

FORMATION OF THE CHRISTIAN YOUTH AND ITS IMPLICATION ON INTEGRAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE NIGERIAN SOCIETY

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Abstract

The place of the youth in the growth and development of any nation cannot be overemphasized and Nigeria is not an exception. Many today on the African continent have blamed the West for the underdevelopment of Africa as a people and as a continent because of the transatlantic slave trade that devastated the continent for some centuries. The **transatlantic slave trade** was a segment of the global slave trade that transported between 10 million and 12 million enslaved Africans across the Atlantic Ocean to the Americas from the 16th to the 19th century. It was the second of three stages of the so-called triangular trade, in which arms, textiles, and wine were shipped from Europe to Africa, slaves from Africa to the Americas, and sugar and coffee from the Americas to Europe. However, though such African youths who were part of the slave trade saga rather than being formed in Africa were exported to the Western world, this paper aims at assessing critically the formation of the Christian youth in Nigeria today with the intent of looking at its implication for the development of Nigeria. How are the youths being formed in Nigeria? Who are the formators? Are such formators utilizing the right tools of formation in our time and age? Are the youths being formed aware of their roles in their training? Why are the Nigerian Christian youths always so eager to migrate to any country in the world? Why are so many Christian youths involved in all kinds of criminality in Nigeria and abroad today? What is the way forward at

curbing the challenges facing the Christian youths in contemporary Nigeria? What indeed is the problem with Nigeria, is it the youths or the system? These questions would form the basis of this paper. This work utilizes the socio-historical method.

Keywords: Christian, Youth, Formation, Development, Nigeria

Introduction

Formation of the human person has continued to receive attention globally and Nigeria is not left out in the whole enterprise. Whenever we hear of the word “formation” especially in Roman Catholic parlance, our minds quickly swing to and fro like the pendulum to formation in our seminaries. But far from it, formation is not only for those intending to be priests or religious, monks or nuns, but for all human persons.

The concept “formation” is one that should not be undermined in our world that is fast going through all kinds of transformation, a transformation that suggests that we need to be cautious in our relationship with people of different mentality, ethnic/tribal affiliations, religious and ideological differences. It has often been said by all and sundry that the world has become a global village with each unit of that village having its own ideologies and models.

In defining the concept “youth” in Nigeria, the Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development on May 24, 2019 launched the Revised National Youth Policy, 2019 with youth stakeholders in Akure, Ondo State. The review which was long overdue – the 2009 Policy states that it should be reviewed periodically (every five years) – was due for review in 2014. However, due to various challenges, the policy review process was not completed till 2019 (an additional five years after the last review was to have taken place).

In the 2019 Policy Foreword, the Minister of Youth and Sports Development, Solomon Dalung, quickly points out that, ‘A major thrust of the current review is regarding the age bracket for the classification of youth from existing grading of 18 – 35 years to 15 – 29 years. The review is informed by practical empirical analysis and the need to promote the appropriate targeting of desired beneficiaries of intervention programmes for the youth rather than adults masquerading as youth.’ Internet source (May 28, 2019)

However, this paper focuses on formation of the Christian youth and its implication on integral development in the Nigerian society. The act of forming people is quite onerous and challenging. It therefore demands all the time and attention one can possibly give in seeing to the realization of that goal of making impact on the human persons and in this case the youth, so as to assist in the integral development of the

Nigerian society. This paper shall adopt the socio-historic approach in its research methodology.

Integral Formation of the Christian Youth in Nigeria

The formation of the Christian youth in Nigeria starts from birth. One born into a Christian family as a child automatically shares from the table of other Christians at home, in the school and up to his/her work place. As a Christian such a child displays the traits of Christianity inherited from his/her parents and live with that until he/she begins to live on his/her own. This brings us to the idea of what a name truly means. There is nothing like a good name, it is often said. It endures forever and never dies. A good image means a good name, a positive reputation, a respectable noble, self-comportment among the members of one's community. Iroegbu (2000, p.186)

Often the fraudulent and wicked though rich, end up as *persona non grata* (undesired persons) in the long run. They build on the vanishing, and sooner or later they vanish with it. An old English primary school poem has it:

The loss of gold is much,
The loss of time is more,
The loss of honour is such a loss
That no man can restore. Iroegbu (2000, p.187)

To loss one's name, one's honour and reputation is a disaster that is unhealable, unrecuperable. It can practically not be restored. The human person and in this case the youth, has an image, that of divinity. The divine is being in goodness, perfection and love. It is therefore a great value to be one who mirrors goodness, excellence and love. What makes a good name is for one to be good and not wicked to others; to be excellent in performance in your trained and talented area; and to have loving-kindness, a caring, understanding and tolerant heart. Therein lies the good image of a person. These are the values that last forever. Iroegbu (2000, p.187)

The place of the family in formation the young people in the society cannot be overemphasized. In all societies North and South, changes appear to be under way, as a result of which individuals and social groups are subjecting their relationships with the family, politics, the economy and religion to a critical review, albeit at varying speeds. By so doing the traditional concept of society is being stood on its head. Indeed, there is talk of 'a crisis of social cohesion'. Several authors, including Hervieu-Leger believe the emergence of new models of family will bring about 'institutional deregulation' or 'deinstitutionalisation'. Roussel even alludes to a dual form of deinstitutionalisation within the family affecting

both the rules and laws which governs it and the normative framework to which it adheres. Guiblehon (2017, pp.71- 72)

It is important to mention here with regards to formation of the Christian youth in Nigeria just as elsewhere around the world how certain practices by the male folks in our society can affect the psychic of both the young girl and boy. In many cultural and religious traditions the woman's body is conceived in such a way that the autonomy of her will and wishes is completely denied. She is often seen as an object for unlimited access. It is not uncommon to find that in many cases of rape, the tendency is to blame the woman rather than the man. A particular fashionable example is the reference to the so –called “provocative dress” of women as if this is a good excuse for violating their persons in cases of rape. Another typical example is what is portrayed in John 8:3-5a “The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, they said to him, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women” But the law as stipulate in the book of Leviticus required that both the adulterer and the adulteress should be stoned to death (Lev. 20:10). In the case cited in the passage quoted above, the rule is bent and the woman alone was condemned to be stoned to death. This is a case where rules and regulations are used to control the body of the woman. Amoah (1996, p.80) With this kind of orientation, young men often believe that the world is theirs and therefore see women as tools only for their pleasure not minding women's disposition to such act. This kind of orientation need to be moderated, whereby women should perceive themselves as the image and likeness of God and men are to see them as such and show them all the respect they truly deserve.

There is also the existence of mental and spiritual violence as well as the fact that physical violence can harm and destroy not only the body but also the human spirit. There is the need to transform ourselves and our world; we need to foster. And gather empowering resources of strength for new cultural creation and transformation. That is why we need new forms of spirituality: spirituality for life which helps and sustain us in choosing life, to affirm, increase, and trust life, and to recognize the energy and power of God's spirit in all the movements of life. Spirituality is quite imperative in formation of the Christian youth. For many people, spirituality is a soft word, something idealistic and dreamy, even sugary, like the icing of a cake, or it is understood merely as something inward, personal, private, or escapist. Spirituality must not be considered as something abstract, divorced from life, as a far-flung saintly ideal for the devout and few; on the contrary, it is something very

concrete, strong, physical and material, embodied, something we can really touch and be in touch with. Ursula (1996, p.152)

There exists a strong tradition in spiritual teaching about the necessity for a discernment of spirits: what is good and what is bad, what is debilitating, distorting spirituality, and what is a strengthening, nourishing one which can bring about growth, lead us to the fullness of life, and endow us with the strength of wisdom. Spirituality is deeply grounded in human experience, but it is also linked to the belief that there is a greater, fuller reality which surrounds, beckons, and calls us. Christians speak of the call to holiness and perfection implicit in the gospel, which says, "You must be perfect as your (parent) in heaven is perfect" (Mt. 5:48). From the beginning of Christianity the search for spiritual perfection, of life lived in the spirit of God, has led to new forms of life, to asceticism, monasticism, and mysticism. Countless Christian writers, from the desert fathers and mothers to medieval and modern saints and mystics, have written about their spiritual quests and struggles, left instructions and teachings, and provided us with models of Christian discipleship and holiness. Ursula (1996, p.152)

As An interpretative, existential tool, Ursula (1996) opines that spirituality is the attitude and interpretation we adopt towards our own experiences to give them meaning, to make sense of them. We can do this by drawing on the resources of a religious faith, on a programme for action relating to justice and peace, on an ideal of being fully human, on a relationship of love and forgiveness. There is the need to discover the ever transcendent and yet so near horizon which surrounds us, envelops and cradles us. In this sense spirituality as the struggle for life is quite literally the immense effort, labour, and pain to produce and bring into life into this world, as women in collaboration with men always do, but also to attend to all details of growth, to nurture it with love and care, and struggle to live and survive against all odds, to make ends meet, to produce the food needed for so many mouths, to calm down fights and quarrels. It is more than merely struggling to survive; it is also the tremendous effort to live a fuller, more abundant, richer, and more meaningful human life. Understood in this sense, spirituality which is a great tool in formation of the Christian youth is the breath and blessing of life; it is the very bread of life. (154)

The Nigerian Christian Youth and Interface with other Religions

The Christian youth in Nigeria is faced with so many challenges as he/she strives to live out his/her life in a country that is passing through a difficult phase in its history. Many observers today see Nigeria as one of the most religious nations on this planet. One can adduce that religion is the Nigerian culture as it permeates all aspects of the average life of a

Nigerian from birth to death. In every city, town and village, the most imposing structures are religious houses. With such religiosity, one would readily have expected sanity in every area of life of every Nigerian. If Nigeria must become a peaceful nation and attain holistic development, there must be a better approach to the issue of how the Nigerian Christian youth is trained. I choose to lay emphasis on the Nigerian Christian youth, because he/she is the focus or target of this paper. (Otonko (2018, p.1)

Religion is a worldwide phenomenon which has played a part in all human cultures. It is an aspect of human experience that may intersect, incorporate or transcend other aspects of life and society. Nigeria is clearly a religiously pluralized society. Three religions, however, stand out very clearly. These are African Traditional Religion (ATR), Islam and Christianity. Islam entered Nigeria by the eleventh century and Christianity set roots in about the early 15th century. Since inception, the two religions have grown steadily on the Nigerian soil. One would ordinarily expect that the country should be reaping the good fruits of these two religions presently. Sadly, however, in Nigeria, especially in recent years, the pages of several newspapers, news items and comments on the radio and television, articles in journals and magazines, and also the social media, fall over themselves identifying and reporting the periodic religious upheavals in the country and the adverse effects these have had on the citizenry. Thus, religious crises have become a ready tool for all forms of national disagreements and conflicts. Because the North-South dichotomy is coterminous with Muslim-Christian entities, every argument in the land is more often than not very readily given religious interpretation. This orientation or perception of national issues has become a lethal threat to the corporate existence of the nation. (Otonko (2018, pp. 7-8)

Extremism has been extolled in the practice of religion in the contemporary Nigerian society. Various provocative seminal topics are often on the lips of preachers, and these often make people of divergent religious inclinations live in awe of one another. This tide has persisted, thereby helping to widen and deepen the dichotomy that exists among adherents of different religions in Nigeria. Thus religions which ought to preach peace, and which should be harbingers of this peace, have become avenues leading to riots, clashes and cold wars between citizens of the country. This certainly looks like an outrageous clash of paradigms. (Otonko (2018, p.8)

One may wonder why this analysis of the Nigerian Christian youth and the interface with other religions. It is for the simple reason that in forming the Christian youth, first by the parents who constitute the first church the youth ever knew while growing up, the church and the

school, especially Christian schools must educate the youth to be tolerant towards other religions and adherents of other religions.

The Family as Agent of Youth Formation

Hervieu-Leger in her analysis of the anthropology of the Church asserts that it favours the biblical model of marriage and the family on the grounds that the norm—the one true married family, following biblical norms, established by God consists of a father (male), a mother (female) and the children they conceive together and that the family is the only natural institution capable of laying the ground for the establishment of a bond between spouses, parents and children. Guiblehon (2017,p.77)

Assessing Hervieu-Leger this form of anthropology which makes marriage the unique, sole and unequivocal benchmark of all human conjugality, leans too heavily on the ‘divine will which, it is assumed, is expressed by a natural order explicitly linking a union with procreation and preserving the principle of submission by women to men.’ She however concludes that this model fails to give recognition to the fact that the creation of an ideal couple is based on the virtue of love. For this reason, she regards it as rather discriminatory. Also, there have been increasing calls, even among the Church faithful urging respect for individual choices and for the ‘menu of options’. It is quite a challenge to talk of specifically African concepts of marriage and the family, since the influence of Western models and practices is extensive. However, to be docile and not proactive would be tantamount to suicide for the Church, which might be forced to accept a model it feels intense dislike or disgust for. It would appear, therefore, that the Church in Nigeria just as in many parts of Africa has little choice but to formulate its own model of the family which remains true to the Church as well as the rich African heritage and its ideas on the family, which include a strong feeling for relationships, kinship and brotherhood, a sense of the importance of solidarity, hospitality, respect for elders and traditions, and a sense of honour for and attachment to ancestors, all of which help to maintain group equilibrium (pp.78-80)

Christian parents should aim at raising children who love and serve the Lord. Perhaps, this is their most important goal. They need to tell their children about the Lord and teach them about his love, so that they come to know the Lord on a personal basis. It is not strange to see children today who do not want to attend Church services. Often, Christian parents feel baffled because their efforts at trying to raise their children in the knowledge of God does not seem to be working, especially as their efforts run up against indifference or resistance in the children. Some children do not want to hear about the Lord. They do not want any part in family devotions. Often times, it is easy for parents

to lose faith and decide that their children really do not have any desire for the Lord or his life. Ralph (1978, p.139)

We have it often said that ‘it is the habit a child forms at home that he exhibits outside and the manners that a girl-child learnt at home that accompany her to her husband’s house’. It is not what the child learnt in school that is mentioned here. When many today refer to education as the greatest legacy parents can bequeath to their children, such persons seem to undermine informal education which encompasses the rudiments of moral and religious formation. For those who have the means, the services of house helps would do in place of their parental responsibility. This is rather an ill-disposition towards the formation of the young ones since as the saying goes, “blood is thicker than water”. It is a valid submission that no nanny or house help will ever satisfactorily fulfill the duties of parents with regard to the raising of children. Parents need to perform their role as parents for the proper formation of their children and for the good of our society. Onoise (2013, p.38)

The Church and Formation of the Christian Youth in Nigeria

Christians comprise of the clergy and the laity and their task involves evangelism and proselytism. The general activities in the Church are presided over by the religious leaders who are mandated to perform due to their special positions. Religious leaders are persons who are trained and set apart to carry out spiritual rites and ceremonies, offer sacrifices to God so as to obtain graces, favours and spiritual harmony. Hence, the clergy are symbols and representatives, spiritual and moral guardians of God’s love to and for humanity. They are personal representatives, mouth – pieces of the divine will, teachers and interpreters of the sacred mysteries and spiritual counselors in their communities. Muyomi (2011, p.505) This indicates that the church has an important role in the formation of the Christian youth in Nigeria.

The traditional position of the mission of the Church heavily emphasized the spiritual perspective. This stand needs to be modified, when we take into consideration the increasing crises in society such as population explosion, famine, poverty, wars, political oppression, muzzling of freedoms of expression, worship. Movement and association, corruption at all levels, increase in refugees and lack of provision of medical care, education and other services. (p.505) The proliferation of street children and street dwellers can be associated not only to poverty but also the break up of the marriage and family structures, as well as a clear indication of the failure of the leaders to ensure socio-economic parity. These groups of people lead a dehumanizing, destitute and desperate lifestyle.(p.507)

The School and the Task of Formation

Christian schools are quite germane in the all round formation of the youth. It does not matter if such youth are Christians or Muslims as exemplified in the fact that most of the early nationalists in Nigeria who were at the forefront of clamouring for Nigeria's political independence went through Christian schools, especially Catholic schools. The Catholic school forms part of the saving mission of the Church, especially for education in the faith. Remembering that 'the simultaneous development of man's psychological and moral consciousness is demanded by Christ almost as a precondition for the reception of the appropriate divine gifts of truth and grace', the Church fulfills her obligation to foster in her children a full awareness of their rebirth to a new life. It is precisely in the Gospel of Christ, taking root in the minds and lives of the faithful, that the Catholic school finds its definition as it comes to terms with the cultural conditions of the times. Flannery (2002, p.608)

While policies and opportunities differ from place to place, the Catholic school has its place in any national school system. By offering such an alternative the Church wishes to respond to the obvious need for cooperation in a society characterized by cultural pluralism. By so doing, she assists in promoting that freedom of conscience and the parental right to choose the school best suited to parents' educational objectives. There is a sort of conviction that the Catholic schools, with their educational objectives, perform a vital service for the Church in today's world. The Church takes part in cultural dialogue through schools, making her own positive contribution to the cause of the integral formation of man. There is the belief that the absence of the Catholic school would be a great loss for civilization and for the natural and supernatural destiny of man. (p.609)

Self as Agent of Formation

While agents such as the family, the school, the church and society are all key players in the the process of formation of the Christian youth; however the major actor in the formation drama is the youth. Self – mastery for self-giving is the solid principle of relating to others with success. Only a fine disciplined mind in a well ordered body can create and achieve something worthwhile for himself and for others. Scholars of literary and historical tell us that the greatest victor on earth is not he who conquers kingdoms and nations. For these are only temporary and external. The greatest victor is he who conquers himself. It is one who has perfect control over his unruly emotions, wild desires and bad tempers. The body and mind are by nature wild. They wander away and get scattered thereby scattering the productive energies of the person, if

left uncontrolled. In some persons this trait is more dramatic than in others, yet all have a battle- against-self to win. Iroegbu (2000, p.186)

The value of self-mastery is fundamental. It is to train oneself in self-control and good character formation. This is through the formation of contrary habits that bring to order the areas most prone to unruliness. Form good habits. Practice good behavior. Educate the senses. Train the faculties in the right direction. It makes one a perfect gentleman or woman. Many also utilize the spiritual methods, others athletic, and some other still normal human practices of self-restraint and self-containment. For instance if your problem is that you talk like a parrot without control, you can choose to practice restraining your tongue by using your hand to shut your mouth or using your teeth to hold your tongue because the urge to talk break loose in the nervous system. If one sees himself as a lazy person, the best and proper thing to do is to follow hard working people or group, not to draw them to his lazy-cushion, but to be inspired by them to wake up from one's laziness-slumber. As a rule of thumb, constant systematic practice will bring about self-mastery and self-development in the desired context. Self-mastery helps in fidelity to one's life commitments, to nobility of life and to general good comportment. It makes one a gentle and good person. By so doing, the persons acquires peace and joy of life. It is a great value (p.186).

Food for Thought

Formation is an ongoing process in our journey in life. Formation does not end till death. We need to realize that the fact that formation exists means that one would continue to get formed from the time one is conceived in his or her mother's womb with the collaboration of God and of one's father. That is why it seems out of place for any person to feel that whoever is not receptive to integral formation is doomed in life and should be sent out from such a society or community.

Those involved in the formation of the youth have a herculean task in their hands. Such persons first and foremost must bear in mind that they have a difficult project ahead of them and must work assiduously to achieve good results. Backing out of the project is a sign of failure or weakness or both. Formation involves the physical and the spiritual aspects. The formator must understand the physical and spiritually dimensions of training if they are to come up with great impact and excellent results.

When there are problems or challenges in the forming of any human person and in this regard, the youth, there are indicators to put into very serious consideration which includes that if there is failure or successes recorded, the person being formed and the formator has his/her share in whatever went wrong or right in the training process. This means that

the right approach or strategy must be adopted and the youth being formed need to be receptive to training.

It is not longer news that many young people in Nigeria today including Christian youths have the mindset to acquire wealth at all cost even if it means stealing from others. This attitude possibly is an offshoot of the corrupt and immodest life style not only by the Nigerian political elites and others who the youth often look up to, but also sometimes by key players in Nigerian Christianity.. Many youths in Nigeria in trying to imitate the much older people end up being corrupt by acquiring those traits which are not in the best interest of Nigeria as a nation.

In the twenty first century, there is the need for policy and decision makers; including formators in all areas of life in Nigeria to encourage the youths to be job creators rather than job seekers. This means that entrepreneurship should be encouraged in our school curriculum. Presently, though entrepreneurship is being taught in tertiary institutions in Nigeria, it is however not yet fully understood clearly by the students. Many youths simply see the act of entrepreneurship as only important in passing examinations. Formators need to do more in educating the young people of its importance in the growth and development of Nigeria.

Also, formators including the government and the Church need to look critically at those indicators which make the youth in Nigeria to be rebellious against the system. In Nigeria for instance the issue of unemployment has become a major challenge. The lack of good living condition of the young people and their inability to raise their profile to the level they would have expected have turned the youths into all forms of unruly behaviour and criminality. This aspect need to be seriously addressed. The youth should be made to realize that migrating to other countries in search of greener pasture is not necessarily the solution to their problems. The solution may just be to look inward and take their destinies in their own hands by believing in their ability to stand firm even in the midst of what may look at insurmountable challenges.

The government has a big role to play in the attitude and development of the Nigerian youth irrespective of the religious affiliation of such youth. The problem of insecurity needs serious attention. There is the need to tackle the problem of insecurity emanating from the Fulani herdsmen who constantly terrorize people on our highways, farms and even residential areas. There are also the constant threats posed by the *Boko Haram* in their reckless bombing and killing of innocent and harmless Nigerians including the youth force. If the youths are to be well formed, security in all areas is key to unlocking the numerous potentials in our youths.

Concluding Remarks

The youth constitute the bedrock of the future in any given society, and this makes it imperative that genuine and serious effort be made so as to assist in his formation. Any society or group that neglects the training of young people is gradually losing its relevance and future in our world. For this reason, the Church must continue to strive for the proper and all round formation of her youth because in the youth lies the continuous growth and development of the Church in our society that is gradually heading towards secularism and all forms of anti Christian tendencies. If the Nigerian society is to grow and develop, the young people need to be made to channel their energy towards making themselves available for the right kind of formation that befits a follower of Christ.

However, those involved in formation of the Christian youth must never give up in their effort at getting the right result in their effort at formation of the youth in meeting the numerous challenges of the 21st century. They need to have the right spirituality which should aim at attracting the youth to the things of God and the Church. A genuine formator should not be someone who would always display the attitude which seems to portray that the youth should only do what he the formator says and not imitate his actions.

The family, the school, the Church and the society should continue to actively participate in the training and re-training of our young people for the purpose of developing the Nigerian society positively; but for formation to be total, is the will and responsibility of the young person being formed. Often times, punishment of the person being trained is not only the best solution, and also sending the young person out of a particular system or institution is not only the best method of formation, except it is very apparent that such a youth has become a real danger to others within the system. Extra effort is required from all those involved in formation so as to achieve the desired goal of integral formation. Giving up on the young person being trained so easily no matter the challenges encountered is the easiest way of neglecting one's responsibility as a true formator.

A great thinker was asked about the meaning of life. He replied, LIFE itself has no meaning, it is an opportunity to create a meaning..! "Be honest when in trouble and be simple when in wealth. Be polite when in authority and be silent when in anger" "This is called "The life management." Let us all join hands in the act of formation of the Christian youth so as to bring about the integral development of the Nigerian society in this twenty first century.

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