

The Early Life of Jesus Christ: A Challenge for Christian Upbringing in Nigeria

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Abstract: Jesus lived a normal life. He got basic education of the Jewish scriptures which was the common practice in his day. He was raised in an artisan family which struggled and which had few basic necessities of life. But what distinguished his family was their piety. He grew up in an honest environment where they inculcated honesty, self-discipline, and obedience to constituted authorities into him. The gene of uprightness in him was nurtured in an environment of righteousness. This paper takes a look at how Nigerian parents could create a similar environment that Joseph and Mary created which allowed Jesus to develop his innate virtues which later blossomed into a life that Peter described as one without sin or any form of deception. This is a template for every child who aspires to please God and live a life that will influence humanity at large. The paper draws resources from relevant literature and scriptures to establish the fact that correct upbringing in a godly environment can help a child attain a life worthy of emulation.

Key Words: Childhood, Godly Environment, Training, Upbringing.

Introduction

The book of Genesis opened up with the account of several beginnings; such as the beginning of creation, the beginning of human race, the beginning of conjugal relationship between a man and a woman, the beginning of sin, etc. Every created organism has a beginning. The beginning of a process in most cases, points to the foundation laying stage. In most cases, the beginning determines the foundation upon which the whole building will lay. Unequivocally, the beginning of everything (both living and non-living) is the most fragile stage of life as it can make or mar the being.

The expression, "in the beginning..." (Gen. 1:1), which is pointed to the beginning of the creation of the magnificent heaven and earth, is an indication that no matter how enormous a person, a thing or a system is, it must have a beginning. Other beginnings alluded to in the bible include: the beginning of the reign of kings like Saul and David; the beginning of the ministries of John and Jesus; the beginning of the missionary work of Paul, etc. All these point out to the beginning of a process, of which biological and physical growth is inclusive. It is observed that the problem of man began from the beginning, precisely, from the compromise of the first family. The concept of "beginning" is very broad. For instance, one could talk about the birth of Jesus as a beginning; one could also refer to the beginning of his ministry; etc. Since the concept of "beginning" in the life of a person is so broad, this work will limit it to the "physical beginning of Jesus as a child in the nuclear family of Joseph and Mary." Therefore, the upbringing as discussed in this work would be the contributions that the environment and the genes played in the making of who Jesus eventually became. Of course, nurture and nature play vital roles in the training and proper upbringing of a child.

The word "upbringing" could mean, "the way in which a child is cared for and taught how to behave while it is growing up" (A.S. Hornby, 2006: 1623). It implies, "early training: especially a particular way of bringing up a child it is the way a child is raised, the care and teaching given to a child by parents or other people" (www.merriam-webster.com, 2016). Before the antediluvian period (the period referred to in the Bible between the fall of humans and Noachian Deluge (the Genesis Flood) in the biblical cosmology; the narrative takes up chapters 1-6 of the book of Genesis), God said unto man to be fruitful, multiply, replenish the earth, subdue and have dominion over every living thing (Gen. 1:28). He also repeated the first three blessings to Noah, namely, "be fruitful, multiply and replenish the earth" (Gen. 9:1) after the deluge. The fourth and

fifth blessings are synonymous to upbringing. To “subdue” means to bring under control while to have means “dominion.” All these expressions indicate that upbringing has been the heartbeat of God from the onset.

One of the reasons why God confided in Abraham, on what He wanted to do to Sodom and Gomorrah was because God knew, that Abraham was trust worthy and that he would train his children on the fear of God. God rejected the sons of Eli, but accepted Samuel just because of his moral values; while Eli was condemned, though righteous, for the fact that he was behind in his responsibility to properly bring up his sons in the fear of God. This paper will look at the roles that Joseph and Mary played in the upbringing of Jesus, viz-a-viz the characters of both parents and the environment of righteousness they created for the tender Jesus to become a fortress of morality. In a broader perspective, this paper intends to take a cursory look at the family background of Jesus Christ, his birth and travails, his childhood, his trainings in carpentry and scriptures, etc. Also, an attempt would be made to explore the early childhood educational and cultural upbringing of Jewish children under the Roman imperialism.

Furthermore, the study will draw an analogy with the present day Christian children upbringing in Nigeria; a multi religious, multiracial country; with the aims of identifying the strengths and weaknesses and the dimension of the current practices. The paper concludes by highlighting some of the critical areas of the upbringing of Jesus Christ, in order to pose a challenge for Nigerian Christians.

The Early Life of Jesus Christ

There are many views on the early life of Jesus Christ by the theologians. For instance, the typologists believe that the beginning of Jesus Christ could be traced to Genesis. According to this school, the first creature which is “Light” (Gen. 1:3) was typified to be Jesus Christ with references to allusions in the New Testament (John 1:1-5, 8:12, 12, 9:5)). They further said that Jesus Christ was among the Trinity in Genesis 1:26. He was typified to be the seed of the woman in Genesis 3:15. He was interpreted to be the wisdom of God that existed before the creation (Proverbs 8:22-30, cf 1 Corinthians 1:24). All these are talking on the celestial nature and deity of Jesus Christ. All these pointed to the pre-carnate Jesus. However, this research did not factor in the divinity of Jesus as an important element that made him to have a proper and balanced upbringing in a human environment. The paper also takes for granted that his divinity gave him an undue advantage, since there had been cases of several bible characters who were ordinary mortals, yet they attained greater heights of morality through interactions with the normal godly parents in a godly home. In the upbringing of a child, there are two elements that come into play. They are nature and nurture. Considering the case of Jesus, he was brought up in a family where the father was described as being righteous, and spiritually sensitive. The mother at the same time was a virgin. Her spiritual sensitivity also was alluded to by her interaction with Angel Gabriel and submission to go on with the will of God, in spite of evident shame and spite from the public. Joseph, the foster father of Jesus was also a carpenter, and there were no records of him being dishonest. In christening Jesus, the parents also did the needful by presenting sacrifices required by the law. The public show of Jesus at Jerusalem at 12 also indicated the religious piety of the parents. If the genes of the righteous Joseph were not found in Jesus, at least the spiritual environment he created made Jesus to have an honest and godly father figure example to follow. The mother of Jesus, Mary on the other hand made a genetic contribution to the baby Jesus. She was a virgin in a society that was morally corrupt. Apart from the apostate nature of the people of Israel, they were colonised by the Romans, who had established a global system of governance and whose taste for leisure and sexual escapades, after the war reached a new height.

It should therefore be noted that Jesus benefited from the piety and honest lifestyle of his foster father Joseph in his administration of his nuclear family and the gene of righteousness in the blood of Mary, his mother.

a. The Family Background of Jesus

The genealogy of Jesus Christ was recorded by two Gospel writers viz: Matthew and Luke. Matthew traced the family background of Jesus Christ from Abraham to his birth and came up

with the record of forty-two generations (Matthew 1:1-17). What is a generation in the Bible? There are many opinions on this. One takes its proof from the prophecy of God to Abraham in Gen. 15:16 where the Lord said the descendants of Abraham would be strangers in a country not their own and they would be enslaved and mistreated there for four hundred years. In the fourth generation they would come back. Here, a generation is 100 years (www.bible-codes.org/old-prophecy_5c-...). Another source says, a generation in the Bible is normally 40 years (Ibid). This is because 40 years is well attested to in the bible. Occasionally, 70 years is also found in the bible (Psalm 90:10); it is said to be the average of a man at his death. In his commentary on Matt. 1:17, Raymond Brown opines that, the spans of time are too great to have contained only fourteen generations each since some 750 years separated Abraham from David, some 400 years separated David from the Babylonian Exile, and 600 years separated the Babylonians exile from Jesus birth (www.rtforum.org/it/it13.html). With all the aforementioned points, it is still very difficult to settle with number of years, but the family background of Jesus Christ could be traced to David from Abraham. That is, Jesus Christ belongs to the royal tribe of Judah in Israel.

Luke begins with Jesus and moves back through Abraham to Adam. Matthew deliberately arranges his genealogy each (Matt. 1:17) with a total of 41 names. Luke has 77 names, apparently arranged in 11 groups of seven, although he never calls attention to this. At the part where the two genealogies overlap, Matthew has 41 names and Luke has 57. Matthew traces the genealogy through David's son Solomon, whereas Luke goes through David's son Nathan (<https://bible.org/.../lesson-14-genology-...>). This discrepancy is a synoptic problem. It was thought that St. Matthew, St. Mark and St. Luke wrote their gospels independently of one another but then a closer examination of the synoptic gospels reveals that they agree too closely to make independent writing possible (Ayegboyin, 2004: 46). On the other hand as close as they are, there are also notable dissimilarities in these gospels (Ayegboyin, 2004: 4) that raise thought provoking questions. However, the biblical scholars have logically procured solutions to the reasons behind similarities and divergences in the synoptic gospels. This study will not discuss these solutions, but will establish the fact that Jesus was related to the righteous Abraham and royal family of David.

b. His Birth and Travails

The books of Matthew and Luke have preserved for us some of the gleanings of the early life of Jesus (Martin, 1966: 387). Matthew's and Luke's records concerning the birth of Jesus Christ have some similarities and dissimilarities. According to Matthew, Joseph was the main character while Mary was the main character in Luke. One of the areas of convergences of the two gospels in the story of the birth of Jesus was that, Mary had been betrothed to Joseph before she became mysteriously pregnant by the Holy Spirit. (Matt. 1:18 cf Lk. 1:27).

In Israel, there were three stages involved in their customary marriage. The first stage was the engagement, which was often arranged while the couples concerned were still under aged. This was followed by the betrothal, which was a confirmation of the engagement, when the couple come of age. During the twelve months period of betrothal, the couple enjoyed the status of marriage without the rights of marriage. They might or might not be allowed any periods alone together. Breaking of betrothal was a serious business and was considered a divorce (Kapolyo, 2006: 1135). This is followed by "Chuppah," the sexual consummation, which could be more than one year depending on the financial capacity of the groom, after a legal contract which is called "Ketubbah" (that is stage one) had been made. An instance of this was the services of seven years rendered by Jacob to Laban to enable him marry Rachael (Gen. 29:15-18). The third stage was the wedding ceremony. At this stage, full rights of marriage were conferred upon the couple and from then on, they would be free to consummate their marriage through sexual intercourse. If a young betrothed woman was found to be pregnant and her suitor was not responsible, as was the case with Mary (1:8). She would be publicly shamed and executed by stoning (Act 22:23-28) (Kapolyo, 2006: 1135) though at the time of Joseph, the Roman Government did not endorse it.

Joseph and Mary were at the second stage of their marriage when Mary became pregnant. Joseph was a just and compassionate man who did not want to put Mary to a public ridicule,

rather he planned to divorce her quietly. While ruminating on this, the angel of the Lord convinced him in the dream that the pregnancy was an act of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 13:19-25 cf Luke 1:26-35). Luke's Gospel tells how Jesus' mother, Mary and her husband Joseph responded to a decree from Caesar Augustus (31BC- AD 14) by making a journey of 120km (75miles) from Nazareth to Bethlehem to be registered, and Luke notes this was the first census that took place while Quirinus served two terms as governor of Syria 6-4BC and 6-9AD (Lawrence, 2006:13, 136). Jesus would have been born during either of the tenures.

The birth of Jesus Christ took place in a manger because there was no room in the inn. (Luke 2:6-7). The Greek word for inn is used by Luke later in his gospel to mean the 'guest room' (Lawrence, 2006: 136). The shepherds in the field visited Jesus in the night he was born according to the Lukan record. Matthew records the visit of the wise men from east to Jerusalem. Jerusalem was 9km (5½ miles) from Bethlehem which was located in the Southern part (Lawrence, 2006: 136). This event seems to have been sometimes after Jesus' birth as the family recorded as living in a house. Herod the Great who reigned between 37-4BC killed all the children in Bethlehem from two years old and under, and would have killed Jesus Christ if God had not instructed Joseph to escape with his family to Egypt. That means the birth of Jesus Christ and the travails that surrounded it took place within this range. Martin (1966: 387) puts the date of Jesus' birth in 6B.C. James W. Hugg (Christmprophecy.org/.../when-was-Jesus-...) opines that Jesus was born during Sukkot, the feast of Tabernacles, (which began the 29th of September) in 5BC, His conception was possibly as late as the 25th December in 6BC, and it is also possible that the Magi visited Bethlehem around 25th December in 5BC, when Jesus would have been almost 3 months old (Christmprophecy.org/.../when-was-Jesus-...). Due to these discrepancies, the birth of Jesus Christ could be fixed between 4BC-6BC. His birth was full of difficulties and danger. One could imagine that if the spirit of the Lord did not intervene and Mary was publicly stoned to death, then Jesus would not have been born. Peradventure, Joseph privily divorced her; Jesus would have been an illegitimate child; and if not for divine intervention, he would have been massacred with other children in Bethlehem. This narrative is meant to portray the role that Joseph and Mary played in protecting Jesus even before His birth. There were several forces that militated against Jesus being born and also being alive to fulfil his divine destiny. It actually involved a lot of sacrifices from both parents who were only ordinary human beings with normal human nature. Both parents took responsibilities for the safety of Jesus in spite of what it would cost them in terms of personal inconvenience, misunderstanding from their extended family members, constant migration and burdensome financial implications.

c. Children's Upbringing in the Land of Israel

Upbringing has earlier been defined as the way in which a child is cared for and taught how to behave while he/she was growing up. Upbringing is all about parental training of children from the cradle. Israelites' parents do not handle their children upbringing with lackadaisical attitude. The Jews were keen on the education of their children being trained from the time they are born. When a Jewish child is born, he is trained to recognize God as his father and maker of the world. He is also taught to know that the entire universe is depended on God (Kponu, 2012: 5).

As Jewish law presented, a boy begins the study of the scriptures at five years of age and the study of the legal traditions at ten. Every Hebrew parent teaches his child God's precepts from the swaging clothe. According to a common rabbinic saying, "the town without school must perish!" Another one says, "Clear to me is the breath of school." Joseph opines that, "our chief aim is to educate our children well; according to him, Jewish children were taught to believe God from swaging clothe (Kponu, 2012: 5). The goal of the Jewish education is the TORAH which is derived from the Hebrew word "Yara" which means to direct, and to teach; this means direction, instruction, and this is also embedded in *Shewa*. The forever is called *Beth-Hassepher*, which is equivalent to the elementary school, always attached to the synagogue where children between age of six and seven begin their formal education; this stage ends at about the age of twelve years. Thereafter, the child begins to learn a trade along with his formal education. A *rabbianic* statement affirms this, with the statement that "He who does not teach a child trade, teaches him to be thief" (Kponu, 2012: 5).

A Jewish boy automatically becomes a bar Mitzvah upon the age of 13 years and a girl upon reaching the age of 12 years. "Bar" is "Son" in Aramaic which used to be the vernacular of Jewish people. "Mitzvah" is "Commandment" in both Hebrew and Aramaic (https://en.m.wikipedia.org/.../Bar_and_Ba...). Bar Mitzvah means "son of commandment". At the age of 13 (12 for girls) children become obligated to observe the commandments. The bar Mitzvah ceremony formally, publicly marks the assumption of obligations to lead religious service. The celebrant is also generally required to make a speech which traditionally begins with the phrase "today I am a man" (Ibid). At Barmiswha, a child is examined to see how his parent had trained him, thereafter, boys that want to become rabbis were sent for training of *Bethhannmdras* (House of Interpretation). It is equivalent to theological seminary today (Kponu, 2012: 5). A devoted Jewish child knows the dos and don'ts of God from the cradle. The balance struck with both religious training and skill acquisition made a Jewish child to apply the fear of God in his chosen profession. There is no dichotomy between his attitude to God when he is at the temple and his attitude to his fellow man in his place of business. He is required to love God on the one hand and his neighbour on the other. To him religion does not stop in the place of worship.

d. The Upbringing of Jesus

Jesus Christ was born into a Jewish family with good reputations. Joseph was a just man (Matt. 1:19a), a merciful man (Matt. 1:19b), a spirit filled man that receives God's instruction through dreams (Matt. 1:20-21). He was versed in the scripture and prophecy (Matt. 1:22-23), he was an obedient person (Matt. 1:24, 2:13-15), a God fearing man, and morally sound, coupled with sexual discipline (Matt. 1:25). Mary was a disciplined lady and a virgin (Luke 1:27), she was also a spirit filled lady (Luke 1:28-35), she believed the word of God and His prophecy (Lk 1:38). Kapolyo (2006:1135) submits that we can assume that Joseph was a young man between the ages of 18 and 20. And as many assume, he came from Galilee, a traditional small town whose custom, unlike in Judah, frowned at betrothed men and women spending any time together in private. He lived in a male-dominated society. He could impregnate Mary before their wedding or involve in pre-marital sex, but he abstained himself from this grievous act.

According to E.F. Har (2008: 914), the life of Jesus Christ was far more nearly influenced by His Jewish mother, nurtured in a home of piety and possibly of near poverty, encouraged to love the scripture, trained in the worship and instruction of the synagogue. All these virtues in the life of Jesus' parents and lots more could have served as a good background for Jesus Christ before he was born. Whether Jesus turned to the right or the left, he is sandwiched between two pillars of piety and morality. The lack of contradictions in the worldview and spiritual perceptions of Joseph and Mary made Jesus to see the world through a single eye. Also, the correlation between the daily conducts of Joseph and Mary and what they profess made their child to have a correct role model, since a little discrepancy could be fatal in the perception of a child towards life and his faith.

A few verses were reserved for the early life of Jesus. But be that as it may, they give a vivid picture of a child that was guided on the right path. Few of the references to his background are highlighted below. He was enrolled by his parents at Bethlehem and he was born there. (Luke 2:1-7). Bethlehem is the original home of Davidic family (Duffield, 1977: 58) that means Jesus Christ was born at royal family. His circumcision took place on the eighth day (Luke 2:21) according to God's covenant with Abraham and his descendants. His purification was in the Jerusalem temple according to Mosaic Law (Luke 2:22-24). The purification took place on the fortieth day of his birth (Martin, 1966: 390). After birth, the baby Jesus Christ was taken to Egypt for asylum (Matt. 2:13-15) while King Herod the great massacred all the male children in Bethlehem who were two year old or under (Matt. 2:16-18). The last record of childhood of Jesus Christ as recorded in the Bible was the journey of his parent including him to Jerusalem for Passover feast when he was twelve years old (Luke 2:41-43).

The Boyhood of Jesus Christ

According to E. F. Har (2008: 914) little information is given about the boyhood of Jesus, and this very fact underscores the truth that our Gospels were not intended to be biographies in the accepted sense of that word. Jesse Lymon HurI (1966: 379-380) opines that "Jesus was brought

to Nazareth when he was a little child not more than three years old, there he grew up as a boy and a young man; and there he lived until he was thirty years of age. We would like to know many things about His boyhood, but the Bible tells us very little. As Joseph was a working man (Carpenter), it is likely that he lived in a house with only one room with no floor except the earth, no window except a hole in the wall, no pictures upon the walls and neither bedstead, nor chair, nor looking-glass. They sat upon the floor or upon cushions (made by Joseph being a carpenter); they slept upon rolls of matting; and their meals were taken from a low table, not much larger than a stool (Jesse, 1966: 380). All these were said by this scholar to expatiate the penury and wretched background of Jesus Christ and his brothers; James, Joseph, Simon and Judas with their sisters (Matt. 13:53-55). The Jewish boys of that time were taught to know almost the whole of the Old Testament by heart (Jesse, 1966: 380). Jesus also learned the trade of a carpenter or worker in wood with Joseph, and when Joseph died, while Jesus was still a young man, He took up the care of His mother and in the work of the carpenter's shop and the quiet life of a country village, and the worship of the synagogue, the years passed until Jesus was thirty years of age (Jesse, 1966: 380).

There were eighteen silent years in the life of Jesus Christ according to the biblical record. Beyond a reasonable doubt, these years were full of series of training for Jesus Christ through his parents and neighbours. Jesus had sound upbringing by his parents as testified by the scripture, that, the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom and the favour of God was upon him (Luke 2:40). By age thirty (Luke 3:23) he was competent to begin his ministry and to stand alone. In spite of the political, religious, social and economic conditions of the early life of Jesus Christ, his parents strived to give him all the necessary trainings, and later became famous and the saviour of his people and the whole world.

The Christian Child's Upbringing in Nigeria

How should Christians train their children from the cradle in Nigeria? Can we exonerate Christian Children from all the societal vices? Bluntly speaking, most Christians find it arduous to justifiably bring up their children despite the fact that they profess the Christian faith or being practicing Christians. The gargantuan strength of Nigeria and other factors could have been the reasons behind this, and failure to savage the situation would definitely lead to the downfall of Nigeria which is already convulsing. Nigeria as it exists today is a pluralistic society, with different cultural and religious groups. The notion of pluralism involves awareness on the part of those affected, of the existential differences in cultural behaviour, philosophy of life, and even certain attitudes and values (Ekwunife, 1992: 17). The population of Nigeria as at 2016 was about 186,053,386 roughly distributed within the age structure:

0-14 years: 42.76% (male 40,744,856) (female 38,879,303); 15-24years: 19.40% (male 18,514,466) (female 17,729,351); 25-54 years: 30.65% (male 24,259,621, female 27,768,368); 55-64years 3.96% (male 3,595,293) (female 3,769,986); 65 years and over: 3.12% (male 2,754,040) (female 3,047,002) ([www.indexmundi.com/nigeria/...](http://www.indexmundi.com/nigeria/)).

It should be noted that, the percentage of children is higher than that of others. Failure to catch them young would lead to a problem in the society in the nearest future. The fact remains that, the religion with high percentage of children at early stage would have a lot of work to do in their upbringing, and failure of parents in this regard will affect the nation at large. To get the accurate population of Christians in Nigeria has always been a problem. A source says, Christians in Nigeria comprise between 50% and 67.4% of the population (<https://em.m.wikipedia.org/.../Christianity-...>). Another source says, 50% are Muslims, 40% are Christians while others are 10% (<https://ask.nay.com/religion/mytrian-...>). Whether Christians are more than Muslims or Muslims are more than Christians, there is still a challenge in upbringing due to different teachings or training being given by individual religious adherents. Christianity itself has different sects and several denominations, which have different ways of bringing up their children. Due to this pluralistic nature of Nigeria, our children are exposed to different trainings at home, community, school, other social gatherings and different religious forum. Sometimes, they are forced to make choices between several conflicting ideas, teachings and counsels. Christianity cannot be practised outside the culture and traditions where it exists. Beyond a reasonable doubt, the influence of such culture

and traditions on it cannot be underrated, just as the Jewish religion and culture had influence on Jesus' upbringing as earlier discussed.

Perhaps, a quick look at scholarly definitions of religion and culture would help in situating the problem of religious upbringing in a society that is becoming increasingly secular in its approach and outlook. Religion is very ambiguous to define, so this paper will rely on a few selected scholarly definitions. According to Killen R. Allan (2008: 1451), the English word "religion" raises certain problems. There are diverse opinions concerning its root and origin. Cicero connected it with *religare*, "to read again" "to consider" "give attention to the divine". Lactantius and Augustine translated *religare* "to bind back". A.S. Hornby (2006: 1231) defines religion as "the belief in the existence of a god or gods, and the activities that are connected with the worship of them". A critical evaluation of these definitions shows that, religion involves concepts like God, tenets, worship, etc., which must be learnt and carefully followed. For somebody to be able to read again, consider something as being authentic and to give attention keenly to the divine, training is inevitable. More so, it is not easy to just believe in the existence of a supernatural being and worship him or her without being indoctrinated. Each religious adherent in Nigeria has a way of inculcating their beliefs in their little ones. J. S. Mbiti (1982: 110) opines that, nature brings a child into the world but society creates the child into a social being, and a corporate person; for it is the community which must protect the child, feed it, bring it up, educate it, and in many other ways incorporate it into the wider community. Nigeria being a multi-religious society where each religious groups, has ways of imparting their children with their doctrines right from childhood or early life. For instance, African Traditional Religion adherents train their children from foetus. They have many rites of passage and ceremonies for their young ones in order to initiate them into their beliefs, right from the cradle.

This could involve taking the baby to the shrine or a traditional priest. Though, they teach their children orally, yet, at the early life, they could recite some lengthy incantation off hand. They do teach them some taboos that guide them as they grow in life. For the Muslims, they take their children to Quranic School from the early life. At the time of attaining youthful stage, they would have been conversant with all doctrines and practices of their religion. They would be able to read, write and speak Arabic language fluently. In the same manner, Christians too introduce Christ to their children at their tender age. Committed Christians do take their children to their places of worship in order to tailor their lives to the way of God right from their early life. Nigerians are indeed very religious. There is hardly any place a person visits in Nigeria without seeing one place of worship or another. Moreover, culture is defined as "the customs and beliefs, art, way of life and social organization of a particular country or group" (Mbiti 1982:110). Recent statistics has shown that there are over 500 different tribes in Nigeria, but the predominant tribes are Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo (www.total-facts-about-nigeria.com/myeri...). It is concrete that each tribe, either small or large, has their culture which they inculcate into the lives of the children from their childhood. The culture is reflected in the language dressing, foods, marriage, greetings, music and social life. It is undeniable that religions and cultures go hand in hand.

The Dimensions of Christian Upbringing in Nigeria

The word "Christian", as simple as it is, needs to be elucidated to enhance proper understanding of the subject matter under consideration. Sime Donald R. (2008:149) defines Christian as one who belongs or is devoted to Christ. The word occurs only three times in the New Testaments. (Acts 11:26, 26:29, I Pet 4:16). It was used first in Antioch A.D. 43. Perhaps it was originally used by the enemies of the disciples as a form of reproach, but since it meant I belong to Christ, it was a term they readily embraced (Lawrence, 2006: 149). This was how the name Christian became widely used. Though, originally meant for people who lived like Christ, but experience had proven that it is mostly used for those who attend one church or the other, or who were born into a church going family. (Rev. 1:11, chapter 2-3). Some people have come up with several versions of Christians such as: lukewarm Christians, fake or counterfeit Christians, syncretic Christians, and genuinely born-again Christians. Since there had been a deviation from the original purpose of God, then living like Christ had become a difficult task.

There is a huge percentage of people who proclaim the Christian faith, but do something

contrary to the teachings of the bible. These people are black sheep and ill winds that blow nobody good. The trait of parents appears in a child. A home where genuine Christianity is practised will also produce children with such traits. The scope of proper Christian upbringing is very wide. It is beyond moral ethics. A Christian child is expected to be excellent in moral ethics and spiritual uprightness. To explore the dimension of what is required in Christian ethics, it is expedient to highlight them and briefly talk about them.

i. Parental or Domestic Upbringing: Upbringing is the treatment and training received by a child from its parents throughout its childhood (dictionary.cambridge.org/.../upbringing). Home is the first place a child is exposed to. Whatever is being given here has a remarkable effect on his or her life. The Bible says, children are the heritage from the Lord (Psalm 127:3). Parents should see their children as precious gift from the Lord and they therefore have the divine duty of bringing them up in the way of the Lord. It is a popular saying that “charity begins at home”. Therefore, parental or domestic upbringing is all encompassing. Apart from spiritual training, parents must give their children mental/academic (how to read and write), physical and health (how to take care of their body or hygiene), social (how to behave well in the society and what their society is all about), ethical (moral principles) economical and financial (how to spend aright and avoid waste of resources), psychological and philosophical (proper way of thinking and reasoning) civil (art of belong to citizens, a sense of good citizen must be inculcated in the children to avoid violent behaviour why growing up), religious (this means to be devoted to religion – Christianity as the authentic while others are adulterated, but they must tolerate others), home economics (the study of household management viz: cooking, sanitary etc.), cultural (norms and values of the society, this includes, greetings, dressing, language etc.) and other necessary trainings. Training up a child is directly related to discipline which means to impart instruction to disciples (Okoli, 2008: 35). Discipline must begin early. Ilori (2002: 28) opines that, a child of five or six can be moulded into anything. However, a child of eight or nine must be bent: a teen of between seventeen or eighteen must be broken; and an adult can almost never be changed except through the working of the Holy Spirit. Parents must not toy with their children's training. In fact, in this age of technology, children must be taught the right way to use media both audio and visual to avoid immorality from the cradle.

ii. Ecclesiastical Upbringing: The training of children by the church cannot be under estimated. Bible contains many references on the training of children. Jesus Christ said, “Let the children come to me, do not hinder the; for to such belongs the kingdom of God (Mark. 10:13-16). The church will never reach its fullest potential until receives the functioning ministry to children. Ilori (2002:28) said, “The Church is the only agency in a community that is primarily concerned with the moral and spiritual needs and interest of people. Church must train children or give sound training to children at all aforementioned areas of life. The church is to complement the efforts of parents in the children upbringing. This can be achieved through the establishment of children bible club in the church, homes, and schools; sunday school, holiday bible schools, holiday camps and rallies, guidance and counselling; The use of Audio-visual aids or instructional materials to train them to be rooted in the word of God by reciting memory verses.

iii. Societal Upbringing: Society is a place where a child grows. It could make or mar a child's life style. One of the upbringing centres in the society is school. A child must be given a thorough Christian education in the school. Nigeria has a rich history of Christian education which could be traced back to the time when Portuguese traders had contact with Nigeria. In 1515, some Catholic missionaries set up a school in the Oba's palace in Benin for the converted princes and princesses with the children of chiefs (Ilori, 2002: 28). By 1571, the same Catholic missionaries visited Warri and established a school there. And the first mission primary school in the west was opened in Lagos (more precisely in Badagry) in 1843 by Mr. and Mrs. De Graft, and was named 'Nursery of the infant church'(Ilori, 2002: 28). Here, the role of the church on child training in the society is still felt. Through Christian Religious Knowledge and other subjects, a child can be well trained in all ramifications to be an instrument of progress and peace in the society.

Apart from schooling, vocation and trade are other media of bringing up a child. The church needs to speak against child abuse. Some out-of-school children have been exposed to

immoral practices while hawking. More so, government must organize programmes that are educative, informative and godly for our children. Offering free education, free primary healthcare etc. would go far in proper upbringing of the little ones. There are many factors militating against the Christian upbringing in Nigeria. They include: parental negligence, church denominational and doctrinal differences, secularization of the school curriculum; prevailing social vices; peer group pressure or Influence: bad use of technology and mass media; poverty; religious crisis; religious crisis; divorce or marital problems; and, demonic influence, among others.

Jesus' Upbringing: A Challenge for Christian Upbringing in Nigeria

The word challenge means “a call to prove or justify something”. It is a new or difficult task that test somebody's ability and skill (A.S. Hornby, 2006, p.231). Having examined the upbringing of Jesus Christ in the midst of adverse spiritual and physical forces, it poses a strong challenge to Christian parents in Nigeria who are finding it difficult to achieve a similar result that Joseph and Mary had. Despite the fact that Joseph and Mary were wretched, they did not commit sexual immorality, they were spirit filled and obedient to the voice of God. Their child Jesus Christ was born in the manger while observing their civil responsibility. They took their child through circumcision, purification in the temple as required by Law of Moses; they rescued the boy from the hand of the wicked king Herod and raised him to a strange land. Critical evaluation reveals that they took Jesus Christ to the Temple in Jerusalem every year. He was trained as Jewish people train their children in all the stages in the rabbinic schools. He was also given a vocational training by his father – Joseph. By age twelve, Jesus could compete with the scribes in the temple. At age thirty, he commenced his public ministry that lasted for about three and half year with such a resounding success.

Challenge implies a call to prove or justify something. If the parents of Jesus could nurture him well in the face of all factors that militated against them, Christian parents in Nigeria should be challenged to do the same. In spite of all the aforementioned factors that could militate against upbringing in Nigeria by the Christians, they should be able to bring up their children in a godly way. The fact is that if Joseph and Mary could do it in a time when all the necessary things to train the children were not as they are now in the age of enlightenment and technology, then Christian parents of this age most especially in Nigeria should be called to prove or justify themselves why they lag behind in their children's upbringing.

Proper upbringing of children is a task that must be done by Christian parents in Nigeria. Christians are supposed to be the hope of Nigeria. Politicians have failed the nation; the people of other powerful religions next to Christianity have indoctrinated their children to be killing non-adherents mercilessly. The children of traditional worshippers are sometimes terrors in the community. Children training should commence from the life style of the parents which their children could see and emulate, just as Joseph and Mary did to Jesus.

Recommendations

All Christian homes should embark on "operations catch them young." Each couple should strive to train their children in the way of God and how to be useful for their communities. The Christian education curriculum should be overhauled and prepared in the way that gives room for Christian children training in the school. If possible Christians should establish their schools to train up their children. As Muslims send their children to Quranic schools apart from formal education, Christians should think of such. If the word of God is being imparted into the life of children from the cradle at home, in the church and school, utopian Nigeria should be in earnest expectation.

Conclusion

This paper has been able to elucidate the key word “upbringing”. It has treated the early life of Jesus Christ, beginning from his family background where the pious life of his parents was treated as bedrock to his upbringing. It discussed the birth of Jesus Christ and all the travails that surrounds it. It elucidated the stages of Israelites upbringing and defended it that Jesus Christ also went through all the rabbinic schools or stages. The boyhood of Jesus Christ was expatiated cum the silent part of the life of Jesus Christ that was not recorded in the bible. It

moved further to distinctively explain the Christian upbringing in Nigeria and different dimensions of Christian upbringing were discussed with the factors that militate against Christian upbringing in Nigeria. The work concluded by challenging Christian parent in Nigeria to bring up their children in the way of God and for the benefit of the nation as Jesus' parents did successfully.

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