CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE AND THE TEACHING OF MORAL VALUES IN THE NIGERIA JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract: This paper examines the role of Christian religious knowledge (CRK) in the inculcation of moral values at the Junior Secondary School (JSS) level in Nigeria. The paper outlines some of the concepts that teach moral issues in the CRK Junior Secondary School Syllabus. These include: Important values in human relationship; sharing of hope, interest and fear; parable about our attitude to possessions; the unfaithfulness of Ananias and Saphira; unity and charity in the early church; Christian cooperation. The paper discovers that conventional teaching method is often adopted for the teaching of moral issues in the JSS classes. This method is characterized by recitation, indoctrination and memorization of facts. This retards the development and demonstration of moral traits and values in the learners. Hence, there is prevalence of moral decadence among the students. This paper posits that there is prospect in the Nigeria socio-political and economic system if appropriate approaches are adopted in the teaching of moral issues. It is recommended, among other things, that values clarification and informal approaches should be adopted in the teaching of moral issues in Nigerian schools.

I. Introduction

The spate of moral decadence among students has reached an alarming state in Nigeria and some other parts of the world. Cases of disobedience to rules and regulations, disrespect to teachers and parents, laziness, truancy, selfishness, cheating, nudity, covetousness and other anti-social behaviours are common among our youths. CESAC (1986) expressed that a situation like this is an indication of moral laxity. No nation can survive when such immoral and unpatriotic behaviours tend to be rampant in the society. This is the reason why the inculcation of social norms and moral values has become one of the major goals of the school curriculum in Nigeria and many other nations of the world. To achieve this, moral values and issues have been incorporated into several school subjects, among these are: social studies, Christian religious knowledge, civic education, population education and family life education.

II. The Teaching of Moral Values

Morals are principles or standards of good behaviour. According to the Wikipedia free Encyclopedia (2008) morality (from the Latin moralitas “manner, character, proper behaviour”) has three principal meanings. In its first descriptive usage, morality means a code of conduct held to be authoritative in matters of right and wrong. Morals are created and define by society, philosophy, religion, or individual. In its second, normative and universal sense, morality refers to an ideal code of conduct, one which would be espoused in preference to alternatives by all rational people, under specified conditions. To deny ‘morality’ in this sense is a position known as moral skepticism. In its third usage, ‘morality’ is synonymous with ethics, the systematic philosophical study of the moral domain. Morals define the pattern of behaviour that the society wants from the people. Certain behaviours are considered to be undesirable. For most societies, however, morals are not written in stone, or proclaimed by God above, but instead reflect local sensibilities. Different societies have different ideas about what is acceptable and not acceptable. There are only a relative few behaviors (usually including murder, and various forms of abuse, including incest and adult-child sexual contact of any sort) that are universally despised by stable societies (Dombrock and Wells-moran, 2008). People are not born understanding their society’s morals. Instead, these usunderstandings develop and mature over time. According to Kohlberg, cited in Dombrock and Wells-Moran (2008), infants have little or no moral sense, because they are not born with an understanding of the nature of human relationships. As children reach elementary school age, they enter into the first major stage of moral understanding, known as the pre-conventional stage. Pre-conventional children are essentially selfish in orientation. They do not think about what behaviours will serve the greater good, but rather think in terms of what will most benefit them. They respond primarily and think of morality as a matter of following rules so as to avoid punishment.
As children grow into adulthood, they typically enter into the stage of conventional moral understanding. Some children will be developmentally delayed in this regard and becomes adults who have the moral understanding of children; we call them sociopaths, narcissists, and anti-social personalities. The majority of people that do make it to the conventional moral understanding start thinking in terms of duty; a duty to promote the greater good. They orient towards behaviours that are most likely to gain other people’s respect and admiration. Part of conventional morality is the duty to behave lawfully. Some people take this duty further and understand it as a duty to conform to what other influential people around them want.

Many adults never actually achieve the final stage of morality, known as post-conventional morality, mostly because in order to get there, people have to throw off their sense of duty to what others around them wants, and reinvest their moral sense in higher principles, such as (but not limited to) “honesty”, “reciprocity”, and “social welfare”. Such people become willing to take unpopular stances and make unpopular decision simply because those decisions represent the right thing to do.

Every society, primitive or modern, has established means of inculcating in the young ones, the acceptable values of the society. This is the reason why Falade (2010) argued that the Yoruba, like other communities in Africa adopts multidimensional approaches in inculcating values that are cherished in the society. The teaching of moral values in the school system has become an important area of focus in the recent time in Nigeria and some other parts of the world.

Education, which is a lifelong process, is a tool for human moral development. In trying to curb the negative trend of morality among children in the society, the home and school have the stronger influence than the church or mosque. To reduce the non-adherence to morality in the society to manageable level, a vital constituent of an effective moral learning experience need to be developed for schools (Ajere, 2006). The responsibility of inculcating values in the youth rests squarely on the nation’s school. The school curricular are expected to articulate learning experiences that can promote moral values in the student (Iyamu and Otote, 2003). This is the reason why the teaching of morals, values and social norms has been integrated into different school subjects like religious study, social studies, civic education and health education.

III. The Teaching of Christian Religious Knowledge (CRK) in Nigeria Secondary Schools

According to the Wikipedia free Encyclopedia (2008) religious study, or religious education, is the academic field of multi-disciplinary, secular study of religious beliefs, behaviours, and institutions. It describes compares, interprets and explains religion, emphasizing systematic, historically-based, and cross-cultural perspectives. While theology attempts to understand God, religious studies try to study human religious behaviours and beliefs from outside any particular religious viewpoint. Religious study draws upon multiple disciplines and their methodologies including anthropology, sociology, psychology, philosophy, and history of religion. Religious study originated in the nineteenth century, when scholarly and historical analysis of the Bible had flourished, and Hindu and Buddhist texts were first being translated into European languages. Early influential scholars included Friedrich Max Muller in England and Cornelius P. Tiele in the Netherlands. Today religious studies is practiced by scholars worldwide (Wikipedia free Encyclopedia, 2008)

Western education as well as Christian religious education came to Nigeria through the activities of the Christian missionaries. Missionary schools were then set up as means of teaching those who had been converted into Christianity. Orebanoji (1992) opined that the missionaries were interested solely in the work of evangelization. They however discovered that in order to be successful, they needed to educate the people to enable them to read the Bible and some religious books.

The Christian missionaries concentrated their attention on the Nigerian adolescence or pre-adolescence because they believed that the young’s were pliable. The first classes were held in missionary’s homes. After the establishment of primary schools, there was demand for post-primary institutions. This demand was met in 1876 when the first secondary school (C.M.S. Grammar School) was founded in Lagos (Jayuela-Omoiye, 2000). Since then, Christian religious knowledge has been one of the school subjects in Nigeria. Today, CRK is a compulsory subject for students in primary and junior secondary schools. The subject is also taught at the senior secondary school level. Adeyinka, Okeke and Orebanoji (1991) identified the objectives of CRK as:

i. To provide opportunity for the students to learn more about God and further grow in faith in God;
ii. To enable students accept Christ as their Saviour;
iii. To enable students accept the guidance of the Holy Spirit in their daily activities;
iv. To enable students accept Christ as the founder and sustainer of the Christian church;
v. To help students understand the basic teachings of Christ and to apply these to their daily lives and work;
vi. To develop and foster in the lives of the students values such as humility, respect, love, kindness, justice, fair-paly, spirit of forgiveness, obedience, devotion to duty, orderly behaviour and selfless service to God and humanity;
vii. To prepare the youth for higher education and for service within the community.
The Junior Secondary CRK syllabus has been designed to enable learners to acquire the values stated above. Some of the contents in the syllabus through which the expected values can be acquired are:

i. Important values in human relationship. This concept defines the meaning of values and identifies some important values in human relationship i.e. love, unity, forgiveness, endurance, peace, patience, cooperation etc.

ii. Sharing of hope, interest and fear. The concept teaches open-mindedness and friendliness. It encourages students to share their hope, interest and fear with others rather than living a solitary life.

iii. Parable about our attitude to possessions. The parable of the rich fool, the rich man and Lazarus are related to learners. This is to teach about the danger of craze for wealth and the need for them to assist others with their possessions.

iv. The unfaithfulness of Ananias and Saphira. Students are to learn this story and bring out the moral lessons which include: danger of unfaithfulness, repercussion of lying and the need for truthfulness.

v. Unity and charity in the early church. This concept teaches the importance of unity among Christians. It also encourages learners to be hospitable by sharing whatever they have with others.

The concepts identified above show that the CRK syllabus for JSS contains relevant moral issues and instructions that can assist learners to acquire values that are cherished in the society. However, the conduct of some secondary school students in Nigeria shows that the teaching of moral values in the school has little or no effect on the learners.

IV. Problems Associated with the Teaching of Moral Values in JSS Christian Religious Knowledge Classes

The teaching of moral values is faced with a lot of problems in our JSS classes. Some of the associated problems include:

i. Problem of adopting the conventional method in the teaching of moral values. The conventional method of teaching is adopted by JSS teachers in Nigerian schools. This method is characterized by indoctrination, memorization and rote learning. The method encourages learners to memorize and recite facts and values laden issues mainly to succeed in examination. Students are not stimulated to develop and demonstrate the inherent morals or values in the concepts that learnt. Orebanjo (1992) discovered that in many schools, Bible teaching meant rote learning which involved reading and memorization of selected passages. The poor quality of teaching and learning is grossly responsible for examination malpractice, cultism and other social misconducts among the students.

ii. Inability of some of the teachers to live by examples. Bad role model is another major problem confronting the teaching of moral values in our schools. There are cases of indiscipline acts among teachers. Examples of such acts are: lateness to school, selfishness and laziness. Ajere (2006) expressed that a number of teachers at primary and secondary schools are intellectually deficient and bankrupt. Their secondary engagements have superseded the professional calling thereby jeopardizing the expectation of teaching and learning.

iii. Negative peer-influence. The peer group has great influence on its members. Some secondary school students joint bad groups in the school which have negative influence on their behaviours.

iv. Wide spread of moral laxity in the entire Nigerian society. There is wide spread of immoral behaviours in the Nigerian society. There are cases of dishonesty, disrespect, disobedience, selfishness and covetousness among Nigerians.

V. Prospects of Teaching Moral Issues in the Christian Religious Knowledge Syllabus

The teaching of moral and social values through the various school subjects in our schools reveals that there is hope for the future of the Nigerian society. If the values that are inherent in the JSS Christian religious knowledge syllabus are acquired by the learners, it will help them to grow up and become obedient, just, fair, honest, forgiving, loving and caring citizens. This can help in solving problems of dishonesty, disobedience, injustice, disunity, corruption, intolerance and selfishness that characterize the Nigeria socio-economic and political system.

Religious study must be learnt when the children are young with the soft and absorbent mine ready to absorb the ethical teachings from the religions. In this jet world of trouble and frustration, the only sure place of solace for man is God. Generally, religious study is closely associated with the inculcation of moral values in youths. When the youths are exposed to the moral teachings of religions at a tender age, it trains them to be obedient and fear God who is capable of punishing evil doers (Orebanjo, 1992).

To ensure that moral and religious instructions are not meant merely for rote learning, the teaching and learning of values should involve values analysis. The rote learning method commonly used in our secondary schools has
faced a lot of criticisms. Hence the following means are imperative for the inculcation of moral values in the learners.

**Values clarification approach.** The teaching of value laden concepts can best be done through values clarification. The teacher can adopt values clarification approach by helping/leading students to understand their values through self-exploration and examination of values. It does not teach a particular set of values, but rather, it helps learners to use rational thinking to examine their personal moral values and resolve value conflicts.

**Constructivist approach.** This approach negates the teacher-centered teaching methods that are common in our schools today. The constructivist approach posits that the teacher/instructor should encourage learners to discover principles by themselves. This involves collaborative activities where groups of students interact and help each other to learn. Learning is not the passive acceptance of knowledge, but the involvement of the learners in discovery and problem-solving tasks.

**Informal Approach.** Formation of school clubs can be useful in helping learners to acquire and demonstrate values that are taught in the classroom. The teacher can guide and stimulate students to form clubs like charity club, chaste club, ethic club etc. Students could be motivated to form these clubs on their own. Falade (2007) pointed out that secondary school students can form clubs on their own if they are stimulated to do so. Their involvement in club formation will help them to acquire moral values and interpersonal skills like respect, trust, honesty, fairness, justice, empathy, openness and tolerance.

**VI. Conclusion**

This paper revealed that Christian Religious Knowledge is one of the oldest school subjects in Nigeria. The subject aims at inculcating in the learners some cherished values in the society. Among other things, the conventional teaching method adopted by secondary school teachers has hindered the acquisition and demonstration of expected values by the learners. Values clarification, collaborative and involvement in informal school clubs can help learners to develop and manifest values like honesty, respect, trust, obedience and forgiveness.

**Reference**