

Parenting and Child Development: A Comparison of Yoruba Parenting and Pauline Concept of Child Rearing in Ephesians 6:4

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Abstract

The importance of children in any society cannot be overemphasized. This is why they are highly desired and valued in every home and culture particularly among the Jews and the Yoruba of south west Nigeria. Their presence signals hope and future for the family, church and the society at large. Yoruba and Pauline concepts of parenting and child development clearly pointed out that there are a lot of similarities between the two worlds. There has been a remarkable paradigm shift from what parenting used to be and what it is now. Both Yoruba and Pauline ideas are at variance with the attitude of many parents in the society today. Children, in most cases, are seen as weak, ignorant, foolish and thereby deserve little or no recognition. This attitude of neglect actually calls for concern. The paper examines the concept of parenting as practiced by the Yoruba people of western Nigeria. Similarly, it also surveys the Pauline concept of child rearing as encapsulated in Ephesians 6:4. As a contextual study, the paper correlates the biblical perspective with the contemporary realities in the Yoruba land and Africa at large. The paper also highlights the elements of contextual connectivity between the parenting in Paul's world and the African view vis-à-vis the Nigerian situation. Consequently, Inferences are drawn from the Biblical and the Yoruba principles of child rearing for the purpose of bringing up total children that will become leaders tomorrow.

Keywords: Parenting, Child Development, Yoruba Concept, Pauline Concept, Children.

Introduction

Children constitute bundles of joy and their value in the family and the church cannot be overemphasized. They form important segment of the society. However, despite their value and importance, they live

mostly in an environment that has become saturated with immorality, corruption and all manners of social vices. The African understanding of child and childhood as a special class of people in the society with distinctive cultural worth and values resonate with the Bible. In most African cultures, particularly in Yoruba land, children are greatly valued and desired. They are perceived as blessings and insurance of the nation's perpetuity. Children are regarded as the most valuable of all God's gifts. Their importance to the Africans and also to God is clearly demonstrated both in African tradition and even through the pages of the Bible. In the Old Testament, children generally were regarded as weak, poor and powerless members of the society. However, the teaching of Jesus brought about a significant reversal to the status of children in the society which apostle Paul also built upon. Parenting which is the impartation of good moral standards have been identified as the responsibility of parents, however, it has been proven that church also has her own roles. The need for the family and the church to take the bull by the horn becomes imperative because of the rate of killings, corruption, violence. Examination malpractice and so on are on the increase. The fact that some of these children come from broken homes, lay more responsibility on the church to develop, rehabilitate, and reform them.

Concept of Parenting

The concept of parenting is an area of significant interest and a front burner issue in the religious circle. Before anyone can make the most of parenting principles, we must understand what the concept is all about. Unless it is understood, one may make a mess of it all. First, parenting is considered to be the most important task in life that determines the quality of health, well-being, learning and behaviour across lifespan. This involves moral upbringing by which such virtues as faithfulness, honesty, diligence, obedience, respect for elders and skills such as care of the body, cooking *et cetera* are inculcated into the lives of children. Secondly, it refers to all the activities, actions and efforts of the parents and/or guidance which begins from gestation period and continues until death and are geared towards helping the child to become a responsible adult. Thirdly, it is also the process of promoting and supporting the physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development of a child from infancy

to adulthood. This process passes through different stages which must be handled with care because “parenting is a responsibility from God” (Adewale, 2009). Therefore, the right spiritual environment in which the child can grow must be provided. In order to achieve this, children must pass through a programme of conscious control over their lifestyle. “A child in our modern culture is exposed to a multitude of influences every day, many of them harmful or even deadly” (Whitehurst, 2004). A Yoruba adage says, “*Owu ti ‘ya gbon, l’omo o ran*, meaning, a child follows the footsteps of his/her mother” (Akintunde, 2008). The implication of this adage is that children simply replicate their mothers. This is why it is often said “like mother like daughter or like father like son.” Gillard (2003) posits that a parent simply refers to “a mother or father of a person or an animal.” In the same vein, Okpako submits that “parents refer to one’s father or/and mother” (Okpako, 2004). In Africa, the understanding of parenthood has a broader meaning compared to what is obtainable in the western world particularly in Europe and America. A married adult of about 30 years or more could still refer to his or her mother “*mo on mi*” (meaning my mother) and to his or her father as “*ba a mi*” (meaning my father). They are those who provide necessary care for a child. They also include grandparents and other senior adults around. Ayantayo (2011) sees parents as the “trustees” of their children and failure on the part of parents to appropriate this trust properly entails dismissal from trusteeship. “In Jewish societies, the primary responsibility of the mother was to produce children, yet, for most children; parents were the original source of moral guidance” (Tenney, 1987).

Parenthood is the state of being a parent. It may also refer to a period when a father or/and a mother and sometimes care-giver provide training, cares and guidance for children under them. This concept informs the traditional idea of collaborative parenting among the Africans particularly the Yoruba people. African folklore also reflects the expectation placed on parents to inculcate good character in their children, and a way of taunting parents who fail in this regard (Ademiluka, 2011). In traditional Yoruba society, *gbogbo abule nii bani t’omo* (meaning that it takes a whole village to raise a child) because it is believed that *ajeje owo kan ko gbe igba de ori* which means a single hand cannot lift the

calabash to the head” (Delano, 1983). This simply describes the value of collaborative efforts among parents. Furthermore, it is said that *oju merin ni i bi'mo, igba oju ni i baa wo*. This literally means ‘four eyes (representing the mother and the father) give birth to a child but it takes two hundred eyes (representing many people) to train such a child.’ This becomes important because home training among the Yoruba is regarded as the responsibility of the whole clan. The above Yoruba proverb exists in different forms in many African and western cultures. For instance, the responsibility of raising children is also seen in the Sukuma (Tanzania) proverb “One knee does not bring up a child” and in the Swahili (East and Central Africa) proverb “One hand does not nurse a child.” The Yoruba (Nigerian) proverb as well as those of Sukuma (Tanzania) and Swahili (East and Central Africa) convey the African worldview that emphasizes the importance of seeking help in doing a task which cannot be accomplished by a single person. This is particularly true of parenting and child development. It is a shame for parents who fail to bring up their children properly to become *omoluabi*, it is more disgraceful, however, for those trained but failed to comply.

Yoruba Parenting

a. Yoruba as a people

According to Yoruba mythology, Oduduwa is generally believed to be the great ancestor of the Yoruba race. He settled in Ile Ife (the cradle of the human life) in the present day Osun state, Nigeria. Ogunade (2006) maintains that “Ile Ife is credited to have been the original homestead of the Yoruba people.” Apart from those found in parts of Kogi and Kwara states, the Yoruba people primarily occupy the south-western part of Nigeria, that is, Oyo, Osun, Ogun, Ekiti. Lagos and Ondo States. Some can also be found (outside Nigeria) in places like the Republic of Benin, Niger, Togo, Cuba, Brazil, and South America. Their language is called Yoruba, a Niger-Congo language. They are predominantly town dwellers who practice hoe agriculture and are well known as traders and for their crafts.

Yoruba people are quite distinct. Apart from their dresses, they can also be identified by the manner of their greetings such as *e ku*. They are therefore referred to as the *Ekus*. According to Oke (2008), “the early

missionaries and traders refer to them as the *Akus*.” For instance, most greetings in Yoruba begin with *E ku*. Thus, *E k’aaro* means good morning; *E k’asan* means good afternoon; and *E k’ale* means good evening etc. Note that *e k’aaro*, *e k’aasan*, and *e k’aale* are often used in plural form or for an elderly person. This is because in Yoruba language, a plural pronoun is also used to address an elderly person. Yoruba people are an ethnic group with rich culture and tradition. Their location, mostly in the south west Nigeria, afforded them the opportunity to be reached with the gospel of Christ and early western education. The first church ever in Nigeria is located in Ake area of Abeokuta, Ogun state.

Pre-conception period

Children are so important to the Yoruba and as such barrenness becomes a great concern, not only for the barren woman but also for the family and the entire clan. The elders in the clan do all things possible including consultation with the oracle in order to find out the cause of the barrenness and save the family from the stigma. According to Awolalu and Dopamu (2005), a woman may become barren if ancestors are angry with her or a witch or sorcerer is standing in her way, or a divinity is persecuting her. It is believed that once the oracle has been consulted and necessary taboos are followed, ‘the road’ will be cleared for the woman to have pregnancy. Parenting among the Yoruba may be deemed to start with pregnancy. “As soon as pregnancy is discovered divine guidance is sought through divination to determine what should be done to ensure a safe delivery” (Gaba, 1995). This is usually noticed the moment a woman misses her menstrual period. At this point, the woman will be guided on what to do and what not to do, on what to eat and what not to eat. This is to ensure that both the mother and the foetus are perfectly secured.

In some families, the pregnant woman may not eat salt until the child is born. Even in some families, the husband will not have sex with the wife during pregnancy. It is believed by some people that a man that has sex with a pregnant woman will be wretched, and the woman herself will have a difficult delivery. Measures are put in place and must be observed. For instance, she must not go about during the hot weather or late in the night so as to guide herself and the foetus against any

spiritual attack. Sacrifices are made to the ancestors of the husband in order to ask for their help during this period as the welfare of both the mother and the foetus are of paramount importance to all the family members. From time to time people that come across the pregnant mother greet her by saying “*se ara le?*” or “*ara o le bi?*” meaning “hope you are strong or healthy.” The pregnant mother also answers “*mo dupe*” meaning I am grateful. The greetings and well wishes the pregnant mother receives from the people around her give her hope and relief as she carries the pregnancy. Not only this, Yoruba believe that prayer is very significant as part of the measures to ensure the safety of both the pregnant mother and the foetus and preserving the sacredness of their lives. Hence, prayers are often said in the following ways: *asokale anfani, k’a gbohun iya k’a gbohun omo* meaning, wishing you a prosperous delivery, and that may both the mother and the baby be alive at delivery time.

b. Childbirth

“When the time comes for a woman to have her baby, the elderly women, who are vast in the ‘business of delivery,’ are always in attendance, though they may not be trained in the orthodox way, but had become experts through constant practices” (Oke, 2008). After the delivery, all the women in the household come around to give their support to both the mother and the new baby. As soon as a baby is born the *Iya Agbebi* (the orthodox or traditional midwives) immediately bathed him/her with warm water and later rubbed his/her body with different kinds of traditional ointment, then the baby will be wrapped in clothes to protect him/her against harsh weather condition. “The baby’s daily birth is characterized by some physiotherapy exercises. This is to loose and strengthen the limbs of the baby to adapt to life outside the womb” (Oke, 2008). In the olden days, a heathen fire was arranged and set to constantly warm the room where the mother and her new baby were. Appropriate food like breastfeeding, pap and *amala* together with concoction are regularly given to the baby. As early as the third day of birth, divination to determine the baby’s horoscope takes place. An individual’s horoscope, in this regard, reveals some dietary rules which each person should observe throughout life. And if the baby is known, again through divination, to be a reincarnated ancestor, he may be further

requested to observe some dietary rules that this particular ancestor, through divination, may impose (Gaba, 1995). The oracle is consulted in order to determine the future of the child.

This is called *ikose da 'ye omo* or *akosejaye*. This is the first step in knowing the future of a child. Also according to Idowu (1996), this rite is the first step in life and is called *ikose-waye* or *Ese n taye*. This step is an enquiry in totality through *Ifa* into the future of a child born or about to be born into the world. The purpose is to find out what sort of child it is, what are the *taboos* to it, what things are to be done in order to preserve its good destiny or to rectify an unhappy one. It is *akosejaye* that determine the kind of *kadara*, *ayanmo*, *ori*, *ogo*, *ipin*, *irawo*, and *akosile* that a child brings into the world (Odumuyiwa, 1996). Once these are known, the parents would be guided on how to handle train and contribute to the growth and development of the child at every stage of his or life. As the child grows, it is the duty of the mother, together with other women in the family, to train the child and nurture him/her in the way of *omoluabi*. This training begins as early as possible, mostly from two years upward. Seneca (4 B.C-65 B.C.), a Roman Stoic philosopher, statesman and dramatist, once said, "No evil propensity of the human heart is so powerful that it may not be subdued by discipline (Shodipo, 2014). This is because a Yoruba adage says, *kekere ni Musulumi tii maa ko omo re l'aso*, meaning Muslim teaches his child squabble at tender age (Babade, 2008).

At a time in the past when the orthodox medicine has not improved to the level it has today and a child fell sick, the Yoruba have their own methods of treating such illness. Some illnesses common with the new babies included; pile, fever, cold, convulsion, teething, cough, and diarrhoea. Usually, prepared concoctions or herbs could not be found wanting in the house of a mother who just gave birth. The older women in the household, upon noticing a state of bad health in a child, quickly applied appropriate herbs, depending on the kind of illness diagnosed through experience or findings. Because of the perceived level of effectiveness of the concoction, the illness would disappear quickly. These herbs were also given to baby on regular basis to prevent any future occurrence until when the child was about five years old. Among the Yoruba people, the way and manner parents cared for and nursed their

children from early childhood are not too different from the Jewish tradition. For instance, a new baby is regarded as guest to the world who is received with joy and gladness into the family. The caring instinct of women brought to bear on this occasion.

Just as the Jews place high premium on child upbringing so are the Africans particularly the Yoruba. In Yoruba culture, a well brought up child behaves well and he/she is morally upright. Greetings and respect for the elders are important aspects of their culture. These virtues are held in high esteem because they go a long way in building a person's character. It is expected of parents to start teaching their children moral values and home training as early as possible. For instance, the male children prostrate to greet their parents and elders, while their female counterparts greet by kneeling on two knees. The act of greeting by the males is called *Idobale* (prostrating) while for the females it's called *ikunle* (kneeling down). It is a way of showing respect to parents, elders, kings and acknowledging people in authority. The Yoruba male children greet their elders by lying down on the ground in front of their parent/elders while female kneel on both knees with her hands at her back and greet them with *e kaaro* (Good morning). An elder will place his hand on the child's head as they speak *se daada l'aji?* And so forth. The child remains on the ground until he/she is told to get up. It is a sign of disrespect and lack of home training if a child rushes up after greeting. It is even wrong and disrespectful for any child to look directly at the face of the elders while greeting. Also, it is improper, disrespectful and very rude for a child to hug or shake the hands of his/her parents. It is regarded as lack of home training if a child initiates or demands for a handshake from an elder. Even when you are meeting a stranger, it is expected of a child to greet respectfully as long as the person is older. Furthermore, the lesson of generosity towards children is expressed in the following Yoruba idiomatic expressions as quoted by Ayantayo (2011),

Agba to jaa jee weyin, ni yo ru'gba e de'le. Adaba jeun ku f'eyele, Orofo jeun ku f'awoko, emi o jeun ku f'omo mi.

Which means,

An elder who finishes the food he is served without leaving a remnant for a child will have to pack by himself the empty. The dove eats and leaves a remnant for the pigeon,

the green wild pigeon eats and leaves a remnant for the
mocking bird. I will leave a remnant for my children when
I eat.

The above proverbs pertaining to child nurture and care have divergent implications for modern day parenting. The truth is that children nowadays need balanced diets that will help their physical, mental, emotional, physiological and psychological growth instead of waiting for the *ajeku onje* (left over food).

c. Naming ceremony

From the biblical account in the book of Genesis, God gave Adam a name and Adam in turn gave names to other creatures at the command of the Creator (Gen. 2:18-20, 23). Consequently, everything in the world has a name. In the same manner, every society has a way of welcoming children into the world. Following the birth of a child among the Yoruba, a welcome party called naming ceremony, is organized to welcome the new baby. It is a programme arranged to mark, celebrate and welcome the arrival of a new baby. It is one of the parenting activities that are organized among the Africans. Children are identified by the names they answer. This is why choosing a name for a baby is highly significant in Yoruba land. In *Yoruba* tradition, naming ceremony is not necessarily a religious celebration. It is not a baptism or christening. In the olden days, names usually come through a group of *Babalawo* (traditional *Ifa* priests) who traditionally performed a divination to find names for children, but in recent times children's names can also come from those of the father, mother, grandparents, next of kin or other ranking members of the family like the grandparents and great grandparents of the child.

Preparations for the ceremony vary depending on the circumstances surrounding the birth of a child. For instance, the naming ceremonies for triplets, twins, or single-born child are not the same. The sex of a baby also determines the form of ceremony to be organized. Like most societies, the importance Africans attach to parenting and child issues in general is seen in the names given to him/her at birth. For example, *Omolola* (child is wealth), *Omolade* (child is crown) are few examples. Also, some names are formed from Yoruba proverbs. Again, *Atinuke* is

a child that is being pampered from the womb. In Yoruba land, the ceremony is normally divided into three stages:

1. Shaving of baby's hair; 2. Wearing of cloth for the baby; 3. Announcing the baby's names.

1. Shaving of baby's hair:

The shaving of the hair for a new born baby is undertaken by an elderly woman in the family, after which a substance like a local gel (adi agbon) is applied on the baby's head to provide lubrication.

2. Wearing of cloth for the baby:

The next thing is the wearing of the cloth for the baby. This is gently and carefully done by an experienced woman in the family. Because the baby is not strong yet, she must handle the head, the limbs, and other part of the baby's body conscientiously. The baby is further dressed properly in order to give him/her a very good and attractive appearance. For instance, the ear of a baby girl is pierced early enough to be able to put ear-rings.

3. Announcing the baby's names:

The last thing is the announcement of the baby's names to the audience: this is the naming proper. An experienced woman in the family opens the ceremony with thanks to God the creator for the new born baby that has arrived into their midst. She goes further to thank and praise the ancestors of the baby. After this, items for the naming are brought out before everybody. These include; kola nut, alligator pepper, palm oil, bitter cola, honey, salt, sugar-cane, wine and some other edible things. However, the absence of any of these items does not invalidate the ceremony. Each of these items is taken by a woman who carries the baby in her arms and stresses their meanings and importance. It is on the basis of these meanings and importance that the woman pronounces blessings on the newly born child. As the woman blesses, she picks each of these items and uses it to touch the baby's mouth. Other edible items are also given to the baby and the mother to have a taste of what the baby will be eating as he/she grows. A bowl containing cold water is put outside where relations, friends and well-wishers will come out and 'drop' "owo adura" (prayer money) or money for the naming. It is compulsory for every woman either born or married into that family

to give “prayer money”. Failure to give may have an implication for the future. After this, the elders will pray one after the other as eating and drinking begin with joy and gladness.

Yoruba names are often carefully considered prior to the naming ceremony day so that it would not reflect any sort of negativity or disrepute to the family. In other words, selecting a name that previously belonged to a thief or criminal is not considered as a wise step, as it (according to Yoruba philosophy) could result in the child growing up to also become one. Most time, names are given to a child to reflect circumstances surrounding his or her birth such as family background, the position of the child in the home, parents’ experiences and so on. This is why it is often said that *ile l’aawo ki a to s’omo l’oruko* (before names are given, family background is taken into consideration). Some days after that a public ceremony with feasting and entertainment is held and family and friends are all invited to celebrate the arrival of the child.

d. The care of children

After a child is born, the care given to the child can be divided into three categories: (a) General care; (b) Traditional care; (c) Care for the special children.

i. General care

Just as it has been noted earlier, the care of a child begins as soon as the child is conceived in the mother’s womb. As soon as the husband notices that his wife conceives of a baby, he becomes happy and gives all the necessary moral and physical support to her in order to ensure safe delivery. According to Awolalu and Dopamu (2005:172), “the pregnant women observe certain regulations and taboos in order that all may go well not only with her, but also with the expected baby.” The greatest cares given to a pregnant mother are the therapeutic attention and treatment (Oke, 2008). These include *Aseje alaboyun* (medicines brewed for the use of pregnant women) which is prepared by the traditional midwives called *Iya Abiye* in conjunction with the traditional medicine men. This is usually taken at the interval of two months beginning from

three to nine months of pregnancy. At the end of the nine months, the family will be waiting for the arrival of *omo titun*, *alejo aye* (a new baby, a prestigious guest to the world). General care for children include the kind of food a baby should eat for at least six months until he/she learns how to sit. This kind of food is primarily from the mothers' breast and *agbo* (concoction). As soon as the child begins to sit, the mother prepares and gives him/her *eko* (pap) as well as introducing little pepper to him/her. This last until the child begins to walk. The Yoruba believes that child care is very difficult to handle and it is only the gods or goddess that can give the best care. As a matter of fact, no one has power over their lives except the giver of those children. For this reason, parents must not be careless about their babies' lives whenever they notice any symptom. If any sickness attacks a child, the experienced women in the family quickly rescue and cure the sickness. The mother prepares and feeds the child with meal like *eko* (pap) that is good for different weather. As the child grows, he/she learns to crawl, sit, talk and walk with the mother guiding him/her. Children are exposed to basic domestic responsibilities such as cooking, washing of plates and clothes, grinding of pepper, pounding of yam and yam flour, fetching of water and firewood, sweeping and so forth. The essence of these is to bring up a total child or *omoluabi*. Some characteristic features of an *omoluabi* are respect for old age, loyalty to one's parents and local tradition, honesty in public and private dealings, devotion to duty, sympathy and readiness to assist the needy. However, some of these virtues are gradually becoming eroded with the passage of time and the introduction of some western cultures. It is believed that *omo ti a o ko ni yo gbe 'le ti a ko ta*, meaning a child untaught shall toss his father's house. (Babade, 2008) also corroborates this fact when he says, *kekere la ti n p'eka iroko, nitori t'o ba dagba tan, a maa a gba ebo* (one cuts the stem of *iroko* tree while it is yet small, because if it matures, it will be demanding sacrifice). One has to tame or train a child away from bad behaviour while he is still young, because when he grows old in the bad way, it would be of total regret (emphasis mine).

ii. Traditional care

This kind of care depends on the family background of the new child. Each family has its own taboos that are peculiar to the members. For instance, some families don't give pap (eko) to their babies at childhood instead, it is the pounded yam they will mix inside water as pap and give to the baby. Some families don't eat dogs, snakes, crickets etc. More importantly, the one that is common to most families is that children are not exposed to the public until the day of the naming ceremony.

iii. Care for special children

There are some children that need special attention and care not necessarily because of any deformity but because of the circumstances that surround their birth. For instance, twins and triplets are normally idolized and sacrifices were offered to them on the day of their naming because they are believed to be supernatural children. Items used for sacrifice include; sugar-cane, white bean-cake, beans, bananas, honey and all other consumable items. The sacrifice to the twins continues from time to time in that family. Apart from the twins, sacrifices are also made for *Idowu* but not for *Alaba* and *Idogbe*, *Dada* and *Ige Adubi*

Concept of child development in Ephesians 6:4

Ephesians is generally acknowledged as one of the richest and most profound of the New Testament letters. The richness of its message, the usual diction, and the beauty of its context made it attractive and appealing to believers in all ages and in all places. This ancient city was situated at the mouth of the river Cayster, on the shore of the *AEgean* Sea, about 50 miles south of Smyrna. In real sense, "the foundation of the church in this city was laid by Apostle Paul on his return from his second missionary journey." Although, scholars often talk about the authorship of Ephesians with high sense of criticism, the early church equivocally supported the Pauline authorship of Ephesians. It is generally believed that apostle Paul might have written this epistle about the same time as Colossians while he was under house arrest in Rome (3:1; 4:1; 6:20). The writer opens his epistle with greetings which is a normal way of life in Africa culture. "Africans generally regard someone who does not greet others as rude (Adeyemo, 2006).

Paul, in the opening verses of Ephesians, chapter six, reiterates God's obligation under the Fourth Commandment on children to honour and obey his representatives, their parents. In Ephesians 6:4, he later follows this with instructions to parents, especially fathers, to be extremely concerned and conscientious about the religious and spiritual training of their children when he says: *Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord* (RSV). From the Greek text of Ephesians 6:4, the coordinating conjunction *Kai*, (and), though not translated by the Revised Standard Version of the English Bible, closely ties the fathers' responsibility with the children's responsibility as it appears in King James Version (Hoehner, 2002).

The article *oi* (the) in *ἱ ὁ δὲ ἡμεῖς* is used to introduce a new group in order to distinguish it from another group. But since children are to obey their 'parents' (6:1), it is very critical to ask, why does Paul address only fathers here? As his pattern was, Paul first addresses the children as those under authority. He now addresses the fathers who have authority over the children. Within the structure of the hierarchical family, Paul makes it very clear that the father must take responsibility for raising his children. It could be said that fathers are addressed because they represent the governmental head of the family. In a similar way, the Yoruba view 'father' as the leader of his own family. In this case, fathers are distinguished from children. However, the plural *ὁ δὲ ἡμεῖς*, "fathers," can refer to parents in general and not just fathers.

In the Old Testament, the father was the main figure who wielded authority and commanded respect. He possessed almost unlimited power over the lives of the members of his family. However, Paul instructed fathers not to provoke their children to anger (Eph 6:4; Col 3:21), but to discipline and instruct them (Eph 6:4). The Greek word, *ὁρᾷν ἡμᾶς*, means "to rouse to wrath, exasperate, anger." In Paul's day, the father had supreme authority over the family. Paul told the parents "Don't use your authority to abuse the child, but to encourage and build the child."

Having stated the negative, Paul does not continue (as seen in Col 3:21) to state "lest they become discouraged" but moves on to a positive exhortation by saying, "But bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4b). Fathers are to bring them up, that is, rear

or nourish (ἐκτρέφει) (provide for physical and spiritual needs), them in the training (ἐπαίδεια), “child discipline,” including directing and correcting; “training” in righteousness and God’s “discipline” of believers and instruction, ὑποουσία; 1 Cor 10:11; Titus 3:10) of the Lord. The verb ἐνθάλω (bring up), again can hardly be limited to the exercise of disciplinary functions. The Yoruba also believe that *Orisa ti a ko ba fi l’omo lowo, piparun ni yoo parun* meaning a god (tradition) that is hidden from the child will eventually go into extinction. The Greek word, ἐκτρέφω (ektrephō), in ἐνθάλω αὐτὸ ἐν παιδείᾳ καὶ νοουσίᾳ Κυρίου literally means to bring up, to nourish, to nurture in the discipline and instruction of the Lord”. The word is not confined to the nourishing of a child physically, but includes its bringing up or rearing in the various departments of its life. The training and admonition to be given by fathers is described further as “of the Lord” ἐνθάλω. Some scholars see this as a subjective genitive referring to what the Lord does through the fathers as his representatives.

Ephesians 6:4 in the Nigerian Context

Many of Nigerian children face enormous problems of abuse and neglect sometimes in appalling circumstances. These problems compound the risk of their survival and create formidable obstacles for the development of a total child. In the cultural setting of Nigeria, for instance, the beating of children is widely sanctioned as a form of discipline. In practice, the beating of children is almost universal in Nigerian homes and is applied frequently as a mode of discipline for almost any type of misdemeanour, however trivial. Corporal punishment is also widely used in schools. Furthermore, some forms of punishment meted out to children are extremely harsh and are both physically and emotionally dangerous (Hodges, 2001). “Parents also have rights over their children including rights to discipline them in order to ensure they (children) do not engage in self-destructive activities in the process of actualising their rights” (Ayantayo, 2011). Such discipline should not normally be excessive to the extent of inflicting grievous harm on the child’s body.

There is an urgent need for the parents and church leaders to take the bull by the horn and teach their children as early as possible in home training which is the bedrock of good character. Following the example

of Yoruba parenting and Paul's recommendations, child development must be carried out in words and actions. Parenting and child development remain potent tools for the political and socio-economic development of a nation like Nigeria and viable instruments for change. According to the National Policy on Education (NPE), Federal Republic of Nigeria, (2004) education is also described as an instrument "par excellence" for effecting national development. This statement is further buttressed by Asaaju (2010) when he says, "every society educates her young ones for the purpose of nation building and this begins from the home." Ephesians 6:4 is built on the assumed social status of the world of Apostle Paul where children were categorized alongside the poor, the less privileged, the vulnerable and powerless. They were not accorded the same social status as the adults in the Jewish literature and culture. In the same manner, Jewish culture held the belief that whatever way a child walked was simply a projection of how he/she had been taught by his/her parents. This is why the wisdom literature commands, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it," RSV (Prov. 22:6). Therefore, if a child is brought up (trained) in a good way or bad way, it will have serious impact in his/her life accordingly. Until the time of Jesus, children were not seen as models of entering the Kingdom of God. During his ministry, Jesus taught that anyone who desires to enter the Kingdom of God must possess the same simple and low status which characterizes a child. It is this godly character and high moral values that the Yoruba refers to as *Omoluabi* which form the basis for a just and egalitarian society.

Conclusion

Apart from the beautiful teachings of Apostle Paul on children, Jesus has profound relationship with them. He particularly welcomed them and claimed, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me" (Matt. 18:2-5). The ministry of Jesus centred on liberation for all in bondage and on meeting the physical and the spiritual needs of the poor, the children, women and the weak in the society. The Epistle indeed demonstrates that God

values and honours little children. Indeed, similarities abound between Yoruba parents in Nigeria and the apostle Paul's world of parenting as implied in the book of Ephesians. The contemporary parents find examples to emulate in the Yoruba parenting and the teachings of Apostle Paul. Children found consolations in Paul's teaching. Therefore, it is important for parents in Nigeria and Africa at large to learn from this and the Yoruba culture in order to bring up their children.

Recommendations

From the ongoing, it is obvious that the contemporary parents have a lot to learn from the two concepts discussed above. However, for the purpose of this paper, the following are given as recommendations.

1. Discipline in love
Discipline is a veritable tool in bringing up children to become useful and relevant to their parents and to the society. Therefore, parents must not withhold the rod of discipline from their children; rather, they must discipline them in love. This will encourage and empower them to face challenges in life.
2. Cooperation between parents
It is very important for both the father and the mother to cooperate together in order to train their children. An adage in Yoruba says *bi ogiri ko ba l'anu, alangba ko le r'aye w'obe*. This means that if there is no crack in the wall, lizard will not be able to penetrate. Issues that can cause a break up in the family must be avoided.
3. Sound moral training
In the contemporary society, the importance of moral education cannot be overemphasized. It is worthy of note that parents in both the Yoruba and the Pauline worlds laid emphasis on sound moral training for their children. Children should be guided to be hardworking, honest, courageous, loving and caring.
4. Exemplary life
An adage says like father, like son, or like mother like the daughter. This should be a watchword for parents in any endeavor. They should live a life worthy of emulation because their children will normally take after them. This is why a Yoruba adage says, *owu ti iya ba gbon*

ni omo n ran, meaning, it is the cotton which the mother harvest that her child spins (Babade, 2008:378). A daughter who fornicates probably takes after her adulterous mother.

5. Expose them to your religion

Although religion is a voluntary practice, it is essential that contemporary parents follow the injunction of the Bible that says, “train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it (Prov. 22:6). This is not different from the Yoruba adage that says *kekere ni Musulumi ti i maa ko omo re l’aso* which means a Muslim teaches his child squabble at tender age. This will help them to love God and appreciate their fellow human beings since all religions preach love. This leads us to the final one.

6. Love your children

Parents must also learn from the teachings of Apostle Paul not to provoke their children to anger (Eph. 6:4). They must avoid anything that will make their children feel unloved, unwelcomed, and unprotected. They must be shown love so that it will make them confident to live a fulfilled life.

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