A Philosophical Examination of the Church and the State in the Development of the Human Person

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Abstract

This paper attempts to evaluate developmental lopsidedness especially between the "developed" and the "underdeveloped" in lieu of the development of the human person. It makes bold to assert that development is a holistic venture where all the components of the human person namely spiritual, moral and material dimensions have to be developed paripasu. This is in line with the African conception of the human person as a concuss of the spiritual, the moral and the material. Any of the components that is developed at the expense of the other brings developmental malaise as are currently in 'vogue' in Africa. It therefore places serious emphasis on the institutionalization of morality in the churches in such a way that humans will be doers and not hearers of religious teachings. The state therefore is supposed to take care of the material needs of the people while the church takes of the moral and spiritual needs of man. It surmises that it is only in this sense of proper, enhanced and balanced development of the human persona that virile development could be achieved.

Key Words: the church, the state, development and the human person

Introduction

Often times when we talk of development in Africa, emphasis is laid on material wellbeing of Africans and in relation to the industrialized societies. The industrialized world, also called the First World or the advanced world, is believed to be far ahead of Africa when we talk of development. For many scholars, therefore, the more we work hard to make Africa like the First world, the more developed Africa will be.

Unfortunately for Africa, the First World is not waiting for Africa to catch up. So, the more Africa tries to copy and be like the First World, the further the First World advances. Another unfortunate situation Africa finds itself is the situation whereby the whole idea and process of development is not taking African values into consideration, especially values that hinge on her conception of the human person.

The African conception of the human person, who is the initiator, sustainer and beneficiary of development, had not been taken into cognizance in the whole scheme of development. Hence African development so far has not been stable and enduring.

This paper, therefore, draws our attention to the key player in the whole process of development – the human person. It is based on the African conception of the human person as a being composed of body (which is material) and soul (which is spiritual and moral). While addressing the role of the Church and state in developing the human person, it stresses the need for a mutual and symbiotic relationship between the Church and State towards the development of a more humane society.

What is Development?

The general conception of development takes into cognizance not only environmental improvement and material acquisition of the human person, but also the physical and psychological wellbeing of the human person.

Moojan Momen views the modern concept of development as the idea that it was possible and durable to initiate action that would speed up social and economic growth.[1]

Historically, there is no race that has not undergone social and economic growth. These growths were very slow following natural causes. However, the economic devastation caused by the Second World War led to the first major development plan named "Marshall Plan". The "Marshall Plan" was such that "the United States poured money and resources into Europe in order to resuscitate the economies of that continent that had been shattered by the war."[2]

The "Marshall plan" was successful in Europe, but the attempt to make it work in other continents, especially in African, did not yield the desired success. The giving of loans by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and supports from other international bodies like the United Nations (UN) did not yield much success in Africa.

Momen gave some reasons why the "Marshall Plan" failed in Third World countries:

much of the money that had been allocated had been siphoned off into private bank accounts. A number of Third World dictators had made themselves into multi-millionaires. Other projects had foundered on inadequate planning, or ….projects that had seemed to be excellent when planned in the rarefied atmosphere of Geneva or New York City were found to be completely inappropriate when put into effect because they clashed with the local culture or with religious beliefs.[3]

The present situation in Africa of increasing poverty, rising population, disintegrating social structures and values, increasing corruption, bribery and ethnic segregation had made meaningful development a wide goose chase.

Furthermore, the aim of development as conceived by the West, and copied or aped by the Third World like Africa, has not helped matters much. The aim was essentially economic: a well planned economic system is believed to yield much capital and wealth for a nation. So to be wealthy and prosperous is to be successful and developed. The wealthier a nation by virtue of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the more developed they are said to be.

The failure of developmental programmes or policies in Africa has drawn attention to human development. For Kwasi Wiredu development does not stop with acquiring sophisticated technology, it also includes "the securing of such conditions as shall permit the self-realization of men as rational beings".[4] This leads to two aspects of development – the material and the moral. Wiredu challenges us to work for a holistic development, "one in which technical advancement and the promotion of human values are mutually reinforcing."[5]

The two aspects of development (the material and the moral) suggested by Wiredu can be likened to the Africa concept of the person which is dual in nature – the material (body) and the soul (spiritual and moral). These we shall now examine.

The African Conception of the Human Person

The African conceives a human person from a dual perspective. The human person is not completely material, neither is the human person completely spiritual. The human person is both material and spiritual. The material part of the human person is the body while the spiritual part (the soul) permeates all parts of the body.

The dual conception of the human person is the basis for human actions. Human actions have a bearing on material and moral life. Maintaining a balance between the material and the moral in human action is essential for a sustaining and enduring development.

In the Yoruba conception of a person, for instance, Oladipo divided the three important parts of a person ("Ara" – body; "Emi" – life giving element; and "Ori" – the individuality element) into

(i) the category of the visible and tangible entities that constitute the material aspects of a person and (ii) the category of immaterial, in a sense invisible, element (s) that is postulated as the categorical basis of life.[6]

To conceive a person is to conceive a being that is material and spiritual at the same time: there is no duality. Relating the above to development it becomes clear that a development that concentrates on material well being alone will be incomplete as far as humans are concerned.

A complete development is one that is both material and moral (spiritual). Although morality could be material, but our usage of moral and spiritual in an alternating sense is aimed at bringing to prominent relief that moral values that are spiritual are more enduring.

Developing the Human Person

In our world today, we have the state and religion as two major key players in the development of the human person. The Church comes under religion. The state is often secular and works for the material wellbeing of all, while the Church often works for the spiritual and moral wellbeing of all. This demarcation between the Church and State has not always existed in history. There were periods in history where the church dominated the state. For example, when Ambrose was the bishop of Milan, he made Theodosius the Roman Emperor (who was a Christian) to do penance for ordering the killing of 7,000 people,

for a year Theodosius had to do penance; for a year he was refused entry to the sacrament; and at the end of it he had to sit among the common penitents, and had even to lie prostrate in the dust before the cathedra door, before the bishop would accept him at all.[7]

There were also times when the state dominated the church: times when the state completely ignored the teachings of the church in the affairs of the state. For instance, Hitler prevented any Christian from holding any power.[8] In Victorian days religion was not allowed to interfere with private life. And totalitarian states made religion a very private affair that is of no secular value.

Furthermore, as more kings, presidents, and heads of states became Christians, more tolerance of religion by the state gradually crept in to state affairs. However, today the church and the state seem not to be working with harmony and this partially explains why some religious fanatics are not good citizens, and some citizens are seriously lacking moral and religious integrity. The dichotomy between the state and the church, the secular and the religious, the material and the secular are still with us. People are holy on Sundays and profane Monday to Saturday. People exhibit one character on Sunday and another (almost opposite) on Monday to Saturday. One consequence of this duality is that the state caters for the material aspect of man through a kind of education that seems inimical to the kind of education given by the church (that is spiritual and moral). The human person in society is now trained in such a way that he has a split personality. One personality is exhibited in matters that pertain to the sacred and holy, and another is exhibited in matters that pertain to the state.

With a split personality it is difficult, if not impossible, to develop properly. Even Europe that is seen as developed is developed materially, but morally, Europe is bankrupt and its development incomplete. In Africa, since our development is tailored towards the west, it is also guilty of materialism. This explains why emphasis is on material development to the neglect of moral and spiritual development. To have a balanced development, therefore, the church and the state should unite and have a common agenda for a more humane development.

Church and State in the Development of the Human Person

The whole process of training a human person to be well developed is education. The whole process of education begins at home and was primarily a home thing before the advent of schools to allow parents work harder to meet economic and social needs. This explains why Chapman – Taylor sees education as "the old process of bringing up children, with some parts of the process handed over to specialist".[9] Dibie also defines education as "a potent instrument of social, cultural, political, economical and technological advancement as well as a means of empowering every individual for the effective performance of his roles."[10]

Since a sound human development requires a sound education, and since a human person is both material and spiritual, the state cannot adequately educate the person without the equal contribution of the church. Even though the church falls under private institutions, it is not proper to separate it (the church) from the state when it comes to educating the human person. As far as education is concerned, the church and the state should work as equal partners. The distinction, therefore, between public and private schools, or government schools and schools run by religious organization should be eliminated if we are to have a stable, enduring and humane development. We are not trying to juxtapose the church and the state in an unnecessary entanglement of priority and hierarchy but bringing to bear the need for a synergy in the process of the molding of the human person.

Take for example children trained in schools run by the church on the one hand, and children trained by the state in state or public schools on the other hand; what values will they imbibe?

Different values certainly. What moral and spiritual value will they have? Certainly, different moral and spiritual values that may even conflict. And at the long analysis, in which society will they both live in and try to develop? The same and one society. How can we produce humane and enduring development when the human person who is the key player in development is not holistically developed? The kind of society that will be produced in this kind of human development will be one of conflict.

Strange enough, the modern state is run by religious people (in the sense that most of government officials profess one religion or the other), trained in conflicting value systems (some in government schools, and some others in schools run by religious organizations); and with conflicting moral and spiritual values. This is reflected in the kind and level of development we have today in Africa. If we accept that as Africans, the human person is both material and spiritual, then all the stages of development of the human person should be inbuilt with an education that is both material and spiritual. This will consequently give birth to a development that is humane and sustaining.

To this effect, the state should increase tremendously budgetary allocation to education. In the words of Dibie, "it is no gainsaying that the [educational] sector should attract the highest allocation. It is through an enlightened citizen that defense, health, agriculture, good roads and housing facilities can be developed."[11] The church should continue to teach religious tolerance and morality, and help in developing a sound character and conscience not only in primary and secondary schools but up to tertiary institutions.

Furthermore, in religious institutions emphasis should be laid on practical religion. Hulmes talk of the link between faith and practice. In other words, there should be no demarcation between belief and action.[12] The Baha'i religious movement, founded by Baha'u'llah linked material and spiritual development together. A change in perspective is recommended. There is the need to move away from the idea that this world is all about competition and aggression. We should begin to see this world as a place of co-operation, love, communal living, and peaceful co-existence. Baha'u'llah stated that "the only way of achieving spiritual growth is through maintaining contact with others and striving to make those contact more spiritual. This is best achieved through serving our fellow human beings.[13]

Humans create value systems from the responses (acceptance or rejection) of certain behavioral patterns. The state, working with the church, should correct the existing value system. Reward, titles, and honours should be based on truthfulness, selfless service, sincerity and hard work. Wealth should not attract any reward or honour of itself unless the means of its acquisition is known and noble, and it is used for the service of humanity.

In addition, the church and the state should both stress the equality of all humans. No life is superior to the other. Article 7 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights states thus:

All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.[14]

In other words, the respect we accord persons in position of authority rightly beings to the position of authority and not the person as a person. If this is properly understood all positions of authority (beginning from the home) will be rightly seen as position of service. Since we remain equal irrespective of the office we occupy, no one is immune to the law. The higher the office one occupies, the more the service to be rendered and the more the responsibility expected of the office holder. This value of equality of all persons based on the common life we share should be inculcated into the development of the human person right from the age of reason.

Conclusion

A proper understanding of the African conception of a person demands a harmonious working together between the church and state in the development of the human person. Poverty, starvation, corruption, indiscipline and misappropriation of funds in Africa are not as a result of lack of money but as a result of lack of proper human development. The current level of human development is too low. This is because the development of the human person as we have it now in Africa is fragmented and uncoordinated between the state (that is more interested in the material benefit of the human person) and the church (that is more interested in the spiritual growth of the human person). Unfortunately, the fragmented human person cannot bring about a humane and sustainable development. Until we concentrate on the development of the human person who is the initiator, sustainer and beneficiary of development, we cannot achieve a more sustainable and humane development.

End Notes

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