

Church and Character Formation of Adolescents in Jos, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examines the roles that churches play in character formation of adolescents in Jos and its environs. It therefore emphasizes the social responsibility of the Church in condemning all sort of menace in the society. Although many works on this subject exist, attention has not been paid adequately to the methods adopted by churches in shaping the character of adolescents. This is the focus of this paper. The study adopted both the primary and secondary methods of research. Information was gathered through interviews with pastors, teachers of the adolescents and the worshipers. In addition, books, journals and other library materials were consulted. The information derived was interpreted within the ambit of consequentialism theory. The study finds that the church ministers through their teachings were creating awareness and inculcating values from the pulpit. They also organize seminars and training to create avenues for in-depth discussion of character and moral values. In the process of creating awareness, they form a team for evangelism. The evangelism teams try to locate bear parlors, where most of the youths visit to preach to them. The relevance of the study lies in the fact that it adequately offers perspectives on character formation which impact morals in the lives of young ones in Jos and its environs.

Keywords: Church, Adolescents, Character, Formation, Methods, Discipline

Introduction

The Church is an agent of Christian moral education as it impacts the lives of the young ones. There are various agencies of Christian moral education such as the home, the church and the school. In examining the church as an agency, it is believed that the church with her many organizations and societies is viable enough to inculcate in the child imbibe the Christian life style. This is reflected in the belief of the Roman Catholic Church about Christian child nurturing expressed thus: "Give me a child between birth and age six, I will make him a catholic" (Bolaji, 2007, p. 10).

This study examines the churches' methods of adolescents' character formation in Jos, Nigeria. It focuses on the roles that the churches are playing in character formation of adolescents in the churches in Jos and its environs. Many Churches do not seem to fulfill the fundamental responsibilities of molding the child to become responsible member of the society. The study is framed around the consequentialism theory which shows that the consequences of the act of sexual promiscuousness and permissiveness that is rampant among adolescents can lead to serious adverse effects of contracting

sexually transmitted diseases that could result to death. The adolescents formed about 30 – 40 % of the population of the Christian worshippers in Jos. Ten persons were interviewed in each category of Pastors, members and the adolescents.

Various studies on the subject of adolescent character formation have been carried out by some scholars. However, most of these works do not cover what this present study sets out to do. For example, Gallagher Russell wrote on ‘Emotional Problems of Adolescents’. Jean Garland wrote on AIDS is Real and it’s in our Church.” Kore Danfulani also wrote on Culture and Christian Home’. None of all these works focuses on the churches’ methods of character formation among adolescents in the churches in Jos and its environs. There is need therefore, to examine the moral, ethical and socio-religious roles of the Church and the method adopted in character formation among adolescents.

Definition of Terms

Adolescence

The term “adolescence” is used in this work in accordance with the definition given by Erickson (1968) which refers to it as an age bracket between 14 to 21 years. Persons in this age bracket are adolescents and they are mostly dependent in decision making. It is a period of development when the individual seeks his distinctive identity (Erickson, 1968) such as social interaction, imitating peers, seeking for personal independence. It is the opinion of the researcher that culturally speaking, adolescents are seen as immature adults, who may not know what is right and what is wrong. But the fact is that they should have a sense of morality.

Church

The term “church” as used in the New Testament is derived from the Greek word,

ecclesia. It is synonymous with the Hebrew word, *qahal* which simply means an “assembly”. The church is therefore, refers to the gathering of Christians organized for the worship of God through Christ. It is the fellowship of the people of God (I Peter 2:9).

Character Formation

Etymologically, the term “character” is a 14th Century word which means an engraving tool. By extension, it also refers to the mark made by an engraving tool. Eventually, it came to mean the distinctive mark of a person. The person’s character exhibits those qualities which distinguish that person from another (Birch and Rasmussen, 1989, p. 74). Character is a complex of mental and ethical traits marking a person. It therefore embeds behaviour, attitudes, morality, values, discipline and dispositions of an individual. Formation is a process of possessing structure or form, a process of influencing or guiding a person to a deeper understanding of a particular thing, and also the process during which something comes into being and gains its characteristics. Thus, the phrase “character formation” is the process by which a person (child) acquires those behavioural, ethical and moral principles or traits and values that mark his personality. It is also a process of molding children to learn appropriate behavior and make good choices. Character formation has to do with nurturing with correction, sanctions and discipline. Discipline as part of character formation aids a child in exercising self-control, accountability and mutual respect. The Church has a responsibility in the character formation of adolescents.

Biblical Basis for Character Formation

Proverbs and the other Wisdom Literatures are of great importance when talking about

character formation from Christian perspective. Proverbs makes reference to the task of moral development in youth especially in the family context. There was a time that Israel faced significant socio-religious changes, when they no longer had the temple, the monarchy, or the land to depend on for her identity (Babalola, 2017). Israel had to struggle with how she could maintain her identity. Wisdom helped to reshape Israel's former nationalistic focus by placing her religious beliefs in a different dimension as evident in the book of Proverbs. As a result, unlike many nations taken into exile Israel was able not only to survive, but also to thrive. With Israelite situation, the household became the central sphere for the development of moral character (Clements, 1992). Even at the time when the Jews lived in a predominantly Gentile world, the moral instruction became family responsibilities.

Proverbs 1: 8-9 states: "hear my child, your father's instructions, and do not reject your mother's teachings, for they are fair garland for your head and pendant for your neck". Proverbs presents the picture of a well-ordered house built by a woman of good character (Pro.31: 10-31). The essence is the formation of moral character. Both the Church and parents are involved in the task of training the youth in the way in which their moral character should develop. Their anthropocentric views are not perceived as conflicting poles (Babalola, 2017) but rather they are synthesizing forces which engage the human and divine wills in the formation of moral character for the sake of maintaining order in the society and the larger community.

As Bolaji (2007) states, the basic function of the family is to prepare youth for living morally responsible lives. Responsibility lies with the parents, the church and the youth in the educational process. Parents initiate the process (Prov. 2: 1-2, 4: 1-4); they provide a caring living

environment where instruction can most effectively take place. They give youth a mental repertoire of proverbial sayings that enable them to face daily moral decisions responsibly. The stereotypical view of adolescence in our culture today describes it as a period of rebellion; a time to sow one's wild oats. It has been stated that a "Youth is believed to have interest in moral or spiritual matters, and if they do not have solid instructions given to them prior to the teen years, it may be too late, it is like trying to reshape a dry fish, which will be a fruitless effort (Babalola, 2017).

In the same vein, talking about the need for character in the New Testament, Jesus (Matt 23) pronounced woes upon the Scribes and Pharisees and about three of the woes are in the ethical area. He said they tithed the smallest of herbs but "overlook the weightier demands of the law justice, mercy and good faith. Jesus is interested primarily in conduct and character. In essence the major concern of Jesus is the inner attitude towards the law, which is character (Maston, 1982). An emphasis on the fruitful life is particularly prominent in the gospel of John where he refers to "good fruit" and "bad fruit". Bolaji (2007) states that by good fruits is meant good works, proof of genuine humaneness and that is character. In the book of James, reference is made to two summary statements, namely, "pure religion, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction" (1: 27) and "whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin" (4: 7). James admonished his readers to allow the testing of their faith to produce some virtues which will move them on to a complete and balanced character. In I Peter too, there is the mention of Christian virtue (1:5-9), which is to "Supplement your faith with virtue" i.e. real goodness, moral character. There is no gainsaying the fact that character formation has its roots firmly in the Bible. Hence, the Church plays

important roles in adolescents' character formation.

Theoretical Reflection of Character Formation

In the process of exploring theories of character formation, Bolaji (2007) cited Kohlberg, a psychologist and educator known for his cognitive theory of moral development. Influenced by Kant, Baldwin, Piaget and Dewey, Kohlberg was concerned with 'virtue' and 'justice'. His theory was shaped around the universal moral principle of justice. "Kohlberg's concept is interactional, in that he theorized that biological maturation does not account for development. Rather, development occurs as the result of interaction between a people's cognitive moral capacities and the influence of significant person's ideas and contents" (Bolaji 2007, pp. 7-8). This is where the Church comes into the role of building the character of the youth. Furthermore Bolaji (2007) further stated that Kohlberg also believed that the relationships between moral stages and religious thinking depend on moral structures. He also believed that religious thinking supports moral development by providing reasons for being moral. Indeed, "Kohlberg understood religious beliefs to provide content for moral decision making" (p. 8).

Theologically, a person with character is someone with judgment to know what is right and courage to do what is good. Character, according to Birch and Rasmussen (1989), is the name given to the moral being of a person or group as that is forged into a distinctive constellation. The word "character" is the mark to those who are morally discerning and committed to acting on their convictions. In view of this, Birch and Rasmussen state that for good or evil, the state of public life mirrors the quality of character in the citizenry. Public and character formation they say is inseparable. Thus, this places the

"community at the center of character formation itself". Their major thesis is that character formation and community dynamics go hand in hand. By implication, one's identity is formed precisely as one identifies with the various social forms which bestow on a society and its participants. This leaves one with two important implications.

First, we exist only in relation to something outside ourselves i.e. moral relations are always dimensions of social relations in which neither "personal" can be separated from social or individual from community. Second, there is something profoundly "moral" in the very structuring of human relatedness. Our existence is so ordered that we are realized or fulfilled only by taking care of that which is not us. In other words, if we do not take care of that which is not us, our own self is stunted (Birch and Rasmussen, 1989, p. 76). In other words this is a challenge to the church, i.e. this brings the Church into the centre of character formation of the young ones or else the Church will be a stunted self as these same youth will stain or mar the image of the Church.

Cultural Role in Character Formation

The culture also plays important role in the character formation of children. Culturally, as a child is growing, every adult plays significant role in the character building of the child. Even in mastering language, children learn the ways of their culture and their place in it. Here is an embodiment of moral substance learned in early childhood. In relation to this Bolaji (2007) asserted that:

Most of what I really need to know about how I have to live, and to do, and how to be, I learned in Kindergarten. Wisdom was not all at the top of graduate school mountain, but there in the sandbox. These are

things I learned: share everything, play fair, don't hit people, put things back where you found them, clean up your own mess, don't take things that aren't yours, say you're sorry when you hurt somebody, wash your hands before you eat, flush, warm cookies and cold milk are good for you. Live balanced lives, learn some and think some, and draw and paint and sing and dance and play and work every day some (Kansas City Times, 17 Sept., 1976) (9-10).

What a better world it would be if the whole world would learn these and stick to them. The society has so much to do in building character in children. Society is a fellowship of not only those now living and those to be born but those who have gone before (McClendon, 2002). The moral legacies of the past and the creations of the present live on. They reside in the ways of culture and its institution; in the heart and mind and the memories and hopes of the people. They are expressed in the varied objects and symbols of human love, trust, all allegiance and commitment; and they manifest themselves in the form of religious devotion; the songs we sing and the stories we tell (Bolaji, 2007, p. 10). All these are effective conveyers of the moral and the social that needs our attention. As Bolaji (2007) further stated, the church, as Christ's body in the world, must minister to the needs of the people. Such a task must call for as much innovations as is necessary to meet the needs of the people in a given community.

As Tidwell (1985) rightly put it, the ministry performance grows out of members' understanding of the purpose and objectives of the Church in relation to the needs of the person (p. 26). He further stated

that the ministry of administration is to equip persons for service. The persons equipped are the Church. The reason for leadership and guidance in the church is to equip the church, furnish it for service or action. These as it were are embedded in character formation. As Proverbs rightly put it, 'a wise child makes a glad father, but a foolish child is a mother's grief' (19:1). The Church's responsibility is to wake up to the responsibility of reforming the lives of young ones particularly in this era of gross juvenile delinquency and sexual immorality resulting in deadly diseases such as HIV/AIDS. In line with this observation, McDowell (1996) states that:

Only 23 percent of the post-body boomer generation claim to be virgins. More than three-quarters admit to having sexual intercourse with another single person. Two out of ten single members of that generation say they have had sex with a married person, and of those who are married, one in fourteen has had extramarital sex. Almost half (47%) of the babies born to that generation in 1992 were born to unmarried mothers. And the New York Times reports that "some studies indicate three-fourths of all girls have had sex during their teenage years and 15 percent have had four or more partners." And girls are having sex much earlier these days, the median age for a young woman's first act of premarital sex has fallen from nineteen in 1960 to seventeen in 1990. Dr. Liana Clark, a Philadelphia physician, says that most of her patients become sexually active at thirteen (281).

That which God created for enjoyment and intimacy has become perverted. Illicit sex is a major example of the sin and moral sickness that characterizes the modern society. This concern has made some religionists to map out ways of dealing with this sort of delinquency that is prevalent today. The government cannot do much to curb most of these forms of moral decadence in the society. Thus, the Church has enormous role to play in that regard.

Brief Historical Background of Some Churches in Jos

It was in the early 1900's that the church came to Plateau. Gaiya (1996) asserted that the Shendam Catholic Church was started in Shendam by the missionaries from the Society of African Mission (S.A.M.). Basically the same year (which was 1907), another missionary group named Sudan United Mission (S.U.M.) emerged and started work with the Tarok and Berom people. Meanwhile, the Society of African Mission (S.A.M.) was unable to penetrate Berom land until the 1950s.

History has it that the Anglican Church was established in Jos, with St. Lukes Anglican Church in the year 1913. According to Nathan Nwachukwu, the First year of the First World War Naraguta at that point was the seat of government and Church was started by the Rev. Canon C.E Doherty, a Sierra- Leonian mobile pastor. Records showed that the first baptismal candidates in Naraguta were baptized in 1915. These were mainly civil servant, traders and members of their families. When the seat of the government was moved from Naraguta to Jos in 1919, the Church also moved along. The worship service continued in the house of Mr. E.O. Kogbe because there already existed in his house, a fellowship and worship group, along what is today known as Church Street. While this was going on the European miners also started an "all whites-only" Church and that

became what we know today as St. Pirans. Today there are several Anglican Churches within Jos.

The Baptist Church was started by some notable Yoruba traders. In the process of trading, they felt the need to come together and fellowship. The first fellowship started on the 10th of October, 1911, at the house of a woman called Magajiya.

Due to the persistent out-break of persecutions from the indigenous Berom and Jarawas, coupled with the affront of the Hausas who were mostly Muslims and some idol worshippers, the Churches started their worship in some private houses for some period of time.

The Role of the Church in Character Formation of Adolescents in Jos.

The Church has been involved to certain degree in the shaping of the lives of the people, particularly the young ones. The churches took part in forming the character of their young ones and pointing them up to their social responsibilities. By that the church was responding to the ministry work which includes using catechism and sermons as well as mentoring in educating and providing support to the character formation of these young ones. Such education and provision of support in forming the character of these young ones came in three folds.

The churches have established various educational mission institutions, both mission schools i.e. bible schools and theological institutions. Some of these institutions are Bingham University owned by ECWA, Karlkum University owned by COCIN, The Redeemed People' Academy, Emmanuel international college, St. Johns College, St. Murumba, St Lois College, ECWA Staff School, Baptist High School, Jos, Baptist Academy, Baptist Science Grammer School, COCIN Schools, Hill Crest School, and a couple of primary and nursery schools in Jos and its environs. Most of all these schools are used as an mediums

to inculcate morals and mold the character of the young ones.

Most of the churches in Jos established some of the schools and colleges to create employment in order to empower the people especially the young ones. In line with this, Nwachukwu (2004) asserted that:

The churches in Jos metropolis through the establishment of health facilities, schools and colleges, rural development and other numerous establishments, such as the Bible Trust, The Bible Society office, CHAN, Christian Central Pharmacy, theological colleges and seminaries, various denominational offices and ministries have provided employment opportunities to many people. It is also believed that these opportunities should become powerful instruments in the fight against this “Number One Terrorist” of our time, HIV/AIDS (41).

Some of these churches normally use their health institutions i.e. hospitals in ministering to these young ones. In view of this Nwachukwu (2004) stated that: it was very noticeable that the city of Jos had benefitted from medical facilities established within the metropolis by churches. Such facilities include ECWA Evangel Hospital, Our Lady of Apostles Hospital (O.L.A.), CHAN Holistic Health Clinic, Brendan Memorial Clinic, The St Luke Cathedral Clinic, the ECWA eye Clinic and the world acclaimed CHAN facilities just to mention a few. Some of these hospitals and clinics have played major roles in ministering to these young ones on the dangers consequences of unwholesome indulgences and practices, particularly involvement in acts of sexual immorality.

Conclusion

The church in its missionary mandate has a duty to mold the young ones and impact them positively in terms of character formation. Just as Jesus with the disciples at Emmaus, so the Church today must become the traveling companion of adolescents. When Jesus accompanied the disciples on the road to Emmaus, he listened to their questions, he explained the truths of faith, he revealed himself to them in the breaking of the bread, and he sent them forth to tell others. This is the job description of the faith community, and in particular, the job of the Church leaders and pastors who are acting on behalf of the Church community and God. To walk with youth, one must learn their questions and understand their experiences (Babalola, 2017).

The Church through sermons, seminars, orientation courses etc. must give the adolescents a sense of responsibility and social relevance in building a stable society. This has to be achieved through interactions, role modeling and close mentoring. The fact is that for the Church to be successful in her ministering to the adolescents, it must be open to adolescents and involve them in projects and programs of the church. The church’s task will be to help their parishes, dioceses, associations, and movements to be truly open to the personal, social, and spiritual needs of young people. The church should regularly teach the biblical principles of total abstinence from sexual intercourse before and outside marriage. More so, there is need to increase attention on the frequent sensitization on the negative consequences of social vices.

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