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THE STUDY OF RELIGION AND THE YOUTH: AN EVALUATION TO ENSURING A SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper analyzes issues surrounding religion as a fundamental tool to human life and its relationship with society for sustainable development. In Nigeria, everything seems to be falling apart each and every day. Inflation has become the order of the day. Criminal activities seem normal and encouraged in society. Some of these issues that contribute to sustainable development include the study of religion, the study of theology, and youth issues. Sustainable development, according to Obiefuna (2018), entails a continual improvement of the conditions of people in every society, from generation to generation; the study of religion, therefore, has a lot to offer for sustainable development in Nigeria. The paper clearly states the practical means of livelihood in Nigerian society, such that no one would give excuses nor encourage criminal activities because of the lack of job opportunities. Rev. Fr. Prof. B. A. C Obiefuna has been amazingly wonderful in his writings on matters concerning the youth and issues in Religion and Society in general. It is now left for everyone in this country and beyond, to put into practice all he has contributed to the academic world for a sustainable livelihood, development, peaceful coexistence of religions and human relations.

Introduction

Everybody in this country Nigeria, both old and young, knows that the country needs an urgent and serious help. Everything seems to be falling apart each and every day. Inflation becomes the order of the day. Criminal activities seem normal, and encouraged, because it is perceived that if they actually stop these activities, how would they feed, are there reasonable job opportunities that they can use to replace these criminal activities? There should be of course. Normally, there should be no excuse to justifying criminal activities.

From the political setting, to the economic setting, to the religious setting, down to the educational setting, are all in shambles. But, should the situation remain the same? Are there nothing that can be done to remedy the situation? Definitely there is but the problem is that, these contributions to a sustainable development in Nigeria, have not been put into practice; of which if put into action, would yield a greater result and huge development to this country, Nigeria.

Since the researcher is in the educational setting as well as in the religious setting, the researcher often gets questions like, why is religion studied in school and its relevance in the educational system, when the Church, Mosque and traditionalists are there to teach people all they need to know about God? These questions give room for, as well as a golden opportunity to change the people's misconceptions and mentality about the study of religion. This is the same reason why it is necessary to expose to anyone, who might have such misconception about the relevance of the study of religion.

Since sustainable development, according to Obiefuna (2018), entails a continual improvement of the conditions of people in every society, from generation to generation; the study of religion therefore has a lot to offer for a sustainable development in Nigeria. If



only these contributions by scholars can be put into practice. These contributions have been made manifest in different ways of which, from the religious and educational settings, some scholars of religion have contributed a lot. One of them is in the person of Rev. Fr. Prof. B. A. C. Obiefuna. This great scholar and author of many books brought out all the issues hovering around Religion as a fundamental tool to humans' life and its relationship with the society for a sustainable development. Some of these issues that should be studied which would contribute to a sustainable development, as mentioned by Obiefuna (2018) include: the study of religion, the study of theology and youth issues.

The Study of Religion for Sustainable Development

The study of religion according to Obiefuna and Uzoigwe (2012), especially when there is religious plurality in a society, is very essential because it creates room for knowledge of different religions and their contributions in the society; by studying their history, geography, social life, relevance to issues and their international relations. When the history of a particular religion is studied and known, it would give room for respect, tolerance and care towards that religion because it exposes the reason for the belief systems of that religion. When the geography of a religion is studied, it would give reasons why the people in that religion dress or behave differently from other people within the same religion or different religions in other geographical areas. For example female Christians in Nigeria especially in the South East cover their hairs and wear dresses or skirts but most female Christians in other countries do not cover their hairs, most of them put on trousers to church. In the same manner, when a religion is studied to know its social life, its relevance to issues and its international relations, the benefits and importance of such a religion would be known and appreciated. Therefore, the study of religion helps one to respect and appreciate life, see the beauty in other religions and appreciate the different benefits these religions possess.

More so, Obe and Adebayo (2010) believe that dialogue and communication deal with acquiring information to give meaningful interpretation as well as to gain an understanding of something. In that effect, the quest to studying religions, in a pluralistic society like Nigeria, gives room for a successful dialogue and communication between religions.

It is worthy to note that, with regards to the question asked above, (on the relevance of studying religion in school) having worship places like the church or Mosque is not enough to teach people how to respect other religions because these places of worship mostly talk about the values in their respective religions. The study of religion gives room to studying the values of all religions. Because the different religious worship centres, do not expose the values found in other religions to their congregations. There are misunderstandings, giving room for religious fanatics but never spirituality in the practice of religion (Obiefuna, 2002).

By recommendation, just as English is made compulsory for communication, in senior secondary schools curriculum, C.R.S. for Christians and Islamic Studies for Muslims, should be made compulsory in senior secondary school curriculum, for good moral standard, for the safety, for proper knowledge of these religions and peace of the individuals and the society at large. It is important to note that religious course should be added among the general studies in the universities. The course name may be Religion and Moral Values at the university level, where the basics of all the three major religions would be exposed to

the students. With this, the students / the youths would grow to respect and know what these religions uphold. (Nwadinobi, 2021).

The Study of Theology for Sustainable Development

This is another area that needs to be studied in order to achieve a sustainable development. Theology is got from two Greek words *Theo* and *Logos*, meaning God and study respectively. God in his might from the onset, (as we were made to understand) is loving and caring, that he decided to create everything in the world in the first place. But how can this loving God be studied with a heart filled with pain, agony and endurance? Should religion be continually perceived as the opium of the people, just as Marx (1990) stated it? Religion and studying of God should no longer be as a result of the helplessness of the masses but because they find joy and peace doing it. In a country like Nigeria where hunger and difficulties are experienced, there are no other ways to ensuring a happy religious masses other than the eradication of poverty and intimidation of the masses from the leaders.

Buchi Emecheta's popular quote "A hungry man is an angry one" can not be overemphasised when it comes to writings on poverty. Have you ever seen people quarrel or fight publicly in the streets of Lekki, Lagos, or any developed area? You would hardly see such public fights because everyone in these areas is comfortable and not financially frustrated. In fact, you hardly hear people's voices around those developed areas. Churches around these areas are equally doing well, because the people living there are happy. But when you go to places like Ajegunle Lagos, Ghetto areas in the country, you see fights, quarrels and killings. This is because the people living in these areas are frustrated especially financially, that at every little provocation, they begin to quarrel. Poverty is truly a disease.

The economy of this country Nigeria, may not be able to improve to a standard that will favour every citizen. Therefore everyone has to help themselves and get rid of poverty at least to an extent. When everyone is financially stable, some problems and killings in the country would be reduced. Though people have been trying to help improve their lives in one way or the other. But if one keeps selling sachet water or keeps frying beans buns everyday, how can one attain this financial stability, especially when the economy of this country has refused to improve? They end up being frustrated, quarrels, insults become the order of each day. Even people who work from 7am to 5pm in their various places of work can never attain financial stability because, they wait for stable salaries that can never match up with the daily increase of commodities in the market. Besides, they are not even sure of continuity because they can be sacked at anytime without any mercy or consideration. More so, they do not even have time for any other money making business. Most young secondary school graduates could not continue with their education because their parents could not afford their university fees. These graduates stay at home frustrated, constituting nuisance. While those who managed to go to school do not have job opportunities or do not have any reasonable work doing; there by, in order to survive, join bad groups and constitute terror in the society.

However, the study of God is very important, it is a form of appreciation to that supreme being who cares for all. In order for this worship and appreciation of the supreme being to be effective, one needs to be happy while doing it. Religious leaders must be conscious of this fact that worshipping God with hunger would not be as effective as worshipping God when one is happy. Obiefuna (2018) clearly asserted that the church needs to fully participate in the eradication of poverty and not giving them false hopes to endure

quietly, nor putting their minds in the notion that no one must suffer. In order to eradicate poverty, all hands must be on deck, starting from the political leaders, to the religious leaders down to every matured individual in the country.

Issues Concerning the Youth

The youth has been defined in so many ways by different authors. But the most common words in all the definitions of the youth are “young people” that is anyone who is young either physically, psychologically or emotionally. The youths are young individuals who are always having one quest or another to fulfil. The youths in every society or organisation are valued set of people, because of so many reasons. These reasons include: they are seen as the future of the society, they are vibrant and have the ability to complete any task. Obiefuna (2004) affirms that the youths are truly valued for their contributions in the family, in the work places and even in defence for the country, when the enemy attacks. Though they are valued, they are seen as not to have achieved their goals in life of which they keep running to achieve those goals (Obiefuna, 2022), striving with the fire in them to achieve something for themselves, because according to Obiefuna (2004) they are always on fire to carry out a task, either positively or negatively. This explains the fact that the youth go through so many challenges and influences.

Talking about these influences and challenges, the country Nigeria has made it a compulsory choice that the youth must pass through difficult challenges, because of the hunger, hardship, incessant suffering and inflation that are experienced today in the country. This definitely affects the way they behave towards one another. They are influenced positively and negatively depending on the environment they find themselves. Obiefuna (2010) rightly observed that the development of individual persons within the society depends largely on influences they receive from their social environment. If they are influenced positively, the youths do incredible things because they do it with a heart filled with positivity and enthusiasm, which brings good transformation and breakthrough anywhere they find themselves. But when influenced negatively, they do unimaginable things that brings shame, pain, agony and terror, anywhere they find themselves.

Therefore in order to achieve a sustainable development in this country Nigeria, the youth must not be neglected. They must be giving proper and serious attention. There must be job provisions and reasonable sources of income made available to everyone in the country. Unfortunately, seeking help from the political leaders always seems to be a waste of time, in the sense that, of all the writings of authors and scholars and complaints of the people about the present condition of the country, things keep getting worse, no improvement, corruption and legalisation of corruption become the order of the day. This legalisation of corruption was clearly seen during the last presidential elections early this year, in February 2023. Where the people’s choice for presidential candidate was rejected and another candidate was imposed on the people with the support of the court, despite all the evidences against the imposed candidate.

Though the government has failed, but, religious leaders can still do something to eradicate poverty, as well as everyone in the country because according to this Igbo adage, “*mmadu anaghi a ju onwe ya*”. Which means that even if you are rejected by everyone, you must not reject yourself.

Roles of Religious Leaders to Achieving a Sustainable Development

Religious leaders can help dismantle poverty by doing the following:

- **Ensuring Good Teaching of their Faith:** Before any physical transformation occurs, there must be a sound psychological transformation of individuals. Religious leaders should take it upon themselves to teach the basics of their faith to the congregations. They must enlighten them on the values that exist in every religion, which must be kept.
- **Respect for and Good Relationship with Other Religions:** Religious leaders must have respect for other religions as well as have respect for their beliefs. They must as well teach their congregations to have and show the same respect to other religions and different denominations in a particular religion.
- **Creating Job Opportunities for their members no matter how small:** The different religions in the country control a lot of businesses like educational businesses, health businesses as well as agricultural businesses. Religious leaders must make these job opportunities available for their religious members not only their family members. This would go a lot way to ensuring that the youths are comfortable and there would be a peaceful environment for all.
- **Foreign Support:** Christianity for instance enjoy foreign support. Their religious leaders are normally given free visas to any country to study or to work. These religious leaders should as well extend these privileges they enjoy to their members, though they may not be comfortable taking them to the foreign countries, but with the help of those foreign sponsors, many youths would be established here in Nigeria. Religious leaders sometimes neglect the power they have to talk to these foreign sponsors concerning the state of the country with regards to providing job opportunities for the youths.

Practical Means of Livelihood made Known to Individuals to Ensuring a Sustainable Development

Everybody, no matter how small, should start doing reasonable something for themselves in order to survive the present condition of this country. These practical means of livelihood include:

- **Acquisition of Knowledge:** knowledge is power. Once one is ignorant of things they should know, they will be tagged as foolish. Most people have smart phones but cannot make good use of them, their phones are just for entertainment. Though Nigeria is still backwards but that does not mean other parts of the world should wait for them when it comes to development. With one's phone, one can access any information one wants. So if you have a smart phone today, start exploring the world with it and acquire as many knowledge as your brain can carry.
- **Google Explore:** Google is not the only search engine we have but it is the most used search engine to look out for any information. Do you know that people make money with Google on a daily basis? One can earn from Google by providing answers to questions on Google, so when people search for answers, Google brings on the answers that were provided.
- **Amazon Explore:** Amazon is another platform where you can make some money and defeat poverty. People post their written papers on Amazon for researchers to buy and download these articles. Amazon itself pays the writer for bringing people to their page.

- **Affiliate Marketing:** you can become an affiliate marketer for another person's business and earn from it.
- **Work for Companies and Individuals Online:** So many people and companies especially foreign companies online need people who would help them in article writing, typing of documents, website design, translation from one language to the other, social media management, resume composition, Proofreading, etc. They pay heavily to anyone who applies and gets the work done. One can only do these if one has the skills. One's smart phone can as well be of help here, in terms of acquiring these skills and finding those foreign clients.
- **Prayer:** In whatever you decide to do, do not forget to back it up with prayer. Prayer opens every door and makes the whole hustle smooth.
- **Content Creation on Social Media:** People earn huge amount of money on social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Tik-tok and YouTube, only for creating quality contents and videos with phones.

These seven tips and many more can help individuals stay comfortable, only if one decides to acquire the knowledge, the skills as well as implement them. Young secondary school graduates can use these tips to earn some money and train themselves in the university and help lift up some burdens from their parents' shoulders.

Conclusion

Right from when the researcher was in primary 1, she has been told that Nigeria is a developing country; up till now, that is over 20 years later, Nigeria is still answering a developing country. It is not funny at all. Nigeria should have been developed by now. Nevertheless, there is hope, because everyone would have to help themselves survive in one way or the other, with reasonable job opportunities. With these stated practical means of livelihood, no one would give excuses nor encourage criminal activities, because of lack of job opportunities. Scholars in the religious setting and educational setting have provided, through writings, quality and practical materials for sustainable development. Rev. Fr. Prof. B. A. C Obiefuna as one of the wonderful scholars has been amazingly wonderful in his writings, in matters concerning the youth and issues in Religion and Society, in general. It is now left for everyone in this country and beyond, to put into practice all he has contributed to the academic world for a sustainable livelihood, development, peaceful coexistence of religions and human relations.

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