

RE-HUMANIZING HUMANITY: REVISITING THE MORAL FABRIC OF THE HUMAN PERSON

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Abstract

Moral decadence has permeated almost all facets of human endeavour in our contemporary society, and as a result, has raised issues of moral concern in the body of literature, social media and public debates. The entire constituents of the human moral structure have been wrecked by inordinate quest to eke out a living in a malaise society. The contemporary African society is one that is predicated on the negated relativist (subjectivist), hedonist, eudemonist and humanist world views and other forms of philosophical interpretations of moral values on the one hand, and in another hand, a lop-sided conception of technology, civilization and learning that are anchored on physical development, materialism and market driven economy at expense of good moral values, good character orientation and attitudinal development. In effect, these negated interpretations of the concepts of development, morality, technology, civilization and learning and their agencies have compounded and ruined almost anything that has to do with the moral aspect of the human person. Given this anomie, this paper takes recourse to revisit the moral fabric of the human person and to re-examine the interpretations of these concepts with the view to showing how they and what they represent have led to the damage done to the foundation of human moral values. The paper further highlights points such as interdisciplinary approach, enthronement of value orientation, living philosophy, positive indoctrination, compulsory teaching of morals, as some of the ways to rebuild the broken foundation of human moral values in order to re-humanize the personhood in our contemporary times. The approach of this discussion will be essentially expository and analytical.

Key terms: Re-humanizing, humanity, moral fabric, human person, development, materialism, moral values orientation.

Introduction

The moral fabric of the human person (the personhood) has been affected to the point of decadence owing to such factors as the subjectivist/relativist views and various other philosophical interpretations of the concepts of morality; the misinterpretation of the concept of civilization, progress and development; and pursuit of means of livelihood in a socio-economic system predicated on modern technology, materialism and market

economic system. This shows that the ways and manners modern civilization (development) has been conceived and pursued have meted danger to the personhood and the society. This is evident in moral decadence in the high and low places: in politics, religion, economy, custom and culture and in fact, in all spheres, structures and institutions of the society. The decadence has not only dehumanized the personhood, but has also derailed and disorganized the totality of human person and the society. The society is morally, politically, socially, religiously and culturally organic. What happens to the individual affects the society and vice versa. The moral fabric has been damaged and the human person has therefore fallen in debris. To rediscover, restore and reposition the human person to his dignity, there is the utmost need to revisit his moral fabric in order to find out how the damage is done. Thus this article will show that a revisit of the moral fabric of the human person is core to re-humanizing (humanity). In this respect, the paper will attempt to discuss the vantage place of the human person and the idea of his moral fabric; the factors considered as responsible for the dehumanization and the effects of civilization and its agencies on the human person; and, the measures to check and re-humanize the moral aspect of the human person.

The Vantage Place of Human Person (Personhood) and his Moral Fabric:

Since the time of Socrates, attention of philosophy has shifted from the physical world to man or the human person with the maxim 'man know thyself'. This has given rise to personality philosophy. The personality philosophers see the human person as transcending nature. Man becomes conceived as the centre piece of society and measure of all things (Protagoras). The output of science and technology are packaged to meet the needs of man. Man gives them meaning. Also, Man's activities can either make or mar them. One important aspect of man is his mind and will and this is evident in man's dual capacity to do or follow either the right or wrong path. When the mind and the will are not well directed, man misapplies his ambivalence and becomes antithetical to one-self, to follow man, to society and to his environs (economically, politically and culturally) through unauthentic living. Another characteristic of the human person is that he is seen to possess an inviolable dignity, an inalienable liberty and an inescapable moral responsibility. These have been enshrined in the laws. Given his vintage position, the primary focus of societal development ought to be the development of the personhood. In giving credence to the primary place of man in the society and in all spheres of national development, Joseph Omeregbe says that authentic development in any nation can only mean primarily the development of the human person and that this consists mainly in the development of his mind and will (197). The development of the will and mind includes, according to Omeregbe, the training of mind to see things critically and to seek the meaning and intelligibility of things. This is as an important aspect of the development of the human person. Critical approach to issues which philosophy intends to create (in man) helps the human person to acquire right sense of judgement, right sense of value and the right attitude to things (197). Again, another very important aspect of the human personality is his moral being. The human moral being is pre-requisite and

therefore a *condition-sine-qua-non* for the development of a nation. Moral development must precede the economic and all modern technological developments. Development in science and technology without moral development would be sheer farce as they cannot develop a country if the citizens are morally bankrupt. Moral development will entail uprightness, decent living, right sense of judgement, sense of duty and responsibility and also be devoid of official corruption, self-interest, embezzlement of public fund, break down of law and order, and so on. Thus society exists in tandem with the morality of the human person. Without morality, anti-social acts will mount supreme and the society will be defective and dysfunctional. In Nigeria for instance, because of the high rate of immorality in the country, the presence and benefits of technology and economic development are not even felt by the citizens as they do not impart positively to the lives of the citizens. Rather, technology and its consequent market economy have egged on materialism and sharpened the throat of corruption in the bid by citizens to eke out a living. So, morality is an integral (intrinsic) attribute that makes man distinct from other mammals. Other mammals are amoral. Morality is also intricately related to reason or rationality. Man *qua* man is chiefly located in his intertwined moral nature and reason. Another very unique attribute of man is that man has soul. Morality and reason are the chief components of man's soul. Soul is the self-conscious life that makes man distinct. The soul inhabits reason, morality, emotions, desires and affections. Now implicit in morality is freewill and the burden of responsibility. So man as a free moral agent is held responsible or liable and accountable for his choice and actions. Morality depicts right sense of judgement, rightness of action and duty, accountability and probity. Morality is thus the soul consciousness of right and wrong, good and evil. Again, man has the moral right to choose either to do right or to do wrong. Man's moral freewill makes him to direct the dual aspect of his ambivalence. A man is said to be immoral or morally depraved when he departs or deviates from the sense of morality and this deviation is a denigration of the dignity of man and the human person. Furthermore, morality supposes man to behave in an orderly manner: to obey and comply with rules or codes of human conduct; to maintain decent means of livelihood and acquire wealth in accordance with the laid down principles of acquisition and entitlement; to respect human rights and regard the dignity of the human person; to regard/value life as sacred; to respect and appreciate societal values; to consider and respect the rights of others; to keep faith and tenets of mutual agreement; to do good and eschew evil; to cherish and value peaceful co-existence with others and so forth. When man contravenes these moral values, and does the contrary, there is bound to be dislocation of the human person and disorganization of the societal institutions that support and sustain man's existence. Deviation from the expected moral values dehumanizes man and affects society and its cherished institutions. One of the major challenges of contemporary society, therefore, is the moral wreck of the personhood. Corruption which has bedeviled the entire institutions of the Nigerian society and has retarded all development efforts is an expression of ruined morality of the Nigerian citizens.

Thus from the fore-going, it may be established that morality is a fabric of the personhood. In the universe of this discourse, the fabric of the human person include the ideals, culture, moral values, set of rules, code of conduct that form the person's orientation background and value appreciation. These constructs are socially determined. The daily life of any person in the society is socially determined by this set of rules and codes of conduct. Thus these rules and codes are strong holds of interpreting and evaluating the human behavior and appraising societal values. They hold the individuals together in all social interactions. Any affront shown to moral values will affect the entire structure of the society and the personhood. In Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Obierika underscored the binding strength of moral values and customs of the people and the implication of affront done to them by western civilization. Explaining this fact, Obierika says: "The white man (western civilization) has put knife (desecrated) on the things (cultural values) that held us together and the centre cannot hold and things fall apart" (141). Furthermore, a society or person that is raised on weak, decayed or desecrated moral foundation is likely to collapse or misbehave. This is to say further that strict adherence to moral values sustains the human person as well as the social system. Thus the human person becomes dehumanized when he loses sense of morality. In this situation, there is bound to be dishonesty, indecency, indiscipline, intolerance, killing and non-compliance with rules of human conduct. Consequently, there is bound to be corruption and illicit pursuit and acquisition of material wealth, leadership pathology, abuse of power, oppression and suppression, man's inhumanity to follow man, and other social vices. It follows therefore, that vices replace virtues in dehumanized personhood and the society. The point in contemporary Africa, particularly the Nigerian society, is that man has been dehumanized.

Factors Responsible for Devaluation of Moral Values of the Personhood:

1. Misconception about the Meaning of Progress and Development

The concepts of progress and development in modern civilization were misconstrued to mean physical material development and as a result deep ethical (spiritual) decline took root in western philosophical thought about development and progress. The conception of economic development is the material welfare of the citizens. For instance, in the view of Jeevan Thapa, the concerns of economic development is "a better society with modern amenities where individuals enjoy quantitatively higher life and a dignified nation committed to sustained and advanced standard of living for a longer period" (N.P). For Sheffrin Justus, nations will undertake activities, policies and processes that seek to "improve the economic, political and social well-being and quality of life of its people" (471). Similarly, for Ashley Dugger, "a country's economic development is usually indicated by an increase in citizen's quality of life. And quality of life is measured using the Human Development Index (HDI)" (N.P). Development is generally described, according to Wikipedia, from the point of view of various types of macro economic and social cultural indicators or indices used by economists and demographers to access the

relative economic advancement of a given country. These include: increase in Gross Domestic Product (GDP); income distribution; literacy and education; access to health care; social security and pension; modern transport; and so on (N.P). According to Albert Schweitzer, in his *Out of Life and Thought*, the very idea of development/civilization had become a will to progress in material and technological achievements that left aside the goal of ethically perfecting persons and society (153). In his *Philosophy of Civilization*, Albert Schweitzer makes the point that ethical ideal from great philosophers of the past had ceased to have any real meaning in the lives of contemporary citizens (41). As a result of the gap in the values and virtues, the economic and the material (social being) needs begin to determine social consciousness. The economy now replaces values as primordial means to give direction and meaning to the lives of the ordinary person. Thus, according to Schweitzer's *Philosophy of Civilization*, "the very souls of people have become entangled in the economic institutions now controlling their lives (18)". The quest for making a living has profound consequences on person identity and societal values. It has encouraged illicit and corrupt acquisition of material wealth with the support of the social system that accords regard to those who make living by all means fair and foul. Politics and other social institutions have necessarily followed the decadence. The overall implication is that the personhood, the society and its institutions are devalued and the expected development retarded. It follows therefore that civilization construed in terms of material progress and development in science and technology has done some harm to morality of the human person. There may be doubts that science has been beneficial to mankind (Rousseau).

There may be arguments that civilization and its outcomes have done more harm than good to mankind. It has been alleged that civilization has corrupted or aided in corrupting moral values, and creating inordinate quests for materialism, enslaved and dehumanized the personhood. It follows then that civilization has replaced virtues, virtuous men and moral entrepreneurs and thus morality has disappeared into oblivion. For instance, instruments and products of science and technology such as fire-arms/weapons have been mismanaged or misapplied by mankind and as such have led to arms-race/arms struggle, massive destruction of lives and property as well as intimidation of one nation by another stronger one. It is not worth to state in-to-to that civilization (development) is associated with dangers, evils and all immorality. It is truer to say that the civilization rather neglected or de-emphasized morality in its curriculum and programme and over emphasized material development/ technology at the expense of morality. The approach to civilization is lope-sided as morality is not placed at *pari-passu* with level of technology. This is the fundamental error in the structuring of technology in juxtaposition with morality. The average African is the worst hit in this respect. African philosophers such as Leopold Senghor maintained this point of view. In his *Negritude*, Senghor emphasizes the value of African culture and laments how it was suppressed by the European (western) culture. He eulogizes African culture and identity and their distinctive outlook on life quite different from the European values and culture.

European culture and value system, feelings and sentiments were the deciding factors in the structuring of the model of civilization/development. Western culture is fundamentally founded on individualism, capitalism and materialism whereas the African culture is founded on communalism and brotherhood. These two cultures and outlook of life are diametrically opposed. As a result of the over swaying hegemony and over-bearing of the European civilization and its attendant colonization, imperialism and neo-colonization, African culture and values that held the peoples of Africa together were consumed by the colonial policies of Assimilation, Association, Direct and Indirect Rule. These foreign systems affected the mindset and morality of the Africans and so endangered the moral fabric of Africans. The African has become a confluence man suffering from crisis of identity and relevance. He has become materialistic, individualistic and amasses wealth at the expense of the dictates of conscience and good moral values that are strange to Africans.

2. Relativist (subjectivist) Interpretation of Morality (its Implication for the Personhood):

Philosophy has raised moral issues that have affected the entire gamut of morality. Western education has led to relativist interpretation of moral values. Relativism argues from the subjective stand point that standards of moral values are relative, that is to say, that moral values vary with different cultural groups and even with different individual. What is sincerely regarded as good by one individual is with equal sincerity regarded as bad by others. This means that each individual or society has the impetus to define and decide what his moral values should be with no considerations to others. This interpretation has to some extent bequeathed an orientation of moral values that is subject to materialism. Relativist interpretation of moral values is the effect of offshoot of certain maxims such as social being determines social consciousness; pursuit/acquisition by all means fair or foul and so on. The interpretation is opposed to a universal/objective conception of morality. Subjectivist and relativist interpretation of moral values by philosophers is an attack to the idea of universal morality. An idealist mind set will define moral values from the stand point of what ought to be while a materialist mindset will define it from materialist point of view. Since the contemporary man and society have gone more of materialism and market economy and less of idealism, materialistic interpretation seem to go viral in the interpretation of moral values. From the view of relativism, according to Bucher Justus, the individual and the society are two factors that determine or define moral values. But the society's definition appears to be superior. However, the society's definition of moral values is not static. It varies and is further determined by economic situation, political situation, religion and culture of the society (157). Western civilization has bequeathed western values and standards of competitiveness, a success and achievement oriented individualism as a code of behavior. To the average African, the materialistic social value orientation is not only a western education but also an effect of western colonization. Thus the relative and

subjective interpretation of moral values colour the individual moral status. This interpretation of moral value further contributes to the de-humanization of moral values in Nigeria.

3. Interpretation of *Summum Bonum*:

One of the problems of moral personhood is the moral answer given to the question: what is man's 'summum bonum' - man's highest good? Hedonism advocated by Epicurus argues that pleasure activity is man's highest good. Rational eudemonism states that man's highest good is the search and pursuit for happiness. Theological Eudemonism advocated by theologian philosophers argues that the man's highest good is a longing for a state of affairs or mindset that cannot be realized in this life. It holds that ultimate fulfillment of man's deepest needs and longings lies beyond this mundane world and this life. It is divine, spiritual and celestial. Ethical Pluralism advocates by the 'maximization of all as the highest good for man. Apart from the theological eudemonism which seems to be spiritually minded and which ecstasy may restrain immoral behavior and stimulate cultivation of moral virtues to certain extent, the others pose challenges to good moral values. They erode the moral personhood. Epicureanism tends to emphasize excessive human pleasure or addiction to selfish desires or instant gratification as a norm for human existence. Selfish pleasure seeking is a virus that has eaten deep into the fabric of our contemporary times. These philosophical beliefs have succeeded in breaking the foundations of moral values.

4. The Doctrine of Humanism:

The doctrine of Humanism has made in-roads into the moral personhood. The driving force is the interest to liberate man and enrich him materially. Man's material interest rather than any other is considered the centre of human activities. Man's material interest is supreme. Whatever gives good feeling is acceptable. Humanism denies the bipolarity concept of material/spiritual, mind/body, earth/heaven, life-here/life here after. Its emphasis is materialism and material universe as provided by science. It does not accept supernatural view of reality. It shares a common doctrine with Epicureanism as it responds to pleasure and appetite. It sees man as not accountable to the divine for his actions. It appears that humanism de-emphasizes human morality for excessive pursuit of human material pleasure, interest, desire and satisfaction in this mundane world. Humanism is a philosophical belief that intends to make man a god to himself. It also exalts human needs problems and welfare above any other. It can be said of humanism that political or economic powers are sought for and used to exert man's influence and acquisition of material wealth.

Re-humanizing the Moral Fabric of the Human Person:

Now that the moral values of the human person and society have been destroyed or dehumanized, there is the need to rebuild it. Rebuilding/repositioning the ruined moral

aspect of the personhood is the concern of re-humanizing or re-humanization. It is the task this paper is set out to tackle and proffer solution to. Re-humanizing the personhood implies restoring the moral integrity of the citizenry. It intends to restore the dignity of the individual through right /proper enlightenment and taking recourse to his innate characteristics of reason and morality. It portends re-aligning the human mind/consciousness to the dictates of morality and reason. Thus it involves a concerted attempt to rehabilitate one's mind perception about things and its attendant consequence on behavior. According to Wikipedia, re-humanization is the "process by which one reverses the damage done by de-humanization" (N.P). The Garnege Council for Ethics in International Affairs expands the meaning of re-humanization further to mean the "restoration of human dignity and the re-assertion of the priority of humans above the systems originally intended to serve humanity" (N.P). In this case, it sees it as a transformation with the principle of universal regard and respect intended to conquer depravity by emphasizing the cultivation of moral etiquette, decency and so on. It is conceived that in dehumanization, economic factors are given primacy over ethical considerations in human behavior, decision-making of government and in almost all social interactions. The implication is that humans lose their dignity and morality in pursuit of material acquisition. In such a situation, economic or material factors are left unchecked by ethics and humans are dehumanized in the process of this invasion. Inordinate material acquisition and consideration of economic entities gain autonomy while humans lose their autonomy. Ethics gives way to materialism. Education, religion, politics, health, security and administration are now designed to equip citizens for gainful material acquisition rather than for moral virtues such as integrity, credibility, honesty, discipline, sense of duty and selfless service to humanity. The outcome therefore is the dehumanization of the human person.

Re-humanizing the fabric of the human person will intend to rebuild the broken foundation of moral values in our contemporary times. Drawing illustration from architecture/building construction, the fabric of a thing/building is the basic structure upon which it is built. The fabric of a thing in other words is the foundation or the things that hold other parts together in order for the other things to function appropriately. The vintage place of the foundation makes it irrational for a builder to construct a building without a firm/strong foundation. The foundation also determines the capacity and durability of any building. According to Merriam-Webster, the term fabric simply means "the basic or underlying structure or framework of something". It may also connote the foundation of something. According to Emma Obiorah, the foundation is the basis on which something depends, stands or rests. Foundation is the underground structure in a building supporting and holding the weight of that building. A foundation dictates the kind of structure that be built. A major characteristic of foundation is that it is hidden below, and not conspicuous (9). In our universe of discourse, morality and reason are intertwined in the fabric of the human person and societal existence. The point

that is being made here in drawing a connection between foundation of a building and moral values is that existential living of the individual and society can only sustain as much progress as morality can permit. Now the issue is that moral values that can build a sustainable development have deteriorated. Given the multi-dimensional problems such as leadership pathology, security compromise, corruption of the citadel of justice, rotten and collapsed body politic, systemic and endemic corruption, moral decadence and economic backwardness plaguing the African states, the importance of good moral value foundation cannot be over stressed or be undervalued. It is the role of this paper to recommend good foundation of moral values for a greater Nigeria and the ways to rebuilding the broken foundation of moral values for the human person.

Measures to Re-humanize the Moral Fabric of the Personhood:

The first attempt in re-humanizing is to admit the fact that there has been a progressively degrading of the personhood of the citizenry and that development of moral character and ethical agencies have been affected by the demands and pursuits of making a living in the contemporary materialistic and market oriented economy. Other attempts will be to reverse the dehumanization. This purports that to re-humanize the moral fabric of the human person, there must be a demonstration of an unflinching commitment to the enthronement of value orientation, moral rectitude and moral renaissance in the personhood of the citizenry. To this end, there should be a reform and a redefinition of the political, social and economic foundations of society as well as the re-orientation of the mindset of the citizens in order to achieve re-humanization. This is because these are the basic structures and institutions that have been de-humanized the personhood. It follows that there is need for re-orientation and re-ordering of social values. There is need to establish a set of values and ideals anchored on principle based lifestyle audacity, endurance factor, strong cultural values, sense of decent living, patriotism, education incentives, and so on. There is need for scholars to undertake an interdisciplinary approach to the problem. This is to tap, to articulate and inculcate a philosophy of life (living philosophy) that will assist citizens to deal with their lives as well as help them out of the quagmire of negated progress, development and civilization. The merit of well-articulated living philosophy is that it will be capable of raising moral entrepreneur who will be capable of inspiring others through the power of their moral character. Arguing in support to this point, Albert Schweitzer proposes the idea of “Reverence for Life” as a new universal ethic true for all people regardless of time, place, or cultural background that has emerged from the mystery of existence and founded on an elemental truth. In his *Reverence for Life*, he says that elemental truth (which is accessible to all immediately evident and intuitively confirmed) will be interpreted and re-interpreted over time and thus become “spiritually our own” (155). According to David Goodin, Schweitzer makes his proposal a two-part project. The first part seeks to satisfy rational thought and create through a critical philosophical and scientific inquiry into the basic truths of existence. This part is tailored toward formulating an academic /intellectual theory. The second part of the *Reverence for Life* project moves from an academic

theory to the lived experience of ethical personhood. That is to say, it seeks to harmonize the reason of rational thought with a person's heart. It attempts to create and substantiate a deep personal conviction in moral agency. It tends to raise moral consciousness and moral entrepreneurs. It aims to create an enlightened and deepened world view that informs and adds context for ethical decision, produces a disciplined and sublime character for a person which permits them to become ethically selfless and unconditionally altruistic individuals. It further aims to make people moral agents and to embed in them in a larger world view that is likely to unite all people, all cultures and all life as one (1-25). Thus, the outcome is that one morally polices oneself without being policed by any agency. With the two-part project, Schweitzer believes that reason and heart must work together if a true morality is to be established (112). In its totality, the idea of reverence for life is an attack on private and societal subjectivism as well as the relativist interpretation of moral values.

Another salient point that should not be neglected in the process of re-humanizing is a positive application of the tenets and values of indoctrination. The idea of indoctrination here is not used to connote violent extremism or religious fanaticism. It is not used with the intention to egg on ethnic prejudice or religious intolerance. The idea here connotes positive, pragmatic and radical inculcation of the truth and good moral values. It is a gradual and sustainable process of rearing, nurturing and instilling in children and remolding in adults the right moral virtues. It is the type of indoctrination that will distill the wrong moral values (such as the dangerous philosophies of hedonism/Epicureanism, eudemonism, humanism and Subjectivism) in order to achieve an internalized and autonomous morality. Internalized and autonomous morality implies to be law-abiding and responsible citizen, to protect and defend the core values of the society with patriotism. Nations like the Jews, institutions like the catholic and Islamic faiths, for instance, have adopted this strategy to pass their cherished ideals onto their adherents. They may be taken as apotheosis of indoctrination strategists. Dissemination of core moral values can also be done by churches, mosques, National orientation agencies and compulsory inclusion of these values into the curriculum of education institutions from nursery to the tertiary levels. The content of curriculum will de-emphasize materialism and emphasize decent living, dignity of labour (hard-work). It will give high premium and reward to role models in history.

Conclusion:

The outcome of this paper shows that there has been a progressively degrading of the personhood of the citizenry and that development of moral values and ethical agencies have been wrecked. This is alleged to have been caused by the misconception about civilization and development, demands and pursuits of making a living in the contemporary materialistic and market oriented economy, and the received western philosophical ideologies. The paper has advanced attempts that should be made to reverse the dehumanization. The paper believes that to re-humanize the moral fabric of

the human person, there must be first, an admittance of the fact that the human person has been dehumanized and, second, there should be a demonstration of an unflinching commitment to the enthronement of value orientation, moral rectitude and moral renaissance in the personhood of the citizenry through an interdisciplinary approach to moral issues, cultivation of reverence for life, living philosophy, positive indoctrination, inclusion into the curriculum of education and compulsory teaching of moral values in the education institutions and raising moral entrepreneurs. The church, the mosque, the Ministry of Education, National Orientation Agency, the traditional institutions and so on are to serve as facilitators of the inculcation of moral values to the citizens.

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