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## PHILOSOPHICAL APPRAISAL OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: LESSONS FOR ABAKALIKI DIOCESE

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**Abstract:** *This paper aims at an exposition and appraisal of Catholic Education in Nigeria and the lessons for Catholic Education System in Abakaliki Diocese of Ebonyi State. Using the method of hermeneutics and exposition, the paper examined the degree to which Catholic Education has impacted values both temporal and eternal, changed orientations and effected developmental strides in Ebonyi State/Abakaliki Diocese and Nigeria. In the same vein, this paper identified that the failure of the government's responsibility towards education makes it imperative and an obligation for the Catholics to supply this deficiency lest Nigeria would be left at a precipice and our education standard jinxed. Towards achieving the stated goals, the paper gives conceptual and theoretical expositions of education in Nigeria and Abakaliki Diocese. Also, the paper gives the corresponding impacts of Catholic Education in the areas of human and spiritual formation, technological, political, economic and social transformation. In spite of the mentioned impact, this paper exposed some of the challenges to Catholic Education in Abakaliki Diocese and the corresponding effects such as poor infrastructures in our schools, non availability of learning materials, government tax policies, unhealthy competitions, gross irresponsibility of some education managers leading to corruption, poor supervision, poor implementation of both Catholic and National Education Policies, e.t.c. No doubt, these negative factors are portentous omen to Catholic Education and must be eschewed without compromise minding the devastating effect to Catholic Education and the future of Abakaliki Diocese. From the findings, it is obvious that in spite of the mentioned challenges, Catholic Education has doggedly made overwhelming, awesome and heartwarming effort to live to its mandate. The implication of the findings is a clarion call on all Catholic Education Managers to live up to her mandate as enshrined in Catholic Education and National Education Policies. Also, it is a call on the government to live up to her basic responsibilities in the Education system.*

**Keywords:** Education, Schools, Catholic, Abakaliki/Ebonyi, policy.



## CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS: UNDERSTANDING EDUCATION AND CATHOLIC EDUCATION

### Education

Education is equivocal in meaning such that different people, culture and background/society attach different meaning to education<sup>1</sup>. Etymologically, education is derived from the Latin word, *educare* which means 'to bring up'<sup>2</sup>. Following this etymological derivation, we define education in two senses:

Education is the process of receiving or giving systematic instruction, especially in a school or university. This form of education is very much interested in an organized system of knowledge, passing examinations and obtaining certificate.

Education can also be referred as the acquisition and development of skills in handworks and attitude.

In an attempt to articulate these definitions of education, the Uganda National Education System Law N. 20 of 1989 defined education as the conscious effort to prepare students through mentoring, teaching, and/training for their role in the future.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, George Williams defined education as the wise, hopeful and respectful cultivation of learning undertaken in the belief that all should have the chance to share in life.<sup>4</sup> In a more systematic understanding, Ukeje defined education as a process, product and discipline<sup>5</sup>. As a process, education is a set of activities for the reason of impacting and handing down ideas, value and norms of society across generations. As a product, education is measured by the qualities and traits displayed by the educated person as one conceived as being knowledgeable. As a discipline, education is defined and assessed on the criteria of the benefit of organized knowledge gained<sup>6</sup>.

The above definitions of education prompt a division of the concept into two major branches: formal and informal education. Formal education involves receiving or giving systematic instruction in schools or universities while informal education involves the acquisition of skills or attitude outside a systematically organized school or university. Informal education does not need a highly organized curriculum of study or school environment. It can take place in homes, market, workshop etc. This is form of education as practiced in Nigeria is chiefly manifest in the homes and workshops for trading and handworks such as mechanics, carpentry, tailors, catering, masons, e.t.c.



In the course of history, different philosophers made serious attempts towards understanding education in different capacities. Socrates compared education to his mother's profession as a midwife such that a teacher, like a midwife, helps the student to give birth to knowledge. In the same vein, like a mother, the student conceives the idea; and the teacher, like a midwife, helps the student-mother to be delivered of the conceived idea<sup>7</sup>. Little wonder Aquinas claimed that for learning process to be a success, the frequency of operation between the teacher and the student must be at equilibrium<sup>8</sup>.

In the modern time, Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educationist in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* showed expertise in his conceptual understanding of education and the method of imparting education<sup>9</sup>. Hence he claimed that a good education method is the key to liberation which is the awakening of critical awareness and the thinking process in the individual<sup>10</sup>. When the right method is applied education impact adequate humanization<sup>11</sup> and liberation to the human person. Paulo Freire's science of education shows that humanization is the true vocation of man. This is possible when education has adequately performed its role to the human society thereby leading the citizens to conscientization and true humanness.<sup>12</sup>

### **Catholic Education**

Catholic Education can be best understood with reference to some authoritative documents of the Catholic Church on education, 'DivinilliusMagistri' of 1929 where the Pontiff, defined education as the Sacred task of forming the character of the child and aiding him/her to attain the purpose of existence<sup>13</sup>. Similarly, in the Code of the Canon Law, education is defined as following:

development of the whole person so that all may attain their eternal destiny and at the same time promote the common good of society. Children and young persons are therefore to be cared for in such a way that their physical, moral, intellectual talents may be developed in a pleasant manner so that they may attain a greater sense of responsibility and a right use of freedom and be formed to take an active part in social life<sup>14</sup>.

In Nigeria, the Catholic Bishops stated that education involves the aggregate of all experiences that enlighten the mind, increase knowledge, develop abilities, build moral and religion towards developing attitudes and strength of will<sup>15</sup>. Hence Catholic Education is the



participation of the Catholic Church in the business of developing the whole man, soul, body, intellect, will, emotion and physical well-being<sup>16</sup>.

## **EDUCATION AND CATHOLIC PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIA**

Having stated that Catholic Education is the participation of the Catholic Church in the business of developing the whole man, soul, body, intellect, will, emotion and physical well-being<sup>17</sup>, this attempt is principally achieved through formal schools, informal education training centers and doctrinal teachings as principal means of advancing education, humanization, liberation, dialogue and conscientization<sup>18</sup>. The Code of canon law defines schools as the principal means of helping parents to fulfill their role in education<sup>19</sup>. In the same vein, the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education defines school as 'a place for integral formation by means of a systematic assimilation of culture'

The greatest mode of Catholic participation in education is through Catholic Schools while other minor modes include teaching services and other pastoral guide to public schools. The Code of Canon Law defines Catholic School as that under the control of the competent ecclesiastical authority or one which in a written document is acknowledged as Catholic by the ecclesiastical authority<sup>20</sup>. Little wonder Pope Benedict XVI in His address in Washington DC to heads of Catholic colleges insisted that the institution must be unwavering in their commitment to authenticity of teaching and human formation guided by the ecclesiastical requirements. Hence divergence from this vision according to the Holy Father weakens the Catholic identity<sup>21</sup>.

In Nigeria, formal education came with colonialism. Two forms of education were in existence before the advent of colonialism in Nigeria: indigenous or traditional and Islamic education. Traditional education was predominant in the southern region and other parts of the Middle belt of Nigeria. This form of education was characterized by informal training in agriculture, artisan, cultural norms, e.t.c. In the same vein, Islamic education was practiced in the northern and little parts of South-Western Nigeria as informed and articulated in the Quran. Islamic education was first accepted in Nigeria by Kanem Jimi between 1085-1097.

It is very important to note that Catholic Portuguese were the first Europeans to make attempt towards western education in Nigeria. This was championed by Henry the Navigator and the Catholic Priests who landed Benin in 1472 and established trading ports. With the support of the Oba of Benin, the priests built several Churches to serve the Portuguese



community and the small number of African converts. In 1515, the Portuguese Roman Catholics set up a school in the Oba's Palace for his sons and those of his chiefs converted to Christianity. After about 37 years dating 1515-1552, different Catholic Churches and Schools were established in Warri and Brass. Following the hospitality of the people, a Catholic Seminary was also established on the Island of Sao Tome for the training of priests and Teachers.

This attempt on western education was aborted for reasons of slave trade and other cultural challenges till 19<sup>th</sup> century. The return of the western education became possible by Church Missionary Society (CMS) in the coastal areas that became the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria about 1842. At the proclamation of the Protectorates of Northern Nigeria in 1900, there was no school of the western type in the Northern territory except for the Church Missionary Society (C.M.S.) School at Lokoja. The Christian missionaries organized and trained some Nigerians in the art of reading and writing. This was led by Rev. and Mrs. Townsend, Mr. and Mrs. AjayiCrowther and several other ex-slaves. The first set of trained people was employed by the colonial government as clerks, interpreters, catechist, e.t.c. The difficulties and barriers of communication experienced with the natives prompted the setting up of schools where interpreters were trained. This gave a leeway for the training of catechists and lay readers as supporters in the work of evangelization. They learnt to read the bible, the prayer book, commentaries and to sing the hymns. This educational activity was championed by the Church Missionary Society (CMS), Methodists and Catholic Missionaries. The colonial administration's interest in schools was simply to raise artisans and minor functionaries such as clerks, junior technicians in public works, sanitary inspectors, tailors, carpenters or bricklayers. e.t.c<sup>22</sup> to assist in running the imperial state<sup>23</sup>.

The spread of western education came from the statutory Education Ordinances

Education Ordinance No. 3 of 1887 for promotion of education in the colonies of Lagos: Lagos Island, Mainland, Badagry, Lekki, Epe and Ikorodu and other Yoruba lands. Till today, this opportunity made the Western Nigeria the Educational pillar of Nigeria.

Educational Ordinance No. 19 of 1903 for the protectorates of Southern Nigeria including the now provinces of Calabar, Owerri, Onitsha (where some part of Abakaliki Diocese then belonged), Warri, Benin, Ogoja (where the second part of



Abakaliki Diocese then belonged) and District of Ondo Province. The Proclamation was strongly influenced by the practices of the Presbyterian Mission with its background of the Scottish educational system.

Though this form of education was innovative in the time but was highly limited to merely elementary stage<sup>24</sup>. It was not for self development of Nigerians but a tool to facilitate running either colonial administration or the work of evangelization such that the education would as well, be done with, when the said purpose is achieved.

Nevertheless, today, Catholic Education System has uncountable number of Nursery, Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Institutions across the States and Dioceses of Nigeria. It is on record that these institutions have distinguished themselves in all areas of learning and human development manifest in the uncountable laurels won in different competitions within and outside Nigeria, excellent performances in different areas of specializations, e.t.c. To say the least, these institutions have proven to be citadels of molding character and learning.

### **CATHOLIC EDUCATION AND LESSONS FOR ABAKALIKI DIOCESE**

It is a fact that education and national development are like two sides of a coin such that one cannot be accepted leaving the other and vice versa. Education ought to be the prerogative of the government. Nevertheless, the government's levity to matters of education calls for urgent concern and need for alternative way to save the hexed standard of education in Nigeria. Hence Catholic Education is not intended to supplant but to complement the government effort to provide education and implement the National Policy on Education.

The effort of Catholic Education towards educational development is immeasurable. The standard set in mission schools creates a yawning gap with the government counterparts and other private schools. A very close look in Abakaliki Diocese of Ebonyi State shows that the church has been relentlessly a bulwark to education and formation in character and learning. Majority of all who had good education before and immediately after the civil war were all trained by Catholic Missionaries either in Catholic Schools or in government schools. It is undeniable that 85% of the father founders of Ebonyi State were trained by Catholic Missionaries. At moment, Ebonyi State has about 30 Catholic Secondary Schools and 53 Nursery and Primary Schools. A cursory look at the state and federal universities in the state



shows that 50% of the best graduating students annually who had their secondary education within Ebonyi State are products of Catholic secondary schools.

A quick look at Ishieke Campus of Ebonyi State University shows that even though Ishieke students refer to Ishieke campus as a dumping ground for students unable to gain admission to their course of first choice such as law, medicine and other health sciences, 45 % of the best Students there are products of Catholic Schools. In CAS (faculty of law and agriculture) and PRESCO (faculty of medicine and all sciences) campuses, the story is the same. Majority of the best graduating students and other competitive positions from the different departments are products of Catholic Nursery, Primary or Secondary Schools. Little wonder did the evidence of this outstanding performances make Ebonyi State Government hand over the management of the best three government secondary/technical colleges in the State to the Catholic Diocese of Abakaliki. These best three government secondary schools include: Government Technical Colleges in Agba, Afikpo and Abakaliki; representing the three senatorial zones in the state.

The story is the same across the country. It is therefore very obvious that the contribution of the Catholic Church in educational development of Nigeria remains unparalleled. The mission used their limited resources to build schools all over the place and products of these schools have distinguished themselves in competitions with their counterparts. Thus the generations of best teachers, professors, lawyers, medical doctors, other professionals are proud alumni of Catholic schools such that up till 1970s most of the best schools in the southern Nigeria were either established or managed by the Catholic mission amongst other missionaries. The most recent victory of the golden girls of Regina Pacis Catholic Secondary school, Onitsha is highly laudable. They silenced the world including China, America, Europe, e.t.c in the World Technovation competition in San Francisco with their FD-Detector app to tackle the challenges of fake drugs in Nigeria. Similarly, very many Catholic schools in Abakaliki Diocese have distinguished themselves in character and learning within and outside Nigeria such as St. Augustine Seminary Ezzangbo who has been the National Milo champion for very many years, Twelve Apostles' College who has won national and international laurels in debate from different countries of the world, St. Charles Primary school Nsokara who has been the best in primary schools' debate in 2016 and 2018 and the host of others. It is always a thing of pride to associate with Catholic Mission Schools or the



students from such schools because they are sound, intelligent and human. Without the Catholic effort towards education, the stupendous progress recorded especially after the Second World War in 1945 would have been a mirage.

Hence this paper is a clarion call on all school administrators/managers to sit up because in Igbo we say *onye a naekirikiriadighimmaiteunyin'ihu* (one who has the admiration of the people need not paint the face black). They should make extra effort towards meeting up with the standard that really defines a school as 'Catholic'. Catholic schools should be able to live above the kiss of death state of government schools characterized by cultism, exam-malpractice {(otuonyeadighiedeWaecn'isiya) syndrome}, sorting, sexual harassment, homosexuality, lesbianism, laziness to study, poor student-teacher ratio, poor infrastructures and learning materials, e.t.c.

It is therefore saddening when the Catholic Schools in Abakaliki Diocese begin to compromise standards and shamelessly compete with the public schools in some of their common vices. What becomes the fate of a Catholic School when the manager does not believe that a student can write WAEC alone and pass the exam. He/she rather waves off the moral implication/responsibility of exam malpractice with '*onwereonyenaanaghiemeya*', (everybody does it) '*a naemeyaebeobula even ma na seminary*' (its done everywhere else even in the holiest of places), '*hapuumuakakaichoroka ha daa*', (leave the children to help themselves unless you wish them failure), e.t.c. Not minding who or where is involved, Catholic Education Policy has zero tolerance to exam malpractice. Therefore, this is a clarion call on all managers to begin to practice this zero tolerance to all degrees of exam malpractice lest Catholic Schools in Abakaliki Diocese become victims of the same disease in Nigerian education system they assume to cure. Imagine where the state ministry of education is accusing a Catholic School of exam malpractice!

*Aru* (abomination)! *Tufiakwa* (God forbid)!

In the same vein, managers should work prudently in partnership with education stakeholders such as the government, communities, Alumni associations, Parents Teachers Association (PTA) minding Catholic integrity. They should be able to maintain the high standard expected of her by following both the National and Catholic policies on education, curriculum design, ICT to fit into the 21<sup>st</sup> challenges, collaborative disposition, infrastructural





development, personnel ongoing formation, standard instructional and learning materials, e.t.c.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

We have made attempt to expose the impact of Catholic education in Nigeria and its implication in Abakaliki Diocese of Ebonyi State. We studied the extent to which Catholic education has impacted values, changed orientation, enhanced technological breakthrough, economic empowerment, personnel and environmental development, socio-political transformation, e.t.c. No doubt Catholic education has its own challenges. As both a human and divine institution, Catholic Education suffers some of the common diseases in other systems of education. Hence some Catholic Schools are bedeviled with poor infrastructures, non availability of learning materials, government tax policies, unhealthy competitions, gross irresponsibility of some education managers leading to corruption, poor supervision, poor implementation of both Catholic and National Education Policies, e.t.c. These portentous omens to Catholic Education must be eschewed without compromise minding the future of Abakaliki Diocese and Nigeria.

Finally, this paper makes a clarion call on all who are concerned in Catholic Education especially Catholic School managers, parents, teachers, students, e.t.c. to work assiduously towards strengthening Catholic Education System in Abakaliki diocese for maximum productivity and greater societal impact. Also, it is a humble call on the Government to sit up to her responsibility towards education by adjusting the method of taxation to Catholic education system minding the fact that it is not just a profit maximization company but an apostolate in education. In the same vein, it is a clarion call on the government to support mission schools; catholic and noncatholic schools in the areas of infrastructural reconstructions, partnership in staff salary payment and provision of other basic learning materials. This support is highly necessary minding the nature and poverty level in the state which makes it difficult for parents to afford high school fees that would be able to maintain the schools. This support would enhance their productivity minding the fact that these schools are partners to the state in the education sector. More so this paper calls upon the Federal Government on the need to implement the National Education Policies especially the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organizations' (UNESCO) recommendation of 26% per capital GDP for education development. Unfortunately, this



policy is not implemented in Nigeria rather the Federal Government has less than 5% per capital GDP implementation of this policy in the education system.

### End Notes

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