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Book Review

Title: Patristic Education

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BOOK REVIEW

TITLE: Patristic Education

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SYNOPSIS

The book begins with a rich and extensive forward that puts the book into perspective. It provides a quick overview of education in an evolving world. It takes the reader on a historical journey of education spanning over two millennia. It gives a picture of how education has morphed both as an agent and object of change. It presents the reader with education as originally conceptualized, its mission, intended purpose, and ultimate goal. The author describes education as handed down to us by the early Church Fathers (Patrists) comprising early Christian philosophers, theologians, scholars, educators and church leaders; who are also credited, even in secular literature, for making immense contribution to education theory and practice. According to the Patrists, divine wisdom based on gospel truth is the origin, mission and destiny of education.

Patristic education is modeled upon the unique recognition of education as an agent of evangelization and transformation (salvation). It lays emphasis on holistic shepherding according to divine gospel, intellectual preparation, nurturing of value, and ultimate human transformation for the highest common good. Majawa brings to the fore the value of informative, formative and transformative education.

Since education takes place within a social context, it has not been spared from historical forces of change in society including radical shift in technology, ideologies, value systems, social relations, religion practices and beliefs, means of livelihood, and politics and governance. Today, education is in a crisis triggered by the widening gap between theory and practice; and between ideologies and transformational moral-spiritual values. In the process of adjusting to change in society, education has gradually lost its footing on divine wisdom to the extent that today, it is deprived of its true, quality witnessing and transformative character. The focus of the author in this text is essentially to consider ways of rerouting education back to its original intended purpose: to transform humanity and human society through divine wisdom and virtuous living.

1.0 BOOK OUTLINE

The text is structured into sixteen chapters that depict the evolutionary journey of Christian education right from the Patristic era (from the first century) to the third millennium. A brief highlight of each chapter is provided here below.

1.1 Chapter One: Introduction to Patristic Education

The chapter sheds light on the concepts of education and patristic education. It takes note of the Latin etymology of the word education: *educare*, which means to lead out. Education is then presented as a life-long process of liberation and socialization of a person through a systematic and responsible transmission of culture for the highest common good. It entails the harmonious, wholesome and full development of all human faculties in order to attain a meaningful, relevant, and transformational life in society for the highest and ultimate goal: the kingdom of God. This is because the earthly life of a Christian is experienced and directed towards heavenly destiny.

The primacy of education as a universal, divine and fundamental human right is captured in virtually all world declarations on education which recognize education an essential duty for nations to fulfill. This right to education is both quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative in the sense that it focuses on access for all; qualitative because it focuses on the human 'being' (in totality).

Religion is thus at the core of education because it is a way of life in human society. Majawa maintains that a human being, created in the image of God is the foundational component of education. This being the case, education can only be meaningful, relevant and holistic if it corresponds to the very nature of the human person who is to be educated. He takes note that many definitions of education lay no focus on the interior and spiritual transformation of a person, which is the means for conscience formation and character building. Patristic education is value centric and Christocentric because it is based on the gospel of Christ, and guided by the intellectual heritage of early Church Fathers.

1.2 Chapter Two: Conceptualization and Contextualization of the Book

Patristic education is multicultural; drawing its roots from diverse cultures including Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Mesopotamian and Hebraic. The author asserts however, that it is the transmutation of the Judeo-Christian intellectual foundation that gave impetus to western civilization and to education as a means of evangelization. This book focuses on the origin, nature, mission and destiny of Christian Education. It sheds light to the original conceptualization of education by the early Church Fathers; points out the contribution of Patristic education to universal evangelization and civilization; suggests the relevance of patristic theory and practice to education today; provides quality assurance parameters for holistic education; and considers how patristic education can be injected into the curricula of higher education to enrich the wholesome quality of education.

The book looks at the role of higher education in Africa and across the globe. It notes that there is a dangerous divide between Christian wisdom and enlightenment for scientific progress, to the extent that today, institutions of higher learning churn out experts of science and technology grossly lacking in moral values and integrity. It recommends the purposive introduction of Patristic intellectual traditions and skills in order to propagate holistic education for social transformation, progress and sustainability.

1.3 Chapter Three: Nature of Patrology, Patristic Science and Patristic Education

The author defines Patrology as the study of the writings of the early Christian Fathers and Patristic science as the scientific approaches of the Patrists' socio-theological thoughts, interpretation and application in life. He defines Patristic education as quality holistic and value-oriented education based on divine wisdom. The writer makes a distinction of patrists and further classifies them on the basis of language (Latin/Greek); authority and influence (major/minor); historical age (Apostolic age, Early age and Later age) and by region (East and West). The Patrists are further categorized into apostolic fathers, Apologetic fathers and Anti-gnostic fathers. The author also focuses on the role of the Church Fathers as church leaders, teachers, gospel witnesses, role models and bringers of change. All the Church Fathers are presented as being inspired by divine wisdom/

1.4 Chapter Four: Evolution of Patristic Education and Non-Christian Traditions

Majawa asserts that Patristic education has evolved through a process of inculturation of the best values and principles from diverse cultures. It has incorporated religio-humanistic insights from Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Jewish and Christian insights. Patristic education drew insights from the Mesopotamian *religiocentric* and *cosmotheandric* educational theory which conceived true education as originating from the wisdom of the gods, trickling down human intellect, impacting the hearts of individuals and ultimately of society. From ancient Egyptian education, Patristic education borrowed the art of reading and writing, science, arithmetic and the practice of formal schooling.

Ancient Greece is credited with some of the greatest philosophers in the history of education. The author cites Homer, Hesiod, Socrates, Plato and Isocrates. Patristic education draws heavily from the *Classical Greek Anthropocyclic Sophictanomics of Education* (Education Centering on People), an intellectual pedagogical tradition which focused on ethics, morality, pedagogy and the teacher's role in transformational education. Majawa makes reference to Homer's *Ethic of Honour*; Hesiod's ideology of *Right, Justice, Truth and Peace*; Socrates *philosophy of a noble teacher*; Plato's *philosophy of a true teacher*; Aristotle's *philosophy of a wise teacher* and Isocrates *philosophy of a lawyer-athletic-credible teacher*.

The author credits Ancient Roman education for the development of the utilitarian theory of education, which upholds pragmatism in education and rigorous moral training and character building for public life, rather than the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake (philosophy). Indeed, the integration of Christian teachings into an existing Roman Education System designed for public life, provided fertile grounds and reliable means for total Christianization of the Roman Empire. Many Christian schools were established thus.

1.5 Chapter Five: Education in the Old Testament

Hebraic education was Yahweh-centric (centering on their God Yahweh) and chiefly focused on the life to come. The curriculum was mainly based on the Torah. Quality education was delimited to divine wisdom which also guided human behavior, ethics and morality, commerce, law, and generally: man's interaction with his environment. Majawa notes that Hebrew writing and literature had the greatest influence on Christian life and education because the Jewish culture, religion, and education theory and practice were essential elements of Christian education. From Hebraic education, Christian education acquired tested education philosophies and methodologies

that were already in use and are still relevant today. Majawa makes reference to RIRA (read, interpret, reflect, apply), Haggantotoros' philosophy of learning by memorization, and Haggazerubabel's maxim of 'rod for discipline'. He additionally notes that Jesus Christ was Himself brought up and educated in the Jewish intellectual wisdom and traditions, and made wide reference to them in His teachings.

1.6 Chapter Six: Education in the New Testament

The author presents education in the New Testament as Christo-centric. It is Christ Himself who designed Christian education through his teaching, preaching, ministry and mission of divine redemption. His divine human nature is a demonstration of the nature of Christian education: its origin, mission and destiny. It originates from divine wisdom, teaches divine wisdom and is geared towards the attainment of divine highest good.

By making reference to the great commissioning of Jesus' disciples, the author avers that Christian education is God ordained. Similarly, by recognizing that Jesus Christ himself was a product of world education systems (through the process of inculturation Pp.106, para 4)), the author declares that Christ and his Christo-centric education is the realization and fulfillment of world education systems. His twelve disciples are the link between Jesus Christ and the early Church fathers. His exemplary life bequeathed Christian education important principles and practices. Christ is commonly referred to as teacher (*Rabboni*). He is the model teacher who advocates for education for all (Pp.87, para.1), looks for every opportunity to teach (Pp.86, Para 4); and teaches by setting example (Pp.88, para.2)

1.7 Chapter Seven: Biblical Sources of Christian Education

The Bible is considered the foundation of Patristic education. The author makes reference to the Bible to confirm Patristic Education as a God given right and duty, and a subject deserving of study (Pp.109 c & d). He relates Biblical teachings, principles and wisdom(sayings) to critical aspects of education, curriculum and methodologies: aims of education {Pp.110}; education designed for specific groups (Pp. 111); necessary conditions for the achievement of quality education e.g discipline and rigor (Pp.112,a,j & k); value of education e.g better than material wealth (Pp.113,d); ultimate goal of education is God (Pp.114c&g); education for righteous transformation(e.g Pp.115,d); education for social involvement and responsible citizenship (Pp.116,a); education for justice and collaboration, and integrity in work e.g. (Pp.118, k).

1.8 Chapter Eight: Bible and Patristic Education

This chapter presents the Church fathers as Biblical heroes and models in the history of salvation. It emphasizes that the Church fathers had profound grasp of Biblical teachings and that their life resonated with Biblical wisdom. The author notes that it is this understanding that enabled them to make sound interpretation of Biblical principles and teachings and to defend the church on matters of faith and morality. He recommends that these principles should serve as guides (signposts) on similar or dissimilar issues in different contexts.

1.9 Chapter Nine: The Greek and Latin Fathers of the Church

The author redraws our attention to the Church fathers. He focuses on their role in the creation of Christian doctrines and establishment of the Christian church as an evangelizing entity. He looked

at their varied socio-ethnic and psychosomatic characteristics, all of which impacted their historical, philosophical, theological and socio-praxis approaches (refer to chapt.3).

The author conceives these unique qualities of the Church fathers as symbolic of the Church: an institution that is both divine and human. The Fathers represent the church as a divine entity united by the power of the Holy Spirit and as a community of human beings with human structures and human discipline. It is for these dual qualities, that the church has had both Holy (exemplary) and sinful (scandalous) experiences. Patristic education teaches about sacredness, nobility, vocation and mission of authentic and credible teachers who walk righteously before God and Humanity.

1.10 Chapter 10: Christian Philosophy as Foundation of Patristic Education

The author observes that Patristic Education is anchored on Christian philosophy and that Christian philosophy has itself been influenced by other approaches, ideologies and philosophies including the Latin and Greek.

1.11 Chapter Eleven: Patristic Education and the Classical Paideia

The author illuminates the concept of *paideia* and relates it to wholesomeness. It is a term commonly used with the Greek culture and Hellenistic education. Regarding education for instance, *paideia* entails instructing, teaching and forming a person considering all encompassing human dimensions. Majawa notes that the Greek system of education (classical *paideia*) was very broad. Such is the system around which the early Christian education was modeled.

The Church fathers modeled a Christian *paideia* through inculturation of Biblical revelations into the classical Greek education. The author notes that there were points of convergence and divergence between the classical *paideia* and the Christian *Paideia*. Christianity borrowed, purified and perfected some non-Christian elements including the Roman *paideia* and used them to advance their mission of evangelization. The Christian *Paideia* gave as much focus to the formation of conscience as it did to development of the body and intellect. It became the basis for Christian education and ultimately of Patristic Education.

1.12 Chapter Twelve: Historical Evolution of Patristic Education

The focus here is the evolution of Christianity right from the Apostolic era to the Patristic era. The author brings to the fore the struggles of the church and Christian education amidst rising opposition and persecution from the mainstream Judaism and Roman religion, coupled with struggles within the church itself, and a multiplicity of other social ills. This notwithstanding, Christianity continued to spread as Christians taught by example through their virtuous lifestyle, and Apologetic fathers taught to defend their faith. In addition, Christianity and missionary work began to extend to other continents including Africa and America. The role of the Church Fathers during this period was to provide religious teaching for conversion; and to enrich and broaden the Christian *Paideia*. It is during the Patristic Period that the church was grossly immersed in her educative role as more Christian scholars emerged and Monastic schools began to preserve patristic intellectual heritage.

1.13 Chapter Thirteen: Contribution of the Church Fathers to Education

Patristic education purposes to divulge and bring to light the rich patristic education wisdom, so as to realize quality and transformative education for all in the society. The author appreciates the

instrumental role patristic wisdom plays in resolving the controversies arising from ideologies of secularism, materialism, rationalism, atheism and liberalism; among other popular trends that have gradually encroached upon definitions of quality education. He asserts that patristic education provides the definition and anchorage for true quality and holistic education as willed by God. He cites the approaches and perspectives of select Church Fathers regarding key aspects of quality and holistic education including philosophical bases, goal and purpose, content, structure, practice and methodology, pedagogy, and discipline.

1.14 Chapter Fourteen: St. Thomas Aquinas and Christian Education

The author singles out this saint as one of the greatest contributors to Patristic wisdom and education. He credits him with noteworthy propositions about the nature of quality education. Drawing from St. Thomas Aquinas, quality education is *cosmotheandric* in the sense that it focuses on the truth about God, humans and nature. In addition, it embraces the concept of Christian *paideia*, which aims at character formation. In a nutshell, quality education forms the basis for evangelization and transformation of people. It is not self-seeking. Rather, it equips people with appropriate skills for survival and self-reliance.

St. Thomas' other contributions to education are captured in his work: 'The Summa Theologica', a teaching, learning, research and education approach that demonstrates that faith has its foundation in reason and that God is relevant in quality and holistic transformation of societal life. His other contribution to patristic education is his '*Five (5) instrumentum Sophia of Education Equilibrium: 5 ISEE*' that outline critical parameters that quality education needs to fulfill: Integral meaning, integral evangelization, integral liberation, integral development and integral fulfillment.

1.15 Chapter Fifteen: Vatican II's Declaration on Christian Education (Gravissimum Educationis-Ge)

The author presents this document as the *Magna Carta* of Christian education. This declaration captures the official position of the church regarding quality holistic education for all people. It outlines fundamental principles to guide Christian education. It elucidates the church's conceptualization of universal human rights to education and outlines the duties and rights of key stakeholders in education. It also gives the church's position on education curricula.

1.16 Chapter Sixteen: Need for Patristic Education in Africa and International Community

The author asserts that the transformational insight of patristic education is needed not only for solid Christian formation for youths, but also to address the challenges of deteriorating values in higher education in Africa and beyond. He notes further that institutions of higher learning are opportune places for evangelization and uniting Christians. He cautions however that Proper interpretation of patristic education will be needed. To enhance adoption, it will be productive to design approaches that are relevant to all. The author is also of the view that more focus on patristic education would step up publications to fill in glaring gaps.

2.0 CRITIQUE

This is a timely and very informative text that demonstrates extensive research, good grasp of subject matter, and novelty in content and approach. It is highly recommendable particularly for

practicing teachers and students pursuing education as a discipline. For all who seek knowledge for its own sake and/or for its utility; for students of Literature and History, this is a book of choice.

3.0 SUGGESTIONS

Many sub-headings in chapter 16 distract coherence. It is rather a summary of issues already covered in preceding chapters. Chapter 9 and 3 could be merged into one. Consider introducing a section for glossary. Correct typos and expression errors (PP.140, 144, 161, 166, 170; 171, 172, 209, 208). Some chapters are very short. Consider for instance chapters 8,9,10 and 11.

REFERENCES

Majawa, C. (2018). Patristic Education.Scroll Technologies. Nairobi, Kenya.