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RETHINKING THE PLACE OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS FOR FORMATION IN RELIGIOUS RELATIONS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Educational Institutions that open her admission to students from different religious backgrounds could help to form future leaders that will be able to relate effectively with members of other religions. The students from childhood would have been helped to overcome the phobia of relating with adherents of other religions. It is however, encouraged that schools that are open to children of different faiths are the best for the future of religious relations in Nigeria. With the use of the qualitative method of research methodology, the work posits that religious relations in Nigeria will be better in future with educational institutions that opens the doors to children from the different religions in the land as opposed to institutions that are open to adherents of the particular religion that establish the schools.

Keywords: Re-Thought, Educational Institutions, Formation, Religious Relations, Nigeria

Introduction

The Nation Newspaper reported a News piece on 18th June, 2026 titled "Kano Police set up panel to probe death of 13-year-old St. Louis student." The Newspaper reported that "the Kano State Police Command has constituted a Special Investigation Panel to investigate the death of 13-year-old Maimuna Sani Salisu, a JSS 2 student of St. Louis Secondary School, Kano." In the News piece, it was reported that "the panel was set up after the family's lawyers petitioned the Command over conflicting accounts of the student's death on 13 June 2026. While the school said she died of an asthma attack, the family alleged the minor was punished by senior students through flogging and prolonged kneeling." It was made clear in the reports that "the panel, led by DCP Shehu Idris of the CID and including officials from the Kano State Ministry of Justice, has begun questioning teachers, students, and witnesses, with medical and forensic tests ongoing."

St Louis School Secondary School, Kano, Kano State, Nigeria is a secondary school established by the Catholic Diocese of Kano but opens her admission to Christians, Muslim children and children from other religious backgrounds that prefer the school for their female children. It is good to point out that such an unexpected occurrence, that is the death of a pupil, could happen in any institution established by adherents of any religion in the world. It is surprising that the online reactions from Facebook and other online sources to the issues calls for the lack of appreciation of the implication of the establishment of such an institution that opens her admission to children from other religious backgrounds apart from Christianity on religious relations for the country. Some Muslims were angry with the Muslim parents who sent their female children to Christian schools. Others warned that Muslim parents should desist from

sending their Muslim children to Christian schools. It is in this light that it is important to point out the advantages of children from different religious background studying together in a school for religious relations in Nigerian. The aim of this piece then is to point out the importance of children from different religious backgrounds studying together for effective religious relations in Nigeria.

Understanding Religious Relations

Religious relations could be defined (Gioia, 2006: 1171) as "...all positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichments, in obedience to truth and respect for freedom. It includes both the witness and exploration of respective religious convictions". In the work, "*Inter-religious Dialogue. The Nigeria Experience"* (Bidmos, 2006: iv) examines the need for effective religious relations between the Christians and Muslims most especially in Nigeria from the Islamic point of view. He points out that he wrote the work in response to the religious intolerance in the different parts of Nigeria as a way of contributing to the project of nation building most especially to proffer solutions to the problems of religious clashes in the country. The author identifies interreligious dialogue as a *sine-qua non* for religious relations in the world. Hence, Bidmos points out that recent happenings around the world had made the study of interreligious dialogue an important practice and academic discipline on religious relations. Bidmos establishes that Christians and Muslims in Nigeria should embrace interreligious dialogue since the Holy Qur'an and the Bible make provisions for dialogue and good religious relations with men of other faiths.

Furthermore, Bidmos shows that the problem of the understanding of the secular state of the Nigerian nation could be resolved through the Mosque and Church: two institutions that are stakeholders in religious relations. He establishes that though the nation has not adopted a particular religion, State affairs in Nigeria have always been conducted with reference to religion before Nigeria independence and after the Independence in 1960. The author examines other factors that could affect inter-religious dialogue in Nigeria and how the issue of the secular state of the Nigeria State with religions could generate other factors that can affect interreligious dialogue. In the examination of the question of intention, (Bidmos, 2006:63) posits that "Muslims would like to be sure of the Christians' genuine intention for dialogue which could lead to effective relations between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria. Bidmos made it clear that this is necessary since Muslims most importantly in Nigeria become wary of certain utterances and events which put a question mark on the Christians intention" He clarifies the fact that Muslims are not terrorists and as such they should not be associated with terrorism such that negative comments like this offend the sensibilities of the Muslims and affect effective religious relations with the Christians.

Bidmos also points out that Muslims in Nigeria are treated with what is described as colonial mentality as the Muslims are not treated according to their worth in the country such as describing them with derogatory terms and painting them with derogatory or negative terms. He advocates a comparative study of lslam and Christianity which could aid inter-religious dialogue/relations between Christians and Muslims. The author also looks at the issue of the Sharia's in Nigeria. This is because the issue has been a burning issue in the relationship between the Christians and Muslims in Nigeria. In examining the *modus operandi* of inter-religious dialogue in Nigeria, the author proposes the qualities expected from the dialogue

partners. He advocates that dialogue partners should be trained in Comparative Study of Religion and they should have adequate knowledge of their own religion. The dialogue partners should also be mature individuals in thoughts and deeds, they should be sincere in their dealings with others with sound experience of their own faith and happenings in life, they should be sensitive to the feelings of others and with mutual respect for others. He also examines interreligious dialogue in operation and treats the different attempts by Christians and Muslims to engage in dialogue for years so as to guarantee effective religious relations.

(Adewale, 1989:3) writing on religious relations points out the fact that two religions that found themselves in the same environment must surely have some effects on one another. He stresses further that healthy rivalry and peaceful coexistence are the resultant effects that the society gets when the religions in a particular environment meet. He, however, says that lack of peaceful coexistence and unhealthy rivalry are the resultant effects when the religions do not meet or when the religions set out to absorb or annihilate one another. For the sake of effective religious relations, Adewale points out further that in the efforts of a religion to survive its struggle, and sue for peaceful coexistence with other religions, a religion might compromise some principles that are inherent in it as it relates/interacts with other religions. He also makes it clear that for a religion to be relevant in a local environment where a particular religion finds itself, the religion might decide to absorb some values of the local environments. It is understood that in this case, the doctrine of the religions is not being at variance with the culture of the environment and the inhabitants.

In continuation of the ongoing discussion on the understanding of religious relations, in the works of (Gioia, 2006: 1171), there are some factors that have been identified to enhance relations among religious people. The first factor that enhances religious relations is the dialogue of life. This is perhaps the most common and effective way of religious relations. In this factor, the people in their different communities live like good and caring neighbours as they participate in each other's sad and joyous moments. Here, people live together as neighbours and share things together without discriminations. For example, members of the different religions patronise the same markets, visit the same hospitals, use the same sporting facilities, gather to use a common social service etc. Here, a Christian Medical Doctor attends to Muslim patients without problems and a Muslim trader sells goods to Christians in peace. Muslims and Christians employ the services of members of African Traditional Religion (ATR) with joy.

In the dialogue of action which is the second factor that enhances religious relations, followers of the different religions jointly carry out works that could help to improve the living conditions of their communities. In this factor of religious relations, people of different religions living together engage in joint actions or services for the good of the community. The joint actions could be the repair of roads, forming political parties for the good of the state, serving as members of organisations to promote the welfare of the state etc. The third factor that enhances religious relations is the Dialogue of theological exchange. In this factor of religious relations, "specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages and to appreciate each other's spiritual values." Here, men of faith share the contents of their faith in a cordial and peaceful atmosphere, most especially in academic and non-academic environments. In the fourth factor that enhances religious relations, which is the dialogue of religious experience, "persons, rooted in their own religious traditions …share

their spiritual riches, for instance, with regard to prayer and contemplation, faith and ways of searching for God or the Absolute." Here, men of faith partake in the spiritual activities of other religions different from their own religious experience.

(Alanamu, 2003:60) writing from another point of view, explains fanaticism as "...violent and unreasoning religious enthusiasm as well as the inability of religious… [believers] to harmonise between the theories and the practical aspect of religion." Alanamu reveals further that "religious fanatics show excessive and irrational zeal to defend their religion and consequently become destructive agents of religious disharmony in the country." Fanaticism is thus harmful to religious relations.

Traditional Institutions for Formation in Religious Relations

Education is not about classrooms and is not limited to the classrooms. Before the advent of the education provided in the classrooms, the different human societies have devised ways to impart knowledge on their children so as to make them to adapt to the needs of their different societies. This is because according to (Majasan, 1969:41)

> Education is the process by which the community seeks to open its life to all the individuals within it and enable them to take their part in it. It attempts to pass on to them its culture, including the standards by which it would have them live. Where that culture is regarded as final, the attempts is made to impose it on the younger minds. Where it is viewed as a stage in development, younger minds are trained both to receive it and to criticise and improve upon it. This definition, in my opinion, gives education a realistic broad basis which recognizes what goes on in the training of the youth in schooless societies and widens the horizon of those who believe that education consists only of institutional learning.

Before a child moves to the classrooms, the children from different religious backgrounds in an environment learnt within the neighourhood, relate together and studied together most especially during the moonlight stories. In this neighourhood learning environment where traditional education is taught with folklore, myths, legends, folktales, riddles, proverbs, tongue-twisters, ballads and songs and folkdance. (Majasan:1969: 43-50) explains myths as one of the important instruments of instructing the young and old in history and general knowledge. Knowledge about the creation of the world, the man's conquest of the earth, human migrations down the history and the causes of natural phenomena are passed to the young through myths to satisfy their curiosity about the happenings in their environments. Legends to Majasan is another instruments employed to educate the young. Through legends, traditional stories are told to the young for the purpose of instructing them in moral virtues. Legends are employed to tell stories about the establishments of sub-groups, villages and towns at public ceremonies. Legends cover more historical facts than myths. Legends also cover social norms which are transmitted from one generation to other generations.

Majasan presents the fact that folktales are known among the Yoruba people for example as *alo apamo* which are generally used as day- to- day instruments for the education of the young in the expected moral etiquette of the young in the communities. Children are fond of folktales but the Yoruba have to place a taboo on it that it must not be told during the day so as to discourage children from telling the stories when they are expected to be working. Stunted growth was the taboo to dissuade the children from being idle by engaging in folktales during

the day. Hence, folktales are usually told at evenings when all must have completed the work for the day, hence, folktales serve as means of relaxation and educations. Folktales are usually interspersed with riddles and chorus so as to keep the participants attentive and awake. The chorus also serves to keep the lessons in mind.

Riddles as explained by Majasan is an instrument of education that could be mistaken for folktales because of the similarities between them as folktales and riddles are instruments for teaching purposes. Riddles, like folktales, are used at moonlit in the evenings. This is the time when children gather around the elders to listen to moral stories for the purpose of amusement and relaxations. Riddles are normally presented in forms of tales and songs with stated questions whereby the children are expected to guess/decode the expected answers to the questions. The stated questions help to keep the memory at alert and to allow the children to keep answers in mind.

Majasan sees Proverbs as another instrument of teaching the young which are suppressed stories which are used as bywords. Proverbs, unlike riddles, could be used at any time of the day. The use of proverbs is expected to invoke deep reflections on whom it is addressed on specific actions or situations. Proverbs are employed as instruments to warn, rebuke, advise, remind, or call both the young and old to desist from particular unconventional acts. Both the young and old make use of proverbs. The young could use it for a peer and an elder could use it for both the young and old. Hence, whenever a cultured person acts in a manner that is contrary to the moral standards of the society, a relevant proverb is enough to bring the person to do the right behaviour. Proverbs are also employed for clarification and illustration as well as to drive home points and settle quarrels. This is because, as the Yoruba says: *Owe l'esin oro, bi oro ba so nu, owe la fi nwa-* Proverbs are like horses which carry one swiftly to the discovery of ideas sought.

Tongue-twisters to Majasan are employed to teach children of ages of eight to twelve in the mastery of elocution for fast but correct speech. Tongues twisters consist of two types. The first type consists of a very quick repetition of sentences of two clauses which have opposite effects and which could excite laughter if one should miss the correct order. The first type could be understood in the following words: *Edun sun gbo, mo sun 'le-*the monkey sleeps in the bush, I sleep in the house. One is expected to repeat these words very quickly and in the process one might say: *Edun sun 'le, mo sun gbo-*the monkey sleeps in the house, I slept in the bush. The second type consists of repetition of words that are similar but with tonal differences which point to different meanings. This could be understood in the following words: *Opolopo opolo ko mo pe opolo lopolo-*Many frogs do not know that frogs have great brains.

Ballads and folk-songs are also very important instrument of education. Majasan explains that they are employed as means of preserving the literature of the society and instruments to preserve and transmit the moral values of the society for years. They help to complement the information that are provided through tales and make them easy to be remembered. Ballads and folksongs are known as *ewi,* a form of warning and instruction that is presented in singing. The people teach historical as well as romantic stories through ballads and folktales. In the same vein, heroic deeds of local heroes, gods, goddesses and nobles are told through these instruments. Also, the acts of lazy members of the society are brought to the public. These also serve to scold children to be of good behaviour and to praise the good children in the society.

Folk-dance is a combination of singing and dancing. In this instrument of education, the singing develops the intellect and the dancing develops the physique so as to guarantee a sound mind in a sound body.

In all, in the traditional environments, before the advent of the education in the classroom, the learning within the neighourhood became the ways of imparting knowledge as education in the compound during the day and moonlight stories in the evening center mainly on moral formations of the children on religious relations. The moonlight stories in the evening continued to serve as the avenues to teach and train the mind of the young about religious relations.

Educational Institutions for Formation in Religious Relations

Educational Institutions should be places for the continuation of the traditional knowledge imparted on the children from home by the parents. The institution should be a place where the Christian and Muslim pupils have opportunity to study together for religious integration. In Ekiti State for example, in the past, most of the parents preferred to send their children to the nearest school to their home. In most cases, the majority of parents in the past did not necessarily discriminate against the school belonging to a particular religion. This is to say that Christian parents send their children to Muslim schools and vice versa. During this period, Muslim children attended Christian schools and Christian children attended Muslim schools in some communities where the Muslims schools were available. This could be understood using the personal experience of the Louis Taiwo Omojola, the researcher as a student in a Muslim school. This is because; he had the opportunity to spend a year at a public Muslim Primary School in the fourth year of his primary education. He was enrolled there since the Ansar-u-deen Primary School was the nearest school to his new home and his parents did not see any danger in enrolling him and his siblings in the school.

During this period, Christian pupils participated in all activities related to the Islamic religions in the school which were for all the students but the Christian students were not forced to embrace Islam. But were excluded from examination in Islamic Religious Studies as provisions were made for examinations in Christian Religious Studies. In the same vein, Christians' schools also expected Muslims children to take part in other activities organised by the Churches that established the schools which they were attending but the Muslim children in Christian schools were not forced to embrace Christianity. There were provisions for examinations in Islamic Religious Knowledge for the pupils in Christian schools. The fact that Muslim children attended Christian schools and Christian children attended Muslim schools served as avenues for the formation in religious relations among the children from different religious background.

(Adelowo,2004: 343-344) presents the fact that the relationship between Muslims and Christians was cordial in educational partnership in the past in Yorubaland but some frictions set in later between the Christian and the Muslims which border on the alleged Christian indoctrination of Muslim children in Christian schools. The problem was that in the early stage, Muslim parents allowed their children to attend Christian Schools but later felt that it could lead to the Christian religious indoctrination of the children. This is because, Christians' schools mandated the Muslims children and to attend to take part in other activities organised by the Churches that established the schools which they were attending but the Muslim

children in Christian schools were not forced to embrace Christianity. The Muslims considered this as an indirect Christian indoctrination of their children and indirect conversion to Christianity. (Adelowo,2004:344) observes further that:

> …Muslims, however, benefitted from the Christian challenge. They were roused to a great defence and propagation of their faith. In the course of persistent Christian challenge, Muslims began to gain acquaintanceship with some Christian literature, particularly the Bible. This was particularly true of Malams who often searched the Christian scriptures for their argumentative significance. This eventually led to the emergence of a special class of Malams known as *Akeukewee*. This group was fairly proficient in Arabic and Yoruba. The group later produced a number of works on Islam and Christianity.

Today, most Christian parents now send their children to Christian schools and most Muslim parents prefer Muslims schools for their children for fear of religious indoctrination. In this way, many schools are no longer instruments that brought children from different religious backgrounds together to form them to recognise the religious practices of the others. The point here is that most Children now attend schools that belong to their religions; Christian children for Christian schools and Muslim children for Muslim schools. The point here is that there is preference by the parents for the school that belongs to their religions: Christians and Muslims. This is not really the best for the future of the country.

Positive Effects of Educational Institutions for Formation in Religious Relations

It should also be pointed out that another positive effects of Educational Institutions for formation in religious relations is that people from different religious backgrounds are able to live together without religious discrimination. One could easily justify this in the sense that since one has studied with others in the same institution, it will be difficult for one to avoid association with classmates or schoolmates that one had shared the same classrooms with from childhood or that one had been on the same football field with for years. The bond of friendship that one had established with one will linger on for years even if one becomes a religious minister of any of the religious traditions in the world.

One of the resultant effects most especially in Yorubaland of children from different religious backgrounds studying together was inter-faith marriages. Inter-faith marriages are marriages that do not lead to the conversion of a partner in the marriage. Interfaith marriage was a beautiful arrangement that ensures religious relations in the land. Marriage between the followers of the religions was very common in Ekiti State for example. Ekiti people did not see religion as a barrier for a grown up child to marry a partner of his/her choice. The Ekiti people believed that the wife may or may not embrace the religion of the husband; hence, marriage between partners from different religions was possible. The people believed that partners from different religious backgrounds could marry and retain their religion if a partner desires and they could still continue to live together as husband and wife. It is the natural thing among the Ekiti people for them to be courteous to their in-laws and to celebrate with them on their festive occasions. Hence, it was expected that a devotee of Osun who has married from the family of Oya is expected to bring some foodstuffs to his in-law on the festival of Oya. In the same vein, the prepared food could also be sent to him as a way of sharing the day with the family of the daughter. that there were interfaith marriages among the Ekiti in the past.

Today, interfaith marriage is gradually fading away such that relationship between persons of different faiths is leading to the conversion of the partners and in most cases; it is always the conversion of the female partner. Ekiti people are aware that interfaith marriages are gradually fading out. The point here is that inter-faith marriages are taking place but most of the marriages are leading to the conversion of one of the partners in the marriages. In this case, the female partner is always expected to embrace the religion of her husband. The resultant effect is that the Christians are now being encouraged to marry Christian partners most especially from the same denomination and the Muslims also from the same religion.

Conclusion

In Conclusion, (Omojola, 2026: 1) pointed out that "security of lives and properties is an important area of any human community that must be guaranteed, preserved and protected by the those in government of the human community. Security in religious practices is a sine qua non for the mutual co-existence of religious adherents in the human community." Hence, this could be achieved by imparting knowledge on the students most especially in the basic elementary schools and secondary schools so as to develop in them the consciousness of promoting effective religious relations and mutual coexistence of religious adherents in Nigeria. This could at help also to form the mind of the young religious adherents in the words of (Omojola, 2026: 89) "that Muslims, Christians and followers of African Traditional Religion should introduce their religions to others with dignity."

In this understanding, these institutions should be open to children from the different religions for an effective religious integration most especially in the present day Nigeria. Students who are made to learn in an institution that is dominated by the tenets of a religion with no opportunity to relate with students from other religions may not appreciate the need to relate with people from other religions in the future. It is strongly suggested that admission to basic elementary and secondary schools should not be limited to pupils from one faith. It is also suggested that the founders of such institutions should be conscious not to force children from other religions who are admitted into their institutions to convert to their religious faiths. In all, in the words of (Omojola, 2026: 87) "the media Practitioners are to inform and educate the populace on the constitutional provisions on the rights of every individual…that the natural law confers some rights on every human being…freedom to choose and practice the religion…".

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