RELIGIOUS FORMATION TECHNIQUES AND ITS EFFECT ON CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS IN IPETU-IJESA, OSUN STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT
This study investigated the religious formation techniques by Christians and Muslims in Ipetu-Ijesa and the roles of religious leaders in forming religious beliefs and practices among their adherents. Scholars have researched the dynamics of religious formation among Christians and Muslims, but not much attention was drawn to religious formation techniques and their effects in Ipetu-Ijesa, Osun State, Nigeria. The study employed historical and sociological research methods in addition to mixed methods using qualitative and quantitative research methods. The agents of socialization are directly involved, especially families and religious leaders; and these form the respondents for this study (50 Christians and Muslims, 25 from each religion). The study findings revealed that the most effective technique employed by Christians and Muslims in Ipetu-Ijesa in forming religious beliefs and practices were giving their children religious names and participating in religious activities. 90% of respondents agreed that the evening religious tutorial (known as Ile Keu (Quranic Class) for the Muslims, and Eko Irole (Evening Class) for the Christians were other effective religious formation techniques used. The roles of the religious leaders were preaching the truth and teaching the members to abide by the core teachings of their religions. The overall effect of religious formation techniques for Christians-Muslims co-existence in Ipetu-Ijesa includes cordial relationship with one another, and learning from others' religions. Using the above findings, it implied that the roles of religious leaders are valuable and effective in religious formation; hence, religious leaders and parents should not relent in their efforts in promoting interfaith religious formation and harmony in all Nigerian communities.

Introduction

The concept of religion is inherently complex and multifaceted, rendering it challenging to define with precision. This complexity is exacerbated by the intangible nature of religious beliefs and practices, which often defy empirical verification. Consequently, scholars and experts from diverse disciplines have offered varied interpretations of religion, reflecting their unique perspectives and interests. Anthropologists, for instance, tend to view religion as an integral component of cultural expression, while sociologists emphasise its role in shaping social norms and institutions.[16] On the other hand, theologians regard religion as the cornerstone of human civilization, influencing artistic expression, moral decision-making, and the development of complex societies. Ultimately, the study of religion demands a multidimensional approach, acknowledging the diverse ways in which it intersects with and shapes human experience.[17]

The intricate and multifaceted nature of religion has led to a plethora of definitions, each attempting to capture its essence. In a notable endeavour, Professor Leuba compiled a comprehensive list of forty-eight definitions proposed by scholars, supplementing it with two of his own.[18] This exhaustive compilation aimed to distil a universally accepted definition. However, the outcome was a definition so broad that it failed to resonate with scholars, highlighting the challenges inherent in defining this complex concept.

The discipline-specific perspectives on religion further underscore its complexity. Anthropologists, psychologists, sociologists, historians, economists, mystics, and theologians each approach religion through the lens of their respective fields, yielding diverse and sometimes disparate interpretations. This multiplicity of perspectives not only reflects the richness and diversity of human experience but also underscores the difficulties inherent in articulating a definitive understanding of religion.

The Nigerian religious landscape presents a multifaceted scenario, with plurality and secularity being two pivotal factors warranting consideration. Research has shown that societies fragmented along religious fault lines are more susceptible to protracted and intense conflicts, as opposed to those divided by political, territorial or ethnic differences (as evidenced by a study conducted in Spain). Nigeria, unfortunately, exemplifies a society beset by divisions across multiple axes, including religion, politics, territory, and ethnicity, thereby rendering it vulnerable to entrenched conflicts and societal fissures.[19]

Nigeria embodies a pluralistic society, characterized by a rich tapestry of diverse religious and cultural traditions. Each of these traditions has indelibly marked the nation's identity, contributing to a complex and dynamic societal mosaic. This pluralistic context presents both opportunities and challenges, necessitating a nuanced understanding of the intricate relationships between religion, culture, and society in Nigeria.

Secularism, in its most fundamental sense, advocates for the distinct separation of religion from the state apparatus. This concept is rooted in the principle of state neutrality, wherein the government maintains a position of impartiality towards various religious beliefs and practices. Concomitantly, secularism ensures that all citizens are afforded the inalienable right to embrace any religion of their choice, free from coercion or persecution. Ingersoll's perspective on secularism, cited by Falola[20] posits it as a formidable counterpoint to the oppressive influences of ecclesiastical authority. He views secularism as an unyielding protest against the subjugation of individuals to the whims of religious dogma, and the squandering of one's life in pursuit of an uncertain afterlife. Instead, secularism advances a human-centric approach, where individuals prioritize the present

[16]R.S. Barret. 2003. *Issues and Perspectives on Religion*, in Olupana, J. K. and Falola, T. (eds.) Religion and Society in Nigeria. Ibadan: Spectrum Books, p 19

[17]M. Muazam. 2006. Citizen and the subject. Contemporary Africa and the legacy of Colonialism. Cape Town: David Philip, p 3

[18]E.B. Idowu. 1993. *African Traditional Religion: A Definition.* London: SCM Press Ltd, p 4

[19]M. Reynal-Querol. 2002. Political systems, stability and civil wars. *Defense and Peace Economics*, 13 (6), p 465

[20]T. Falola. 1998. *Violence in Nigeria: The Crisis of Religious Politics and Secular Ideologies*, Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 94-95. Also see Akinwumi, p 142

moment, cultivate meaningful relationships, and strive for the betterment of society.

Virgilius's[21] definition of secularism aligns with this humanistic outlook, characterizing it as a utilitarian social ethic that seeks to enhance human well-being through the application of reason, science, and social organization. Secularism, in this context, embodies a positive and proactive worldview, wherein human activities and institutions are guided by a commitment to the present life, social welfare, and the advancement of human flourishing.

Despite the myriad definitions of religion, three fundamental elements consistently emerge: belief, ritualistic practice, and moral principles. At its core, religion involves a profound conviction in a supreme entity, which is then expressed through various forms of worship and devotion. This relationship between the individual and the divine is further governed by a set of moral guidelines, which provide a framework for navigating the complexities of human existence. In essence, religion can be succinctly defined as an intricate system of beliefs, ritualistic practices, and ethical imperatives, all of which are inextricably linked to the concept of a higher power or divine authority. The global religious landscape is characterized by a rich diversity of faiths, with Christianity and Islam being two of the most widely practiced and influential religions worldwide, shaping the lives of billions of adherents across cultures and continents.[22]

Religion is an integral facet of human existence, permeating every aspect of life. It serves as a conduit for understanding and navigating the intricate relationship between individuals and the supernatural or divine realm.[23] Religions are, in essence, a manifestation of a particular community's distinct worldview, providing a framework for interpreting reality and interacting with the world around them.[24] Through religion, individuals and communities establish a profound sense of identity, which, in turn, influences their values, beliefs, and practices.[25] Moreover, religion plays a vital role in shaping moral values and principles.

As Orebanjo[26] astutely observed, the inculcation of moral values is inextricably linked to religious education, whether formal or informal. The transmission of moral values through religious teachings is a ubiquitous aspect of religious practices, underscoring the significance of religion in fostering a morally grounded society. Conversely, the exclusion of religious education from societal institutions would raise fundamental questions about the efficacy of moral instruction and the potential consequences for societal well-being.

Ipetu-Ijesa, a town in Osun State, Nigeria, is a fascinating case study for religious relations. This in-depth look at the town reveals a complex tapestry of religious beliefs, where Christianity, Islam, and traditional Yoruba religion coexist, sometimes harmoniously, sometimes with underlying tensions. Ipetu-Ijesa, also known as Ipetu-Aro-Odo, is a historic town with roots tracing back centuries. The town's name, "Ipetu," is believed to mean "a place of refuge," reflecting its history as a sanctuary during times of conflict. The "Ijesa" appendage links it to the larger Ijesa ethnic group, a subgroup of the Yoruba people. Ipetu-Ijesa's religious landscape is diverse, reflecting Nigeria's broader religious makeup. The three dominant religious influences are: Traditional religion, Christianity and Islam.

Various scholarly researches by prominent scholars such as Berger,[27] and Iannaccone,[28] have delved into the complex dynamics of religion formation, illuminating its profound impact on the development of individual and collective identities. From the foregoing,

[21]F. Verligius. 1990. 'Religion, Problem of Definition' in Vergilius, F. (Ed.) *An Encyclopedia of Religion,* New York: Philosophical Library, p 653

[22]J.O. Adetoyese. The Present State of African Religion, p 3 Retrieved from http://www.biblicaltheology.com/Research/AdetoyeseJO01.pdf

[23]T. Rajaratnam and A. Sitompul. 1978. *Theological Education in Today's Asia,* Madras, CLS, p. 105

[24]J.O. Awolalu and P.A. Dopamu. 2005. *West African Traditional Religion.* Ibadan: Macmillan, p. 12

[25]S.A. Abioye. 2001. *Basic Text of West African Traditional Religion.* Oyo: Akunlemu, p. 24

[26]M.A. Orebanjo. 1994. The relationship between moral and religious Education, *West African Journal of Education*, Xviii (iii), p 434

[27] P.L. Berger. 1967. The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion

[28] L.R. Iannaccone. 1994. Why Strict Churches Are Strong

scholars have not drawn much attention to religious formation techniques and their effects on Christians and Muslims, particularly focusing on Ipetu-Ijesa community in Osun State, Nigeria. This is the gap that this current work has filled.

The research was conducted with the following objectives in mind; to examine the techniques employed in forming canonical observances and dogmas, to assess the roles of religious leaders in forming ecclesiastical traditions and doctrines, to investigate the effects of religious formation techniques on the confessional practices and teachings among the Christians and Muslims in Ipetu-Ijesa, and to identify the influence of religious formation techniques on Christians-Muslim co-existence for religious tolerance in Ipetu-Ijesa.

Apart from the historical and sociological research methods used, this study adopted mixed methods using qualitative and quantitative research methods. Thus, this study adopted survey and in-depth interview methods. It should be noted that based on the nature of this research to assess the influence of religious formation techniques on Christians and Muslims in Ipetu-Ijesa, the agents of socialization are directly involved, especially families and religious leaders (Christian and Muslims); and these form the respondents for this study.

It is needful to say that Ipetu-Ijesa community is structured into quarters, and each quarter has streets where people reside. There are five main quarters in Ipetu-Ijesa. These are Ifofin, Igando, Odo-Ise, Ogunna and Oke-Owa.

For the in-depth interview, clerics of the major churches and mosques across the community were needed. Due to the presence of many churches and mosques in Ipetu-Ijesa, basic random sampling methods without replacement was employed to choose 1 major church and 1 major mosque in each quarter without repetition; and this made a total of 5 churches and 5 mosques.

Religious Formation in Christianity and Islam in Ipetu-Ijesa

Traditional Yoruba Religion

This indigenous faith predates the arrival of Christianity and Islam. It centers on a pantheon of deities (*Orishas)*, each associated with natural forces or human attributes. Ancestor veneration is also a significant aspect of traditional Yoruba religion.

Advent of Christianity in Ipetu-Ijesa

The advent of Christianity in Ipetu-Ijesa can be traced back to the last quarter of the nineteenth century, correlated with missionary expansion in the region. These missionaries, primarily from various denominations such as the Anglican Communion and the Baptist Church, held critical significance in introducing Christianity to the local populace.

Today, Christianity is a major religion in Ipetu-Ijesa, with various denominations and churches present in the town. The legacy of the early missionaries can still be seen in the numerous educational institutions, healthcare facilities, and social organizations that were established under their influence. While the story of Christianity in Ipetu-Ijesa is one of religious transformation, it is also a testament to the resilience of the community in adapting to change while preserving its cultural heritage. The town's history reflects a blend of tradition and modernity, where indigenous customs and beliefs intertwine with Christian values and practices.

Advent of Islam in Ipetu-Ijesa

While precise dates remain a subject of ongoing historical research, available accounts suggest that Islam reached Ipetu-Ijesa during the 19th century. This period saw increased trade and interaction between the northern and southern regions of Nigeria, which facilitated the movement of people and ideas. The introduction of Islam in Ipetu-Ijesa stemmed from multiple interrelated factors, notably trade, migration, and the dedicated efforts of Muslim clerics and scholars. Today, Islam is a vibrant and integral part of Ipetu-Ijesa. The Muslim community continues to grow and contribute significantly to the town's social, economic, and cultural development.

Religious Relations in Ipetu-Ijesa

For the most part, the three major religious traditions coexist peacefully in Ipetu-Ijesa. There are instances of intermarriage between people of different faiths, and community events often see participation from members of all religious groups. This spirit of coexistence is rooted in the Yoruba concept of ìwà pèlé (gentle character),

which emphasizes respect and tolerance towards others.

Religious Festivals

Ipetu-Ijesa, like many Yoruba communities, is a place where religious festivals are vibrant expressions of faith and culture. These festivals, whether traditional, Christian, or Islamic, often have a community-wide dimension, fostering interaction and sometimes even shared participation across religious lines.

i. **Traditional Festivals:** Festivals dedicated to various *Orishas* (deities) are a significant part of the cultural landscape. These festivals often involve elaborate rituals, music, dance, and masquerades. They are opportunities for devotees to connect with their deities, seek blessings, and reaffirm their cultural identity. Examples might include festivals for Ogun (god of iron), Osun (goddess of the river), or Sango (god of thunder).

ii. **Christian Festivals:** Christian denominations in Ipetu-Ijesa celebrate major Christian holidays like Christmas and Easter with great enthusiasm. These celebrations often involve church services, processions, and community gatherings. Carol services during Christmas, for instance, are often attended by people from different religious backgrounds, highlighting the shared festive spirit.

iii. **Islamic Festivals:** Muslims in Ipetu-Ijesa observe important Islamic festivals such as *Eid al-Fitr* (end of Ramadan), *Eid al-Adha* (festival of sacrifice), and *Mawlid* (celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birth). These festivals involve prayers, feasts, and community celebrations. During these celebrations, neighbors of different faiths often exchange greetings and sometimes even food, showcasing a spirit of conviviality.

The significance of these festivals lies not just in their religious importance but also in their social function. They provide platforms for interaction, cultural exchange, and a sense of shared community, even amidst religious diversity.

Religious Formation Techniques in Ipetu-Ijesa

There are many religious formation techniques employed by both Christians and Muslims in Ipetu-Ijesa. This section succinctly explores all these techniques under each religion.

Christians Formation Techniques in Ipetu-Ijesa

Ipetu-Ijesa, like many communities in Nigeria, has a rich Christian heritage. Religious formation plays a crucial role in shaping the spiritual lives of its inhabitants. The diverse techniques employed by Christians in Ipetu-Ijesa for religious formation, encompassing traditional practices, and the unique socio-cultural context of the town.

Family-Based Formation

The family unit forms the cornerstone of religious formation in Ipetu-Ijesa. Parents, grandparents, and older siblings play vital roles in transmitting Christian values and practices to younger generations. The family serves as the Primary Seminary in Ipetu-Ijesa, as the first and often most influential agent of religious formation. Family members act as spiritual mentors, transmitting Christian values, beliefs, and practices to younger family members. This transmission occurs through various avenues which include the following:

i. **Daily Devotions:** Family prayer sessions, often held in the mornings and evenings, are a regular feature in many Christian homes. These sessions may involve Bible reading, hymn singing, reciting prayers, and sharing personal reflections. They instill a sense of shared faith and dependence on God from an early age.

ii. **Moral Instruction:** Parents play a crucial role in instilling moral principles rooted in biblical teachings. Honesty, integrity, respect for elders, hard work, generosity, and community service are emphasized as essential Christian virtues.

iii. **Religious Observances:** Children are actively involved in religious observances from a young age. They accompany their families to church services, participate in religious festivals, and observe religious rituals.

iv. **Mentorship and Spiritual Guidance:** Older family members often take on a mentorship role, guiding younger ones in their faith journey. They may share their own experiences, offer advice, and provide spiritual support. This intergenerational connection strengthens family bonds and ensures the continuity of religious traditions.

Church-Centered Formation

Churches in Ipetu-Ijesa are not merely places of worship; they are vibrant centers of religious formation, offering structured programmes and activities for individuals of all ages:

i. **Sunday school:** Nurturing Young Faiths: Sunday school is a cornerstone of religious formation for children and teenagers. Through engaging lessons, storytelling, interactive activities, and memorization techniques, children learn about the Bible, Christian doctrines, and the history of Christianity.

ii. **Youth Fellowships:** Building Community and Faith: Youth fellowships provide a platform for young people to connect with their faith in a peer-supported environment. These groups offer opportunities for Bible study, discussions on relevant issues facing young people, community service projects, and social activities.

iii. **Women's Groups and Men's Fellowships:** Gender-Specific Spiritual Growth: These groups offer gender-specific platforms for spiritual growth, Bible study, mutual support, and fellowship. They address issues relevant to men and women within the context of their faith and provide opportunities for sharing experiences and learning from one another.

iv. **Adult Bible Study:** In-depth Bible study sessions are organized for adults to deepen their understanding of scripture and apply its teachings to their daily lives. These sessions often involve detailed analysis of biblical texts, theological discussions, and reflection on personal experiences.

v. **Choirs and Musical Groups:** Expressing Faith through Music: Music plays a vital role in religious expression in Ipetu-Ijesa. Participation in church choirs and musical groups provides opportunities for spiritual development through singing, playing instruments, and performing. Traditional Yoruba musical styles are often incorporated into church music, creating a unique blend of cultural and religious expression.

Community Involvement: The wider community also contributes to religious formation through:

i. **Religious Festivals:** The observance of sacred festivals, such as Christmas and Easter, reinforces Christian identity and provides opportunities for spiritual renewal. These festivals often involve elaborate processions, cultural performances, community gatherings, and special church services. They bring the community together in celebration of their shared faith and provide a public expression of their religious beliefs.

ii. **Community-Based Prayer Groups and Bible Study Circles:** Small prayer groups and Bible study circles meet regularly in homes or designated spaces for prayer, Bible study, mutual encouragement, and fellowship. These groups provide a more intimate setting for spiritual sharing and support, fostering a sense of community and belonging. They also provide an opportunity for individuals to learn from one another and grow in their faith together.

iii. **Mentorship and Discipleship beyond the Family:** Older, more experienced Christians often mentor younger believers outside of their families, providing guidance and support in their faith journey.

Socio-Cultural Formation:

i. **Yoruba Culture:** The Yoruba culture significantly influences the expression of Christianity in Ipetu-Ijesa. Traditional values, such as

respect for elders, communalism, and the importance of family, are often integrated into Christian teachings.

ii. **Oral Tradition:** Oral tradition plays a crucial role in transmitting religious knowledge and values. Stories, proverbs, and songs are used to communicate biblical messages and moral principles.

iii. **Syncretism:** While Christianity is the dominant religion, some elements of traditional Yoruba beliefs and practices may still influence religious expression and worldview.

Modern Influences: Shaping Faith in a Changing World

In addition to traditional practices, modern influences also play a significant role in religious formation in Ipetu-Ijesa:

i. **Formal Education and Religious Instruction:** Christian schools and educational institutions integrate religious instruction into their curriculum, providing students with a formal education in Christian theology, ethics, and history. This integration of faith and learning helps students develop a holistic worldview that encompasses both academic knowledge and religious values.

ii. **Media and Technology:** Expanding the Reach of Faith: The advent of radio, television, and the internet has significantly expanded the reach of religious teachings and resources. Christian television programmes, online sermons, podcasts, devotional apps, and social media platforms provide access to a wealth of religious content. They also offer a convenient way to engage with faith in a busy world.

iii. **Literature and Publications:** Deepening Understanding and Reflection: Christian literature, including books, pamphlets, magazines, and journals, provides access to theological insights, spiritual guidance, and personal testimonies.

iv. **Charismatic Movements:** Experiencing Faith in New Ways: The influence of charismatic movements has introduced new forms of religious expression, such as speaking in tongues, faith healing, and emphasis on personal experience of the Holy Spirit. These movements have revitalized many Christian communities and attracted new members with their emphasis on spiritual gifts and personal encounters with God.

Muslims Formation Techniques in Ipetu-Ijesa

The Muslims of Ipetu-Ijesa have developed and employed various religious formation techniques to nurture their faith, transmit their values, and ensure the continuity of their religious traditions across generations. These Muslims of Ipetu-Ijesa utilize a range of religious formation techniques, encompassing both formal and informal methods, to instill Islamic values and knowledge in their members. These techniques can be broadly categorized as follows:

i. **Family Education:** Parents and elders are responsible for transmitting Islamic values, beliefs, and practices to younger generations. This is often done through storytelling, discussions, and the practical demonstration of Islamic rituals and customs**:**

ii. **Quranic Schools (*Ile-Kewu*):** Quranic schools are the bedrock of Islamic education in Ipetu-Ijesa. Children, and sometimes adults, enroll in these schools to learn the recitation and memorization of the Quran, the foundational text of Islam. The curriculum often includes basic Arabic literacy, Islamic jurisprudence (Fiqh), and the study of the life of Prophet Muhammad (Sirah).

iii. **Mosques and Islamic Centers/Religious Gatherings:** Mosques serve as centers of religious learning and community life in Ipetu-Ijesa. They are places where Muslims gather for prayers, listen to sermons, and participate in religious discussions. Religious gatherings, such as *Mawlid* celebrations

(commemorating the birth of Prophet Muhammad) and Ramadan lectures, also provide opportunities for religious education and spiritual growth.

iv. **Islamic Schools:** In addition to Quranic schools, Ipetu-Ijesa also has formal Islamic schools that combine religious instruction with secular education. These schools offer a more structured curriculum, encompassing subjects like Islamic history, Arabic language, and Islamic ethics, alongside conventional subjects like mathematics, science, and social studies.

v. **Modern Schools with Islamic Studies:** Some modern schools in Ipetu-Ijesa incorporate Islamic Studies into their curriculum. This ensures that Muslim children receive a well-rounded education that integrates both religious and secular knowledge.

vi. **Celebrations and Festivals:** Festivals and Celebrations: Islamic festivals and celebrations, such as *Eid al-Fitr* and *Eid al-Adha*, are not only occasions for joy and merriment but also opportunities for religious instruction. These events often involve special prayers, sermons, and communal meals, reinforcing Islamic values and fostering a sense of community among Muslims in Ipetu-Ijesa.

vii. **Sufi Orders:** Spiritual Development: Sufi orders, such as the Tijaniyya and Qadiriyya, have a presence in Ipetu-Ijesa. They provide avenues for spiritual growth through *dhikr* (remembrance of God), *wird* (daily litanies), and guidance from spiritual leaders.

viii. Community Involvement:

a. **Religious Associations**: Muslim associations and organizations play a vital role in organizing religious activities, providing social support, and promoting Islamic values in the community.

b. **Interfaith Dialogue**: While predominantly Yoruba, Ipetu-Ijesa has a diverse religious landscape. There's a tradition of interfaith dialogue and cooperation, fostering mutual understanding and respect.

ix. **Mentorship and Guidance**: Islamic scholars and Imams play a crucial role in providing religious guidance and mentorship to the Muslim community in Ipetu-Ijesa. They are respected figures who possess in-depth knowledge of Islamic teachings and are sought after for advice on religious matters.

Modern Influences

i. **Islamic Media:** Access to Islamic television channels, radio programmes, and online resources has expanded the scope of religious formation. These platforms offer lectures, discussions, and educational content on various Islamic topics.

ii. **Scholarly Works:** The availability of Islamic books, journals, and translations of classical texts has facilitated deeper engagement with Islamic scholarship.

Our Findings

The findings indicate that on the one hand, Christian mothers are closer to their children than the fathers are, while the Muslim fathers are closer to the children than the mothers are. On the other hand, these findings could mean that the techniques of religious formation are more put to use in the family by the Christian mothers than the fathers and vice versa in the Muslim family.

From our findings, it is discovered that the most effective religious formation technique employed by Christians and Muslims in Ipetu-Ijesa in forming religious beliefs and practices was giving their children religious names (76%), followed by praying and fasting (52%) and participating in and attending religious services (70%). Other religious formation techniques include reading and reciting the Holy books at home (78%), teaching religious tenets at home (74%), giving incentives to encourage religious participation (65%) and sometimes, giving

punishment to children for disobeying religious tenets (75%).

To buttress the findings above, some respondents, in the open-ended part of the questionnaire, commented that apart from the techniques highlighted, some other techniques to reinforce religious beliefs and practices formation include evening religious tutorial (known as *Ile Keu* (Quranic Class) for the Muslims, and *Eko Irole* (Evening Class) for the Christians. According to a Muslim:

> *We have Ile Keu (Quranic Class) for core religious teachings and recitation of the Holy Quran, not only for my children but all interested children in the community. We hold Ile Keu at least three times a week. This technique is a very powerful and effective one for us Muslims.*

Similarly, according to a Christian:

> *I am an Anglican; we usually have Eko Irole (Evening Class) particularly for those children to be Baptised and/or Confirmed. We give them core teachings on the Bible and religious doctrines and tenets. We hold this class, not only for the church members, but for any interested Christian child. This is an effective technique for us.*

According to another Christian mother, another religious formation technique employed is making sure that their children belong to and participate in a religious group/society in the Church. She said:

> *My children are in the youth group of the church. This youth group is sub-divided into many units, which are Choir, Drama, Evangelism, Ushering, Sunday school teachers, Children Ministry teachers and others. I make sure that each of them belongs to one or two of these units. This helps them to form religious beliefs and practices easily and effectively too.*

Similarly, according to a Muslim mother, "I always attend our *Asalatu* (Muslims Mothers') meetings with my eldest daughter to let her be involved and participate in what we do now, so when she becomes a mother, the religious practices and obligation of a Muslim mother would have been a part of her. In support of this, a Muslim father affirmed that:

> *I am an Alfa, a well-known and practicing one. All my sons are my protégées. They know every bit of everything and in fact, everything is already a part of them. Some people even call them Imam already. This is because I make sure they are involved in what I do and practice since their childhood, and before they clock 12 years, they are already a master of everything.*

The findings under this research objective indicate both Christians and Muslims in Ipetu-Ijesa employ religious formation techniques in their unique religious ways. It is discovered that these techniques are proven to be effective for their children and religious adherents to form religious beliefs and practices.

To assess the roles of religious leaders in forming religious beliefs and practices among Muslims in Ipetu-Ijesa

The responses from the religious clerics during in-depth interview sessions were used to achieve the above objective. While responding to the kinds of roles that clerics play in forming religious beliefs and practices among Christian members, Pastor David Akinloye of the Redeeemed Christian Church, Oke-Owa, Ipetu-Ijesa, said, "In our Church, we preach the undiluted Word of God, the Gospel, and I see this as the most effective technique to instill religious character in our members which in turns shapes their religious beliefs and practices, both at home and in the society. Similarly, Alhaji Hammed Ajetola of the Ansar-Ud-Deen Central Mosque, Division 1, Odo-Oja, Ipetu-Ijesa, acclaimed that, "the preaching of core teachings as prescribed by the Holy Qur'an is the ultimate. This makes the Muslim faithful to know what is expected of them by the Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW)."

In the words of the Ven. Michael Adeniyi Adeoye, the Dean of St. Paul's Anglican Cathedral, Gbaun-Gbahun, Ipetu-Ijesa:

> *We use many techniques. The first one is preaching; to preach the Word of God to the people. The second one is teaching; to teach the people the tenets and doctrines of the Church, so that they are not swayed away by*

adulterated doctrines and false teachings. The third one is healing and deliverance; as directed and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we heal the sick and deliver the captives. These are even the core techniques and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. Other techniques include helping the needy, providing for the poor and the less privileged, and even engaging in community development services. These are holistic techniques we use to form and develop religious beliefs and practices in our Christian members. And they are very effective.

In the same vein, Imam of the Alhaji Sanusi Parakoyi Mosque, Oke-Owa, Alhaji Samshudeen Gbolagade, expressed that:

We the Muslims are very pragmatic and practical in our approach to religion. Apart from core preaching (Waasi), we enforce regular prayers in all of the 5 times prayer hours daily for our true faithful. This portrays our devotion and reverence to Allah. Then, we urge Muslims to engage in Zakat (charity), which is alms-giving. God is very happy with this. And importantly, any Muslim faithful must fast, it is compulsory. These are part of the pillars of Islam, and they are the Ibaadah (good works) that Prophet Muhammed (SAW) expects from all of us as Muslims. Doing these is a great religious technique to form and develop religious beliefs, practices and devotion towards Allah.

Conclusion

The religious formation in Ipetu-Ijesa is a multifaceted and dynamic process shaped by a combination of unique socio-cultural context of the town, which involves the family, the church and the mosques, and the wider community; all playing vital roles in nurturing the spiritual growth of individuals and transmitting their values across generations. The strong religious heritage and the commitment of the community, provide a solid foundation for continued religious formation and development from both Christianity and Islam.

Lastly, it could conveniently be concluded that religious formation techniques employed by both the Christians and Muslims in Ipetu-Ijesa are effective in promoting religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence with one another. The religious formation techniques employed by Christians and Muslims in Ipetu-Ijesa are similar in nature, practices and usage. And this is evident in the cordial religious relationship between the adherents of the two religions in the community.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion reached, we hereby recommend that:

i. Parents should continually employ religious formation techniques at the home front to nurture their children and make them grow in a religious character right from the home.

ii. Government and non-governmental agencies should support interfaith initiatives at all levels. This could involve funding interfaith projects, organizing workshops on interfaith dialogue, or facilitating communication between religious leaders.

iii. Schools in Ipetu-Ijesa and Nigeria at large should be fully involved in inculcating religious formation techniques such that they should incorporate materials into their curriculum that teach students about different religions, their beliefs, practices, and histories. This can help to dispel misconceptions and promote respect for all faiths.

iv. Similarly, schools should organize interfaith activities, such as visits to different places of worship, interfaith dialogues, and cultural exchange programs. These activities provide students with opportunities to interact with people of different faiths and learn from their experiences.

v. Teachers need to be trained on how to teach religious diversity sensitively and respectfully. They should be equipped with the knowledge and skills to facilitate interfaith dialogues and address sensitive issues related to religion.

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