

RELIGION AND THE ADVENT OF WESTERN EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Religion has become one of the veritable tools used by developing countries like Nigeria, to revamping their education system. The paper is intended to explore the impact of religion on Western Education in Nigeria. The paper also describes the content features of early mission school, Islamic Education System in Nigeria, Western Education in the Northern Nigeria and government intervention in education. A careful presentation is made of the history of the Western Education in Nigeria, the trends in its development and the relevance of the system to the overall economy.

Key Words: Religion, Western Education, Revamping, Economy, Nigeria.

Introduction

The aim of the missionaries who brought Western Education to Nigeria was also similar to the Muslim Arabs that brought Islamic education into Northern Nigeria centuries before. The only initial difference one might notice was the desire for economic activities by the Arabs. The Christian missionaries on the other hand arrived to, according to Aloy (2001), "*liberate the dark minds of the Africans from barbarism and idolatry.*" The economic and political factors come much later.

The history of Western education in Nigeria was traceable to the Portuguese traders who came to Benin in the early part of the 15th century. Then they taught the children of the Oba of Benin. However, no rearing full development of Western education which was not accepted took root until late 18th and early 19th Centuries. However, the history of meaningful Western education in Nigeria is traceable to the activities of the Christian Missionaries, which started in 1842. Accounts of this historical eve not were given by numerous educationists. Among them were, Taiwo, O.C (1980), Adesina S. (1988), Fayana, A. (1978) and Fafuwu (1974) to mention but just a few.

The mission responsible for the introduction of Western education in Nigeria was the Wesleyan Methodist society, which opened the Christian Mission Station at Badagry, near Lagos. The activities of this society were facilitated by an ex-slave of Yoruba ruler by name

Fergoro who had earlier returned to the area. It was him that succeeded in persuading the Yoruba chiefs to bring the missionaries from Sierra Leone into Badagry. This effort saw the coming of Thomas Birch Freeman and Mr. and Mrs. De Graft in September, 1842 under the auspices of the Wesley Methodist society to establish the first ever Christian mission station in the area.

Fafunwa (1978) observed the Catholics; through the influence of the Portuguese traders were the first missionaries to set foot on the Nigerian soil. They established a seminary on the island of Sao Tome, off the coast of Nigeria as early as 1571 to train Africans as church priest and teachers. From Sao Tome, he continued, they visited Warri where they established schools and preached the gospel. The effort of the Wesleyians Methodist society was further consolidated by three missionaries of the church missionary society who arrive Badagry from where they later moved to Abeokuta. On the team were Rev. Samuel Ajayi Crowther, (later Bishop), Mr. Henry Townsend and Mr.G.A Collman, Samuel Ajayi Crowther settle at Igbehin and established two schools, one for boys and the other for girls, while Townsend settle in Ake, another part of the town, where he built a mission house, a church and a school. This was the beginning of real rivalry among the Christian Missions in Nigeria. The Methodists, who started the first evangelical work in Nigeria, did not take this news kindly and so decided to send a lay of missionary to Abeokuta to commence work there.

The Content Features of Early Mission Schools

The missions of the early mission schools were to evangelize and convert Nigerians into Christianity. They, however, believed that this was not possible except through formal educational process that would enable the natives read and write. This was the bases upon which the need for the establishment of mission schools was conceived and pursued, vigorously alongside their main objectives. At the established schools, children were expected to receive tuition in English education at suitable age he apprenticed in useful trades/skills in gardening and Agriculture etc. the most serious and promising youths were considered for further education that would prepare them as school teachers in the interior, catechists and ministers.

The curriculum and methods of studies were almost similar to the Qur'anic schools (Fafunwa, 1978). Rote-learning predominated and the teacher taught practically everything from the one textbook. The Bible, like the Qur'an, was the master text book and every subject no matter how remote had to be connected in some way with the holy writ." In addition to these contents, children received formal training in writing, arithmetic, reading and singing. 'When there was a lady teacher, the girls learnt sewing.

No tuition was charged initially in missionary schools. Children who cared to come were welcome. Admissions were attracted by the missionaries through various means, which included door to door visits to persuade parents to send their children to school. Some parents

were insisting payment from missionaries before allowing their wards to attend such schools. The parents considered it a big sacrifice allowing the children to attend school instead of the farm. At a certain time, some stipends were suggested by the mission teachers for school children living at home as an inducement to make them regular at school.

Islamic Education System in Nigeria

The history of Islamic education in Nigeria cannot be complete without recasting our minds on the impacts it had made on the world at large. Islamic education generally started with the first Qur'anic revelation to the prophet of Islam, Muhammed (S.A.W). The first five verses revealed contained clear directives to him and the rest of the Muslims to pursue the course of knowledge, signifying that the religion is solidly rooted in the pursuit of knowledge. The verses in question are as follows:

In the name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful

1. Read in the name of your lord who created;
2. Created man from a congealed blood;
3. Read, and your Lord is the Most Great;
4. Who teaches man the use of pen;
5. Teaches man what he knew not; (Q96:1-5)

The above verses illuminated the world, which was hitherto grouping in darkness and sauntering in the shackles of ignorance. The virtue of knowledge is extolled and the power of the pen for its documentation and preservation is clearly pointed out. Since then, the Muslims have been working relentlessly to establish themselves as patrons and/or custodians of knowledge. The tremendous achievements recorded in the fields of architecture, history, medicine, philosophy and other branches of liberal and natural sciences were credited to the period of the reign of the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties who ruled in the third century after the *Hijrah*.

The scientific and technological breakthroughs of the modern world owe a lot to the researchers conducted by the great scholars of Islam. Centres of learning in Basra, Kufah, Baghdad, and elsewhere in Europe particularly Cordova which began from mosques as religious centres developed into full-fledged centres of higher learning and universities, from where a great number of Muslims scholars emerged. Notable among them were Averroes (Ibn Rushd) who was "responsible for the development of Aristotle's philosophy, which made a clean distinction between religious and scientific truths". His achievements in the area of philosophical discourse "paved the way for the liberation of scientific research from the theological dogmatism that was prevalent in churches and mosques". Others like Muhammad Ibn Musa, the mathematician responsible for the introduction of decimal notation and assigning digits the value of position; Avicenna (Ibn Sina), the physician and other Arab scholars spearheaded the introduction of geometry and the development of spherical trigonometry, particularly the sine, tangent and cotangent.

In the field of physics, to say the least, the Muslim Arabs discovered the pendulum and were able to advance “the world’s knowledge of the optics”. They dominated the field of astronomical research and invented many astronomical instruments, which are still in use today. The angle of ecliptic as well as the precision of the equinoxes worked out by the Arab scholars have been and are still sine-qua-non to the world’s technological advances. The Arab Muslims discovered such substances as potash, silver nitrates, corrosive sublimate and nitric and sulphuric acid, which set the edifice for the scientific breakthroughs the world is witnessing today. The Muslim scholars have also made their marks in the field of agriculture and manufacturing which helped to boost trade among nations. It was indeed, the trading activities that transpired between the Arabs and the Africans that brought about Islam and the Islamic system of education to Africa.

Historical records show that Arab scholars and traders played a great role in the propagation of Islamic faith and education in Africa and Nigeria. Great cities like Cairo, Timbuktu, Djenné, Gao and the regions of the Western Sudan flourished as centres of commerce and religious learning. Many notable judges, doctors, clerics and historians were produced in these centres, which impacted significantly on the lives of the people. The civilization that came to Africa, especially the North Africa and the Western Sudan, owe much to the activities of the Arab traders and scholars who visited the land hundreds of years before the coming of the Europeans.

Western Education in Northern Nigeria

Like you have learnt, the North was the seat of the Islamic education. The values of the system were deeply rooted in the minds of the inhabitants who were predominantly Muslims. This peculiarly, together with geographical terrains determined the pace of development of western education in the region. The Northern Emirs were less enthusiastic in adopting a system which they considered as “enemy to their faith. Consequent upon this, then Sultan was reported to have remarked as follows: *“I do not consent that everyone from you should ever dwell with us. I will never agree with you. I will have nothing to do with you....”* (Adesina, 1985 p.89).

Based on the resistance of the Emirs, Lord Lugard, the Governor of the Northern region persisted in warning the Christian missionaries against the consequences that would result from spreading Christianity in the area. His warnings to the Christian missionaries are contained in the following words “ I see no reason- why religion- be it of one sort or another should be forced upon the natives- I see much in it to exasperate the Muhammadan master who considers himself robbed of his property, that we may further a religious propaganda hostile to its creed.” (Adesina, 1985 p.80).

The skepticism notwithstanding, the system got way to the middle belt region of the north. By the year 1913, only four schools had been established, one exclusively for the training of the sons of the chiefs who would take over administration from their fathers and one

for the training of mallams. The aims of schooling were imparting academic knowledge to produce literate ruling class and few educated people to assist the colonial administration.

Government Intervention in Education

Decades after the introduction of western education in Nigeria education had remained under the control of the Christian Missionaries. Government was unwilling to participate in the system in part or in total. The sources of funds for the mission schools mainly came from donations from groups and individual outside the country, including local Christian and parents who were later paying for their children. The bulk of the contributions were from the grants from the main abroad. In 1877 however, government decided to give unconditional grants to the mission school, which was used only to proliferate mushroom schools in villages. Thus, the conditions of the schools remain bad. There was acute shortage of teaching and learning facilities. "The Blackboards, chalks and slates were in short supply and the primers were largely religious tracts or information unrelated to local background" (Taiwo, 1980 p.241).

Arising from the petition of the secretary of state for the colonies, the Gold Coast colony, of which Lagos was part thereof a bill for promotion and assistance of education was passed into law. The provisions of the bill provided the basis for the establishment of the General and Local Boards of Education; each with its powers. It also categorized schools into public and assisted schools. The former being financed squarely by public funds and the later assisted (grant aided) from public funds as well. The bill approved the freedom of parents concerning the religious freedom of their children, specified how the grants should be used which were mainly for school buildings payment of teachers' salaries. The conditions for the eligibility of the grants were also spelt out. They included effective managerial control, attendance of children in such schools and the examination results in specified subjects.

The Relevance of Western Education To Nigeria

In 1877, an education ordinance for the colony of Lagos came into being. The provision of the ordinance laid down some principles, which became the foundation of the education laws and relevance for Nigeria. The provisions as listed by Taiwo (1980) are:

1. The constitution of a Board of Education, comprising the Governor, members of the legislative council, (which was then a small body), the inspector of schools, the Governor's nominees not exceeding four in number;
2. The appointment of her Majesty of an inspector schools for each colony, a sub-inspector of schools for the colony and other education officers.
3. Grant in aids to schools and teacher training institutions.
4. Power of the Board to make, alter and revoke rules for regulating the procedures of grant-in-aid.
5. Rates and conditions of grant-in-aid to infants' schools, primary schools, secondary schools and industrial schools based partly on subjects taught and partly on the degree of excellence in the schools.

6. Safeguard as to religious and racial freedom.
7. Certificate of teachers.
8. Admission into an assisted school of pauper and alien children assigned to it by the Governor.
9. Established of Scholarships for secondary and technical education.
10. Power of Governor to open and maintain Government schools.

A careful examination of the ordinance revealed the re-echoing of the provisions of the 1877 provisions and the intention of government to participate with the missionaries as partners in the provision of education to Nigerians. This experience helped immensely in the administration and management of education later in the colony and protectorate of Southern Nigeria.

Conclusion

This paper examined the trends in the historical development of western education in Nigeria. The factors responsible for the introduction were purely religious- to convert the natives of Christianity. This remained the primary aim of education until the coming of the education ordinances of 1877 and 1886. The ordinances provided for the grant-an-aid to missionary schools and mandated government to run and maintain public schools as well. Western education in Northern Nigeria was not welcome. It was greeted with some misapprehension mostly from the fear that the Muslims might be converted to Christianity. However, much later after it had been accepted in the middle belt area, the Northern Emirs consented and allowed their children, who would take charge of administration after them to be educated. In addition, education was provided for the training of people who would assist the colonial administration as clerks among other things.

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