do right is strengthened, and the mind is fortified to resist those temptations which, especially in the period of adolescence, threaten the gravest danger to the moral life.”⁸ Thus, Religious education cannot be focused only on knowledge and understanding, it has special responsibility to foster more on the attitudes and practices that promote personal growth through worship, ritual and prayer.⁹ Hence, children are guided and encouraged to develop appropriate attitudes of, and respect for, people of different faiths and people who adopt a non-religious stance for living, respect for truth; respect for the views of others; awareness of the spiritual, of moral responsibility, of the demands of religious commitment in everyday life and especially the challenge of living in a multicultural, and multifaith society. The school of Church of England puts it thus: “Religious Education is the process by which, and through which, children understand the religious traditions of life and thought. It helps children to be sensitive to the ultimate questions posed by life and to the dimensions of mystery and wonder that underlie all human experience.”¹⁰ Religious education is not simply a subject among many other subjects, but the groundwork of the entire educational process. It makes important contributions to the whole human person and social development of the person through the attitudes and the capacities “to love, to forgive, to create, to dare greatly, to overcome prejudice, to sacrifice for the common good and to discipline the impulses of animal instincts.”¹¹

From the above, we conclude that religious education deals with the development of the person in relation to awareness of where he comes from, why he is here on earth and where he is going, his relationship with God and others, and the understanding of different beliefs, values and practices. It is best appreciated in a situation of mutual thrust and responsibilities between the Church, family and the State. Such understanding will give rise to a division of work among the various institutions making up the society. The society made up of well-trained products will no doubt experience a national growth and development.

Moral Education

Moral education is the process through which an individual develops proper attitudes and behaviors toward others in the society, based on social and cultural norms, rules, and laws.¹² In order words it nurtures in a person those virtues and values that make him a good person, thus developing his thinking skills of moral judgment about what is right and wrong and rational judgment about difficult matters.¹³ It influences an individual on how he thinks, feels and acts regarding issues of right and wrong. Therefore, the moral feature of human act is based mainly on what action is right and what is wrong. For this reason it is very important to gradually tutor children on how to make the right choices from the beginning of their lives, and help them to exercise their freedom in a responsible manner. Moral education also helps them to begin to appreciate common values such as honesty, liberty, justice, fairness and respect for others. Moral education, then, helps children acquire those moral habits that will help them individually live good lives and at the same time become productive to the nation. It therefore, contributes not only to the students as individuals, but also to the social pulling together of a nation or community.¹⁴

Again, it is an education of the will whereby the will of man is educated to embrace the good proposed by the right reason and avoid that which is detrimental to his becoming a noble man.¹⁵ This involves the development of man in his set conduct, aspect, tendencies and affections.

Finally, Francis Arinze said: “Moral education not based on dogma and supported by ritual soon proves itself inadequate and unable to carry a person through moments of great crisis.”¹⁶ Hence, moral education imparts children with intellectual acumen that helps them to make responsible judgments in moments of catastrophe

⁷ NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF AMERICA, *Basic Teachings for Catholic Religious Education*, January 11, 1973, pub. US. Catholic Conference, Washington D. C. 1973.

⁸ <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05295b.htm> 6 October 2009.

⁹ Cf. P. HANNON, *Moral Decision Making*, Veritas Publications, Dublin, Ireland 2005, 10.

¹⁰ http://www.ssj-school.co.uk/docs/SSJ_curriculum.doc 6 October 2009

¹¹ <http://www.bic.org/statements-and-reports/bic-statements/02-0826.htm> 4 October 2009

¹² Cf. <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-3447200374.html> 8 October 2009

¹³ Cf. http://dspace.wrlc.org/bitstream/1961/223/1/1998_relationship_of_religion.pdf 17 September 2009.

¹⁴ Cf. <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-3403200420.html> 21 September 2009

¹⁵ Cf. M. REBOLLO, *Moral Education in the School*, UST Publishing House, Manila 2000, 10.

¹⁶ F. ARINZE, *The Child has Right*, Tabansi Press Ltd, Onitsha 1979, 26.

especially when it is based on dogma and supported by rituals. Therefore, moral education aims in developing in children and youth a strong conviction of the worthiness of moral behavior and a sense of moral responsibility. It influences them to take moral obligations seriously and caring deeply about doing them and at the same time to possess the will power to execute moral judgment into effective moral action. Above all moral education is about conscience formation. Man created in God's image can not properly be formed without reference to God. God endows man with a conscience so that he can easily know the general principle (good must be done and evil avoided) but to be able to determine what is good or evil in concrete situations, the conscience needs continuous formation.

Agents of Religious and Moral Education

In our examination of religious and moral education we have come to the conclusion that it is a journey of formation. For a positive outcome, this journey of formation involves three agents, namely the Family, the Church and the State.

The Family as the Primary Agent of Religious and Moral Education

The life of the child begins in the family, where it is nurtured and developed. By God's design the family has a fundamental and an irreplaceable task to accomplish in the world, namely the rearing and upbringing of the child, to become a useful member of the family, State and the Church. In this regard, the Second Vatican Council says: "Since parents have conferred life on their children, they have a most solemn obligation to educate their offspring and therefore must be acknowledged as the first and foremost educators of their children."¹⁷ The right and duty to educate the child belongs entirely to the parents as a result of generation which is not finished until the newborn reaches his full growth.¹⁸ Based on the act of generation St Thomas affirmed that "the child is naturally something of the father and as such must be under his care up to the completion of what nature intends, that is a perfect man which is considered as attained when man reaches the age of reasoning."¹⁹ Therefore, the primary upbringing of the child is attained by the parents through the family education. It is in the family that the child first learns about God, how to worship and love Him and how to love his neighbor. The fact that parents have the first responsibility and primordial right in providing suitable education for their children is not in doubt;²⁰ since they have the original, prime and inalienable right to educate their offspring in conformity with the family's moral and religious belief. "Their role in education of their wards is of such importance that it is almost impossible to provide an adequate substitute."²¹ Thus, under their care proper formation is initiated, and as a result within the family circle the foundation of moral, intellectual, social, and religious education is laid down. There is no better or more suitable atmosphere in which children can be brought up than the family. The home is more appropriate for education in the virtues. It is the natural environment for initiating a human being into solidarity and communal responsibilities.²²

The Church as an agent of Religious and Moral Education

Education is a basic human right, and therefore it is a fundamental task of the state, which includes the family and also the Church.²³ The pre-eminence role of the Church to educate rests on the mission entrusted to her by Jesus Christ to "teach all nations" (cf. Mt 28:19). Hence, the Church has the right and even more the duty to be essentially "a teacher for mankind".²⁴ She educates the man for what he must be and what he must do here below in order to obtain that sublime end for which he was created; and "at the same time promote the common good of the society."²⁵

Pope Pius XI, in his encyclical letter on Christian Education of Youth, established the right and the responsibility of the Church to educate the children. The nature of this education and its relation to other societies is clear in the following statement:

¹⁷ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Declaration on Christian Education, *Gravissimum Educationis*, (28 Oct.1965), n. 3

¹⁸ M. REBOLLO, *Moral Education in the School*, 28.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, 28

²⁰ Cf. P. O. OKPALOKA, *The Role of the Church in Nigerian Education in the Light of Vatican Council II and the 1983 Code of Canon Law*, Rome 1989, 99.

²¹ CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, Paulines-Africa/Libreria Editrice Vaticano, Città del Vaticano 1994, n. 2221,

²² Cf. S. EZEANYA, *Christian Education for our Children*, Tabansi Press Ltd, Onitsha 1988, 20 and CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, no 2224.

²³ Cf. JOHN PAUL, "Address at the inauguration of the Catholic Centre for Education in Perth: The Effectiveness of Catholic education depends on the Cooperation of all members of the Church," in *L'Osservatore Romano*, English Weekly ed., Vatican City (9 Dec.1986), 23.

²⁴ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Vatican Press, Vatican City 2004 n.70

²⁵ Canon 795 of the CIC 1983.

Hence, it is that in this proper object of her, that is, 'in faith and morals', God himself has made the Church sharer in the divine Magisterium and, by a special privilege, granted her immunity from error; hence she is the mistress of men, supreme and absolutely sure, and she has inherent an inviolable right to freedom in teaching.²⁶

As a result, the Church is independent of any sort of earthly power or any civil authority, in the origin as in the exercise of her mission as educator, not merely in regard to her proper end and object, but also in regard to the means necessary and suitable to attain that end.²⁷

The Conciliar Fathers never tired of repeating the message that the education of the young is an ecclesial responsibility so, they made it clear that the Church has the right and obligation to see to it that all her children reach maturity in their faith.²⁸ They pointed out that: "The Church is bound as a mother to give to these children of hers an education by which their whole life can be imbued with the spirit of Christ."²⁹ Thus, the Church's right and moral duty have a supernatural basis: "On the supernatural order which belongs to the Church alone, the Church affirms her divine mandate not only for evangelizing all men: not only in regenerating them by baptism, but equally in executing her functions as mother of the faithful."³⁰ The new code of canon law is also clear on this point: "The duty and right of educating belongs in a unique way to the Church, which has been divinely entrusted with the mission to assist men and women so that they can arrive at the fullness of the Christian life."³¹ Fidelity to this mandate challenges the Church to be greatly interested in the whole of human life, including its secular dimension. For this reason, "she has role in the progress and development of education."³²

The State as an agent of Religious and Moral Education

In our analysis of the Church and the family in education, we concluded that both have rights and duty in religious and moral education of the child. In like manner, the state has a right and duty in education of its citizens. The reason for which the state exists is to promote the common well-being, the general temporal welfare of its citizens. Thus, the state as a promoter of common good has the right and duty to educate her own.³³ The right of the state emanated from the limitation and insufficiency of the family. The family is an imperfect society, as it does not possess all the means necessary to attain its particular aims; generation, development, or formation of the offspring.³⁴ Naturally, the state comes into existence with its varied tasks which includes education, in response to the natural demand of the family to meet up with its own proper development and specific goals.

However, the involvement of the state in education cannot be equaled with that of the Church and parents; its role is a "subsidiary one, an extension of Church and family education."³⁵ Its right is not based on the title of natural motherhood as in the case of family and supernatural mother as in the case of the Church, even if that right belongs to the state according to the already established things. They:

have been conferred upon civil society (State) by the author of nature Himself, not by the title of fatherhood, as in the case of the Church and of the family, but in virtue of the

²⁶ PIUS XI, Encyclical Letter on Christian Education of Youth, *Divini Illius Magistri*, (13 December 1929), n. 7.

²⁷ M. REBOLLO, *Moral Education in the School*, 29-30

²⁸ Cf. *Ibidem*, 30.

²⁹ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Declaration on Christian Education, *Gravissimum Educationis*, (28 Oct. 1965), n. 1.

³⁰ Cf. V. SINISTRERO, *Il Vaticano II e l'educazione con la dichiarazione sull'educazione cristiana, genesi, testo, commento, Elle di Ci, Torino-Leuman 1970*, 417.

³¹ Canon 794.1 of the CIC 1983.

³² VATICAN COUNCIL II, Declaration on Christian Education, *Gravissimum Educationis*, (28 Oct. 1965), n. 1; & Cf. Canon 794 of the CIC 1983

³³ Cf. G. A. OJO, (ed), *The Church and the State in Education in Nigeria*, Claverium Press, Bodija, Ibadan 1981, 19, and M. REBOLLO, *Moral Education in the School*, 30.

³⁴ Cf. F. C. OKAFOR, *Return of Voluntary Agency Schools: Implications for the Nation*, CECTA Ltd, Enugu, 1991, 38.

³⁵ M. REBOLLO, *Moral Education in the School*, 31.

authority which it possess to provide the common temporal welfare, which is precisely the purpose of his existence.³⁶

The Catholic Bishops of Lagos, Western and Midwestern Nigeria re-emphasized the above point in their 1971 Pastoral Lenten letter when they explicitly stated that, "the purpose of the state is for the common good of its citizens. There is no gain-saying that education has a great bearing on the common good."³⁷ No wonder many governments world over appear to pay special attention to the education of their citizens, promoting those rights to education by proper legislation.

As a matter of fact, the duty and the right of the state should not be reduced to minimum and mere subsidiary function, let us recall the words of Pope Pius XI:

... the State can exact and take measures to secure that all its citizens have the necessary knowledge of their civic and political duties, and a certain degree of physical, intellectual and moral culture, which, considering the conditions of our times, is really necessary for the common good.³⁸

From the above, the right of the state to ensure the necessary measure of instruction for its citizens is made clear. Therefore, the state should see to it that its citizens receive a civic education like education in patriotism, obedience, social justice and also education to peace, dialogue, tolerance and other social, political and civic virtues for the common good of the society.³⁹

Religious and Moral Education and its Implication on National Development

In our examination of religious and moral education we have arrived at the conclusion that religious and moral education deals with the development of the person in relation to self-awareness, relationships with God and others, and the understanding of different beliefs, values and practices. As such, it makes an important contribution to the development of person in preparation for adult life, exploring questions concerning the meaning of life. We have seen that the moral element is the process whereby a person develops responsible attitudes towards others, and skill of moral judgment about what is considered right and wrong. It also helps the person to possess rational judgment about controversial matters. Finally, religion primarily deals with our relationship with the God, while morality pertains to the conduct of human affairs and relations between persons. We now address its implication on national development.

Religious and Moral Education and National Development

The implication of religious and moral education for national development lies in the relationship between the individual and national development. When citizens are developed, the nation is implicitly developed. Intellectual and moral poverty of the citizens is the greatest poverty that any nation can suffer. It is therefore true that the primary object of religious and moral education is individuals, in developing them, the nation as a whole is developed.

Religious and Moral education contributes significantly in the development of a nation. To be precise most African countries have gained greatly by the effort of religious and moral education in those early days; when there were no armed robbers, when one could travel in the night without fear of molestation, when villages were safe even though they had no ubiquitous police stations which are now in every hook and cranny. When kings reigned and ruled, when the village customary courts were the court of last resort as it were.⁴⁰ Today, many people are afraid that we stand the risk of destroying those excellent values and descending to the abyss of moral decadence.

Religious and moral education has played and still plays a positive role in a nation's development, in regard to economic growth, health, education, management of natural resources, peace building and governance, to mention etc. Without the close collaboration of religion and development in the past, some countries would

³⁶ PIUS XI, Encyclical Letter on Christian Education of Youth, *Divini Illius Magistri*, (13 December 1929), n. 39-40.

³⁷ CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF WEST AND MIDWESTERN NIGERIA, *No True Education Without Religion*, Ibadan 1971, no. 10.

³⁸ PIUS XI, Encyclical Letter on Christian Education of Youth, *Divini Illius Magistri*, (13 December 1929), n. 47.

³⁹ Cf. F. U. ANYIKWA, *Moral Education of Youths in Nigeria: Implication for an Integral Formation*, Rome 2002, 60.

⁴⁰ Cf. www.bowenuniversity-edu.org/The_place_of_moral_education_in_a_secular_state.doc - 24 October 2009.

have charted and therefore taken a different course, and maybe have a slower rate of development.⁴¹ Religion, therefore acts as a catalyst; it exerts great influence on the affairs of the society, the Church and the home.

As we have seen earlier, religious education provides believers a guideline about life and the life-after and thus provides much-needed incentives for indulging in productive activities during lifetime. Thus, it is seen as a promoter of growth and a promoter of development. It improves economic growth and development by promoting a positive attitude towards honesty, discipline and hard work, thereby influencing people to have a sincere attitude in all their dealings and interactions. Its teaching promotes hard work and most religions have it as a norm that work is a duty to God and one should put diligent effort in his work. The Scripture says: "... not to let anyone have any food if he refused to do any work ... we order and call on people to go on quietly working and earning the food that they eat." (2 Thessalonians 3: 10-13). And according to Habibullah Khan: "work not only helps believers to stay away from a sensual, immoral life but also is the best means for glorifying God... Thus, one must avoid idle conversation, unproductive recreation, or oversleep in order to have maximum time for work."⁴²

Religion also influences productivity through certain traits such as thrift and openness to foreigners which motivate effective savings, investments and therefore economic growth that leads to nation building.

Religious and moral education develops people's social skills, qualities, attitudes and characteristics such as respect, tolerance, forbearance and a willingness to get involved. With these characteristics people are enabled to relate themselves successfully through an understanding that they are one family, one nation. Surely this helps people to play a full and fulfilling part in the community and society.⁴³ It also helps to solve some of the nation's pressing social problems, such as youth delinquency, drug addiction, cultism, examination malpractices, bribery and corruption, and other evil that hinders the growth of a nation.

It uplifts people's spiritual life which is the integral part of man's purpose in life. It enables an inward search, and promotes good human relationships. Religion provides man the opportunity to explore values and beliefs, and the way in which they impact on people's lives. It also offers opportunity to understand human feelings and emotions, the way they impact on people and how an understanding of them can be helpful; developing a climate or ethos within which all people can grow and flourish, enabling mutual respect, and appreciation of each other in his differences and short comings.⁴⁴ Finally, it assists man to develop characteristics such as courage, hope, acceptance, strength, insight, compassion, love, trustworthiness, generosity, humility, and willingness to sacrifice for the common good in order to face all the sufferings, challenges and opportunities of human life.⁴⁵ All these qualities in one way or the other have constituted the invisible yet essential foundations of progressive community living, laying effective base for national development or growth.

Religious and moral education helps people to take an increasingly thoughtful view of what is right and wrong, to recognize the needs and interests of others as well as themselves. It assists people to develop characteristics such as truthfulness, kindness, unselfish attitudes and commitments to virtues. All these encourage people to reflect on the value of living in ways that respect the well-being and rights of each person.⁴⁶

Religion encourages open minded attitudes to cultural and religious diversity. It encourages man to value and participate creatively in his own culture and the cultures of others by developing his appreciation of the arts, sport, music, travel and other aspects of culture. Hence, cultural development makes man to participate in diverse varieties of cultural life for the enrichment of the man and his community. Consequently cultural development enables man to develop understanding, qualities and attitudes which lead to appreciation or participation in the community and society.⁴⁷

It contributes to education of responsible, active and intellectual persons which helps man to be responsible for his own and other people's life, responsible thinking about his own future, responsible for his own decisions, behavior and actions and to acquire a responsible use of freedom. Religious and moral education

⁴¹ Cf. <http://archive.lib.msu.edu/DMC/African%20Journals/pdfs/Institue%20of%20African%20Studies%20Research%20Review/1991v7n1&2/asrv007001&2005.pdf> 23 October 2009.

⁴² <http://www.u21global.edu.sg/PartnerAdmin/ViewContent?module=DOCUMENTLIBRARY&oid=157451> 24 October 2009

⁴³ Cf. <http://www.bluecoat.nottingham.sch.uk/rsresources/docs/Syllabus/B%20SMSC%20and%20citizenship%20in%20Notts%20RE%202009.pdf?PHPSESSID=b6f5ce694c60099d3ffc7e085311339a> 22 October 2009

⁴⁴ Cf. http://www.caen.iufm.fr/colloque_iartem/pdf/balciuniene_mazeikiene.pdf 22 October 2009

⁴⁵ Cf. <http://www.bluecoat.nottingham.sch.uk/rsresources/docs/Syllabus/B%20SMSC%20and%20citizenship%20in%20Notts%20RE%202009.pdf?PHPSESSID=b6f5ce694c60099d3ffc7e085311339a> 22 October 2009

⁴⁶ Cf. *Ibidem*.

⁴⁷ Cf. <http://www.bluecoat.nottingham.sch.uk/rsresources/docs/Syllabus/B%20SMSC%20and%20citizenship%20in%20Notts%20RE%202009.pdf?PHPSESSID=b6f5ce694c60099d3ffc7e085311339a> 22 October 2009

encourages man to be responsible and care about his neighbor, responsible and respect for his parents, responsible in the family, and responsible in preparation for his own family life. All these gears toward development of the nation, without the full and integral development, man becomes a nuisance both to himself and to the nation. There will be chaos in the nation.

Another value that religious and moral education promotes is patriotism; love for one's nation which advocates for oneness and unity of purpose, and peace. Religious practice benefits individuals, families, communities, and thus the nation as a whole. The practice of it improves health, academic achievement, and economic well-being.

Conclusion

Religious and moral education has a positive impact on national development; it shapes the nation to a greater development, especially when persons are formed to respect human dignity, care about the welfare of others and demonstrate integrity and social responsibilities, reflect on moral issues and seek peaceful resolution of conflict. Religious and moral education will then serve as a strong foundation to cultivate national responsibility for every individual and consequently to national development. It develops also people's spiritual life which is the integral part of man's purpose in life and inculcates moral virtues such as honesty, obedience, truthfulness and respect in man. Religious and moral education therefore should be allowed to live and organized properly in the schools State and the Church and be carried out in the homes.

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