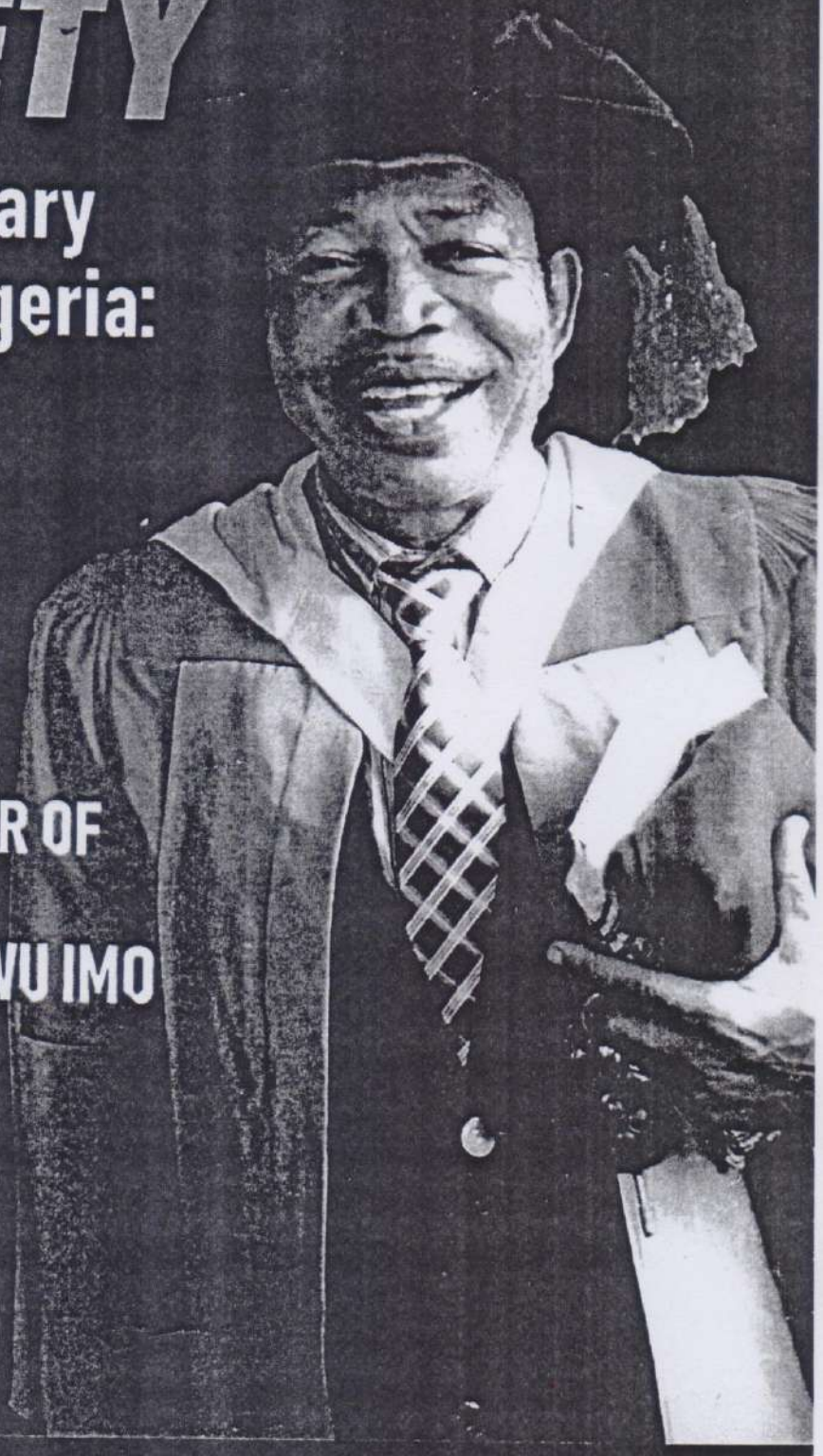
PERSPECTIVES ON RELIGION, MORALITY AND SOCIETY

In Contemporary Pluralistic Nigeria:



ESSAYS IN HONOUR OF PROFESSOR CYRIL OKECHUKWU IMO

Editor
Pic Onwochei

PERSPECTIVES ON RELIGION, MORALITY AND SOCIETY IN CONTEMPORARY PLURALISTIC NIGERIA: ESSAYS IN HONOUR OF PROFESSOR CYRIL OKECHUKWU IMO

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Chapter 12

THE PLACE OF THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN NATIONAL TRANSFORMATION: THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

In recent times there have been tendencies in some religious circles to discredit the importance of theological education in national transformation. Frequently, an impression has been given that all that is needed for Christian ministry is the Holy Spirit and not theological education. Yet theological education is widely considered to be one of the factors affecting the future vitality and direction of Africa's rapidly expanding church and nation. The thrust of this work is the place of theological education in national transformation in Africa with reference to Nigeria. The method used is historical. Theological education in biblical literature was investigated to establish how it was used as a tool for national transformation in ancient Israel and how it has been used or can be used to reposition Nigeria for the long awaited transformation. It was discovered that theological education shaped the lives of average Israelites and thereby brought visible changes in the social and religious lives of the people. It is therefore recommended that theological education be encouraged at all levels of the development of the Nigerian child for the expected national transformation to be achieved.

Key words: Theological Education, National Transformation, Nigeria

Introduction

Attempts have been made in some Christian traditions in Africa especially Nigeria to devalue the importance and necessity of theological education. This is because some people believe that anyone called into the Christian ministry only needs the teaching and direction from the Holy Spirit to be successful in ministry. This is done through long prayers, fasting and other forms of spiritual exercises. They do claim that Jesus and the Apostles never attended any theological school yet performed excellently well; as such theological education is not important. Also, some people stake their aversion for theological education on the grounds that it engenders spiritual pride, arrogance and backsliding. They always refer to Paul's statement in 1Corinthians 3:6, "For the letter kills, but the spirit gives life." Besides, there are those that believe that theological education can easily lead people astray from the faith citing James and Jambres in 2 Timothy 3:7-8.

In view of the submissions above one may ask; what was the value of theological education in ancient Israel? Were Jesus and his disciples exposed to some form of theological education? What is the relevance of theological education in national transformation? Answers to these questions would form the fulcrum of this work.

The Concepts of Theology and Theological Education

At this juncture, it is pertinent to define the key words namely; "Theology" and "Education." Defining the key terms is necessary for all of us to agree on what the rest of this exercise is all about. What is theology? Theology came from two Greek words *theos* and *logos*. *Theos* means "God" while logos means "word", "matter", "discourse", or "things." Theology, therefore, is discourse about God. Theology is the science or study of God. In order words, it is the study of the divinely revealed truths. Theology considers the being and nature of God and His creatures and the whole complex of the divine dispensation from the fall of Adam to the redemption through Christ and its mediation to humanity by His church.

On the other hand, education has been described as the art of developing a person mentally or morally, especially by instruction. It also means to train or improve a person's faculties, judgment, skill, etc. (Allen 444). To Dewey, education is "the means of social continuity" (Oduolowu 2). Chuham asserts that "Education is the shaping of behavior or modification of an individual's behavior for adequate adjustment in the society" (Chuham 3). From these definitions, it is evident that the main purpose of education is the formation of character and development of intelligence.

Theological education, therefore, can be described as an effort to train and improve a person's faculties, judgment, skill and competence through exposure to the revealed truth of God systematically outlined and laid out in the Bible, nature, history and other areas of human experiences. It should be noted that in recent times, theological education is now primarily associated with training for the Christian ministry. This has made some scholars to see theological education as the systematic biblical and doctrinal teaching, both theoretical and practical that has as its purpose the preparation of the believer, especially the leader for the role of a special ministry in the church of

Jesus Christ (Mulholland 3). The goal and ministry of the church is to transform the world. Those who have acquired theological education are expected to transform their environment by their lives and ministries.

Theological Education in Old and New Testaments

A careful study of the Old and New Testaments revealed that theological education is all embracing. This is because an average Israelite was exposed to this form of education from the cradle. According to Preiswerk, two constants are essential in the education of a person; these are theological and sociological constants (51). In theological constant, God is considered to be the principal and authentic educator. The sociological constant recognizes the family as the essential absolutely basic educational institution in ancient Israel. This view gave rise to various educational models. Accepting Preiswerk's position, one can say that in the Old Testament, the family constitutes the basic pedestal for theological education. The concern here is for an elementary form of theological education in which the essential elements of faith are taught. This form of education centers on moral, liturgy and history with particular reference to the origin and meaning of Israel's experiences and festivals. This type of education was expressed through songs and poems, etc. For instance, in Exodus 12:25-27, God commanded that the significance and meaning of the Passover should be transmitted from one generation to another:

> When you enter the land that the LORD will give you as he promise observes this ceremony. And when your children ask you, what does this ceremony mean to you? Then tell them, it is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he stuck down the Egyptian.

Besides, the priests, prophets, and the scribes were secondary agents and institutions of theological education in the Old Testament. In order to preserve the culture and faith in the presence of an influential foreign civilization, there was the need to formalize theological education. In this context, the teaching role of the priest was not limited to the casuistic application of the law within the temple (Preiswerk 61-63). It is the responsibility of the priests to consider the global situation in which the people live.

As far as the prophets were concerned, theological education was not a mere transmission of traditions of a people. They reinterpreted these traditions in a way to give the people the impetus to serve God in the right way. They made the worship of Yahweh central of Israelite religion. However, the settlement in Canaan influenced Israel's culture. This brought syncretism into Israelite religion. It became difficult to draw a line of demarcation between the worship of Yahweh and the elemental gods of Canaan. For instance, an altar earmarked for the worship of Yahweh also had the emblems of Baal and Asherah. After sometime, the worship of Yahweh became unpopular among the people.

Also, to the Old Testament prophets, the Exodus event remained a watershed in the history of Israel. As far as they were concerned, Israel's deliverance from the Egyptian bondage and the Sinaic

Covenant formed the basis of their nationhood. The prophets stressed that there was a dire consequence for rejecting Yahweh to serve other gods (Jer. 1: 16; Amos 5: 21-27). The primary goal of the prophets was to bring the nation back to Yahweh (Isa 1:16-20). The prophets maintained that right relationship with Yahweh would have positive impact on interpersonal relationship in the society (Isa. 1: 10-15). The people however refused to listen to the prophets and as such suffered exile. The Assyrians destroyed Israel in 722BC while Judah in 586 BC experienced Babylonian captivity (Jer. 15: 10-14; 28: 1-17; 30: 10- 17).

Furthermore, apart from the priests and the prophets, the scribes contributed significantly to theological education in the Old Testament. The scribes were believed to be the successors of Ezra (Ez. 7:6). The duty of the scribe was to safeguard tradition and apply the scriptures. No one becomes a scribe by birth but through long and deep study under the tutelage of a teacher or a rabbi. In other words, it is a long and deep relationship between a student and a teacher of the law in the Old Testament that produces a scribe.

This is an indication that there were some forms of specialized theological education for religious leaders in ancient Israel. In spite of the fact that the Old Testament priesthood was hereditary in character, training is essential for good performance. The old priests took the young ones through the rudiments and the fundamentals of priesthood. The younger priests are expected to understudy the older ones as they performed in the Temple. By this practice, the Israelite priesthood was regulated and sustained.

Concerning the training of the prophets, the phrase "sons of the prophets" suggests that some form of training was required at a stage in the history of prophetism in Israel. However, some scholars argued that the title "sons of the prophets" denotes a prophetic guild or several guilds. For instance, among the Semitic people, the term "sons of" was frequently used to indicate membership of a tribe, a group or a guild. The leader of the prophetic guild is usually called father (2 Kgs. 2:12; 6:21; 13:14). In the same fashion, the New Testament is full of examples of some forms of training before people engaged in Christian service.

A good example is that of Jesus and his disciples. When Jesus was to start his ministry he selected twelve men as his disciples. They understudied him for three years and later continued the ministry after his ascension. This is an indication of theological education (Matthew 4:18-22). The New Testament informs us that Paul and Barnabas started their ministries after they have stayed for sometime with the Apostles in Jerusalem (Acts 19: 9-10).

Theological Education in Nigeria

As discussed earlier, theological education has made great impacts in the life and ministry of the ancient Israel's priests, prophets and scribes. It has helped in the ministry of Jesus and the apostles. It is expedient for us, at this juncture, to explore the premium placed on theological education in contemporary Nigeria. This will help us to know whether theological education has made and has continued to make the needed impacts in our nation. To facilitate the understanding of the issue, it is pertinent for us to examine the present state of theological education in Nigeria in order to suggest ways for improvement.

Historically, institutionalized theological education began in the 19th century A.D with the view of training indigenous leaders for the Nigerian church. It was observed by the western missionaries that the best way to reach a people or group is to send their own people to them. This led to the establishment of some theological institutions in Nigeria. Examples of early theological institutions in Nigeria are: The Nigeria Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso; UMCA Theological College, Ilorin; LIFE Theological Seminary, Ikorodu; ECWA Theological Seminary Kagoro; ECWA Theological Seminary, Igbaja to mention but a few. An erudite scholar Byang Kato was trained in the Seminary in Igbaja before proceeding to London. Kato later came back to Igbaja to join in the training of indigenous leaders for the church in Africa. He left the Seminary in 1967 and moved to the ECWA Headquarters in Jos upon his election as the General Secretary of ECWA (Bowers 2).

However, it was discovered that the theological education offered in these institutions established by the western missionaries is defective because it failed to consider the African worldview and cultural milieu. It did not come to terms with the realities in African context. Training did not address how to handle demons, poverty, sickness, diseases, oppression and the like that have plagued the African people. Whenever church members are faced with any of those challenges and run to their pastors, they do not know what to do because they have not been taught how to handle such things in the Bible College or Seminary that they attended. This made the members of the church to find solutions to their problems from other quarters. As noted by Abogunrin. "Religious houses are not moving fast enough to cope with the ethical problems" in the society. It should be noted that the Pentecostal Theological Colleges in recent times are bridging this gap.

Besides, hard times and unemployment have made church planting a viable business. Attempts to find lasting solutions to these issues have led to proliferation of churches, prayer homes/mountains, healing and deliverance centers. This has robbed church members of sound theological education that would have transformed their lives. The 'acid test' for genuine call into Christian ministry now in Nigeria is the ability to perform miracles. According to Dada, "Theological education, therefore, is seen as inimical to charismatic endowment and development" (50). Furthermore, most of our Bible Colleges and Seminaries are not well equipped to train persons capable to face African and global challenges. As far as Anderson was concerned, many of our theological colleges were answering questions that no one was asking, and worse still, not answering questions that most people were asking (1). There can be no meaningful impact of theological education in the lives of the people until it has started providing answers to people's questions. In Nigeria today there are Christians that have one leg in Africa Traditional Religion (ATR) and the other in the church. They attend the church during the day and attend the shrine appointment at night. This is because these people do not have absolute trust in God. To them, failures are recorded when they seem to trust in the Supreme Being (Tambiyi 6). While it is true that Christianity has spread widely in Nigeria, it is not well rooted in the lives of the people. This is an indication that theological education in our theological institutions has not addressed the social challenges of the Nigerian people. Wanak observed that:

Our theology and teaching had not adequately entered the lives of people, their worldviews, their fear, their oppressive elements in their lives and their poverty. Ours was a proclamation – oriented school that had little to do with socio – cultural concerns (Wanak 11).

Repositioning Theological Education for National Transformation

A careful study of global Christianity revealed the need for Africa especially Nigeria to contextualize the Christian faith with the view of meeting global challenges. This can only be achieved through systematic theological education. As mentioned earlier, Israel's transformation came through the activities of the prophets, priests and the scribes. For any nation to experience real and genuine transformation, the ministers of God must be well informed.

At this juncture, it is pertinent to define the word, transformation. The word 'transform' means to change outward appearance of that which itself remains the same. It means to assume the appearance of another. The word, transformation, is used interchangeably with revival in both religious and social spheres. Theologians call it "revival" while sociologists refer to it as social change. Transformation is a change that takes place on individuals or a group of people. Transformation is the word used to explain the significant alteration of social structures within a social system. Sometimes there may be the need within a social system to review its norms, values, cultural, products, and symbols from their present state back to original state. This is called revival in religion and transformation in secular circle. The adjective 'social' means all that is related to the society. Therefore, social transformation is the social change in cultural reforms. It is the process by which an individual alters the socially ascribed social status of their parents into a socially achieved status for themselves. The following are the ways theological education in Africa and especially Nigeria can be repositioned for national transformation:

1. Sound Leadership

The church in Africa especially Nigeria must be able to provide leadership that is able to transform the people. The Christians must get involved in governance so that injustice and the like can be abated. Involvement in politics should be from wise, intelligent and deep conviction and not from anger and hostility.

The social transformation introduced by Jesus in the New Testament should serve as an example for the leaders of the Nigerian nation today (Luke 4:18-20). The path of social reform is like the path to heaven on earth as reflected in the teaching of Jesus on social justice and equity. Political leaders determine to a large extent what happens in a given society. Leadership determines the destiny of the people.

For meaningful transformation Nigerian leaders should embrace the poor in the society by providing them with basic needs of life which will inspire the citizens to be more loyal to their nation. Political leaders in Nigeria must understand that the citizenry will always want leaders who will treat them well to be their leaders. Most of the social problems, poverty, and political unrest found in Nigeria today are a direct result of our leaders' insensitivity to the plight of the citizenry.

2. Our Theological Education must be Biblical

Curriculum for the training of Church leaders must be drawn from the Bible. Teachers and students must have had personal encounter with Christ before they are considered as trainers or trainees. In other words, it is only individuals that are committed to the ministry of Jesus Christ that are to be considered as teachers or students of our Bible Colleges and Seminaries. The Bible must be the primary source of theological education in Nigeria. According to Abogunrin, The Bible must be the main source of Christian theology in Africa. Our research cannot be said to be relevant if we are not speaking to the church. The majority of Africans still live the Bible world of the New Testament (Abogunrin 1986).

It is the responsibility of the instructors in our theological institutions to explore different ways the Bible can be meaningful to the adherents of the Christian faith. African hermeneutic principle that is capable of breaking the hermeneutic hegemony and ideology of the western scholars should be incorporated into our theological curriculum (Adamo 10-12). According to Adamo, we have the African comparative approach, the African bibliography approach and the evaluative approach. The adoption of these methods in the study of the biblical texts will enhance proper domestication of the bible truth and message. The church must commit herself to a biblical interpretation that can liberate the total body, mind and spirit of the African people. Theology, we believe, is transforming because it is about renewing our mind and thinking differently about God that leads to acting and living differently. Theology is essential to the church and its mission because it does not only have the power to transform how we think, but it also has the capacity to transform the way we live and act.

3. Our Theological Education must be Prophetic

A prophet in the Old Testament was the mouthpiece of Yahweh. The prophet is a watchman, a servant, a messenger of God (Ukpong 176). He was expected to receive oracles from Yahweh and deliver them without editing. In ancient Israel, prophecy served as a medium of social control and change. The prophet declared the mind of God to His audience from time to time. The Israelites identified themselves as having a covenant relationship with Yahweh. Many Christians in Nigeria also see the country as having an important role in God's agenda for the end time. If Nigerians will play this role, then our theological education should equip the ministers of God adequately to declare the word of God without fear or favour. It has been observed that Nigerian preachers normally preach against social injustice and lopsided government policies while they are in their churches. But, they tend to be silent while in the public probably as a result of fear. Even when many of them do speak, they do so to identify their solidarity with the administration or against fellow clergymen who are bold enough to criticize those in power.

4. Our Theological Education must be Holistic

One of the distinguishing characters of theological education in ancient Israel is that it is holistic in character. It is a form of training that addresses every aspect of life. It is not one that

Conclusion and Recommendations

Therefore, all instructors and facilitators in our Bible Colleges and Theological Seminaries should take up the challenge and draw positive moral lessons in the topics which they teach. Moral transformation must be emphasized.

Also, theological education should provide church leaders with the skills they need to be good citizens, for participating in political literacy and for social responsibilities. Every society needs sound theological education and good moral instructions to create conditions for peace, harmony, unity, stability, progress, prosperity and bringing up the young ones properly for tomorrow's leadership. A sound theological education will go a long way in providing the right type of values and attitudes that will rid the society of its evil, bad leadership and bring mature, disciplined and patriotic individuals who would place God and their country above all other considerations.

Besides, theological education offers a glorious opportunity for meaningful development in the society. Through proper development, implementation and utilization of the knowledge that theological education provides about society, the right environment would be created for evolving appropriate legislation, ethics and values for the society. Since politics is crucial to social transformation Christians must get involved in politics by joining political parties of their choice with the view of shinning the light of Christ.

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