

Gospel Ministers as Agents of Inculcating Christian Virtues into the Young Generation in The Church

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Abstract

The Church has a significant responsibility in shaping the moral, spiritual, and social lives of the young generation. Young people constitute an important part of the future of the Christian faith and the wider society. Therefore, their characters and values need to be carefully nurtured. Social media influence, moral relativism, peer pressure, materialism, and other competing values are affecting the moral values of the young generation. This experience is contributing to an increase in social vices, with devastating effects on young people, the Church, and society. The paper is descriptive, and the author employs a qualitative research approach that combines a literature review and biblical analysis. Virtue is the admirable qualities of persons that shape their moral lives. Virtues in the Christian view are classified into two major categories: moral virtues and theological virtues. The paper identifies ways that ministers of the gospel, as agents of inculcating Christian virtues, can employ virtues in the young generation in the Church, including practical demonstration and modelling of Christian virtues, feeding the young generation with Christian virtues through intentional and relational mentoring, fostering teamwork, and providing recreational facilities. The paper concludes that the Church, through the ministry of gospel ministers, can create an environment that encourages the young generation to develop a personal relationship with God and to demonstrate Christian values in their families, schools, workplaces, communities, and society. This makes the role of gospel ministers particularly important in addressing the moral and spiritual challenges confronting the young generation.

Keywords: Agents, Christian Virtues, Church, Gospel Ministers, Young Generation.

Introduction

The Church has a significant responsibility in shaping the moral, spiritual, and social lives of the young generation. Young people constitute an important part of the future of the Christian faith and the wider society; therefore, their character and values need to be carefully nurtured. In a rapidly changing world characterised by technological advancement, social media influence, moral relativism, peer pressure, materialism, and other competing values, many young people are exposed to influences that conflict with Christian teachings. This experience is contributing to an increase in social vices, with devastating effects on young people, the parents, the Church, and society. Gospel ministers play an important role in ministering to the young people because they are called to teach, preach, counsel, mentor, and provide spiritual direction to Church members. Their ministry goes beyond delivering sermons; it includes modelling Christian virtues through their conduct, helping believers understand and appropriate biblical principles in their everyday

lives. Christian virtues such as love, honesty, humility, compassion, forgiveness, patience, self-control, faithfulness, justice, obedience, and service are essential for the development of responsible Christian character. The effective inculcation of these virtues requires consistent teaching, practical demonstration, mentorship, discipline, and opportunities for young people to participate in Christian service. Gospel ministers are to serve as role models and moral agents who help young people translate biblical teachings into practical ways of living. The young generation in the context of this paper is male and female individuals who are between the ages of fifteen (15) and thirty-five years (35). The paper is descriptive, and the author employs a qualitative research approach that combines a literature review and biblical analysis. The paper examines the concept of Christian virtues, ministers and the Church, the young generation and the Church and ways of inculcating Christian virtues into the young generation in the Church.

Concept of Christian Virtues

Virtue is the admirable qualities of persons that shape their moral lives. Virtue is a learned, distinctive potential that enables humans to live a balanced life and fulfil the reason for their existence. Virtue in Christian ethics refers to learned traits resulting from the moral and religious upbringing, relationship with God and fellow humans, and from individual choices and self-discipline. From a Christian perspective, human life is ideally lived in the kingdom of God. The Christian virtues are the traits that fit a person for life in the kingdom. The Christian life is also to be lived in the present, fallen state of the world, in which humans see unclearly and face many temptations and oppositions (Robert 1995:189 and 2016:45). Several of the Christian virtues fit the believers to survive spiritually in life. Since the proper human potential is to be a child of God, the Christian virtues, taken as a set, are the actualisation of a personality characteristic of a Christian. Virtues are not just dispositions to behave properly. They embody a person's philosophy of life (self-understanding and understanding of the natural and social world). It determines human concerns, desires, emotions, and perceptions of all things, as well as one's actions (McInerny, 1999:23). Virtues vary in structure according to the philosophy of life to which they belong. Therefore, the Christian virtues will be quite distinct in important ways from their non-Christian fellows. Virtues are good traits, and the opposite of virtue is vice. The moral philosophy that concentrates on the notion of virtue is called virtue ethics (Robert 1995:190). For virtue ethics, moral life is determined by the entire ideal in one's life. Virtues reflect in the actions of humans and show what kind of being one is. Thus, virtues reveal individuals' identities.

Two Categories of Virtue

Virtues in the Christian view are classified into two major categories: moral virtues and theological virtues.

Moral Virtues

Moral virtues are expected of ideal humans. In the Christian perspective, moral virtues are emphasised in the teaching of Jesus Christ. The sermon of Jesus on the mount, known as 'Beatitudes' in Matthew 5:1-12, is the biblical basis for moral virtue. Beatitude is the condition or statement of blessedness, and the word has its root in the Latin word beatitude. The word means "happy," "blessed," or "fortunate," and Jesus used it to teach his disciples moral virtues. Jesus taught that blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy, blessed are the poor in the spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven, blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God (Matt. 5:3, 7.9) (McInerny, 1999:12, Pojman and Fieser, 2012:55). Jesus emphasised these virtues to show the characteristics of the people who have heard and believed him and ready to

follow his teaching. Natural law provided common moral rules that all people could recognise and observe. There are key moral virtues that seem to be represented by wise people through the ages, setting a standard of conduct to which Christians, too, should aspire. Both Christian and classical writers identified four virtues as of special importance: temperance, courage, prudence, and justice. These were the cardinal virtues, drawing on a Latin word *cardo*, which means ‘hinge’ (Lovin, 2000: 155). Reflecting on the above submissions, the paper affirms that, the moral virtues are indispensable virtues that humans need to develop. This is to sustain them in their moral relationships and cope with other virtues that are of great value for their living. Hence, this will help humans to maintain peaceful coexistence with people who are pursuing different virtues. A few examples of moral virtues are honesty, humility, compassion, forgiveness, patience, self-control, prudence, temperance, faithfulness, justice, obedience, and service. The moral virtues enable humans to learn and maintain an honest life with integrity.

Theological Virtues

Theological virtues guide Christians in their relationship with God. It also helps humans to preserve and please God in the journey of faith. Theological virtues are love, faith, and hope, and the good life of every responsible Christian turns around these virtues. The theological virtue requires a fundamental re-evaluation of human lives, and they are fundamental to Christianity and help Christians to live an acceptable life to God. The three virtues that are theological virtues are love, faith and hope, which relate to one another and cannot exist in isolation. Love is the crown of all other virtues, and without it, all other virtues are futile. The Greek word *agape* dominates the Bible’s ethical understanding of love. It is the head over all other virtues (Col. 3:14, 1 Cor. 13:13) because Jesus replied to his disciples that the greatest commandment is love: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with your mind." You shall love your neighbour as yourself (Roberts, 2026:157). Similarly, faith, as one of the theological virtues, concerns the relationship between humans and God. Faith is the leading biblical term for the relationship humans are to have toward God. It expresses an orientation of the whole person. For that reason, faith is not merely a doctrine but a confidence, trust, and assurance in the graciousness of God as revealed in Jesus Christ (Kaczor, 2008:63; Horner, 2011:57). Also, hope is the expectation rooted in confidence and desire. Hope may often be presented as an abstract category. In practice, hope has an object in view, which may range from physical or emotional survival to the acquisition of a particular object or the attainment of a particular goal.

The Ministers and the Church

The Church is defined as a body of baptised believers in Christ, and organised to carry out the Great Commission of the Lord Jesus on earth. When viewed from the New Testament standpoint, the Church is the totality of believers in Christ, or the local body of baptised believers who are associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel. The Church has been described with several images and pictures. These include: People of God; family of faith; Church militant and triumphant; visible and invisible Church, etc., among others. The Church, as an organism, is the communion of believers who are united in the bond of the Spirit. The Church is an institution and an agency for the conversion of sinners and the perfecting of the saints (Grudem 1995:853). The minister in charge of a local church is a leader responsible for gathering and shepherding the people of God. He protects, feeds, directs, equips, and disciplines the sheep. Aghawenu (2016:64) affirms that the parishioners look to the pastor for guidance. Thus, the pastor is the epitome of life direction and has significant influence over a local church. The relationship between pastor and

parishioner is confidential and built on trust and respect” Thus, the paper submits that a minister is a guide and model of Jesus’ principles to the Church. He is his members' confidant when he is dependable and trustworthy. Maxey (2017) presents an ethical conception of the church when he asserts that, “the Church is the instrument in a community that points men to the Saviour from sin, and to lead them to a better and more noble life on earth and an eternal life in heaven” (346). All these depend in no small measure on the understanding and ability of the pastor to discharge his/her responsibility to the Church. Therefore, the success of the same is determined by the pastor’s relationship with the entire Church on one hand, and his faithfulness to the young generation ministry in particular. This is scripturally justified as Jesus reiterates the significance of faithfulness to his followers (cf. Luke 16:10). Therefore, a minister needs to be determined, devoted and aspire for the actualisation of those things that expressly uphold and excel the goal of the gospel. It is required of a minister of Christ to be stewards of the ministries of God, which is rooted in faithfulness (1 Cor: 4: 1-2). A minister, therefore, is an epitome of dignity. Maxey (2017: 83) highlights the synonyms of dignity as worthiness, nobility, repute, honour and respect. It can therefore be inferred that a minister's prowess in the Church is primarily determined by his ability to demonstrate faithfulness in his stewardship ministry, regardless of the age group involved.

Young Generation and the Church

The young generation is male and female individuals who are between the ages of fifteen (15) and thirty-five years (35). At this age, the young generation has started forming habits that will last the rest of their lives. They become interested in the mind and emotion, with their sense of appreciation and power of reasoning increasing. Their ways of life, music, dressing, and education reflect their identity. There is a young generation whose self-esteem and self-confidence are channelled towards God, knowing well that God accepts their kind of worship, hence they are further motivated to put their knowledge to work. It is a period characterised by hormonal increase, which often leads to emotional outbursts towards people around them. It is also a period of worry about peer relationships, physical appearance, acceptance, sex and sexuality, among other things. The social and emotional growth of the young generation is marked by many doubts and fears about their relationship with God. The challenges of having control temptations often make them wonder if they have truly been saved (Black, 1999: 91- 92; 107-108, and Fields and Robins, 2007:30-31). Speaking of the young generation means addressing a number of gaps not only between them and God but also between them and their parents, friends, and authority figures.

It is not uncommon to observe the young generation during this period becoming like chameleons (changing to blend with their environment). They are caught in the midst of change, confusion, challenges, media bombardment, family dysfunction and a host of other stresses. They yearn for stability and normalcy, seeking a sense of belonging so as to deal with the loneliness and quickly change to conform to the experience of the generation about Christianity.

Ways of inculcating Christian Virtues into the Young Generation in the Church

The paper identifies eight ways to inculcate Christian virtues in the young generation within the Church.

Practical Demonstration and Modelling of Christian Virtues:

This is the role of the ministers to actively express and exemplify values such as love, faith, hope, compassion, prudence, honesty, discipline, humility, and forgiveness as taught through Christian teachings. The young generation will not only learn theoretically but also see practical examples from the gospel ministers. When the gospel ministers’ model Christian virtues, it offers a tangible

example of how to live as Christians. Practical demonstration of Christian virtues encourages young people to embody these virtues, fostering a sense of responsibility and empathy towards others as they grow and develop in their lives.

Feeding the Young Generation with Christian Virtues through Intentional and Relational Mentoring

The minister's position is unique in the life of the Church because he is called to stay with the flock, feed them regularly and comfort them in their various life experiences. While he has an outreach ministry to sinners, his primary ministry is to feed the flock of God (Orchard, 2004:157). The ministers declare the testimony of the Church in the worship boldly, and witness to the Church's faith in Jesus Christ, to whoever cares to listen. He is called to be a counsellor, an administrator, an educator, a builder, an orator, a teacher and almost an endless number of other things as the situation demands (McBurney, 1977:74). All these responsibilities the ministers discharge to every member of his congregation, the young generation inclusive. Therefore, the responsibility of the minister is to preach, teach, mentor and counsel the young generation through which Christian virtues are inculcated to live a godly and exemplary life in this morally decaying world. The paper submits that gospel ministers should engage in intentional, relational mentoring in their work to instil Christian virtues in these individuals.

Raising Team Work for Inculcating Christian Virtues

To effectively minister to the young generation, it is expedient that a minister works with a team. This is because the minister cannot do it alone, as the young generation ministry should not be run as a 'solo' ministry. A healthy ministry depends on the support, gifts, talents, passions and energies of other leaders. The team members could be made up of leaders and the young generation themselves. Fields (2002) states that teamwork assists growth, leaving the minister with more energy and avoiding burnout in the ministry. It makes the Church stronger, and the minister's impact is broadened, and his ministry skills increase (171-172). The minister should be intentional and relational in partnering with the right team members. Similarly, engaging the young generation in the teamwork of the Church makes them actively involved in the activities of the Church, and through this, Christian virtues will be instilled in them, and there will be a glorious, brighter future for the Church of God and her ministry.

Providing Recreational Facilities to Inculcate Christian Virtues

Inculcating Christian virtues in the young generation requires the minister to understand these special age groups and their culture. They need someone who understands them and can guide them. The young generation, as the future of the Church, is a reservoir of energy and power; however, they need sound moral teachings to be effective in life and ministry. This can be achieved by providing a recreational facility for them as a means to learn. The recreational facilities can be used for exercise, through which Christian virtues will be instilled in them, e.g., indoor and outdoor games. This will keep them fit and strong while also preaching to them. The minister can encourage regular exercise by having a recreational facility in the Church, which will be used for ministering to the young generation.

Involving the Young Generation in Ministry

Ministers of the gospel are to involve the young generation in ministry, and they are to be intentional and relational about it. The young generation is the power and the future of the Church

and even of the gospel ministry; they have passion, zeal, and energy to effectively carry out the assignments given to them, especially in evangelism, revival, and Church activities. The young generation should be given opportunities to serve in ways that are different from adults, with the whole Church benefiting from their contribution. Stanley III (2001:35) asserts that the youth can be taught to channel their energies and idealism positively. Therefore, the young generation should not be left out in the ministry; this will help in building them for the future, help them to remain focused, active in things of God and build them morally. With this approach, a minister will be able to bridge the gaps between the Church and the younger ones, communicating with them in the way they best understand. Also, it will be rewarding to involve them in leadership positions to make them more responsible.

Utilising Christian Apps, Video and Social Media Platform in inculcating Christian Virtues

The world has shifted from manual to digital, and the world of the young generation is more digital than manual, engaging in different kinds of social media platforms. In this case, there is a need to expand and strengthen the ministry of the church into the realm of the young generation. There should be more Christian apps, videos, tweets and snaps. The Church needs to take the message to where the young individuals are. Philip (2018) states that social media/network has crossed boundaries, bridged gaps, connected continents and linked nations (40). It is, therefore, a great tool for Christian evangelism as it has surmounted the hurdles and barriers of the most hostile communities in the world. Hence, the minister, his team and the church should have robust social media platforms – Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Snapchat, Tinder, Twitter, etc. – that can easily and adequately attract, engage and bless the younger group. Some Churches in Nigeria are now adopting the model in reaching the young generation. Therefore, ministers of God are expected to be strategically involved in young generation ministry in the media crew of the Church, posting godly messages, videos, drama, and music to their platforms in order to instil Christian virtues into their lives.

Effective Education Ministry of the Church: The minister and his team must pay special attention to the educational needs of the young generation with academic excellence as the overall goal (Oyedele, 2015:114). The teaching ministry of the church should start from birth through preschool and other stages (McCutcheon, 1978:67). The paper submits that programmes such as extra-mural classes, admission securing department, career guidance and marital counselling can be appropriated to inculcate Christian virtues in the young generation.

Utilising Gospel Music to Inculcate Christian Virtues: The minister needs to find a balance in the choice of worship music in ministering to the young generation. The Christian faith has hymns and songs that are rich in moral values, and the gospel ministers have moral obligations to teach the young generation through music. This is because music is one of the ways of preserving and inculcating Christian virtues, and all the virtues discussed in this paper can be inculcated into the young generation through music.

Conclusion

Virtue is the admirable qualities of persons that shape their moral lives. Virtue is a learned, distinctive potential that enables humans to live a balanced life and fulfil the reason for their existence. Virtues in the Christian view are classified into two major categories: moral virtues and theological virtues. The paper identifies ways of inculcating Christian virtues into the young

generation in the Church which include *practical demonstration and modelling of Christian virtues, feeding the young generation with Christian virtues through intentional and relational mentoring*, raising team Work for Inculcating Christian virtues, provision of recreational facilities, involving young generation in ministry, utilising Christian Apps, Video and Social Media platforms, utilising gospel music and effective education ministry of the Church. The paper concludes that the Church, through the ministry of gospel ministers, should create an environment that encourages the young generation to develop a personal relationship with God and to demonstrate Christian values in their families, schools, workplaces, communities, and society. This makes the role of gospel ministers particularly important in addressing the moral and spiritual challenges confronting the young generation.

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