

## ADOPTION IN PHILEMON 1:10-11 AS A STRATEGY FOR COMBATING YOUTH RESTIVENESS IN NIGERIA

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**ABSTRACT:** There is no human society that is bereft of youth. The youth constitute a very significant part in every human society. The existence of the youth guarantees continuity of human beings and enable transmission of moral values and ethos in the society. However, current activities in the Nigerian society and the global world characterized by unwholesome attitudes by the youth such as internet fraud, armed robbery, theft, drug abuse, rape, kidnapping, militancy and cult related activities with its adverse consequences suggests a relapse in the numbers of youth in the society. Who is to be blamed? The youth, parents, churches, society or government? How can this youth restiveness be curbed? What role can Christian families and church organizations play in combating youth restiveness? This is the focus of this paper. The paper examines adoption role played by Apostle Paul in Philemon 1:10-11 in converting Onesimus a runaway slave of Philemon and proffers such strategy as a way of combating youth restiveness in Nigeria. The paper employs the descriptive and historical-critical methods of biblical exegesis and argues that should Christian families and church organizations consider adoption as exemplified by Apostle Paul on Onesimus expressly on the youth in the Nigerian society, thus nurturing and admonishing them in the way of Christ, youth restiveness in Nigerian could be abated.

**KEY WORD:** *Adoption, Militancy, Restiveness, Youth,*

### I. INTRODUCTION

There is hardly no day that the Nigerian print and electronic media is not encumbered with a lot of anti-social activities perpetuated by youth in Nigeria and the global world. Activities such as advanced fee fraud popularly known as 419, internet fraud, rape, prostitution, armed robbery and cult related activities are few among the social ills heinously carried out by some youth in Nigeria and in the global community. While these vices persist in an alarming rate having detrimental consequences on both the youth and society, scholars assume divergent views on the reasons for such vices. Some scholars blame the parents of the youth for their failure and inability in rising up to their responsibility in appropriately raising, nurturing, training and admonishing their progeny in a way that does not portend them to be societal nuisance, others blame the youth in not being decisive and maximizing their potentials wisely. Still others blame the vices on the inability of the government to provide employment opportunities for the ever increasing youth population of which mostly are employable. Surprisingly, while blame of the youth, parents and government continue to be on the increase, the aforementioned vices keep intensifying. Hence, this paper seeks to suggest an ideal strategy to Christian parents and church organizations on how to combat youth restiveness in the Nigerian society by advocating adoption of youth as epitomized by Apostle Paul on Onesimus in Philemon 1:10-11. The paper argues that if the youth and government has failed in delivering good governance that has necessitated social vices in the modern time, does it mean that the church organizations and ideal Christian homes has also failed? What the church organizations and Christian families could do to curb the high rate of youth restiveness in the Nigerian society is the essence of this paper.

### II. CLARIFICATION OF TERMS

The operative terms in this paper are 'adoption, youth and restiveness'. The word adoption is the English equivalent of the Greek word *huiothesia* which means "an act of taking legally as a son into one's family" (E. Richard Pigeon 24). It also signifies "the place and condition of a son given to one to whom it does not naturally belongs" (Vine W.E 14). In the context of this paper, as exemplified by Apostle Paul, adoption implies the process by which a man brings another person into his family, endowing him with the status of a biological son or daughter and ensures that the person is nurtured in a way acceptable by the society. The term youth is difficult to define. *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* defines a youth as "one who is young". It is especially the phase "before a child becomes an adult". This may mean a period between age fifteen and twenty-five years, and it also includes young adults from twenty-five to thirty years (Della Summers 1920). The United

Nations Organization (UNO) defines as those persons who fall between the ages of 15 and 24 years". Dayilim and Atowoju remarks that "the specific age range that constitutes youth varies from one culture or society to the other. Moreover, the western definition does not align with non-western definition. They maintain that in the traditional African societies, youth includes younger ages up to 35. In the Nigerian context, the term youth may include young people whose age fall between 15 and 35 years (1-2). The youthful stage is a period when critical decisions that will affect the entire personality of a human being is made. It is the time of opportunities, demands, and foundation for future strength, aspiration, ambitions and character. Pope John Paul 11 asserts that "youth is the age of hope, of promise, of enthusiasm, of plans and ideal" (Dorothy Ezeh 309). It could also be an age of regrets. Youth are depositories of talents, potentials, skills and strength for society's sustainability, development, productivity and posterity. Dayilimand Atowoju opines that "Enthusiasm, energy and physical strength are significant qualities of youth however for these natural endowments to be harnessed, they must be steered in the right course" (6). Restiveness is "inability to be still or quiet or having difficulty in being controlled especially when one is not satisfied with something" (Stella NgozInduka-Ozo&Igba Daniel Igba 898). Restiveness also means "Situation of stubborn resistance to control, or being marked by impatience or uneasiness" (Dickson David Agbaji et al 66). Restiveness in youth has been attributed to various factors such as parental conflict, poor attachment between parents and children; large numbers of children in the family. Other factors include poor parental upbringing, high rate of unemployment and under employment, high rate of poverty, peer pressure, bad and corrupt leadership and lack of youth participation in governance.

### III. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO PHILEMON

The epistle to Philemon is the shortest of the personal letters in the Pauline Corpus. Traditionally the letter is attributed to Paul and was written about AD 61-63 from a Roman prison to Philemon a Christian living in Colossae together with Apphia his wife, Archippus a fellow soldier and to the entire church at Philemon's house. The purpose of the letter is to appeal to Philemon to accept Onesimus his runaway slave not only as a slave but as a Christian brother (v.16); to commend Philemon for showing compassion to other believers (vv.1-7), and to announce his plans to visit Philemon in view of his foreseen release (vv.23-25). Kizhakkeyil, Sebastian writes that Philemon was a former persecutor of Christians who, after converting to christianity, opened his house to christian group in Pergamon. He then sent his non-christian slave Onesimus to Paul in jail in Ephesus to tell him of the new development. While in prison with Paul, Onesimus accepted faith from Paul, who then desired that he stays with him as an associate in his mission. Hence, Paul Paul wrote to Philemon asking him to release Onesimus so that he could return to be with him (111-112). Although this view prevails in New Testament scholarship, the paper consents to the former view thus, the young Onesimus ran away from his master when he met Paul in Rome. The reason for absconding from his master is not made clear however, scholars like Thomas L. Constable believe that he ran away from his master, perhaps not because Philemon treated him cruelly, but because he dealt with him graciously, by giving him unusual liberty. He maintains that Onesimus may have been a runaway slave, or he may simply have been entangled in some domestic trouble with his master. While on the hill, he made his way to Rome, where he hid himself. Eventually, as a result of divine providence, he came into contact with Paul and became converted as a Christian (1). Falaiye A.E. quoting Wubbels and McDowell submits that perhaps his master's conversion must have brought some unusual changes into the life style of the house. Thus, Onesimus not yet influenced by the gospel, must have become irritated of regulations, creeds, constant counsel and scrutiny. Resenting all these impact of Christianity, he decided to run away rather than adjust to the situation at home thinking it is greener on the other side (432). The epistle to Philemon suggest that Onesimus had stole from his master's treasury (v.18), knowing the consequences of his action as applied in the Greco-Roman and Jewish society which is death, did not hesitate to run away and hid himself until Apostle Paul while in house arrest in Rome encountered and adopted him, after due nurturing and making a convert of Onesimus into Christianity and one among those who later attended to him while in prison decided to send him back to his master. Paul declared: "I am appealing to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I have become during my imprisonment. Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful both to you and me" (Philemon 1:10-11). Apostle Paul's role in converting Onesimus resonated from his adoption of the runaway slave into his own family.

#### The Effects of Youth Restiveness on Nigerian Society

The effects of youth restiveness are manifest in the Nigerian society. The present day Nigerian society is encumbered with myriads of anti-social activities such as armed robbery, kidnapping/ hostage taking, internet fraud, cultism, rape, homosexuality, drug abuse/drug smuggling, and gangsterism masterminded by youth in the region. Worthy of note is the fact that the six geo-political zones in Nigeria which are the North-Central, North-East, North-West, South-West, South-East and South-South are characterized by one or more of the unwholesome activities enumerated above and this reveals the societal perception and understanding of people living in such zones. For instance, in the South-South and South-East zones, due to the availability of crude oil and multi-national oil companies' and other endowed natural resources, militancy, kidnapping/hostage taking,

armed robbery, illegal refining of crude oil, prostitution, human trafficking, drug smuggling and cult related activities are on the high side while in the South-West kidnapping, killing for ritual purposes, prostitution, human trafficking, internet fraud, rape, drug abuse and armed robbery is domicile. On the other hand, in the North-Central, North-East and North-West regions, Boko Haram insurgency, Fulani herdsmen attack, ethno-religious crisis, armed banditry, rape and illicit drug marketing is predominant. With the increase in these anti-social and humane menace in the society, there is a relapse in the numbers of youth in the society due to a clamp down on the youth by security agencies such as the Nigerian Police Force, Nigerian Securities and Civil Defence Corps, Nigerian Immigration, Nigerian Army and Navy. In all this, how can Christian families and church organizations assist in combating these heinous crimes in the Nigerian society?

### **Role of Christian Family in Combating Youth Restiveness**

The Greek word *oikos* when translated in English ensues as family or household (W.E. Vine 225). The family is the basic social unit in the society. It is the centre for the transmission of basic cultural norms and societal values held by a given people from one generation to another. Ekeopara asserts that, “the family is one of the strongest socio-political institution from which all public life emerged. Life began and ended in the family” (43). While Haralambos and Heald assert that the family is the cornerstone of the society (325), Amamkpa writes that:

It is in the family that the foundation of national life is laid. It is in the family that the seeds of love, self-denial, truth, courtesy, honesty, self-help and cooperation are sown. If the seeds are germinated in the home, transplanted in the school, and trimmed in the church, the state will expect good fruit (45).

The importance of the family to the society made secular ethicists of the Greco-Roman society to consider the stability of the city-state as solely dependent upon the responsible management of the household. In view of the above, like Apostle Paul did adopt Onesimus into his family, ideal Christian homes could as a matter of urgency adopt youth who may have lost their sense of reasoning as a result of peer pressure, youth restiveness or disengagement with their parents and make them feel a sense of belonging by using the holy scriptures to daily impact their lives positively. Apostle Paul while in house arrest used the holy scriptures to transform the life of Onesimus, thus he who was once useless became useful (v.11). The holy scriptures have a transforming effect on people whose heart are open to it. The effectiveness of Paul’s ministry on Onesimus through his adoption and consequent use of the holy scripture necessitated his developmental strides which was so rapid that he later became the second bishop of Ephesus after Timothy. According to Falaiye, after Samuel Ajayi Crowther was liberated from the slave traders, he was adopted by the Crowther family who also initiated the idea of his schooling. It is worthy of note that Samuel Ajayi Crowther became the first African bishop in West Africa (440). Corroborating to this view, W.O. Wotogbe-Weneka in revealing one of the ways in which morality is enforced/induced in the Ikwerre traditional religion asserts that young ones are formally sent to live in the homes of people (relations/friends) who are well known for their impeccable character and integrity for months sometimes years for mentoring. The purpose of the action is to imbibe moral integrity of such personalities on the young ones (145-146). Accordingly, Christian families can curb youth restiveness in Nigeria by deliberately and willingly adopting youth who may have fallen short of societal norms and consciously deciding to liberate and rehabilitate such ones using the holy scriptures in addition to their practical living of such virtues being taught to the youth.

### **Role of Church Organizations in Combating Youth Restiveness**

Church organizations as a veritable instrument for the propagation of the gospel of Christ (Matthew 28:18-20) can enhance the curb of youth restiveness in Nigeria. This is achievable through the building of rehabilitation centres where sound morality and vocational skills could be taught thereby enabling the youth to attain faith in God and eventually turning them into useful members of the society. The establishment of rehabilitation centres could enhance the promotion of ethical standard, assist in the impartation of vocational skills. This is in line with D.B. Usman assertion that “The Church must de-emphasize concentration of resources on gigantic edifices and look outwards by embarking on charity ventures to reach out or address the problems of the needy and the homeless street boys and girls in the African societies” (259). John questions “But whoever has this world’s good, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? (1 John 3:17). Church organizations could also establish prison ministry with the aim to bring youth who have been found culpable of crimes and consequently incarcerated into the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, supporting them spiritually, physically and materially while in prison and after their release. This is in addition to offering legal counsel/ assistance to secure their release especially the repentant ones and also assisting in their medical upkeep.

## **VI. CONCLUSION**

The paper examined adoption as exemplified by apostle Paul on Onesimus who was a runaway slave of Philemon. With the principle of adoption, Onesimus who was once declared useless was rehabilitated and found

useful. Hence, having enumerated myriads of anti-social and anti-human activities masterminded by Nigerian youth in the society, the paper strongly advocates the principle of adoption to ideal Christian families and church organizations as a strategy to combating youth restiveness in Nigeria. The paper maintains that if the principle of adoption is emulated by Christian families and church organizations with great vigour and passion, it would definitely result in positive effects of recovery many youths in the Nigerian society with regards to helping them realize their latent potentials especially on those who have become societal nuisance.

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