

DIVINE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN TEACHER: THE CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVES

Jude Chukwudi Obidigbo, PhD

Department of Christian Religious Studies,
Nwafor Orizu College of Education Nsugbe

Abstract

This descriptive research examines the roles of teachers in the Nigerian society. It is aimed at exposing the identity and responsibilities of a trained teacher in a rather low income and ethically maleficent population seeking liberation from a self-inflicted corruption. Here many people take to the teaching profession for its economic values and as a means of survival than the desired human development. It also serves as a wake-up call to the Catholic teachers to live up to their missionary mandate of communicating Christ via their profession. To accomplish this all important tasks, the researcher critically examined the identity of the teacher and the teaching profession, their services to education for human wholistic development, the authority of Christ as the Teacher par Excellence, the roles of the Church and Catholic teacher as well as some critical challenges of the teaching profession in Nigeria. The researcher therefore discovered that the teacher must be properly trained to understand and willfully accept their proper roles in the society as mentors and guides to their students; that education is for human development and can only be realised with a proper blend of the physical and spiritual needs of man which Christianity and the catholic church has significantly advocated most recently. To continue to lead this effort therefore, catholic teachers should sustain their desires for continuous learning and self-improvement as well as imitate Christ as light to their societies. This study finally suggests that teachers should be properly remunerated and motivated to enable them focus on their duties and not give in to activities that might hamper their desired successes. They should also value their profession in order to protect its ethics and improve their overall ratings and image in the society.

Keywords: Divine Responsibility, Teacher, Education, Nigeria.

The Teacher

Is taken from the verbal infinitive 'to teach' which is given in Latin as *duco*. The Teacher also translates the Latin *doctor* which other synonyms include the *magister* - master or *praeceptor* - professor. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2023) simply defines the teacher as “one that teaches, especially one whose occupation is to instruct” (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/teacher>) without qualifying what, where and how they teach. In this case, the word has a very broad application including anybody, anywhere who takes to teaching.

For Wikipedia free encyclopedia (2022) “A teacher, also called a school teacher or formally an educator, is a person who helps students to acquire knowledge, competence, or virtue, via the practice of teaching” (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teacher>). This definition introduces the idea of teaching as a profession which this work is all about. Consequently, the National Open University (2006) states that; “A teacher is a person who has undergone approved professional training in education at a College of Education or Faculty of Education in a University, University of Education. Graduates of these institutions are capable of imparting knowledge, right attitudes and skills to learner” (p. 16).

Nature of the Teaching Profession

The National Open University of Nigeria (2006) aptly describes the child as a young plant which needs proper growth, nurturing, shaping and pruning, and the teacher is like a gardener who understands the plants and their needs for growth through bending, straightening and pruning. To be able to carry out these tasks, the teacher is trained in both the theory and practice of education to incorporate his influence, character and example in his process. Little wonder many also regard teaching as a vocation.

According to the International Taskforce on Teachers for Education (2023) there were “about 93.7 million teachers worldwide; 11.6 million in pre-primary, 32.6 million in primary, 20.7 in lower secondary, 15.7 in upper secondary, and 13.1 in tertiary education”. These data seem to indicate among other things that teaching is about the world's biggest profession which population vary from one country to another.

As the nature of the teachers' activities also depends on the age of persons taught, teachers in Nigeria have been (traditionally) grouped into three - primary or elementary school, secondary school, and tertiary school teachers. However, teaching young children and adolescents were hardly considered a profession before the 20th century because it was more like an art where the relatively young and untrained women and men kept schools or heard lessons as they were called.

These young and untrained men and women usually learnt their art solely by observing and imitating their own teachers. “It was only university professors and few teachers of elite secondary schools that merited being called members of a profession like priests, medical doctors and lawyers” (Havighurst, 1984, Vol. 18).

The Teaching Profession in the Service of Education

It is an obvious fact that teaching and learning are the two very important components of Education. By this we mean that education cannot be said to be going on without somebody teaching and another being on the receiving end - the learner. Put in another way, education presupposes a teacher and a learner. In order to understand the function and role of a teacher therefore, we must first of all understand the meaning of education and its purpose.

Generally speaking, the definition of education is as varied as there are educationists themselves. The word 'education' can be understood either in a broad, technical or strict sense. In a broad sense, education includes all those processes through which man acquires the experiences that enable him to gain new knowledge or augment the one he already has. Technically, education includes those activities through which man's intellect or will is strengthened. It can be gained either in the home, school, church etc. In its strictest sense however, education is used to mean "the consciously planned systematic imparting or acquisition of knowledge in a system we call school" (Nwabuisi, 1992, p.5).

Etymologically, the word education is derived from two Latin words according to two different schools of thought. In the first school of thought, the idealists posit that education is derived from the Latin word *educere* meaning to lead out' or to bring out'. This is because they believe that the mind has innate ideas, which would only need to be squeezed out. The empiricists on the other hand hold that the word education originated from the Latin *educare* meaning to form, train, nurture or elevate. This is because they believed that the child or learner's mind is a tabula rasa (a blank or erased slate) on which external objects are meant to impress their sensation to create information and knowledge. This latter theory has been seriously challenged on the fact that the child's mind becomes active even before birth. Be that as it may, education is always a two-way effort on the part of the teacher and learner to transmit, evoke or acquire knowledge, values, attitudes and skills. According to Maritain,(1943) education;

In its broadest sense refers to the entire complex of influences under which a man is moulded in his evolving dynamism and led towards (maturity and personal) fulfilment. Or from another point of view; the total milieu through which a culture is communicated to individuals. Secondly, it may refer to the conscious work of formation - intellectual, moral, emotional - which adults intentionally undertake with regard to youth. Finally, in its most restricted sense, education refers to the specific sphere of formation, which is the responsibility of schools, colleges and university. (pp. 1-2)

From the foregoing, it is clear that from one point of view education is everybody's business and involves everything that living itself entails, but from another point of view, education is rather a specialized study with its own techniques and the business of experts. This is why Jeffrey (1972), "none of us can escape active participation in the business of education; our own and other peoples' since the influence of persons on one another must result in education of some kind; good, bad or indifferent" (p. 3). However, Bala N. and Nuhu, J. (2018) describes teacher education as:

A series of complex and complete procedure of preparing individuals whose work is imparting knowledge to other individuals with the aim of contributing to national development. Teacher education therefore refers to the government policies and educational practices designed to equip prospective teachers with the knowledge, attitudes and skills that enable them perform their duties effectively in the classroom, school and wider society (ps. 3-4).

The End of Education

From our understanding of what education means, it goes without saying that education is not and cannot be an end in itself. Its focus is on human life; "man's growth and development as a human being, so far as the process of development can be manipulated and controlled" (Guzie, 1967, p.177). Thus, just as the human person occupies a central place in God's entire creation, so also does he enjoy a central place in any meaningful education. Education therefore aims at the full and balanced development of the human person. From the above statement, we now draw two strong conclusions:

- A. Since the human person is a component of body, mind and spirit, an education that is worthy of the name must aim at the full and balanced development of these parts. Man must strive to harmonize his powers at the rational, moral and spiritual levels. And this is what the teacher can help him to do.
- B. Similarly, education must be on-going since human growth and development is an on-going process. Thus, even though human growth is an end in itself demanding the fulfillment of each stage of development for its own sake, there is "no end product in the sense of a stage, at which it is possible to say that the process is now complete"(Jeffery, 1972, p. 4).

Education is therefore not a limited or particular possession of an age or individual. Consequently, most civilisation or age had understood education as a means towards the full development and growth of man but has unfortunately failed to present a holistic conception of the purpose of true education. These have either been too myopic or conservative/rigid having expounded theories based on their philosophy of life, religious creed, political bearing and views of reality as a whole. This was the case in the primitive times when education sought only to maintain the status quo because it gave the inhabitants a sense of security. In the oriented China for instance, an indirect educational examination based on archery was carried out in selecting public officers. This was relevant at some time because the public officer was supposed to defend the city against invaders. But this practice unfortunately continued at a time when development in warfare led to the use of firearms instead of archers and so their practice led to stagnation. With its emphasis on obedience to parents and authorities, the ancient Hebrew system of education maintained an aim that is conservative and retrogressive in outlook. This is because it also forgot that there are stages and circumstances in a person's life when blind obedience would not be necessary.

The Greek Spartan's aim of education of just preparing the youth for war was too limited since it neglected other areas of human development. It was rather the Athenians that brought some changes in the educational system of the Greeks with Plato's classification of the citizenry into three groups- kings, soldiers, and artisans. These were to concentrate on intellectual, muscular and technical developments respectively. If this is so, it means that the king for instance cannot acquire nor develop the courage and craft of the soldiers and artisans respectively. And so, Plato's aims and objectives of education do not make for the development of the whole man. The Epicureans on the other hand advocated for the education of all in the society. But they made the development of the senses and the attainment of

pleasure the highest end of education. Aristotle on his part, maintained that happiness is to be the end of education but he ascribed this happiness to the cultivation of only the intellect while neglecting the other faculties. The Romans on the other hand, developed a system of education that was mainly utilitarian and for the state and neglected the more personal and spiritual needs of the individual. With its basic belief in Allah, Muslim education aims at building up the individual to become Allah's Khalifah i.e. one who behaves and acts according to Allah's teaching. Scholars agree that the Muslim system of education rather covers all aspects of the human person: the spiritual, bodily and mental. However, their fundamentalist stance that regards all non-believers as non-human to either be converted or killed is grossly inconsequential, miseducative and so to be rejected.

Renaissance humanistic education was marked by the appearance of such educationists as Francis Bacon (1561-1626) who was the expositor and philosopher of the new scientific movement. For him, the purpose of education was to advance learning. This at least neglects the needs of the body. Jean Jacques Rousseau (1717-1778) on the other hand opines that the purpose of education was to effect a cultural transmission. More modern thinkers have also made some invaluable contributions to the discussion. Alfred North Whitehead, while rejecting inert ideas as useless and harmful to education opines that education must be developed to produce men and women who possessed both culture and expert knowledge in some area. For him therefore, the teacher should inculcate knowledge that is meaningful and relevant to the life of the student. In his view also, all subjects taught in School should be connected.

But the pragmatic-oriented education of John Dewey (1859-1952) requires a special mention because it is one that has greatly influenced the system and practice of education in many countries of Europe, America and Africa today. In his emphasis on the importance of experience and the scientific method in education, he concluded that only that system of education that can be translated into life situations is educative. Nwabuisi (1992) quotes John Dewey as saying that the aims of education are within the educative process itself because "all aims belong to the activity or process in which they operate"(p.101). With his theory of foresight, a prior event leads to a successive one, which utilizes the furnished experience to advance a next stage until we arrive at the foreseen end. In this case, it is the foreseen result that determines both the action and means of achieving the result. Needless to say, this sort of education neglects truths gained from insights and so supports only the materialistic end in education. As a system of social function then, Okpaloka (1989) citing Jacques Maritain states that it is "a doctrine of doubt, or scepticism because it distrusts truth not provable by verification and it also doubts the intellectual power of the students mind". In the face of the decline of all these aims already mentioned, we now turn to a Christian, and especially, the Catholic aim of education.

The Christian/Catholic Aim in Education

The Christian religion is Judeo-biblical in origin. In the same vein, the Christian aim of education is Judeo-biblical in origin and therefore essentially Theocentric. In the views of Nwabuisi (1992), such aims are already set in the O.T Wisdom books and typically in the prologue of the book of Proverbs. Here it is stated that the purpose of the books are:

For learning what wisdom and discipline are, for understanding words of deep meaning, for acquiring a disciplined insight, uprightness, justice and fair-dealing, for teaching sound judgement to the simple, and knowledge and reflection to the young... The fear of the Lord is the Beginning of knowledge; fools spurn wisdom and discipline (Prov. 1: 1-4,7).

In this researchers understanding, the essential words here are God and Wisdom as found in nature. These are also the themes expounded in the N.T. as incarnated in the only Son of God whom St. Paul incidentally described as the Power of God and Wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:24). Christians therefore in their efforts to become like Christ (always) insisted on His teachings. With an understanding of the apparent ephemeral nature of the present life and an eye on eternal happiness in the life to come as a

reward of this present life, the Christian aim of Education seeks to inculcate in an individual, those virtues that will lead to the full development or the realisation of the human life. This it does by harmonizing the spiritual with the bodily and the intellectual. However, it was not uncommon to find groups or settings who tried to emphasize the spiritual to the detriment of the intellectual and/or the bodily, or the intellectual and spiritual against the bodily. These included the monastic and the scholastic spiritualities of the Middle Ages, as well as the spirituality of the chivalry, and the guides. However, Okpaloka (1989) insists that "the church sifting all that is best in the rich educational patrimony of the ancient and modern civilization and culture, preserves it and transmits it to all her educands in the light of the divine revelation and the Gospel values" (p. 59). This is most apparent in our own era with the provisions of Vatican II, the 1983 Code of Canon Law, and other magisterial sources on the purpose of true education. That the church attaches great importance to education is seen from the fact that the Vatican Council II for instance, devoted a whole document to this topic. Thus the Declaration on Christian Education' (*Gravissimum Educationis*, 28th October 1965) states clearly that:

All men of whatever race, condition or age, in virtue of their dignity as human persons, have an inalienable right to education. This education should be suitable to the particular destiny of the individuals, adapted to their ability, sex and national cultural traditions and should be conducive to fraternal relations with other nations in order to promote true unity and peace in the world. True education is directed towards the formation of human person in view of his final end and the good of that society to which he belongs and in the duties of which he will, as an adult, have a share (G. E. 1).

Furthermore, having recognised the primary task of the family in providing education with the help of the society as a whole as well as the duties and the rights rested on the civil society in this regard, the document also declares that the church has concerns in the subject not only because it must be recognized as a human society capable of imparting education but most especially because it has "the duties of proclaiming the way of salvation to all men, of revealing the life of Christ to those who believe, and of assisting them with unremitting care so that they may be able to attain the fullness of that life" (G.E. 3). From the foregoing it is also clear that the church's/Christian aim of education respects people's cultures because it understands that man is a cultural being. Infact it holds the view that education is a primary task of culture. On this *Gaudium Et Spes* (1965) says that, "it is one of the properties of the human person that he can achieve true and full humanity only by means of culture, that is, through the cultivation of goods and values of nature. Whenever, therefore, there is a question of human life, nature and culture and intimately linked" (G.S. 53). Indeed, the researcher makes bold to say that Christian education leads the educands to lead integral human lives in order to attain their temporal and supernatural ends.

Christ as the Teacher Par Excellence

In his letter to the Colossians 1: 15-20ff, St. Paul says "Christ is the image of unseen God, the first born of all creation, for in him were created all thing in heaven and on earth: everything visible and everything invisible...." In its commentary on this passage, the Jerusalem Bible states vs 15-17 show Christ as the head of all that exists naturally while vs 18-20, show Him as the head of all that exists supernaturally through redemption.

The researcher here reasons that Christ is the reason for man's creation in God's image (Gen. 2 & 3); the subject of the Proto Evangelium (Gen 3:27); the O/T messianic prophecies and of the annunciation and nativity events of the synoptics because in him God took on the human nature so that man's lost image may be restored. Christ is also the perfect example of man's nature and the full realization of his humanity which he hopes to realise through education. Since he is both the communicator and the communicated, Christ is therefore the teacher par excellence.

Little wonder Christ was more frequently addressed as Teacher than by any other name in the Gospels: (cf. Mt 18:18-22, Mk 4:35-41, Mt: 10: 24, Lk 20:21, Jn 3:2). He gathered a group of disciples and acted as their rabbi or teacher. He was asked a type of question teachers were asked "Mt 22:36, Lk 10:25" and his place of teaching was often in the synagogue (Mt 4: 23, Mk 6:2: Lk: 4:15,3). His teachings made deep impressions on his hearers because he taught with power and authority (Mt 7: 29; Mk 1: 22; 11:18). His teaching was that of the one who sent him (Jn 7: 16) and He thought what He was thought by the Father (Jn 8: 28). But Christ did not teach only by words but also by actions. His miracles and signs are a manifestation of God's loving presence among his people and a foretaste of man's liberation which he proclaimed (cf Jn 4:34; 5:17; 9:4; 10: 37-8; 11: 42) because "I have come that they may have life and have it to the full" (Jn 10:10). He was their light and enlightenment Jn 1:4- 5,7-9, John 9: 5 to emulate Mt 5:14. and to Thomas' demand Christ answered; "I am the Way; the Truth and the Life" (Jn 14:6-7). He is therefore the Truth of the divine existence communicated to us, and the Life of God in man ie. fullness of life which a truly human education is set to realise. Thus, a catholic teacher that is worthy of the name must always communicate Christ in his/her discipline.

The Catholic Teacher and the Challenge of Communicating Christ

As the teacher per excellence Christ is the model for all teachers who should maintain noble bilateral relationships with God on the one hand and their students on the other. The first and most important challenge for the catholic teacher therefore is to imitate Christ Himself who communicated the truth not only by words but also by action. The teacher should therefore have it always at the back of his/her mind that he/she is performing (not just any work but) a sacred job; one that fosters the realization of God's intention for the person He dearly loves. The researcher believes this to be teachers' primary challenge (of all time).

The sacred scripture encourages this wisdom of such teacher in Dan 12:3: "Those who are wise will shine as brightly as the expanse of the heavens, and those who have instructed many in uprightness, as bright as stars for all eternity". Like Christ he should radiate His light by being examples to the students because "where example is not given, instruction lacks a soul"

Another important challenge to the catholic teacher is the need for his/her proper training (or suitability) to perform his or her roles. Hence, the New Catholic Encyclopedia (1967) stress the following:

1. The traditional and historical importance of the teacher as seen in Christ's mandate to the Apostles: "Go and teach all nations"(Mt.28: 19).
2. The responsibility of teachers to instruct their students and foster their intellectual development through a thorough civic and cultural formation. The significance of the teacher's function 'in loco parentis' and the consequent need or close cooperation with parents; and the moral and intellectual impact of the teacher on students not only on the elementary and secondary levels but also on the college and university levels. (p. 958).

The doctrine of 'loco parentis' recognizes that children are entrusted to the school by their parents who as well delegate to them certain responsibilities and liabilities. The teacher and the school thus take some of the responsibilities and authorities of the parents to whom the primary duty and inalienable right of educating the child belongs. According to Clark (1967) in the New Catholic Encyclopedia: the primary obligation of the teacher comes from such delegation in virtue of which he assumes a quasi-parental obligation of piety towards children committed his care by parent". He also incurs a certain obligation in justice to perform the duties for which he has been paid". These quasi-parental obligations include the obligations to love, to teach, to correct and to give good example. The last option I think, depends greatly on the earlier ones : For the moral impact of the teacher on students , he / she has to fulfil the obligations to love , correct and give good example to the students while he / she can help them better intellectually if he/she fulfils his/her teaching obligations effectively. On these, *Gravissimum Educationis* says that

teachers should possess the "appropriate qualifications and adequate learning both religious and secular ... be skilled in the art of education in accordance with the discoveries of modern times".

The Challenges before the Contemporary Nigerian Teacher

Havighurst (1984) in his study on the teaching profession identifies the following roles of the teacher:

- A. Roles in Schools, Colleges and Universities which include; Mediator of learning, Disciplinarian or controller of student behaviour, Parent substitute, Confidant of students, Judge of achievements, Organizer of curriculum, Bureaucrat, Scholar and research specialist and Member of Teachers Organizations.
- B. Roles in the community as public servants, surrogates of middle-class morality, experts in some areas of knowledge or skills, community leaders, agents of social change.

These views awaken us to the fact that the teacher still lives in the wider society and so can be influenced by his society and vice versa. The same holds true of learning and education as a whole. Obviously, changes in contemporary Nigeria society also affect both teachers and their profession in many ways. This research identifies the following: Misplacement of values; Examination malpractices; Challenges of cultism; and Teachers' organizations.

i. **Misplacement of Values:** Many Nigerian teachers like their brothers and sisters in various works of life have either totally lost the sense of values or their proper hierarchy. An attempt at juxtaposing Maslow's Hierarchy of Values with the internal motivations and attitudes of some teachers leaves much to be desired. First of all is the alarming rate at which substandard schools at all levels are erected and approved in Nigeria cannot pass unnoticed. In spite of our growing population, there appears to be an unhealthy competitions among Nigerian to own private schools either as status symbols or for pure economic reasons thereby placing less emphases on quality. Instances of same system of schools erected very close to each other with little or no spaces for recreational activities and schools housed in uncompleted buildings abound all over the Federation. Most of these schools also employ unqualified low- paid individuals as teachers to maximise their profits.

If poverty on the part of the patronising parents could ever be identified as reasons for such situations, what can explain why appropriate salaried government officers and regulators would not maintain minimum standards for the good of the students and their families except for the rumour that they are easily compromised in the discharge of such duties. Some of these regulators are said to even threaten to fail any school that would not comply with their demands, however equipped they might be. In all, it is obvious that most of our schools cannot grow or adequately advance the needed development of their students as expected. Can existing teachers help in this situation?

ii. **Examination Malpractices:** Since enough attention is not given to learning, some teachers today help their students to indulge in examination malpractices thereby widening the gap of ignorance among the students and the rot in the system. At all levels, it appears very normal to pass every student who wants to even if it means awarding only a pass mark. We are aware that one-time exams are not true tests of knowledge for which various methods of evaluation can be employed because complete lack of evaluate has been identified as one of the major causes of truancy and generalised apathy towards learning.

It is also common today for some schools to organise the collection of Examination levies which sole aims are to oil the palms of external invigilators that encourage cheating in examinations. What of private external examinations centres that practically sell grades and certificates to intending candidates while we cry foul at the declining rate of scholarship in the Nigerian educational system.

iii. **Challenges of Cultism:** Cult activities seem to have come to stay in our schools. What appeared common in our tertiary institutions are now noticeable in our secondary and primary schools today

because of the rising wave of irreligion and moral decadence in the society. It is worse to condone parents and students especially among the influential members of the societies who belong to these and make shows of same. What of some teachers and lecturers who act as patrons or guardians to these groups in the schools when we know they are threats to peace and orderly conducts in our schools.

This list is certainly not exhaustive because there are many and interrelated incidents bothering on the general lack of discipline or corruption in the larger society. They are to be denounced for their negative effects on our educational system and the society at large. Nonetheless they do not promote the kingdom of God on earth which is one of the purposes of our educational system.

Conclusions

A good look at the general understanding of the nature and roles of the teacher, the teaching profession and the Nigerian educational system reveals the need to understand better and seriously consider both the spiritual and physical aspects of man's existence. This is because both represent the depth or complexity of man and his natural aspirations which the teacher and education are meant to serve. It follows that the ends of the teaching profession and education cannot be completely met in the source of life. It is therefore not a mistake for the teacher to consider his roles as divine responsibilities. Hence Bala N. and Nuhu, J. (2018) also referred to the teaching profession as "an art and science of instilling fear of God through behaviour modification which lead learners to acquiring wisdom" (p. 41). In the business of teaching and learning therefore all hand must be on deck in serving the higher human values before personal benefits.

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