

Restoring Biblical Nurture in Christian Homes as a Panacea to Rejuvenating Christian Morality in Nigeria

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Abstract

The incessant cases of moral failures in Nigeria have raised different camps of agitations among scholars. However, it appears that the stance of secularism, promoted by psychological, philosophical and social underpinnings have been given high premium, in breeding an efficient paradigm for human transformation and character formation than the biblical perception of it. Thus, Christian principles in promoting normative values of human behaviour has been somewhat abandoned in solving this multi-dimensional issue. The purpose of the study is to advance Christian model of morality for enhancing human behaviour in Nigeria. The paper adopts descriptive and phenomenological methods. The significance of this biblical perspective on morality becomes pronounced because of the wave of information, efficiency and dynamics it will promote among Christian families and the Nigerian society at large. The negligence of parents and inability to utilize Christian model of morality in the homes have aggravated the level of immorality in the society. The paper recommends that there should be appropriate application of the Bible for enhancing morality in Christian homes and the Nigerian society.

Key words: Biblical nurture, Christian home, Christian morality, immorality in Nigeria

Introduction

The catalogue of Nigeria's recent past and current experience revealed a lot of moral failures at every stratum of her common identity. The leadership, through different garbs of functionalism, ranging from parliamentary feudalism to aristocratic presidency have earmarked series of programmes to reduce indiscipline in the Nigerian society.¹ The prolonged shows of public disappointments in all these initiatives have raised backup agitations from social and religious commentators who believed that folding arms would be disastrous. Those who appear pious to their religious or philosophical doctrines and are unsatisfied with the level of moral insanity have their reservations at different levels. James Hunter along this line describes this period as an age where the common saying is "if you feel good about it; go for it not minding the consequence on self and others." The notch of this aphorism is largely revealed by James Davidson Hunter² who examined morality among people generally. In his evaluation of moral education, Hunter avers that "godly character is now replaced with absurdity and astonishing atrocities that are beyond what one can comprehend".³ The multi-dimensional moral failures of individuals, families and communities are at the level of apogee. From mundane to sacred, there are unfathomable levels of character deficiency that could be somewhat identified with level of training from the home. Various measures have been adopted from social sciences to improve good conduct in Nigeria by the Government and experts.⁴ A Christian side of nurturing for character formation and judgment, beginning from the home, has not been sufficiently utilized as measure for improving the parameter of rightness like other social control measures.⁵ A well nurtured Child, who later becomes a father or a mother, through biblical tenets would influence the society when placed in any area of human performance and delivery. A proper handling of this biblical model on child development would bring about renewal in the society. The need to promote a better society free from crime and corruption calls for the re-awakening of Christian nurturing from the biblical perspective. The researcher, from Christian perspective employed descriptive and phenomenological methods with a view to advancing the pragmatic use of biblical principles to reduce the myriads of moral problems in the contemporary Nigerian society.⁶

Clarification of Terms

There is the need to clarify some concepts that are pertinent to this discussion

Christian Home: A Christian home, in uncomplicated terms, is one in which God is alive and present in the lives of the parents. It is a home where family members are guided under the tenets of the Bible.

Christian Morality: Generally, morality is a global and operative model which has to do with right and wrong, good and bad personal or social behaviour, based on a certain standard of conduct which is organized as measurement for social cohesion towards human existence. However, Christian Morality is biblically oriented in nature. Christian Morality is the biblical standard for human control that makes man fulfill the will of God on Earth.⁷ The bedrock of Christian morality is the Ten Commandments which represent a moral standard of conduct (Exodus 20:1-17). Christian Morality, as it relates to the Ten Commandments is the parameter for judging the correctness and wrongness of a Christian. This is the model for character formation and establishment of God's ordained values.

Biblical Nurture: This is a Christian model of upbringing in which children are raised and brought up under the principles and tenets of the Bible.

The Nexus between the Home and Morality in the Contemporary Nigeria

It is evident that there is a level of absurdity ranging from homes to the society in the contemporary Nigerian experience. The resultant effect is unsatisfactory and to some extent, cascading confusion on the society. Beginning with the Ionian Philosophers of the ancient Greek world, morality is much discussed and practiced. This is obvious on morality when Plato reveals that, "the community suffers nothing terrible if its cobblers are bad and become degenerate and pretentious; but if the Guardians of the laws and state, who alone have the opportunity to bring it good government and prosperity become a mere sham, then clearly, it is completely ruined."⁸ The statement shows the intensity of ethical discussion and reiteration in the platonic world. Since humanity develops through good behaviours and encouragement of good conduct, the

changing face of character is a global concern. However, negative is the case on the current scene. It has been observed that many people condoned good conducts in their everyday life, while the level of atrocities and corruptions revealed the increase of moral decadence in Nigeria.⁹ The prevalence of evil in the society calls for urgent attention. Hence, the breakdown of core values at the home-front largely affects the common wellbeing of the nation due to their interactions.

There is a connection between the home and moral development which includes defense, communication, restoration, meditation, calm, privacy, silence, regulation of one's moods, core affection, and so on.¹⁰ These social bordering hurdles are associated with the foremost unit of social environment which is the family. The failure to set the right priority from the home has become such an uncontrollable thing to be handled by educational institutions.¹¹ The whip of unrest unleashed on the society is as a result of the breakdown of law and order, aggravating the tension of evils, injustice and wickedness of all sorts. It has been observed that the behavioural or attitudinal patterns of some young people are becoming much tensed and largely uncontrollable.¹² The aspersion of negligence has been cast on the home builders which are the parents. Some parents are much occupied with frivolities and survival of their careers at the expense of the care of the body and soul of their wards. This neglect has had an adverse effect on the homes generally and especially on the nurture of the wards of such homes.¹³ There are colossal amount of children from African nations and other parts of the world that are involved in commercial sex as a result of hunger and their desire for more pleasure than what their parents could afford.¹⁴ This means hunger has led some young people into unchaste actions and that has destroyed their lives. There is a rise in immorality among young ones in the developed nations and Nigeria in particular. For instance, it is palpable that a teen adopts moral and ethical values from his parents and other family members. However, teens become violent or show signs of juvenile delinquency only when they are facing disturbance at home. Broken or disturbed families with bad relations can cause teens to go astray and become violent in the society.¹⁵ More than this however, it has been reported that numerous others (about one million young people between ages 14) are facing greater risks of permanent or incurable diseases through early

sexual activity every year in America.¹⁶ While there may not be ready statistics to determine that of Nigeria and some other African countries, the situation is not different either. An unnamed medical doctor in Nigeria who carried out a research in 2010 confirmed that many young ones are sexually exposed before age 14 and that is not different from what is happening globally.¹⁷

There are varying expressions of child delinquent behaviours in the society with attendant level of physical and psychological effects. One of the commonest abuses among young ones today is drug and substance abuse. In Nigeria, it was reported that one out of every ten children smoke, one out of five children use drugs such as marijuana and others get drunk.¹⁸ It is unfortunate that many adolescents are involved in regular drinking. Some on the long run become addictive or become insane, constituting a problem and burden for the society.

There is character deficiency which is quite inimical to the community identity of African tradition. Behavioural disorder, lack of respect to parents and constituted authority are evident.¹⁹ There are prevailing social issues, including divorce, births from unmarried parents and single parentage. The trend of over-ambitiousness and inordinate affection for pecuniary gains has inhibited some parents from having enough time with their young children to make impact on their lives. The media has become foster parents to many children.²⁰ The effect of exposure into media and the internet on children, without proper check from the parents is detrimental and has equally made negative impact on them.

The gradual decline and less academic performance among young ones indicate the level of distraction created by modern technology. The educative line of technology has not been copiously harnessed than the access to pornographic, criminal and forgery links where their minds are continuously polluted.²¹ Most of these children are already influenced negatively and this is a grave concern to the Christian homes and society. It should be noted that, it is not as if there is no iota of morality in Christian homes, but the rate at which it is dwindling is becoming obvious. Hence, a need to re-awaken the consciousness of Christian nurturing is germane so as to reduce the level of immorality in the

Nigerian society. Children, teenagers and youths must be provided with quality Christian nurture through an in-depth study and knowledge of the scripture that would help them respond to challenging situations as they grow daily. A provision of solutions that will speak to both the body and soul is exigent. In a multi-cultural and religious society like Nigeria, building and restoring godly character should be the joint efforts of the home, church, school and the government. These should be entrenched in the scriptures with pragmatic application of it, for social transformation.

The Principles and Processes of Achieving Biblical Nurture in Christian Homes

The popular platonic theory on educational transmission informs that the mind at birth is ‘tabula rasa’ (clean slate) that needs be imprinted with experience.²² Such philosophical speculation rests on the fact that human beings are not born with a well-developed moral sensibility or good character, they earned it through relationship and experiential procedures. Just as a child grows, human beings grow in their character formation with the assistance of others around guiding them into knowing what is right or wrong.²³ Consequently, it is instructive to note that moral education is part of any particular culture and requires transmission formally and informally, deliberately and unwittingly. The Bible which is the basis for the Christian faith must be used as the experiential guide for character formation. This is the keystone to the principles and processes of nurturing for Christian homes. The Hebrew indoctrinates their children with the dose of Shema which categorically expressed the true nature of Yahweh. This forms the basis of character consciousness of Israel’s society and the responsibilities of individuals in the community of faith (Deut.6:5).²⁴ The implication of Shema to the contemporary world is that the home is the bedrock of moral education and character formation. The home as the first avenue of socialization must be conscious of passing biblical standards and right values into their children.²⁵ The equation of the Hebrew Shema is realized in constant fellowshiping and family communion with the focus on the Bible as standard for behavioural modifications.

The secular mode of transmitting value is appropriate and valuable. However, while character or moral education has its good sides, teaching Christian virtues through Christian education that is derived from the

Bible becomes very helpful. Christian Education is more than an exercise in learning Bible stories, doctrine and about the Christian heritage. While advocating the value of Christian education, Roehl kepartan says, Christian Religious Education that is purely derived from the Bible involves “people of mature faith nurturing others who are growing in faith. Such nurture includes caring relationships, meaningful conversations, working together in a variety of serving activities, sharing faith stories, and being with the larger faith community in workshop and fellowship as well as in many other activities.”²⁶

The use of the Bible today to teach right and godly values should not be despised despite the level of technology in the world today because the truths of the Bible stand the test of time. Most children and teenagers despite the struggles they have by outside influence most times, hold to what their parents have exposed them to. The urgent return to the Bible by investing quality time in nurturing all members of the Christian homes will definitely remedy the ugly situation. Esther Ayandokun maintains further that, “biblical truth should be the foundation of our homes. By following the principles of these commands, we teach our children that worshiping God should be constant, not reserved for Sunday mornings or nightly prayers.”²⁷ Children learn a great deal through direct teaching, they learn much more by watching their parents. Therefore, educating and nurturing them in biblical manner fosters Christian morality.

The generation of parents today must wake up to their responsibility and pull their children out of quagmire. As a parent who has keen interest in the spiritual growth of children, based on experience, it is essential that the training of children is better handled together by both parents to bring out fruitful result. It is further disclosed that women are more committed to religious activities than men, so it must become a point of duty for mothers to acquaint their children with religious activities and teach them to be responsible and accountable to God and humanity. These children must be taken through the Bible and its teachings and both parents must have interest in the things of God before they can really make lasting impact on their children and other members of the family.²⁸ The task of teaching, nurturing, caring are all directly the responsibility of the home or family before other agencies come up to perform their duties.

The family is seen as the organic unit which serves as the natural basis for nurturing. The Christian family has a rich heritage to pass on to the

next generation. The family shapes the attitudes of children and this background affects in most cases the future success of children. Christian attitudes are easily learned and copied when the home is characterized with love and harmony derived from the truths in the Bible. This will positively affect the society and promote character formation.

The home where prayers are said regularly, where Bible study becomes a thing of joy will provide good background for teaching and disseminating Christian virtues. To modify this lane of fellowship, Lawson and Choun opines that “the home is made responsible for the spiritual discipline of the next generation. The home must strengthen all members towards Christian nurture”.²⁹ The home must be in the task of re-awakening biblical nurture for fruitful result in the society. Families play significant roles in the training of their children and other members of the home.³⁰ An appropriate degree of Christian values in Christian homes will curb the menace of immoralities and transform the Nigerian society at large.

Biblical Nurture in Christian Homes and Restoring Christian Morality in the Society

A Proper measurement through the use of biblical doctrine must be put in place for the nurture. First, the home must come to the state of awareness and be ready for the upbringing of their children for social transformation through responsive fellowshiping and nurturing. This must be accompanied with intensive study and application of the Bible. A home that is modeled for example will produce sound and dignified seeds that will transform the world and reduce the level of crime in the Nigerian society. The goal of biblical nurture in Christian homes is to rejuvenate morality in Nigeria through Christian lens. Parents most times are considered a failure despite other achievements if they fail to train their children; this understanding therefore calls for inculcating godly virtues in children as they mature. These could be achieved with the parents’ conscious efforts and relationship with their children.³¹

Parents who belong to the church have the foundation of their teachings in God who enables and empowers for righteous and godly living. Children are assisted to learn to do what is right despite the societal

pressures. This nurturing will create a Christian home characterized with a loving environment and sensitive to character formation for the development of the society. The implication therefore is that, before a child is sensitive to sin, he should be directed towards righteous and godly choices very early in life. Children should be assisted to learn to resist unholy desires and conformity to the world by this model of Christian nurturing. Parents are expected to be persistent in the training of their children until they are sure the child can withstand tempting situations and circumstances. No chance should be left until the child forms good will and character. The Christian home must not fail if other homes are failing because God's intention has been catching them young for Him before others around make unholy impressions.³² The Christian home should teach the scriptures and its values to the children. They should heed the command of Deuteronomy 6:7-9 regarding teaching of children to do the same. This passage emphasizes the ongoing nature of such instruction. It should be done at all times - at home, on the road, at night, and in the morning. From past experiences, most children who know and love God have no trouble behaving well and living right with God and others around them. Parents who belong to the church are opportune to help their children grow in the Lord through the teachings and instructions they receive from Sunday school lessons. History will never forget the unique roles Robert Raikes played in the religious education of children as far back as 1780 when he decided to instruct the poor children of Gloucester in England in the elements of knowledge and religion.³³ This community-based empowerment can be replicated to transform the Nigerian society in the area of Christian philanthropy for the social transformation and empowerment of the teeming youths. Presenting Jesus Christ to the young ones must start as early as possible and this will create a relatively peaceful society. On this Barna revealed that:

A series of studies we conducted regarding the age at which people accept Christ as their savior highlights the importance of people acknowledging Jesus as their savior when they are young. We discovered that the probability of someone embracing Him as Saviour was 32% for those between the ages of 5 and 12; 4% for those in the 13-18 age range and 6% for people of 19 or older. In other words, if a person does not embrace

Jesus Christ as their Saviour before they reach their teenage years, the chance of them doing so at all is slim.³⁴

The above citation makes it imperative to be involved in instilling Christian values and catching the children very young when their minds are soft to receive the words of God. The parents should help to give the young people the spiritual nurture and the type of environment which will aid their commitment to the Lordship of Jesus Christ for the Nigerian transformation and to help them live exemplary lives. While efforts to evangelize all and bring them to the knowledge of the Saviour is needed for all age groups, more efforts and energy should go into catching them young which invariably will reduce pain and sorrow for parents.³⁵ Upon their knowledge of God's love, they are to be assisted to grow in the grace of God and be exposed to all teachings appropriate for their age group. They should learn about the existence of God, the existence of the Trinity, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in genuine disciples of Jesus Christ, life eternal with God, stewardship, relationship with God and others and many more. They must learn about the devil and his works and how they can be victorious over the works and deceit of the devil for social order and transparency. They should accept the Holy Bible as the authentic word of God for their life while they should also learn about other books with their errors and limitations. The home have the mandate to care for all their wards spiritually and that is most achieved by adequate nurture and care through biblical training and nurture.³⁶ The optimum preparation of the young ones for better tomorrow through the validation of the Bible for social transformation will promote a society that is relatively free from corruption, poor leadership, cyber-crime, prostitution, assassination, single parentage and divorce.

Recommendations

The following suggestions beg for consideration in rejuvenating morality in Christian homes for Nigeria's social transformation:

1. There should be consistent attitude in promoting Christian standard in accordance with character formation and moral sanity within the social framework.

2. Christian leaders must be able to sensitize their congregation to be more intensive in their family life and promote avenues for sound biblical indoctrination in their homes.
3. The parents must be conscious of the environment and take into consideration biblical model of child's training.
4. For Christian self-identity, the Christian home and the church must be ready for the task of producing character non-deficient leaders who will use their political will to transform the society at large. This can be further magnified on continuous discussions in seminars, workshops, symposia and other information mediums.

Thus, redeeming young ones through a positive approach in a negative environment can also be achieved through adequate biblical nurture when they learn to turn negative situations around for the good of others.

Conclusion

The church exist to provide parental care for all who belong by feeding them with all that would make them sons and daughters of God for integral community development. The goal of the church providing nurture is to help members grow into maturity in the image of Christ and influence their world positively. There must be a synergy on this. This must be further accompanied with interconnected responsibilities from the Church and homes in enhancing biblical standards on character development by indoctrinating the young ones positively. This would equally transform the Nigerian society that is drenched into the marsh of moral debacles. It also important to adhere to the biblical injunction, recorded in Ephesians six verse four that parents should bring up their children in the nurture and discipline of the Lord. Children are God's heritage that must be preserved for him and not for the devil (Exodus 13:12; Deut 26:2; Psalm 127:3, Gen.18:18-19). The home must be saturated with the word of God. The home environment must help the children to grow and mature in the Lord for social transformation. This ground work of Christian values, in line with character formation will reduce the level of corruption, child trafficking, cyber-crime, divorce and separation and untold hardship in the society. The biblical perspective in instilling morality is apposite, in a time when good conduct, hard work, diligence, transparency, accountability and justice are on the verge of

dwindling and moving into a state of oblivion. This will popularize the mission of Christianity as the light of the world.

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