

# The Aim of Philosophy of Religious Education in a Pluralist Society (Nigeria as an Example)

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## Abstract

The major aim and leitmotif of this paper is to highlight the Nigerian society and its diverse, multi-cultural and pluralist composition – a society which has experienced in the last fifty years, and is still experiencing fantastic and tremendous signs of growth in democracy, but which is also almost unsure of the right path and the correct decision to make to attain the expected height in all facets of national development, especially education as it relates to religious awareness. Apart from the observable and undeniable general educational backwardness, there is a huge lacuna in the area of dialogical encounter between the various ethnic, cultural, and religious groups constituting the country as a nation. Even the academia and the law enforcement agencies seem not actually well-prepared for the task of enlightening and guiding the populace on how to live together in a pluralist society like Nigeria. Pluralism should not be understood to mean godlessness or irreligiosity. On the contrary, this is because Nigerians are deeply religious. Rather, in the language of Martin Buber, there is a complete failure of the fundamental principle of the dialogical encounter based on the “I-Thou” relationship of considering each other as human persons. There is a failure of this principle, not only in relation to adults and communities, but especially in its relationship to the education of the child and the youth who constitute the future leaders of the society. This paper will consider the possible causes of this great lack in the proper education of the child and the youth in Nigeria, as well as proffering possible suggestions and solution as a way forward. The paper seeks a philosophical basis for the development of education in Nigeria because of the perennial adage which states that philosophy is the teacher of life (*Philosophia vitae magistra est*).

**Keywords:** Philosophy, Religion, Education, Pluralist Society, Nigeria

## 1. Introduction

Different philosophers, schools of philosophical thought and social scientists, etc have endeavoured at various points in history to explain the aim of education – generally or contextually. Not long, Graham Haydon argued that “the phrase, ‘aims of education’, at its most general, is a way of referring to whatever it is that educators try to achieve, or should try to achieve, when they undertake education as a deliberate activity” (Haydon, G. 1996:11-12). Describing it as a science, M. Hollis further opined that it helps people to act, and for the most part, rationally (Hollis, M. 1996:34). To crown it, he maintained that the social sciences depend, for instance, on the accomplishment of this peculiar aim of education. By extension, I would say that almost every aspect of science is rooted on this aim of developing the human mind. G. Haydon and M. Hollis could be said to be re-echoing what so many great thinkers had emphasized before them one of whom was John Dewey (1859-1952) who stated that education as such has no aims, but that it is the people involved in education, teachers and others, who have aims (Dewey, J. 1963:20). John Dewey’s position in educational development has impacted greatly on its planning and execution by most countries of the world, majority of which are regarded today as developed nations, and rightly so. These countries had aims and had accomplished them in the course of time. This is where questions arise for Nigeria and so many other developing countries who seem to relegate educational and its proper planning to the background, however, not without unbearable consequences on the child and the youth of their countries. It is on account of these negative attitudes to the education of a child that J. Dewey further emphasized that the long-term developmental consequences of such experiences can be described as miseducative, especially if it has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience. The particular situation of Nigeria cannot but be properly fitted into this category. What do we do? I am of the opinion that education should be aimed at channeling a great deal of our innate talents and material resources to the advancement of humanity.

## 2. The Central Problem of every Education

If we are to take what John Dewey said above seriously, then it becomes important to agree with him that any bad experience on its own part and merit may be immediately enjoyable but in the long run promotes the formation of a slack and careless attitude, which operates to modify the quality of subsequent experiences. The effect is that, it or rather, a cumulation of such experiences prevent a person from getting out of them what they have to give. That is why also the central problem of an education based on experience is to select the kind of present experiences that live fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experiences. Since the aim of this paper is to study the Nigerian situation and her own experience of education, we can already deduce from the foregoing what type of experience the whole educational sector has been having, and its possible impact on the leaders of

tomorrow. What is an average child's experience of education and intellectual formation in Nigeria? What are its prospects in the face of such experiences? The experience of an average child in Nigeria, probably, is how to grasp, explain, and realize (Haydon, G & Orchard, J. 2004:149) the type of education offered it by her leaders; and even by the parents. Since contexts differ, I believe that the context of education and its planning in Nigeria should put into consideration its multi-cultural setup and composition. It is a consideration that would not neglect dialogical encounter – of which I have chosen Martin Buber's model- without grave consequences. Our model of education should be existential in nature.

### **3. Contextual Problems:**

#### **3.1 A fundamental dissatisfaction abound**

If I should be honest to the prevailing situation in Nigeria with regard to education, I must admit from the onset that there is a fundamental dissatisfaction (Ryan, J. 2004:21) in the present educational system – one to which a deep philosophical attention is needed for a better future educational programme for its citizens and humanity as whole. The dissatisfaction referred to, seems mostly to be rooted in the fact that most of the educational policies – though framed in wonderful words and phrases – portray a deep sense of lack of personal touch and consideration. The whole context of the human being and his dignity are not adequately represented. A sheer glance at the classrooms and school environments in most of the schools – from primary to university levels – can testify to this observation. Perhaps, some private schools and institutions are showing a great leap from the seeming status quo of stagnation and backwardness.

Coupled to the infrastructural impasse, there is the poor relationship between teachers and pupils. Teaching a child to grow has something to do with passion and interest. In fact, to teach successfully, a teacher must reach his students affectively and socially. But how can a teacher achieve this feat when his own welfare is not put into consideration by the government or the appropriate authority. No one gives what he has not – *nemo dat quod non habet* a Latin adage says. It is indisputable that an average child focuses favourably on the academic material presented to him after these mentioned emotional and social needs are taken care of. There is also no doubt that proper learning can be stimulated when instructional activities reach students/pupils through positive feelings. No teacher or student would be easily convinced of the preparedness of his government to promote education when students are charged high tuition fees while the teachers are not well paid or remunerated at the end of the month. The motivation would obviously not be there to carry out intellectual activities. If done, then it would be very disorderly or incomplete. Again, the whole issue revolves around the proper recognition of the dignity of the teacher and the person taught.

#### **3.2 Rejection of moral and religious values –growing tide of atheism**

If education is taken to be holistic, as it is intended by this paper, then what is most important is not just the intellectual development of the pupil or student involved. It also implies taking his dignity into consideration. This means that his welfare and fulfillment become the ends that education must serve, and not simply the means to some more ultimate goal, or a supposed higher goal – material wealth, fame, any other vain glory. In fact, the goal of education must be the advancement and well-being of learners and community of which they are an integral part (Ryan, J. 2004:21). The Vatican II Council Fathers declared, “true education is directed towards the formation of the human person in view of his final end and the good of that society to which he belongs and in the duties of which he will, as an adult, have a share” (Gravissimum Educationis, 1965:1). Unfortunately, there is a growing tide of atheism which has not spared any part of the world, casting doubt on the traditional image of man and of the world, as well as rejecting religion and moral values. In the long run, advance in science impedes the promotion of human progress and dignity (Ratione habita, 1967).

#### **3.3 Lack of a conducive environment for mutual co-existence and poor leadership**

Contextually, Nigeria provides a suitable environment for the consideration of the proper aim of philosophy of education in a pluralist or multi-cultural society. Considering its own peculiar situation, one can argue that the place of dialogical encounter takes a pride of place. This involves a drastic reversal of the negative trend in human relationship in the country which has been built into the psyche of the teeming youthful population. The new trend advocated here involves the break down of artificial curtains and barriers based on ethnicity and religion. This is also where Christianity and Islam as world religious bodies should play a very important role. When the self-esteem of every pupil is upheld without bias or prejudice then they would be propelled to carry out genuine dialogue, especially interreligious dialogue. My opinion is informed by the fact that the more one can relate, the more comfortable and relaxed one's prospect is and will become. Trust becomes a major ingredient of human development and well-being.

Incessant religious conflict in Nigeria is a very big challenge for the over 150 million Nigerians, both home and abroad. No year passes without the country registering one ugly incident of religious uprising or the other. As I am writing this paper, the month of July 2010 has witnessed a brutal relationship between Christians

and Muslims in the local Government of Wukari where citizens have co-habited for decades as brothers and sisters. But the irony of this breakdown of law and order is attributed to a no less personality than a senior police officer who should have maintained peace and harmony. According to *The News Magazine* (vol.35,no.03, 26 July, 2010:25), “though communities in Wukari Local Government Area, since its creation in 1976 have engaged in series of bloody battles with their Tiv neighbours in Benue State and nomadic Fulani cattle rearers, skirmishes in Wukari, ..., have not been religion-inspired”. In other words, religion had until the recent anomaly been the cord of unity and mutual co-existence.

It is a well-known fact that “most families in Wukari comprise Muslims and Christians in almost equal proportion” (The News, *ibid.*). This means that the two communities have had, as it may, a seemingly unwritten peace accord since almost thirty-four years, which unexpectedly was broken on 13 July, 2010 when members of both religions rose against each other in arms, killing and burning houses.

One thing is amazing in this incident which has attracted my interest to cite it for our lesson and evaluation. As already mentioned, “the trouble in Wukari started in early July, when the newly posted Police Area Commander in the community, Mohammed Mustapha, an Assistant Commissioner, decided to build a mosque on the premises of the Area Command at Wukari” (The News, *ibid.*). It sounds ridiculous, if not ludicrous, that a trained police officer has allowed his religious idiosyncrasy to override his supposed function of keeping law and order. It becomes more interesting to note that such a person was allowed to reach such a rank in the police force in a pluralist country like Nigeria. A police officer who should be calling people and individuals to order refused to heed to the pleas of the Christian youth and the traditional ruler in the area to suspend his fanatical action in a hitherto peaceful community. His obstinacy and obduracy led to the loss of ten lives while he fled the place for his dear life. In this religious extremism, one observes the police officer’s craze or the value of his own life – a selfishness and amorality of the highest order.

It is not exactly one year since the Boko Haram incident gave Nigeria another stamp of intolerance, disorder, and brutality (cf. Daily Sun, 10 August, 2009; Sunday Punch August 1, 2010; TELL no.37 September 20, 2010). We recall how another religious fundamentalist and extremist, Mohammed Yusuf (1970-2009) misled a lot of young people into picking arms and engaging themselves in wanton destruction and lunaticism. He claimed that his goal was to fight the influence of western education in the Nigerian society, himself being a graduate and product of western education and training. Almost 1000 lives was lost.

### **3.4 Lack of an adequate programme of character training**

I am convinced that an educational philosophy based on the famous existential principle of “I-Thou” relationship in Nigerian public and private schools would help to raise a new generation of leaders in various fields of human endeavours by training them in the proper methodology which emphasizes character in the society. If the aforementioned two persons – Mohammed Mustapha and Mohammed Yusuf – had understood this principle in their various formative years, perhaps, they would not have engaged themselves in the ugly business of letting blood flow like a dirty river on the streets of Nigerian towns and cities. It would not be an exaggeration to claim that good character becomes necessary in this context because it is central to the attainment of personal and societal development, as well as moral and intellectual growth.

The two incidents mentioned above are aimed at inviting and helping young people particularly to see each other as creatures of God, in which case, discrimination on the basis of religion or any other barrier or mindset would be minimized, if not completely eradicated. Here, three categories can be made: a) the categories which emphasise aims having to do with the realization of qualities that are seen as intrinsically good; b) aims having to do with promoting the good of the individual; and c) aims having to do with a good society. All gear towards the development of constructive values and attitudes (Kohlberg, L. 1981:9).

### **4. Corruption**

No objective and realistic discourse about Nigeria can be made without mentioning the most corrosive and prevalent scourge in the society at large – corruption. But corruption as a concept would have not much meaning for us as a people. It is corruption engraved in the veins and arteries of the segments of the society that gives it an exceptional importance in relation to Nigeria. For the proper realization of the type of educational revolution of character which I am advocating, we must be bold to acknowledge that Nigeria is endemically corrupt. A society becomes corrupt when the members and its fundamental parts no longer hold together. In a country of immense variety and diversity like Nigeria, corruption arises when there is a lack of the consciousness of unity and feeling of togetherness. It is like a house divided against itself, which would eventually crumble (cf. Mk.3:24-26; Mtt.10:21-22; 36-38; Mtt.12:25-26; Mtt.24:9-10; Lk.11:17-18; Lk.12:51-53; Lk.21:16-19). It is rooted in selfishness and lack of consideration for each other, for the common good, etc. If Nigerians are deeply religious as already indicated above, which I believe is the case, there should be a re-thinking in relation of what the Christian Bible and the Muslim Qur’an admonish separately. In Surah 9:47 and 30:41, Allah registers his disgust over corruption. The Qur’an goes further to identify corruption with mischief (cf. Surah 7:74; 11:85;

26:183; 29:36).

The mischief associated with disunity and selfishness leads to greed – the urge to grab everything and anything that is available for the purpose of taking advantage over others. It is this pervading spirit of divisiveness that calls for the effort to pursue a rigorous educational revolution for the aspects of society including religious understanding between one another. Such a revolutionary trend, which should be rational, would have the mission of inculcating leadership attributes of discipline and diligence into the teaming youth of the society. There is no doubt that such a clear and compelling philosophy of excellence embedded within a multicultural mission framework of education would ultimately aim at breaking away from regimented learning to integrative and life-applicable learning.

Corruption and Greed are closely related because wherever you find one, the other is around to make its impact. So many politicians and civil servants in Nigeria see the opportunity to serve in these categories as avenues to rip off the nation. In fact, they milk the national treasury dry. There is little to show that they have the interest of the nation at heart. The Federal Law-makers are already known to pass Bills which enable them to pay themselves a lot of money while poverty pervades the nation. It is an outrage when compared with what obtains in the developed countries of the world like America and Great Britain. Professor Itsejuwa Sagay, a renowned legal practitioner and public affairs analyst makes an astonishing revelation, describing as embarrassing and outrageous the discrepancy between the salaries of Nigerian Federal lawmakers and their American and British counterparts. Whereas a Federal lawmaker in Nigeria takes an official annual salary of \$1.7 million, that of an America and British lawmaker is \$174,000 and \$64,000 respectively. The difference becomes most disheartening when we compare the income per capital of the three countries: in the USA, it is \$46,350; United Kingdom, \$35,468; and Nigeria records a low income per capita of \$2,249 (Daily Sun, July 28, 2010:8). In the light of this, it becomes impossible to instill a life of discipline in the young people whose ambition would be how to enter politics and make material fortune.

### **5. Kidnapping**

Those who cannot achieve their dream of acquiring wealth through politics and pen-robbery would go into other forms of crime like kidnapping and murder. What a grave consequence for the whole society. What started as a joke in the Creeks of the Niger Delta where Foreign Nationals working with the Oil Industries were targeted as an expression of their dissatisfaction with the Government's negligence of the area later evolved into a widespread malaise for the entire Nigerian society. It has disrupted the whole security system of the polity. It is one of the clearest signs of the failure in education and general upbringing of children and young people in Nigeria.

### **6. Lack of Discipline and Order**

Discipline is a major prerequisite of order and proper organization. No society survives without. No society remains stable for a long time without it. Obviously, the educational goal of any society suffers greatly under a situation of indiscipline and disorder. In the last decade, the country and the educational sector has been hijacked and terribly disrupted by the activities of secret societies and cultism in general. There is no university that is spared of this obnoxious militancy and violence rooted in terror. One hardly finds any undiluted genuine student-body in the tertiary institutions in the country. These dangerous groups are used to settle scores with either fellow students or with lecturers. In the long run, there is little or no trust, which is a fundamental condition for a harmonious academic work. Indiscipline has led to the enthronement of examination mal-practices.

### **7. Drug-trafficking/Addiction**

In the prevailing situation of disorder and confusion, many students and young people in general have taken to drug-trafficking and consumption of hard drugs (cocaine, Indian hemp, opiates, injection drugs, etc) without any sense of shame and consideration for the future outcome. Involvement in the use of hard drugs has led to various diversionary behavioural tendencies and abnormalities. We know that these dangerous drugs affect both the immune functions and the clinical outcomes of the individuals concerned. Most young mothers are affected adversely during pregnancy, and invariably the innocent babies in the womb. Despite the Shariah in some parts of the North, drug addiction and trafficking is carried out at an alarming rate. In other words, drug addiction has become a pestilence, especially for the youth – the future of the nation. Describing the situation in Kano alone, The *News Magazine* of 19 July, 2010 writes, "Kano's reputation as a commercial city and centre of Islamic learning is blighted by widespread use of illicit drugs on its streets" (vol. 35, no. 02, p.16). It is a practice that has made the street and Refuse Sites the home of reckless young men and women. In this city alone, a myriad of illegal drugs abound: 1)Roka, 2)Borum Burum, 3)Gedegi (looks like a tea herb), 4)Hankufa, 5)Arungumi Zaki 6)Kashin Kadangare (lizard dung), 7)Benylin with Codeine, 8)Anafrolin, 9)Pamolol, 10)Chinese capsule, 11)Kwaya, 12)Kwaya mebile, 13)ICD Tablet etc (The News, vol.35:2, 2010:24). Most of the young people who are involved in drug addiction and trafficking are connected with armed robbery and other deviant behaviours.

Sometimes the efforts of the National Drug Law and Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) are frustrated while at other times, some of their officers act as accomplices in the promotion of drug addiction and drug trafficking.

### 8. The 419 Plague

Perhaps, this is the highest and the greatest scourge that is menacing the Nigerian society presently. It is an art of deception and fraud aimed at obtaining money from their rightful owners by pretence. It is rooted in dishonesty and maneuver, sometimes involving the use of charms and force or threat. Nigeria has acquired a very notorious image in the last decade for this unconventional way of getting rich and attaining fame in the society. The “419” Syndrome has expanded its tentacles to the international community where unsuspecting investors are lured into Nigeria and defrauded of their money. The majority of those used to perpetrate this act are young people – unemployed, neglected, and sometimes, lured into the unwholesome business themselves. The “business” of 419 advances in method and strategy with each unfolding day – from direct persuasion and oratory to the sophisticated use of the internet or the Cybercafe. The most recent method is what is described as the “Yahoo Plus” or “The New 419”. It is described as “an improvement on former cyber crime methods” and “the latest fad among unscrupulous Nigerian youths” (The News, vol.35, no.3, 26 July, 2010:18).

### 9. Suggestion/Recommendation

Every educational principle, policy and practice should be assessed according to its quality – high on merit and low on malpractices. Role models are needed by different communities to grow and succeed. They should be inspiring figures of integrity and moral values.

Good leadership is important for the promotion of qualitative education and good governance, especially one that would ensure a dialogical relationship of tolerance, friendship, and love among the various ethnic and religious groups in Nigeria. It would not be an exaggeration to claim and argue that the future of any society, especially a complex one like Nigeria lies in the hands of prudent and creative leaders.

But it is not to be forgotten that the attainment of great heights in any endeavour or enterprise is not without challenges. The seeming and greatest challenge in Nigeria as a multicultural society is how to serve the people to make them realize that they all belong to a large family called Nigeria, irrespective of cultural, linguistic, and political differences.

Nigeria needs a humble leadership devoid of the flamboyance and extravagance of material wealth. The yardstick for measuring character in Nigeria should exceed the prevailing situation of outward arrogance called wealth.

The age-long values of integrity and honesty should be re-appraised in the culture of our country, especially the leadership. Without it, the dark tunnel of planlessness, or even improper planning of society, especially in the area of qualitative education would continue to have a priority of place in the country.

A little analogical picture would help us to understand what is intended here. The Nigerian National Football Team (male) is a point of reference. Therein abound individual talents who never make much progress in international tournaments because of lack of cohesion and collective will to succeed. Disorder prevents Nigeria at every important soccer engagement from advancing to the next round. Looking into the profiles of most our private businessmen and women, one notices a huge avalanche of talents and pedigree which the country never harnesses for her own progress and development due to selfishness, greed, and non-patriotism.

To combat corruption in the country, as major factor of distortion in every sector of the society, we have to acknowledge its presence and decide to root it out completely. Here, the wise advice of Abraham Lincoln in a Speech of June 16, 1858 would be *ad rem* to our situation. In this speech aimed at convincing Americans about the need for a unity of purpose, he said, “if we could first know where we are, and whither we are tending, we could better judge what to do, and how to do it” (Lincoln, A. June 16, 1858). In a heterogeneous society like Nigeria, a major philosophy of change should be service-based and value-driven, open and dialogical. A curriculum based on dialogical relationship because of the special nature of Nigeria would be one designed to promote human development, provide functional and qualitative education, which are in turn life-applicable, practice-oriented, holistic and integrative (Lesch, W., 1993:110). Others who have emphasized similar views include J. Rawls (1988); A. Gutmann (1993); J. Waldron (1995). They have all recognized and upheld the idea of an adequate and philosophy of education that builds up an integral society, especially where it is unique and diversified.

With regard to Drug Combat in the country, it is important for all sectors of the society to combine efforts to fight it and its perpetrators, ranging from village heads, ward heads, community leaders to the police and the NDLEA. Above all, qualitative education for all must be enforced for children and young people. When this is done, it would be very difficult for the young people to be deceived into deviant behavioural tendencies. Moreover, the Legislative bodies – state and federal – should enact effective laws to discourage people from engaging in illicit drug business. The sponsors, and in fact, the hidden hands behind drug business in the country should be fought courageously. The Enforcement agencies can only achieve this feat by avoiding bribery. This

entails also that the government should pay the officers enforcing the Drug laws very well.

## 10. Conclusion

The basic point to observe in any statement on the aim of a philosophy of religious education in a pluralist society like Nigeria is a well-oriented pedagogy, which, for me, elaborates the relationship between teacher and student. This is a truism testified to by the age-long saying that learning is as old as history. Thus, Socrates admonished his students/pupils that an unexamined life is not worth living, a statement that remains valid today for any valid philosophy of education, especially in religion. In other words, education cannot lose its value as a process whereby an individual routinely and regularly questions the very roots of his self-knowledge, with the goal of creating a total individual, a complete person, a renewed society. It is an education, even for the ancient Greeks that goes beyond phenomenal knowledge alone, bearing in mind the fact that an individual is an amalgam of physical, spiritual and intellectual excellence.

Taking cognizance of the special emphasis on dialogue, between religions and persons, I strongly advocate that the recognition of each individual as a “Thou” (in the language of Martin Buber) in a dialogical relationship of ‘I-Thou’ is integral in any philosophy of religious education if a student should be really treated as a unique person with respect and love. The same approach should be reciprocated to the teacher from the part of the student. Here, mutual respect forms an integral part of any genuine philosophy of pedagogy. It is a method and process, which promotes the fact that every student should be taught how to learn and how to think with openness and sincere encounter. This process becomes realisable where a student is treated as an extension of the instructor himself. It is what makes education more than a process in which a student learns how to learn. In other words, the student and the instructor strive towards self-improvement through mutual interaction and exchange.

Thus, following the Socratic injunction for a continuous examination of one’s life, knowledge should be unfolded through a clever dialogue of question and answer, and by a process of imposition, whereby a teacher or instructor should be skilful in pulling knowledge from the student because the latter has also knowledge. He is not a *tabula rasa*. To acknowledge and promote this method and process of education is to recognize and accept its predication on trust and mutual respect. On the contrary, Cicero’s admonition that the authority of those who teach is often an obstacle to those who want to learn might be justified in any given situation or context when they fail to affect or impact the society positively and dynamically.

Going beyond Nigeria, the global society requires a broader outlook on issues concerning mutual co-existence of peoples and cultures. This means that the purpose of education, especially based on the dialogical principles on any multicultural society, like Nigeria in Africa, or Canada and the United States of America, in North America is to produce individuals who strive for excellence for themselves, their peers, and for their larger community. This is what makes a total individual and a better society, which enables a student, and in fact every individual to enter life with the valuable lesson that they can make a lot of difference. With the thought that they have been treated and taught with respect, students could later communicate with others, especially their peers for the development of the community where they live.

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**Fee Payment**

F20: Sender's Reference

AB/INV15S059452

F23B: Bank Operation Code

CRED

F32A: Value Date/Currency/Interbank Settled Amount

Date:1510302015 Oct 30

Currency:USDUS DOLLAR

Amount:160,00#160,00#

F50K: Ordering Customer - Account - Name and Address

Account:/0700242470

Name and Address:ISIDORE UCHECHUKWU NWANAJU

EBONYI STATE UNIVERSITY ABAKALIKI E

F53B: Sender's Correspondent - Party Identifier - Location

Party Identifier:/36145826

F57A: Account With Institution - Party Identifier - Identifier Code

Identifier Code:HSBCHKHHKHHONGKONG AND SHANGHAI BANKING CORPORATION LIMITED, THE

(ALL HK OFFICES AND HEAD OFFICE)

HONG KONG HK

F59: Beneficiary Customer - Account - Name and Address

Account:/848480281838

Name and Address:POD SERVICE LIMITED

F70: Remittance Information

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