

# Education, Religion and National Development

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## Abstract

*There are three key words in this paper: education, religion and national development. All the words are like beads. The history of western Education in Nigeria is traceable to the Portuguese traders who came to Benin in the early part of the 15th century. The Portuguese came originally for the purpose of commerce but this they intended to achieve through Christian education and evangelism. For the sake of evangelism and effective trade transaction, they saw need for breaking the language barrier between them and the Benin people who happened to be their customers. This necessitated the establishment of schools, so that the people might be able to read and write and communicate in a common language as well. It is against this background that this paper engages in the study of: education, religion and national development with particular emphasis on Christian religious education. This research is qualitative. Data are collected from published works, which include: textbooks, dictionaries, journal and e-books. The paper briefly examines the origin of education in Nigeria. Since we have three major religions in Nigeria, namely: African Traditional Religion, Islam and Christianity, the researcher being a Christian chooses to constrict his work to Christianity. So, the paper discusses the history of Christianity in Nigeria briefly. Based on the findings, Christian Religion and Education came to Nigeria simultaneously. Sequel to this, the two ushered in National Development. This paper examines how Christianity and Education bring National Development to our nation, Nigeria. Amongst the ways are, religion being opium to society, nationalistic spirit, innovation, harmony etc. It looks at factors militating against the National development, with Nigeria in focus, vis-a-vis; insecurity, cultism, embezzlement, power tussle and lots more. The paper observes that, religions and education if abuse can breed underdevelopment in the society. It recommends that, Religion and Education should be properly utilized to enhance development of our Nation, Nigeria.*

*Keywords: education, religion, nation, development, underdevelopment.*

## Introduction

There is no way one would talk about education without talking about religion and national development in every part of the world. These three concepts are interrelated. There are thousands of religions on earth. Due to the Wideness of the word religion, this research would streamline it to Christian Religion. Consequently, this research would be unveiling the roles played by missionaries in Christianizing, educating and developing our country Nigeria to be specific.

This research traced the origin of education in Nigeria, Etymologically, the

word “education” is derived from the latin word *ēducātiō* (“A breeding, a bringing up, a rearing”) from *ēducō* (“I educate, I train”) which is related to the homonym *ēducō* (“I lead forth, I take out; I raise up, I erect”) from *ē* – (“from, out of”) and *dūcō* (“I lead, I conduct”)<sup>1</sup> It has an overview of the emergence of Christianity in Nigeria. As earlier stated that, Christianity and education (Western education) are interrelated. Around the 1840s, Western education was introduced into Nigeria by Christian British missionaries. The first missionary school was established by the Anglican Church Missionary in 1842.<sup>2</sup> Against this background the research discusses Christian Religion and Western Education as agents of National development.

The paper examines how Christianity and education bring development to our Nation Nigeria. Since every development has militating factors, the paper reveals the factors militating against National development in our country. After this, the researcher presents his recommendations on how religion and education should be properly used in this contemporary era to enhance national development. Which is the capacity of the Country to raise the standard of living of its residents. It is holistic in approach.<sup>3</sup>

### **Origin of Education In Nigeria**

Before the British arrived in the early nineteenth century, there were two major types of, education in Nigeria. In the Islamic North, Education was strictly religious in nature. In each, Muslim Community, a Mallam drilled Children as young as five years old in the teachings of, the Quran and the Arabic alphabet.<sup>4</sup> The indigenous system was the second type of, education, before the British education, students were taught the practical skills needed to, function successfully in traditional society. Usually children within two or three years of age, belong to an age – group. Together, they learned the customs of their community and were, assigned specific duties around the village, such as sweeping lanes or clearing bush.<sup>5</sup> and as they grew older, they were introduced to different works like farming wood carving, drumming and lots more., The history of western Education in Nigeria is traceable to the Portuguese traders who, came to Benin in the early part of the 15<sup>th</sup> Century. The Portuguese came originally for the, purpose of commerce but this they intended to achieve through Christian education and evangelism. However, the language barrier between them and their customers necessitated the establishment of schools.<sup>6</sup> In 1515, the catholic missionaries through the influence of the Portuguese traders set up a mini – Schools in the palace of Oba of Benin to educate the sons of Oba and his Chiefs who has been converted to Christianity. Between 1515 and 1571 the Portuguese traders had established a number of trading posts, Churches and schools in Lagos and Benin.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately all these went into extinction to-

tally., However, the first known school in Nigeria was established in 1843 by Mr. and Mrs Williams De Graft. On 24th September 1842, the Wesleyan Methodist Society sent Revd Thomas, Birch Freeman, son of a Negro father and an English mother to Nigeria. Freeman was accompanied by Mr De Graft, one of the earliest educated Ghanaians together with his wife., Freeman returned to Gold – Coast (Ghana) and left De Graft behind to take charge of the, Methodist Mission in Badagry. Mr and Mrs De Graft established a school named ‘Nursery of, the infant Church’, which was popularly believed to be the first known school in Nigeria. The, school started with fifty pupils in which, the children of Sierra Leone emigrants were in, majority only a few converts sent their children to the school. The Methodist thus, has the, credit of establishing the first school in Nigeria.<sup>8</sup> The school was started at the first storey, building in Badagry owned by Church missionary society (CMS) before moving to it’s, current locations at Topo, Badagry. Two years (1845) after, the school was renamed, St, Thomas Anglican Nursery and Primary School by Reverend Golmer of the Church, Missionary Society (CMS).<sup>9</sup> The first grammar school was founded by Revd T.B. Macaulay in 1859 and was named Church Missionary Society (CMS) Grammar School, Bariga, Lagos.<sup>10</sup> Since that time to this time the number of the schools had been increasing.

Officially, we have 61,921 public primary schools, 55,004 private primary schools,<sup>11</sup> with the number of senior secondary Schools include: 9,589 public schools, 17,453 private schools with, the total of 27,042.<sup>12</sup> As at 2019, Private and Public Middle Schools in Nigeria counted 4.9, million students age 12 to 14 years.<sup>13</sup> There are 152 Colleges of Education in Nigeria,, consisting of 27 Federal, 82 private and 54 State Colleges of Education.<sup>14</sup> As of today,, Nigeria can boast of 17 Federal and 26 State owned Polytechnic<sup>15</sup> and many private, polytechnics. There are 170 Universities in Nigeria. As of 2021, 79 were private, federal, university amounted to 43, while State Universities were 48.<sup>16</sup> These statistics are given to establish how far education has gained ground in Nigeria while its impact would be discussed later.

### **The Emergence of Christian Religion in Nigeria**

The Portuguese missionaries were the first to visit Nigeria. In 1485 the Oba of Benin sent an appeal oversea that some missionaries be sent to his kingdom. Catholics, Spanish and Italian capuchins visited Benin. They were able to convert the Oba and His Royal family.<sup>17</sup> Also, some missionaries of the Sacred congregation of Propaganda in Rome came to Benin and Warri. However, by the beginning of the 19th century, missionary work in Benin and Warri had collapsed. All that remained were few reviews of Christian Symbols and Church buildings.<sup>18</sup>

Most Nigerian Church historians do not trace the beginning of Christianity in Nigeria to these, town because, the seeds of gospel sowed in the town germinated but did not survive. The, reasons were not farfetched from the influence of Idolatry and hypocrisy by the earlier, baptised people who disguised to be Christians for personal commercial gain., The emergence of Christianity in Nigeria was greatly assisted by the abolition of slave, trade in Africa. History records that, from 1938 some liberated Africans in Sierra Leone, acquired boats to trade along the Coast or West Africa. During one of the trading, activities, they reached Badagry and Lagos and recognized the port where they had been, shipped away by slave dealers. They embarked and went to Abeokuta their home town, Oyo, and Ijebu. By 1841 more than 500 of them has returned to Yorubaland.<sup>19</sup> It should be made, clear that these ex – slaves had been Christianised in Sierra Leone, and on their return, they, missed the spiritual care they had enjoyed. They therefore made urgent entreaties for, Christian missionaries to come and begin work in their homeland. Among the liberated slave, was James Ferguson, an emigrant Methodist convert in Badagry. He was the one that sought, and was granted the approval of the king of Badagry to write a letter to the missionaries, stationed in Sierra Leone. The letter was addressed to his old minister in Sierra Leone, Revd, Thomas Dove on the 2nd of March, 1841. In response to his letter, Revd Thomas Birch, Freeman emerged on the deck of a small vessel named *Spy*; which anchored in the shallow, water of Gberefu (KLE-FU) Sea Beach very early on 23rd of September 1842 with his two, African assistants, Williams De Graft and his wife both from Gold Coast.<sup>20</sup>

On enquiry, Reverend Freeman was directed to AGIA TREE known as ASI-SO TIN which was the most popular Square in Badagry on 24<sup>th</sup> September, 1842 and the sermon of Christianity was first preached that day under the famous agia tree.<sup>21</sup> he built a little Chapel where he held prayer meetings on Sundays.<sup>22</sup> based on invitation by Oba Shodeke, Freeman travelled down to Abeokuta on December 11 1842. On 19th December, 1842, Henry Townsend of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) arrived Badagry. Revd Freeman returned to Badagry to celebrate Christmas as he had planned before arrival so, on 24<sup>th</sup> of December 1842, Revd Freeman and Revd Henry Townsend with their companies celebrated the first Christmas in Nigeria.<sup>23</sup> The Christmas service was attended by a large and devoted congregation made up of the Badagry people, the resident Europeans in Badagry and the Returnees who had settled in Badagry. Revd Freeman preached the day's sermon on "The Incarnation Redeemer of mankind."<sup>24</sup>

After the emergence of The Methodist and the [Anglican] CMS missions. The Baptist mission was led by Revd. Thomas Jefferson Bowen in August 1850. The Roman Catholic Society of African Mission (S.M.A) came to Nigeria in 1856

and many other missionary bodies. In addition to these are the emergences of African instituted or indigenous churches in Nigeria which number is numerous to count.

### **National Development in Nigeria, What it Implies**

National development is the capacity of the country to raise the standard of living of it's, residents. It can be achieved by providing individuals with basic employment, etc, Development is a process that creates growth, brings in progress and positive change. <sup>25</sup> It, includes full-growth and expansion of our industries, agriculture, education, social, religious, and cultural institutions. Moreover, National development implies development of a Nation as, a whole. It can be best defined as the all – round and balanced development of different, aspects and facets of the nation viz political economic, social, cultural, scientific and, material. <sup>26</sup>

John Vaizy, a noted economist defines “National development as the total effect of all citizen forces and addition to the stock of physical, human resources, knowledge and skills.”<sup>27</sup> Broadly, development of the nation encapsulates such parameters as:

1. Development through a planned national economy
2. Increase in Agricultural production through application of modern technical knowhow,
3. Harnessing industrial production
4. Development of human resources
5. Application of Science and technology in Production sector
6. Provision of mass education and
7. Provision of various facilities to meet the needs and aspirations of disadvantaged, deprived and poorest of the poor segments of population.<sup>28</sup>

Nigeria had series of development plans but the Country is permanently hunted by the, spectre of development. Its sixty-two years of independence actually are rocking by, daily in search of development. The myth of growth and development is so entrenched, that the country's history passes for the history of development strategies and growth, models from colonial times up to date. No term has been in constant flux as development. <sup>29</sup>, This seems the only country where commonly all motions and models of development have, been experimental two years after independence, the first National Development plan, policy was formulated between 1962 and 1968 with the objectives of development, opportunities in health, education and employment and improving ac-

cess to these, opportunities etc This plan failed because fifty percent of resources needed to finance, the plan was to be gotten from external sources, and only fourteen percent of the external finance, was received.<sup>30</sup> Besides the reason for the failure of the plan on national development, was that: the past development plan failed as a result of implementation problem, and, lack of committed leadership etc.<sup>31</sup> One truth that is so glaring is that the record of, failure we are recording in Nigeria today in terms of national development was not really, like this in the era of missionaries even the colonial masters. Agitation for independence, was good as carried out by the Nigeria Nationalists before the independence. The, question is that, is the country able to govern herself and follow the trend of national development as experienced during the time the Christians experienced during, the time the Christian religious leaders (missionaries) were in this country? The next, thing this paper would look into is how Christianity and education brought National, Development to Nigeria most especially at the inception and the progress on the template, set by the missionaries.

### **How Christianity and Education bring Development**

There is no way one would talk about education without talking about religion and, national development in every part of the World, Nigeria inclusive. Education brings enlightenment to the society that accommodates it. The term national development is very comprehensive as, earlier explained. It includes all aspects of the life of an individual and the nation., National development implies the ability of a country to improve the social welfare of the, people e.g. providing social amenities like quality education, potable water, transportation, infrastructural, medical care etc.<sup>32</sup>

The above definitions have spoken volumes to us in terms of how Christianity and, education bring national development. It is obvious that inception of Christianity to any country is a development itself. We could call the era of slavery and, idolatry before the emergence of Christianity in Nigeria a dark age. The history revealed, to us that, the freed slaves who returned to Nigeria from Sierra Leone called Nigeria an, abode of darkness while beckoning on missionaries to come and preach the Gospel in the, Land. The letter of James Ferguson which was dated March 2<sup>nd</sup> 1841 reads thus; "I am, now in a place of darkness where no light is. I know that I was once under light, and now, I am in darkness...." <sup>33</sup>

When Christianity came in 1842 through the Wesleyan and Church missionary society, through the coastal town, Badagry and other missionary bodies like Baptist mission, Presbyterian mission, Roman Catholic Mission and lots. They brought laudable and, great developments to Nigeria. It is worth knowing that Christianity transformed the life of, people through genuine conver-

sion from idolatry to Christianity. The fear of devil and, African Traditional Religious divinities were put into demean through sound teachings of, the word of God and miraculous conversion of the traditional priest. The level of sacrifice was reduced. Human Sacrifice or twin killing was obliterated. Most groves were turned to sanctuary of worship. So, Christianity is the catalyst and subtraction of national development in Nigeria. Adelowo buttresses this assertion in his book titled *Education in Ogbomoso* (1855 to the founding of a university) Opines that, the influence of the Baptist mission in Nigeria in the development of education in Ogbomoso cannot be fully assessed within the scope of his book. It is incalculable in terms of quantity and quantity and is all pervasive.<sup>34</sup> He further said, on October 1st 1855, Mrs Bowen (with Mrs Reid) Opened a Day school with twelve Children in attendance. This was the sequence of important events that marked the genesis of formal education in Ogbomoso.<sup>35</sup> The first primary school started in Badagry in 1843 was called “Nursery of the Infant Church”. It was part of community development projects or missions by the missionaries. This was the beginning of formal education in Nigeria and its later spread to other regions in the country. Since most colonial masters were Christians. It was easy for them to join hands together with Christian missionaries to establish mission schools in Nigeria.

Through, they had challenges in the Northern part of the country due to the influence of Islam and Arabic Education which dominated the Area before the emergence of Christianity. Yet, they still penetrated. Young Nigerians were privileged to attend mission schools freely. They were also opportune to travel overseas on scholarship for further study. Consequentially, this led to agitation for independence from their Colonial masters.

Nationalists like Herbert Macaulay, Nnamdi, Azikiwe, James Johnson and Mojola Agbebi, were products of mission education. These persons and others led the nationalist, movements in Nigeria and dominated the social and political life of the country.<sup>36</sup> The role of Christianity in bringing National Development to Nigeria could be, summarized through the mentioning of the achievement of Christian Missions in Nigeria, as follow: Establishment of the Christian Church, Development of Nigeria Languages and, Literatures, Introduction of Western education, provision of modern medical services,, trade, Rural and Agricultural Development, the maintenance of peace and order and, political and cultural awareness leading to self – rule. <sup>37</sup> Education from the common, sense is the right development of the capacities, physical, mental and spiritual of an, individual to enable him or her grow in accordance to the purpose of God, naturally, meaningful to himself and the general society. It helps individuals to develop a sense of, belonging which enables one to participate and contribute to the progress and, development of his/her society.<sup>38</sup> Education plays central role

in the development, process as it pervades every aspect of nation building as a significant factor in manpower, development and an offshoot of the development culture of the society. It also holds crucial, position in the overall development of human resources sector and national life.<sup>39</sup> All, what the research tries to establish is that, Christianity in Nigeria is a part of National, development and not that alone, it brings education which opens door for other National, Developments at every sector in Nigeria.

### **Factors Militating against National Development**

According to former President Obasanjo, the three major, problems that militate against national development in Nigeria are: Leadership,, continuity and finance. When leadership is bad, the Nation would experience slow or low development. Then when there is no continuity the development would be affected. In Nigeria, there are many abandoned government projects due to lack of continuity which, could be as a result of political difference or Ideologies. Lack of money or fund could also, militate against the development of a country. Sometimes, there is fund but mismanagement, or misappropriation of fund could militate the development of a country, most especially a country like Nigeria.<sup>40</sup> Since the paper sees religion as an agent of development, religious intolerance could also affect the development of a country. Religious intolerance refers to the inability of some, people, be it individuals or groups to tolerate the religious behaviour of others in the society,, Religious intolerance breeds mutilation, fight, terrorism, and destruction of lives and property, which are meant for community development.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

It has been established that the three terms work together, education, religion and national, development. The paper focuses on Christianity and not the whole Religion in Nigeria since, we have multi-religions in the country. It is glaring that Christianity itself is a national development. It was Christianity that gave birth to education. Education is a prominent, thing while discussing national development. It could also serve as agent of national development. For any Nation to experience the desire development, Religions and education must be put in proper order. Having said this, the research hereby presents his recommendations as follows:

1. Christian religion education must start by parents at home to inculcate moral into their wards.
2. Christian Religious Education must be given priority in our primary, second-



ary and higher institutions due to its all-rounder roles in the development of a country.

3. Government must ensure that everybody in a country is well educated. If possible, free education should be given to all the citizens at all levels.
4. The genuine exhibition of Christian faith must be thoroughly tested before offering any Christian ticket or privilege to run for any political office in Nigeria.
5. Religious tolerance must be preached and practised by all the adherents of the major religions in the country to avert unnecessary destruction of lives and

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