

IMPACT OF CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS STUDIES AND THEOLOGY ON NATION-BUILDING

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Abstract

This article focuses on the “impact of Christian Religious Studies and Theology on nation-building.” Nigeria as a nation is alleged to be very religious, with Islam and Christianity being the two major religions in the country. Both religions preach and uphold high pious morality. Adherents of both religions have been at the helm of affairs, yet the country is said to be steep in corrupt and immoral practices. This article examines the role that Christian Religious Studies and Theology could play in ameliorating corrupt practices' effect, and positively impacting nation-building. Using the Ten Commandments as a model principle for governance and living, the article highlights the impact of the Ten Commandments progressively in every aspect of the nation. The Ten Commandments, like the pax Romana which contributed to the growth and development of Rome, gives a template that encourages faithfulness, trust, peace, and love, for a perfect environment where positive growth and development may be attained.

Keywords

Impact,
Christian Religious
Studies,
Theology,
Nation-building

Introduction

Nation-building for a long time has been an everyday struggle. Things have always been falling apart in every sector of this nation. There are often cries and the thirst and hunger for restructuring, the war against indiscipline, and war against corruption, which has led to the formation of the EFCC, ICPC, SARS and other paramilitary or parastatals to curb corruption, armed robbery, kidnappings, fraud and other social vices ravaging this country; Nigeria. However, the reverse is the case as these vices keep increasing at almost

uncontrollable rates, despite the popular belief of Nigeria as very religious country. This is evident in a study by the U.S. government in July, 2018 reports a 2012 survey done by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life estimated the population of Christians to be 49.3 per cent Christian and 48.8 percent Muslim, while the remaining 2 percent belong to other or no religions. It is a well-known fact that with these vices rampant in any nation, it is far from growth and development. This work will examine the impacts of Christian

Religious Studies and Theology on the society, for if the society thrives, then the nation thrives too because the society forms the nation.

Christianity as an Ethical and Moral Religion

Godfrey Emeka Amanchukwu (2014:138) believes, “there is always an explicit and intrinsic connection between evangelization and human development. The person to evangelize is not an abstract being but one who lives with all the socio-political and economic issues.” It is without a doubt that Christian-dominated societies are not compared to non-Christian communities in terms of development, transparency, peace, law-abiding etc.

It is quite pathetic that Nigeria’s situation has gone so bad that Hassan Kukah in Godfrey (2014:142) says, “corruption, sad as it may sound, is the only thing that works in Nigeria.” This is the truest statement the writer of this paper has heard about Nigeria for some years. Corruption has dug so deep into the blood of Nigerians that nothing is done the right way anymore, all one finds in the educational and labour sectors are nepotism and bribery. No longer what you know that gives you admission or job, but who you know or have, and what (substance, body, or money, etc.) you have to give. One often hears “use what you have to get what you want.” Someone hearing this for the first time may think it is an intellectual qualification, but sadly it is the other way round.

Godfrey (2014:142) notes that “the commandment of love of Jesus Christ must address the issue of corruption in our country; otherwise, there will be no transformation.” Godfrey goes further to say, “evangelization implies moral reorientations and authentic changes in the real context of the people's lives. To

ensure that evangelization yields its proper fruit of moral reorientation, certain conditions need to be met.”

The embodiment of the Christian religion rests upon the love of Christ and the Ten Commandments, which guide moral lives, thereby increasing communal productivity and development.

Bartholomew Chidili (2015:202-3) states that “since ethics is defined as a set of moral principles or study of morality. Christian ethics are principle derived from the Christian faith by which Christians act. All about Christian faith is enshrined in the Bible. Using the scripture's principles, Christians can determine the ethical course of any given situation. The moral principles in scripture answer every life situation, be it personal, common or governance. From the time, immemorial, there has been nothing beyond God’s control, and there can never be. Since the Bible is God’s special revelation of himself to humans, the Bible is, therefore, the best moral manual or guide for any society.

Christian Religious Studies and Christian Theology as Influential Disciplines and the Impacts on Societal Development

Christian Theology, into which Christian religious studies is embedded in has from long before now proven to be influential. History has it that in ancient times, the pre-requisite for the study of any course was theology, hence the definition of theology as “the mother of all science.” Bishop Hassan Matthew Kukah and Dist. Prof. YusufuTuraki, amongst other theologians, stands out in Nigeria with their immense contribution to nation-building.

Sylvester Dan Udofia (2011:155) posits that “The belief and teaching in God’s omniscience which upholds that one cannot escape God’s judgement even

if he or she escapes all society's sanctions is a healthy restraint from immoral behaviour." The knowledge and fear of the impending judgment of God on evil doers have been a major warning in the hearts of so many and have guided them towards avoiding evil vices at all cost. Theology and Christian religious studies have produced Theologians and scholars who have the burden to preach Christ and, afterwards morality and Christian ethics to shape our society for the better.

The influence of these disciplines births their tremendous positive impact on societal development. The purpose of these disciplines as highlighted by Yohanna S. Kesmen and Bitrus Tok Dung (2011:151) is to be "found in the personal and spiritual knowledge of God." Citing Lekwart, Kesmen and Dung (2011:161) say, "when there is an encounter with God, a change is brought to play in persons' moral character from within the heart is inclined to such a moral behaviour the activity becomes acceptable to both God and man."

Just as scientific and technological disciplines provide scientific and technological development to the society, theology and Christian religious Studies (education) also have the capability to provide peace, justice, law and order etc., without which scientific and technological developments are impossible. These disciplines have in them vital roles towards the revitalization of societies. These disciplines should not be considered just in the academic or theoretical form but also in their practicality. James the apostle in his epistle encourages not just to listen but also to do.

To this end, Yahaya A. John (2014:31-2) harmonizes Kwasau and Illori's objectives of Christian Religious Education and presents them as follows:

1. To develop true values, virtues, character and attitudes about others and other means of communication.
2. To develop the talents God gives each of us so that we may so that we may earn our daily bread and be of service to others, and foster the capacity to make responsible decisions
3. To foster in growing persons a consciousness of God as a reality in human experience and a sense of personal relationship to him.
4. To develop in growing persons such an understanding and appreciation of the personality, life and teaching of Jesus as well as leading him to experience Jesus as Savior and Lord, loyalty to him and his cause, and manifest Jesus in his daily life and conduct.
5. To foster in growing persons a progressive and continuous development of Christ-like character.
6. To develop in growing persons the ability and disposition to participate in and contribute constructively to the building of a social order throughout the world, embodying the idea of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man.
7. To develop in growing persons an appreciation of the meaning and importance of the Christian family and the ability and disposition to participate in and contribute constructively and meaningfully to the life of this primary group.
8. To lead a growing person in a Christian interpretation of life and the universe: the ability to see life in God's purpose and plan.
9. To expose an individual to the truth that sets free and dispels error, the source of bondage.
10. To instruct individuals to obey Christ through the great commission by making the truth entrusted available to every generation.
11. To orient individuals that education must be viewed largely in economic

terms as a profitable long-term investment for individual and national development.

By the objectives of this discipline stated above, it is obvious that all it gears towards is societal development and nation-building, bringing a nation to its prime. There need to be understanding that not all nations will thrive by science and technology, many, if not all nations should give other disciplines like theology and Christian religious studies due consideration.

Kesmen and Dung (2011:161) posit that “Christianity’s source of theology and ethics is the Holy Bible..., ethics is a social affair because it deals with human conduct and conduct is possible only in a social situation. This means that one individual’s behaviour or actions affects others living with him in the same community. It is this social context that the Ten Commandments in part says that:

1. Honour your father and mother that you may live long in the land the Lord your God gives you.
2. You shall not kill.
3. You shall not commit adultery.
4. You shall not steal.
5. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor, you shall not covet your neighbour’s wife, his man servant, his maid servant, his ox, his ass, or anything that is your neighbour’s (Ex 28:12-17).”

Reuben Turbi Luka (2018:14) believes that the situation in Nigeria now needs Christian theology; he quotes Oliver R. Backlay saying;

it is only through sound biblical teaching that righteousness can be entrenched in our nation’s political system. The Ten Commandments for instance, were given to the total standard of life and social activities in the Jewish social intercourse. Since

both Islamic and Christian traditions lend support to these laws... the ten commandments still provide an astonishingly complete outline of social righteousness and justice.

It is without doubt that any nation that must thrive must be through justice and righteousness; this is what Christian theology and Christian religious Studies teach. If only the Christians in the helm of political affairs will be true to biblical teachings, then corruption and injustice will be dealt with in such a nation.

However, it is worthy of note that theologians and scholars abound who preach and teach a different gospel or theology, to which Paul said they are accursed already though. Still, they have caused an undeniable setback and harm to the African society. They preach what Mshan Rogate (2013:725) calls prosperity theology.

The fact economic and ecological justice bitters Rogate is missing in Africa. Africa for long has been operating on a faulty theology, which is the theology of prosperity that has perverted God’s word by portraying people in poverty as being so due to their sins; rather than exposing the injustice that makes them poor, they are blamed. He believes transformative theology will go a long way in addressing critical issues of greed, usury, and corruption; and restore to the churches and the people the meaning of God’s economy, at the heart of which lies economic, social and ecological justice for all.

It is important to note that many perpetrators of injustice are found in the church and even among ministers, and the only help that can be rendered is “transformative theology.” He believes this transformative theology can bring about transformation in the church and society at large. It is obvious that part of the society forms the church, and the church forms part of the society if only

transformative theology which has an influence on all of the theology and leads to economic, social and ecological justice for all, thereby correcting the prosperity theology that birthed greed, usury, and corruption will be gotten rid of.

Just like Rogate, Umaru Tanimu Saminaka Ishaya (2017:141) believes that "it is the job of the Church to be the social welfare to the people and not the Government. The church is to engage the government to do the bidding of God," and till there is a transformative theology in the church, this sounds almost impossible.

It is pertinent to note that for justice to take the lead, everyone in society needs to understand that they are stewards of everything in their possession. As Philip Ter-abur (2015:117,118,121) has it, "a biblical basis for stewardship must begin in the affirmation that God is sovereign and that we recognize him as exercising divine ownership over all that there is. Stewardship demands strict faithfulness."

People often find it difficult or tend not to be faithful with public properties or positions. They see such times as opportunities to get their own share of the national cake, especially in Nigeria. They need to know that, even if they do not account to the government or public, they will surely account to God who placed them in such positions as stewards who are to be faithful, representing the kingdom they come from.

And as Biitrus A. Sarma (2018: iv-vi) states that: "Christian theology is *sine qua non* in gauging the sociopolitical milieu and context of any given society because sound Christian theology reflects on the mind of God regarding his standards for a just prosperous society."

Conclusion

It is quite unfortunate that all the positive impacts of Christian religious studies and theology is been bottled up and enclosed only religious departments of universities theoretically, theological institutions and churches by scholars, theologians, pastors, Christians, government and the entire community. There is a dire need to allow these very influential disciplines find practical expression in societies which translate into the nation. It is sad to affirm that in Nigeria, most individuals go to school for certificates to get a job, not the knowledge to impact lives and society at large. People need to understand that these disciplines are not evil, for so many regard theology as such just because it seems to challenge their prior and erroneous knowledge of scripture, the fact that it goes beyond just the text of scripture to get context and background, often makes people say "do not bring that your theology here." For impact to be feasible, it has to start from somewhere, no matter how small. Theologians and Christian Religious Studies Scholars need to start impacting their immediate family, friends and communities; to make people begin to view theology as a good thing rather than an evil thing, it is more like a mentorship thing, where one who is mentored is expected to mentor others, and the circle goes on and on. One does not need to get a very big platform, maybe in a conference or gathering of great crowds, it can begin with just one person offstage, maybe on the street, in a store or even through social media. Theologians and Scholars need to understand that they do not need to be given platforms to impact life and society; all they need do is create platforms.

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