

Towards an Integral Education in Africa: Some Philosophical and Theological Considerations

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The African Situation

The World Education Forum in Dakar, April 2000 came out with a policy called, ***The Dakar Framework for Action*** which assigned to the international community six goals for making universal education for life a reality. Two of these goals are germane to our discussion. The first is “ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality”. The second involves “achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults”. However, three years after the Dakar Forum, the number of adult illiterates worldwide still stands at 868 million and 125 million children are not receiving a primary education. Illiteracy nonetheless has significantly diminished in relative terms and should continue to decline. The percentage of illiterates fell from 30.8% in 1980 to 22.8% in 1995 and should drop to 16.6% in 2010. But because of the increase in world population, the actual number of illiterates remained astonishingly stable between 1980 and 1995 – around 890 million – even if it has declined since then, albeit too slowly. And over 100 million children of primary school age still do not attend school or simply have no possibility of doing so. In Africa, according to the 1995 Social Development Summit, on current trends 54 million children in sub-Saharan Africa will be out of school by 2015 and the speed in narrowing the gender gap in education in most African countries has been very slow.

Nigeria is one of the signatories of the Dakar Forum but the situation of education in the country leaves much to be desired. It reflects the general lack of commitment on the part of governments at all levels and the failure of the nation to define its national goals and policies. The right to basic education for most people in Nigeria remains elusive. By estimates of the Nigerian government, over 7 million children remain out of school and one third of them are

girls. While we stay referenced to these figures which are very unreliable, it is important to ask whether government is taking enough initiatives to increase the number of children and adults who are getting quality education.¹ This is significantly disturbing because Nigeria was a pace-setter in education for most of other countries of Africa until the recession of the 70's². However, with the onset of the years of the locust in the country characterized by economic mismanagement, lack of public accountability, whole scale corruption of sprawling proportions, irresponsible government and lack of proper scale of preference in governmental policies, the educational sector like other aspects of our national life started to witness a glaring lack of direction. This has led to poor visioning and strategizing which all translate into poor policy framework that lacks coherence, coordination and integration. They have led to disjuncture in policy initiatives, epileptic and unstable structures and lack of synergy of both personnel and planners on one hand; and the people for whom the policies are meant on the other. Many countries like Tanzania, Mozambique and Uganda have taken quantum leaps in their efforts to achieve education for all within the next decade. Indeed, in Uganda school enrolment has risen from 54% to 90% within the last six years. This happened because the government of Uganda increased its funding for education from 1.6% of its GDP to 4%.³

This is also the case in the fight against HIV/AIDS; Uganda as well as Malawi have achieved a remarkable reduction in the infection rate of this terrible disease which is the African equivalent of the Holocaust. Nigeria is unable to achieve these apparently significant milestones because our priorities lie elsewhere. Education which is a basic human right take the back seat in a country that would consider the construction of a National stadium within two years (spending \$300 million and another bogus \$90 million dollars on a phantom space programme that has no Nigerian input in it save for the money)⁴ or the hosting of the African Games, more important than funding of education at all levels and empowering her citizens. The right to education is fundamental and is enshrined in Article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as in Articles 28 and 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. As the UNESCO's Director-General Koïchiro Matsuura stated on the occasion of Human Rights Day (10 December 2003), the right to education is so fundamental for human rights in general, because only a person who is aware that he or she has rights can better

strive for those rights, whether it be the right to a job, to obtain adequate food, shelter or medical care, to participate actively in political life, or to benefit from the progress of science and technology.

Girls and women are especially disadvantaged in education. This is particularly evident in Nigeria and other countries in Africa where girl education is considered particularly unprofitable since there is still the feeling among many Africans that a woman has value more for getting married, bearing children, and making the home than being a professional; they are better seen than heard. In Northern Nigeria for instance, as well as many Moslem populated countries of Africa, the right of women to education and basic freedom is still far from being realized. In the Eastern part of Nigeria however, given the change in the existential templates of many males presaged by the crave for quick money that was witnessed in Nigeria especially since the regime of Babangida, women particularly in Igbo land are taking over the educational terrain, while the men are more interested in making money as business men and other fast-track means of surviving. It is therefore necessary in addressing the present crisis of education in the continent in general and Nigeria in particular to look at some fundamental issues in education. I will restrict myself to three issues, the need for a sound philosophy of education, the need for religious education in schools and the training of teachers.

A Philosophy of Education

Education opens doors that no other process can. It gives each person a way to understand their world, to develop their self-identity and skills for working productively to support their families and contribute to the common good. Education is an important tool in alleviating poverty and addressing the inequalities present within and between countries. Education is the key to national development and the path to the survival of civilizations. Education is not a commodity to be offered for sale to the highest bidder; it is a service provided by society for the benefit of its entire young people especially the most vulnerable. Education both formal and informal is an ongoing dynamics which should be open to both the young as well as adults who never had education. However, we cannot educate the young unless we clearly

understand the content and end of education. It is important that any educational process must take into consideration the cultural tradition of a people. This is what is lacking in many African countries. I believe that we need a clear cut cultural solution to the many problems that plaque Africa. It is my thesis that Western education as practiced in African countries must be brought in harmony with the specific challenges facing Africa today and should therefore be weeded of its secular accretions and pass through the rich rarefied fields of African cultural traditions.

Writing on African education, Babs Fafunwa⁵, notes that there are seven characteristics of traditional African education namely, physical training, development of character, respect for elders and peers, intellectual training, vocational training, agricultural education and trades and crafts, community participation and promotion of cultural heritage. These meet the requirements of authentic educational philosophy. This is because they responded to the challenges that faced the traditional Africans at that point in time which included establishing the preeminence of the community and social life, the intimate bond between social life and spiritual values, the multivalent character of formation to meet with diverse life challenges and situations and the gradual and progressive development and formation of the physical, emotional and mental faculties of the child. These should be integrated in the formation of any philosophy of education in our schools.

Since fundamental questions concerning the aims and nature of education are within the purview of philosophy of education we ought to evolve and adapt a philosophy of education that is native to us, receptive to other influences, yet strong enough not to lose its creativity and able to inform and form the mind and evolution of the Africans. Any philosophy of education necessarily derives from a philosophy of life of the group. *A philosophy of life or worldview consists of a set of assumptions, beliefs, concepts and ideas (explicit or implicit) in terms of which one understands the world and interprets one's experience of it within that framework; and a set of values, principle and attitudes which influence how one chooses to act in it. A philosophy of life is an understanding of ultimate reality and life and one's place in it.* Educational system is informed by the assumptions and beliefs on the nature of man, the ultimate purpose of life and human destiny, the goal of common life among others. Two realities emerge from the foregoing excursus the first is that every

educational system has a worldview that underpins it; and the second is that those who are formed in that educational system are formed according to this worldview. The success or failure of any educational system can only be judged by its philosophy of education and the applications of this philosophy in the educational enterprise.

Philosophy of education is concerned with ascertaining the purpose of education and the meaning of the key terms associated with the educational process. The content and character of education are determined by what one perceives to be its aims and purpose. All educational systems whether Western, Islamic, Christian or African must revolve within a philosophical cycle evident or implied. Education is a process of transmitting cultures in terms of continuity and growth and for disseminating knowledge either to ensure social control or to guarantee rational direction of society or both⁶. Education is concerned with the formation and development of human beings or as Jacques Maritain notes education does not consist in adapting a potential citizen to the conditions and interactions of social life , but in **first making a man** and preparing a citizen.⁷The goal of education should be the liberation of the internal and spiritual freedom of man to be achieved by each person through knowledge and wisdom and through goodwill and love. The Jomtien World Conference on Education for All recognized that it is the responsibility of government to provide quality education for all working with other agencies. The kind of educational philosophy envisioned here is the one that promotes the cognitive, social, physical, emotional, moral and spiritual development of the child

The Nigerian National Policy on Education (otherwise called the 6-3-3-4 system) for instance states that the philosophy of education in the country is to promote “a free, just and democratic society, a land full of opportunities for all citizens, able to generate a great and dynamic economy and growing into a united, strong and self-reliant nation.” (No 8). The 1999, Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (18) clearly states that the objectives of education is to eradicate illiteracy, offer free education to all at all levels and promote science and technology. Missing in all these is the need for creating a morally conscious citizenry and the promotion of the cultural heritage of the country and inculcating a culture of peace and tolerance in a nation that has witnessed a civil war, an ever-revolving cycle of religious and

ethnic violence and other signs of lack of unity among the people.

The Inadequacy of Western Educational Model.

Western Education is in crisis which is at the heart of the crisis of civilization which is facing Western countries. There has been a lot of intellectual discussion and disagreements on the extent of the crisis in Western civilization and inter-civilizational conflicts in the world since the publication of the work of Huntington, ***The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*** in 1996. I do not think however that Huntington's thesis of conflictual dynamics among civilizations should be normative rather it is interpretative based on the emerging world situation especially in the face of rising fundamentalism among religionists, terrorism, violence and wars. Human civilizations are not meant to be in conflict. There is something human in every civilization which connects all humans to all civilizations outside their own. From the heart of each civilization, re-echoes the highest ideals of the human spirit, that is, the desire for love, peace, happiness and the urge to be connected to the spiritual reality that transcends and define us. This is what is gradually being lost in the Western world. This crisis is what Pope John Paul 11 has constantly referred to as the crisis of civilization which has resulted in secularism and materialism of frightening proportion under a techno-scientific determinism. The loss of a value-centre which historically in the West has been Christian and Christ-centred is the ground for understanding this crisis of civilization. The Christian tradition which informed and carried Western civilization is in reverse gear. Today the Christian message does not capture the imagination of many people in the West. The reason for this is the emergence of liberal education since the Enlightenment.

The Enlightenment gave rise to radical individualism. The individual was the author and creator of meaning, truth and even reality. This individualism led to political liberalism and intellectual freedom that was unencumbered and uncontrolled by institutional structures be it political or religious. Man did not live to serve the temples of the gods or the dynasties of the princes, but the individual's own self-interest. With this kind of disposition, came the intellectual and moral freedom that gave free reins to the limitless imaginations of man. There was nothing like a higher truth. The touchstone of everything that can be concluded according to Kant as a law for a people lies in the question whether the people could have

imposed such a law on itself without an external influence. The Enlightenment was also aggressively anti-Christian which culminated for example in the replacement of Catholic dogma and clerical fanaticism by the Temples of Reason in which the Supreme Being the God of nature would be worshipped. It is no doubt that Auguste Comte the father of positivism would emerge from this kind of environment. His rejection of metaphysics as an attempt to hide 'behind the physics' and the erroneous conception of God gave him the basis to attack religion. Religion was for him the sign of primitive society. No doubt the rise of positivism and atheism in the writings of philosophers in the 19th Century and early 20th Century is no surprise to those who are familiar with the evolution of Western thought. Positivism for example found adherents among empiricists dismayed by Hume and among scientists who saw no need of any philosophical backing for their works, and would certainly not be lured by the involuted intellectual scheme of Kant or Hegel.

This was the intellectual trend that gave rise to liberal education. This kind of education was characterized by individual liberty in the pursuit of the truth and freedom to choose one's life style, equality of respect and consistent rationality. Liberal education encourages personal autonomy, critical openness, the autonomy of academic disciplines, equality, rational morality, avoidance of indoctrination, neutral moral standpoint, absence of any conception of the good and acceptance of diversity and pluralism.⁸ Many people in the Western world today think that Christian education is a prescriptive enterprise, motivated by ideological intent; its theories were based on little more than apriori metaphysical speculation and value-laden dogma. Educational philosophy, they argue, should neither be metaphysical or prescriptive, it is rather an empirical and value-free enterprise motivated only by a disinterested search for knowledge and understanding. At this point of decay in values, Western culture achieved a position of world hegemony and thus exported or rather imposed its educational philosophy on many colonial countries especially in Africa; but at the same time it ceased to be Christian, and the old institutional framework of Christian culture was swept away by revolutionary movements. Even though this education came to Africa through Western missionaries, it communicated a dualistic education that served the interests of the missionaries and the colonialists. For the missionaries faith was what

education should offer and for the colonialists clerical competence was what education should communicate to help get native Africans who would help serve as a link between the colonial Lords and their exploited Africans. This kind of education contributed in putting African countries in the cultural crisis and political problems that they face today. Thus they offered Africans a more or less pragmatic education which is typical Deweyan in nature even though Christian in scope.

However, for a proper understanding of this whole question, it is worth noting that this liberalism, articulated mainly by Locke, Montesquie and Rousseau, and further elaborated by Mill, had its origins in the English Puritan Revolution of 1640 culminating in the “Glorious Revolution” of 1688, which in its turn inspired the American Revolution of 1776 and the French Revolution of 1789. Locke, Montesquieu and Rousseau, influenced by Calvinism, were reacting against the absolutism (“divine right of kings”) of the Tudors and Stuarts in England, and the Valois and Bourbons in France. This absolutism, inimical to individual liberty and freedom of enterprise, was carrying on the ancient imperial tradition of Persia, Hellas and Rome, Byzantium and the revived Roman-Germanic empire, then vested in the Habsburgs. However, Western civilization threw the baby (Christian faith) with the bat (education). It was not surprising that in order to carry on the project of liberal education to its end; Church-owned schools were either taken over by the state or their course contents were radically altered to serve the new liberalism of the state and society. Hence the take over of education in Austria (Austo-Hungarian Law of 1868), German Reich Law of 1872, France 1841 and Italy among others. England and Wales were to follow later in the middle of the 20th Century. The point must be made that Western education lifted Western civilization to an enviable height and produced the many marvels of science and technology and the liberal arts. However, it is still deficient and in need of a radical reform in order to produce more balanced and integrated men and women who would serve humanity and God.

However a study of the works of the god father of Western education in its liberal brand John Dewey⁹ reveals the hidden pretensions and limitation of the liberal Western educational model. For lack of space we cannot adequately explore the position of Dewey, but suffice it to mention that his denial of immutability of human nature and moral principles and his idea of progressive education were founded on a wrong anthropology. Education can never be an

end in itself as Dewey argued. A self-sufficient education places man on the margins and really separates the subject of knowledge (man) and the object of knowledge (wisdom).¹⁰ Referring to this kind of philosophy, Pope John Paul II teaches; “Rather than make use of the human capacity to know the truth, modern philosophy has preferred to accentuate the ways in which this capacity is limited or conditioned.”¹¹ The horrors of the Holocausts and the World Wars, colonialism, capitalism, apartheid, the gap between the rich and the poor countries and the present scourge of insecurity in the world show us the limit of liberal education in its lack of a sapiential and ethico-transcendental cutting edge. The dissolution of the sense of right and wrong in Western culture is as a result of the system of Western education that has no room for moral education.¹² We need therefore an education in Africa that responds to the emancipation of the whole man (soul and body) and the uplifting of our continent from the cesspool of poverty, ignorance, disease, undue dependence on Western technology and loss of the sense of community and failure of governments.

Concluding theological Reflection: Religious Education and the role of Teachers.

Any true education must be integral. It must prepare young men and women for positions of rule and responsibility in the world; it must shape their minds with a sense of method, measure and sober and subtle judgment. The key to the future of all nations is to be found on how the citizens of countries are able to make correct judgment about who they are the meaning and value of life, the goal of society and the ultimate human destiny. Article 1 of the Declaration of the Second Vatican Council on Education, affirms that education is the inalienable right of every person irrespective of age, race or condition. This is founded on the dignity of the human person. Education should not be value neutral; it should be suited to the particular destiny of the individual and adapted to their ability, sex and national cultural traditions. The Declaration defines education this way; “*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*”.¹³

This definition is rich in meaning, and re-echoes the definition of the Pope Pius IV in ***Divini Illus Magistri***¹⁴ that the whole purpose of education is so to shape man, in this mortal life,

that he will be able to reach that last end for which the creator has destined him. It needs to be observed that education is an ongoing human reality. The Fathers also teach that education should aim at bringing all men and women and nations of the world to peace and unity founded on mutual fraternal relations. This teaching would echo in many other documents of the Council especially in the face of threats to peace founded on religious, ethnic and racial disharmony, which is at the heart of modern violence and acts of terrorism. Education should lead men and women to appreciate the differences in race, religion and worldview; it should lead especially the young to make sound moral judgment based on a well-formed conscience and to put them into practice with a sense of personal commitment and to know and love God more perfectly. This article also calls for the proper integration of the advances in psychological, pedagogical and intellectual sciences in the educational process and a prudent, balanced and positive education in matters relating to sex.

Article 2 continues the teaching on the meaning of education. However the definition of education is more descriptive than definitive. This description is not moralistic-humanist as contained in the original text which defined Christian education as the human and at the same time religious perfection of men. Here the foundation of Christian education is the ontic-existential one based on the biblical-theological understanding of human nature. Three aims of education are advanced here: the maturation of the human person in a wholesome manner, the introduction of those who are baptized into the mystery of salvation, so that they realize their Christian calling and finally moral and religious formation of men and women so that they would grow in righteousness and love for the truth and develop the eschatological virtue of hope which is a summons to transform the world to suit God's plan. In this way, Christian education in association with the Christian mystery would serve the well being of the human family.

The Christian conception of education is founded on the dignity of the human person and on the acceptance of transcendent truths in terms of which human life, morality and existence are to be given some objective and absolute meaning. It also recognizes the primacy of the common good. Man finds himself by subordinating himself to the community and the community finds itself by serving man and realizing that man is the meeting point of

immanent and transcendent horizons beyond the limited veil of social analysis, abstruse and purely scientific theories of education among others. Man is a mystery and education and life demand a double connection with human and divine realities as they relate to the full truth about human destiny and reality in general. This is also the under guarding principle in Catholic education. There is a rich corpus of work on this as can be gleaned from the mission statements of the Jesuits for instance (see *Ratio Studiorum* of 1599) or the pioneering comprehensive works of the Marists Brothers, the Dominicans of the school and the burgeoning religious congregations that have taken up the mantle of education in many African countries.

Integral education encompasses the ontology of man, *nihil humanun mihi alienum*; nothing human is foreign to me; in the same vein nothing human is foreign to education. It is then to be regretted that schools run by voluntary agencies were taken over by the government especially in most parts of the country. This is a great act of injustice. Schools run by churches are essential component of promoting the common good of nations and do not threaten the secular status of the nation. From the earliest centuries of Christendom, the Catholic Church has been a great pioneer in education in both classical and liberal arts as well as in morals. The Catholic Church has been the greatest agency for the preservation of human civilization dating back to the Monastic education of the 6th Century. The Church believes that human beings can grasp the truths about themselves and by doing that know their maker and serve their neighbours. Christian education then is not just education in faith, but education in culture, education in love, education for work and education for the poor. We need to liberate our schools from the chain of state control which has not helped to advance the cause of the country or improved the standard of education.

It is obvious that for effective education to take place in the schools we need qualified and motivated teachers who would be role models to the students. Teachers are custodians of humanity for they play a vital role in handing on the right kind of values and attitudes that make for a stable society. Unfortunately, teachers in Nigeria are underpaid and overworked hence they lack enthusiasm for the work and eventually reproduce many unwholesome tendencies in their students. We still hear of all kinds of exam malpractices, sexual

harassment of students, bribery and corruption in schools and all kinds of exploitative tendencies of students by teachers. The teachers also lack adequate training, teaching techniques and the educational resources like good libraries, computers and internet services to help them enrich themselves as well as their students. It is also to be regretted that the Catholic Church in Nigeria has not maintained the legacy of education that is associated with Catholicism. Many church owned institutions have become substandard, make shift and make-belief institutions with a dearth of libraries and lack of adequate staffing. The good Catholic schools and even seminaries are in most cases exclusive schools for the rich. The teachers and other staff in these schools, like workers in many church owned institutions are still underpaid and overtime become aggressively hostile to the Church and all that she represents.

Today the notion of literacy is no longer restricted to the three R's reading, writing and arithmetic (numeracy): education must also offer access to skills and know-how that enable the individual to take his or her place in society. It must also be a school of democracy, for the surest defence of the City is an educated and responsible citizenry. True education would bear fruit if education for all is integrated in national development and poverty-reduction programmes. Today the essential link between education, development and poverty-reduction is universally recognized. Education, as Jacques Delors has stressed, is founded on four pillars: learning to know, learning to do, learning to be, and learning to live together. Education for all is the best cement of peace, both between and within nations: it is the road to prosperity and the surest guarantee of moral rectitude and technological advancement. The question is whether the governments of Nigeria and other African nations are courageous enough to pay the cost of education. For those who say that education is costly, Abraham Lincoln was in the habit of replying: "Very well, gentlemen, then try ignorance!"

¹ I have relied for these statistics on Charles Abani, "Progress towards achieving EFA (education for all) in Nigeria", a contribution to *the Monitoring Report*, this study is available as a policy watch publication at www.actionaidnigeria.org.

² Historically there were three conferences by African education ministers prior to Dakar Forum, the 1961 Addis Ababa Conference which tried to redefine the main thrust of education in post-independence Africa and the Nairobi conference of 1968 which appraised the status of the

educational scheme in Africa in the light of the various recommendations of various international agencies especially UNESCO and emphasized the producing of skilled manpower for national development and the 1976 conference in Lagos which was heavily influenced by the National Policy on Education which was under revision within the time of that meeting and was later revised in 1977, 1981, 1989 and 1999.

³ See for instance the findings of the Oxfam International, in Watkins, K. **Education Now-Break the Cycle of Poverty**, London: Oxfam International Pub. , 1999) 4. See also **AIDS Epidemic Update**, Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS and World Health Organisation, December 2003. This report notes that sub-Saharan Africa remains by far the region worst affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic. In 2003, an estimated 26.6 million people in this region are living with HIV, including 3.2 million who became infected during the last year. AIDS killed approximately 2.3 million people in 2003. The report notes that part of why this disease is spreading especially among women is the lack of basic education. However countries like Uganda and Malawi have taken the bull by the horn and are fighting this disease with the improvement of education and healthcare services.

⁴ See Karl Maier, **This House Has Fallen, Nigeria in Crisis**, (Colorado: Westview Press, 2000) 298.

⁵ A. Babs Fafunwa, **History of Education in Nigeria** (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1974) 20-48.

⁶ Fafunwa, 17.

⁷ Jacques Maritain, **Education at Crossroad**, (New haven: Yale University Press, 1971),15.

⁸ See James Arthur and co, **Earthen Vessels: The Thomistic Tradition in Education** (Gracewing: Canterbury Books, 1999), 7.

⁹ His theories of education as the reconstruction of experience and his pragmatic postulations which leaves the individual to the counter-veiling currents of a non-moral scientific regime is flawed in the search for integration and truth of being which all education should aspire. His views has been proffered as adequate to Nigeria in D. I. Agwaranze “Pragmatic Philosophy: Basis for Educational Development in Nigeria, 252-260 in J. Obi Oguejiofor (ed) **Africa Philosophy and Public Affairs**, (Enugu; Delta Publications, 1998). I totally disagree with the position adduced in that paper and most prominent Nigerian educationists like Fafunwa, Ukeje, Ohuche, R. Onuche, F. Okafor are agreed that functional education for Nigeria is necessary but not sufficient ground for adopting pragmatic education.

¹⁰ See the Christopher Dawson, **The Crisis of Western Education** (NY: Sheed and Ward, 1961) 129-144.

¹¹ **Fides et Ratio**, 5.

¹² James Davison Hunter has argued in his works on the need to restore the moral content of authentic education in the United states of America for instance. See **The Death of Character** (NY: Basic Books, 2000).

¹³ **Gravissimum Educationis** 1

¹⁴ Pius XI, **Divini Illius Magistri**, 29