Integrating Some Godly African Cultural Moral Values in Theological Education

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Abstract

The society today appears to be corrupted as a result of various vices such as lack of respect, self-centredness, cultism, fraudsters, kidnapping, robbery, ritual killing, prostitution, raping and many others. Some of these vices like lack of respect, self-centeredness appear to be controlling the lives of some products of theological education who would have been transformative agents. This is in spite of the rich curriculum put in place in theological institution. It is the above scenario that has given rise to the topic, "Integrating some godly African Cultural Moral Values in Theological Education." In view of this, the writer is of the opinion that integrating some godly African Cultural Moral Values such as mutual respect, honesty, tolerance, justice, patience, perseverance and brotherhood in theological education will go a long way to reducing those vices in her product to the barest minimum. These will be standard bearers of transformative ministry who will impart their congregations and the society for the better. To achieve the above, the writer employed phenomenological method and also interacted with related sources. The writer concluded and also recommended that theological education should re-design her curriculum to accommodate some godly cultural moral values as a way of integration for all to be pace setter as a model of transformative ministry. He also suggested that the course on cultural moral values in theological education should be a core and not an elective course.

Introduction

Over the years, theological educators have redesigned their curricula to meet desired goals of transformational ministry such as discipleship class, spiritual formation, spiritual retreat, ministers' conference and other courses to broaden the knowledge and re-sharpen the character of those who have yielded to the call of God upon their lives for better training and good performance in the society. The above are integrated in theological education to produce the called ones in line with her vision, mission statements and core values. However, good as it may, feedbacks about character of some pastors, which centre on pride, dishonesty, and lack of respect continue to surface. It is generally observed that some pastors disrespect those who are ahead of them in ministry and church members also frown at their characters at the local church levels.

It was re-echoed by the chairman of Ethiope Delta Baptist Conference of the Nigerian Baptist Convention by Sunday Onoyenure at the 2022 Ministers Conference, held in Baptist Theological Seminary Eku, to the writer, on the need for theological education to wade in and reduce this ugly phenomenon to the barest minimum. In that regard, there is a need for integrating some godly African cultural moral values in theological education to add to what they have been taught in order for them to know the negative effects of pride, dishonesty, lack of respect and to inculcate in them some godly African cultural moral values to correct some of their negative traits of questionable character. To this end, the writer will look at theological education, some godly African Cultural Moral values, integrating the cultural moral values, before conclusion and recommendations.

Meaning of Theological Education

Theological is an adjective relating to theology, and theology according to *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (2001) is the study of religion and beliefs, while education is a process of teaching, training and learning especially in schools or colleges to improve knowledge and develop skills as defined by *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (2001). The above definitions points towards the goals of theological education, which is training people about religion and its belief systems.

On theological education Stephen O. Baba quoted E. A. Babatunde in his write up on theological education in Nigeria as a means of empowering the next generation for God in the light of the book of Judges (2012) that theological education is defined as the process of preparing for the religious vocation. It is a process of providing God-called men and women with knowledge, skill, competence or usually desirable qualities of character being so provided, especially in a formal course of study, instruction or training in a school. Still on theological education, Ogundipe (2012) approaches it from another perspective saying that it goes beyond preparing leaders for ministerial assignment, rather it extends to administering the knowledge to build lives, effect changes in behavioural, emotional, mental and psychological disorder or abnormalities that result to problems. Other areas of its operation include checking, or resolving imbalances, and bringing rightness into human senses for right living in human community.

The same expectation is required of graduates from the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso under ministerial life as stated in *NBTS Essentials* (2021), that they should be able to develop the skills of ministry in the areas of evangelism, teaching, discipleship, counselling, recruitment and training of church workers, developing meaningful relationship and getting involved in solving the problems of the society. In that regard, products of theological education are to have meaningful relationships with others including members of their churches and as such, they ought to have what it takes to correct others through exemplary lives.

Culture and Indiosyncracies of Some Godly African Cultural Moral Values

Alabi (2002) in his write up on *Promoting Excellence in Indigenous Christian Mission Work in Yoruba Land Through Theological Education*, quoted, E. A. Babatude who observed that the Western education introduced to African soil carried with it western type theological education. He explains that there is a need for African to now apply what is called 'home grown' to make theological education more relevant in Africa. His idea of 'home grown' is the African

cultural mindset that should be carried along with theological education.

Culture has been defined and explained by many people from different perspectives such as Macians (1995) that, it is the beliefs, values, behaviour and material objects that defines a people's way of life, while Marvia (1983), sees culture as the learned, socially, acquired traditions and life styles of the members of a society, including their patterned, repetitive ways of thinking, feeding and acting. From the above definitions and explanations, what attracts the writer most is the commonalities as related to behaviour or pattern of life. The pattern of life that is suitable for a given community, institution, nation, and a continent as a whole.

Again William (1978) in his explanation of culture said that it is a set of shared ideals, values, and standards of behaviour. This could be achieved through learning in an institution or by growing up through parents and community members as one observes ways of doing things. It is important because products of an institution speak volume of it than beautiful infrastructures, thus, they invariably become its ambassadors either good or bad. This is one of the reasons theological education appears to be striving for moral excellence.

According to Kwame (1996) morality is a set of social rules and norms intended to guide the conduct of people in a society; the rules and norms emerge from and are anchored on people's belief about right and wrong conduct or good and bad character. He further stressed that morality is essential to every human culture even though features of the moral codes or values of one culture may differ from those of another culture, yet there are some moral values that are cherished across Africa. Morality plays important roles between God and man as Awolalu and Dopamu (1979), rightly noted that morality enhances God's fellowship and maintains the well-being of the society. Not only the well-being of the society as it relates to theological education but its all inclusive, because some factors of moral values as listed by Kwame (1996) are not only limited to the society alone. Some of them include, kindness; compassion, generosity, hospitality, faithfulness, truth-fulness, concern for others, and the actions that bring peace, justice, dignity, respect and happiness. Those values are good and to be imbibed by all.

On respect, Ayantayo (2009) noted that respect means to hold in honour, to esteem, to regard and value others. It is an act of identifying and appreciating the work of other fellows and accepting the existence of others besides us in any society or setting as the basis of respect. He further categorized respect into three, which include self-respect, mutual respect, and respect for constituted authority and for human dignity. One needs to balance them to enhance good relationship with others, otherwise pride will set in if the focus is only on self. Pride as explained by Jesuvi (2017) is being proud of one's own worth, ability and possession or wealth and that it also implies looking down on others. This automatically leads to moral and social injustice which eventually poisons human relations and consumes others.

It has been observed hat some products of theological education focus on self and see themselves as more important than others. In line with that, Sunday Ogboru as interviewed said that some pastors don't allow other pastors to preach in their churches and their words is always finals. This is as a result of lack of respect as observed by their congregations or members. As also observed by Cyril that some pastors step upon the elders, they disrespect them with their harsh words and see ministry as politics to do whatsoever in order to achieve their goals. In that situation, some individuals are looked down upon forgetting that to be an elder is a gift from God and should not be undermined. As culture demands, respect should be accorded to whom respect is due or a senior is always a senior especially in terms of age in ministry. Even respect for people who are senior chronologically matters. The scripture supports this, too. In this wise, mutual respect is needed to ensure cordial relationship. Such relationship will only be enveloped in good character for there is a saying 'when wealth is lost something is lost, when health is lost something is lost but when good character is lost all is lost.' In the absence of good character, bad character ensues such as dishonesty, insincerity, lie, irresponsibility, disobedience, disrespect for elders and constituted authority and injustice. Others are selfishness, envy, jealousy, hatred and so on.

It is not only for the products of theological education to show good examples but also all faculty including non-teaching staff. Mutual

respect should be the cultural wheel that theological education should rest upon for peace, progress, and development of human capacity. Wherever there is mutual respect, there will be cooperation, honesty, tolerance, justice, patience, perseverance and brotherhood. One could say that they are the fruits of mutual respect.

The writer agrees with Ayantayo (2009), in his explanation on the fruit of mutual respect. In that note, cooperation implies colleagueship, co-partnership and tie-up relationship, and where there is cooperative spirit, to Ayantayo, there is always growth of fraternity, solidarity, fellow-feeling, voluntary association, coalition, federation, united fronts, common front, mutual assistance and reciprocity. When such act is put into practice, self-interest will be reduced to the barest minimum.

When there is spirit of mutual respect, sincerity to one another, accommodation of views, opinion, and people defer to one another, equity and justice, i.e. giving to one his/her due without short-changing one another, then mutual respect will thrive and disrespect will be reduced.

The community of faith will then share a common vision, objectives and goals and the resultant effect will be great as a result of cooperation and mutual respect. Otherwise unethical behaviour such as dishonesty, insincerity, lie, irresponsibility, disobedience, disrespect for elders and constituted authority will continue to increase in theological institution which could lead to chaos and anarchy. Thus if care is not taken, theological education will have a lot of behavioural issues to grapple with. Students are to be graduated in character and learning. It therefore suggests that as learning is important so also character is. Even though none is perfect but at least blame should be less. "*Kidie ubi r'one vuovo oyi gbe egu kwe"* as Urhobo people put it, only one seed of yam can spoil the whole bowl of pounded yam. Right living attracts honour, respect, and opens good doors for the individuals who dare to accommodate others through good character and humbleness. The practice of right living is very important and needs urgent attention so that both students and staff could relate well and even staff with staff as the case may be. It will also translate to local churches where the individual is serving God's people through the ministry of reconciliation as observed by Mannoia

(2006) that Christian leaders should follow Christ's example by obeying the Father, submit to His will and make Christ known as the means for reconciliation to God, that's our ministry. Not ours personally, but ours because its God's and we are His servants, and so we minister to the needs of people, the greatest of which is reconciliation. It is God's passion at work through us because we are His servants.

On the other hand, bad character always rebels against constituted authority, elders, fellow congregants and even family members. Such act cannot reconcile others to God. Bad character does not align with some theological education's core values as it can be found in a published book titled *The History and Development of Baptist Theological Seminary, Eku, Delta State, Nigeria* (2020), that as a seminary community devoted to the training of men and women for the multifarious ministries of Christ and his church, the institution emphasizes five areas of formation which cut across these domains of learning: cognitive (academic), affective (spiritual) and psychomotor (ministerial). The core value of the institution are thus: all-embracing academics (cognitive domain); healthy (behavioural domain); all-inclusive leadership (cognitive and psychomotor/behavioural domain) and warm communal life (cognitive, affective and Psychomotor/ behavioural domain). As good as this, the society may not be concerned with any core values of the institutions but the products, which are what the society sees and relate with any character deficiency in these indictment in the theological education they were made to go through. This can be addressed by the inclusion of African Cultural Values in their curriculum.

Integrating Some Godly African Cultural Moral Values in Theological Education

The word integrate according to *Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary* (1965) is to form into a whole; to unite with something else, to incorporate into a larger unit. It is to combine things together. In that situation the African Cultural Moral Values that are good and not against the scriptures should be integrated into the theological education curriculum as also observed by Emiola (2014), who quoted Gnanakan that the goals of integrated learning are to maximize the

experience of learners, to integrate theoretical knowledge and concepts to real life, to relate learning to the particular gift of the learner, to relate one of learning with others in a curriculum and to employ various modes of educational deliveries.

Theological education curriculum should be re-designed to accommodate some godly African Cultural Moral Values for the purpose of achieving a common objective of producing transformational leaders in the African Context. For a student to pass through the four walls of theological education for the period of two, three, four, five as the case may be, such student will be well grounded in some godly African Cultural Moral Values and put them into practice. For it is not easy for one to abandon what is already part of his/her life.

In this contemporary time, most communities are devoid of such characters and it is expected of theological education products, who serve as touch bearers to the society, to bring the light of their learning to bear on such societies. Nihinlola (2014), quoted that one of the objectives of the Department of Theology in the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso is "To lead students in the integration of biblical, theological, historical and practical studies and evaluate same from the viewpoint of relevance to the African context and culture." One can only hope that the staff members of that department are sufficiently aware and enabled to achieve this glorious objective. That idea is only for a department, however, in this paper, all is inclusive because lives or characters speak volume of the institution they attended. So the writer is of the opinion that African Cultural Moral Values should not be elective but a core course in theological education. This should be so since the goal is towards a contextualized theological education curriculum for Transformative Ministry.

Ministry as related to the church, is an official duty to some people. It is a service to others and ministers who as the products of theological education serve as public servants. This as observed by Anie (2015) is used pertaining to servants. It is service that transform people's life wholistically with a vision of preparing people for heaven. Such ministry should be people oriented or centred even in this contemporary period when things are not easy. African Cultural Moral Value of brotherhood should also be included. The practice of

brotherhood culturally is to see all as one, and whatever affects one, affect all as demonstrated in Acts 4:32-35 that:

> Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things He possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceed of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need (NKJV).

The above passage and quotation is an act of brotherhood and corporation as it relates to African Cultural Moral Values. It ought to be seen among brethren whether in theological education or in the church. This situation is of real affection in action that knows no bound where peace and harmony co-exist for the progress of humanity and to the glory of God.

Without being told, such act goes a long way to elevate the needy among them to a higher level where things work together for common good. There is no doubt of massive turnout of people to embrace Christ and even strengthen the faith of others. The outcome of it will be glorious. This is what theological education also needs to include into her curriculum for transformational ministry.

Conclusion

The theme: Toward a Contextualized Theological Education Curriculum for Transformative Ministry is very timely because of various vices in the church and the society at large. These vices include lack of respect, cultism, fraudsters, kidnapping, robbery, ritualists, prostitution, raping and many others. In order to reduce the above vices to the barest minimum, theological education as pacesetter should raise products that will transform the society through their ministries. The above vision can be actualized when Theological education curriculum is re-designed with the view to integrate some relevant or godly African cultural moral values such as mutual respect, tolerance, corporation and brotherhood as practiced in

Africa context which always lead to peace and harmony in any given society including the church, thus the expectant transformative ministry will become a practical reality.

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