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Studia Redemptorystowskie nr 12, 461-478

2014

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

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THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, SOCIAL JUSTICE AND THE QUEST FOR POLITICAL STABILITY IN POST-COLONIAL AFRICA: WHAT VALUES AND STRATEGIES FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Słowa kluczowe: sprawiedliwość społeczna, Kościół katolicki, doktryny społeczne, postkolonialna Afryka, pokój i stabilność

Keywords: social justice, Catholic Church, social doctrines, post-colonial Africa, peace and stability

Schlüsselwörter: soziale Gerechtigkeit, Katholische Kirche, Soziallehren, postkolonialen Afrika, Frieden und stability

Introduction

Justice has been accepted as one of the fundamentals of democracy whether in its old form from the Athenian city-states to the new waves in its representative form. Examining justice as being sacred to human life is important in the sacredness of human dignity. But the problem today is the way the 'leaders' of new modern-day democracies tend to look at the issue of justice because transparency, common good and truth, which are the hallmarks of justice, have been eroded especially in African nation-states with modern-day terms of manipulation, relativism, negotiations, usurpation of power, compromises among others. This is the situation of African societies today!

There are a number of issues in stabilising a heated polity of which social justice is the foundation. It is usually said and has been taken as a slogan that there can be no peace without social justice and no development without peace. In other words, it is only in the atmosphere of peace that a society could grow and develop. And from the assertion, the issue of social justice is pertinent and it is also in various forms and kinds. Door¹ (1991:7) writes that the most obvious

¹ D. Door, *The Social Justice Agenda: Justice, Ecology, Power and the Church*, Dublin: Gill &

item on the social justice agenda is the very gap between the rich and the poor. This gap exists at various levels. He is not saying that it is a crime for one to be rich and other poor, and not canvassing for a some-what classless society but that justice demands equal rights, conditions and remuneration to everyone not minding the race, tongue and ethnic among others. To make a bridge over the lacuna of what might be interpreted of the above, he corroborates his idea that “the mere fact that some people are more wealthy than others is not, in itself, a social injustice. But the existence of gross poverty alongside conspicuous wealth is morally unacceptable”² (Door, 1991:8). And it would be from the foregoing that this paper shall examine the issue of politics, which affects all over other segments of the society. For political stability in this part of the world, social justice plays an important task of which every individual and institution ought to play its part effectively. If individual or institution has a stake in maintaining political stability, there and then, the Church’s role is enormous in the effort of stabilising a political society.

1. Theorising justice as a concept

Social justice is an important aspect in the society, which is so crucial to the running of a particular society where there will be equality and freedom on the same basis and or level without putting some individuals into high pedestals. Aristotle’s analysis of justice is the key to its meaning at the level of the particular act or decision. Justice, he said, consists in treating equals equally and unequals unequally but in proportion to their relevant differences.³

A democratic polity without the issue of social justice could not be said to be one. The question of justice has been a continuous point to ponder in the society. The question about justice is closely linked to the idea of impartiality of persons in the society. The “Golden Rule” of Kant presupposes a kind of social justice in its application to those in such society. Kant’s categorical imperative deals with the notion that justice (and equality) ought to be given and granted justly to all and sundry; his moral reciprocity of doing to others as one would have them to do oneself is closely related to the idea of not doing evil to others and doing things at the expense of others in the community. Benn writes, “From this follow ideas such as a fair wage, a just price, and a fair exchange (what Aristotle called “commutative justice”), as opposed to exploitation and profiteer-

Macmillan Ltd, Ireland, 1991.

² Ibid.

³ S.I. Benn, “Justice” in P. Edwards (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vols. 3 & 4, New York & London: Macmillan Pub. 1967.

ing.⁴ And so, the question of social justice would be discussed in this work from the ideas and theories of Plato, Rawls and Marion Young.

Plato was highly dissatisfied with the prevailing degenerating conditions in the Greek-city states of his time. The Athenian society was on the verge of ruins and was responsible for the death of Socrates, his master. His attack against the ills of his society was in form of the construction of an ideal society in which justice reigns supreme since he believes that justice is the remedy and antidote to the societal problems. He made use of Socrates in the dialogue and other interlocutors, and the bystanders. Justice, for him, is at once a part of human virtue and the bond that joins man together in the society. It is the identical quality that makes good and social, "I will tell you, I replied, justice, which is the subject of our inquiry, is as you know, sometimes spoken of as the virtue of an individual and sometimes as the virtue of a state (*Republic*, Book 2). He is not taking justice as virtue for the individuals in the state alone but also for the state in general. The state is considered as a perfect whole in each individual, which is its element, functions not for itself but for the health of the whole. A state, he asked, is it not larger than an individual? A state in the barest notion must include four or five men (*Republic*, Book 2). Justice would, therefore be like that harmony of relationships where the planets are held together in the orderly movement. This is a type of society, which is so organised and fit for survival. In the dialogue, he writes that, "then, my blessed Thrasymachus, injustice can never be more profitable than justice (*Republic*, Book 1); considering justice not as a mere strength but as a harmonious strength where all moral conceptions revolve about the good of the whole individual as well as the social.

Citing that a just man will live happily in any society whereas an unjust soul will live otherwise, this for him also applies to a state: Then, an evil soul must necessarily be an evil and superintendent, and the good soul a good ruler...the just soul and the just man will live well, and the unjust man will live ill... (*Republic*, Book 1). It is a fact of life and a reality that life of a just man is better and happier but as a living being in the society. This explains the thought of Socrates that the soul, which is more virtuous or in other words more just is also the happier soul.

In the same analysis of what justice is all about, Rawls employs a social contract argument to show and examine that justice and especially distributive justice is a form of fairness, that is, an impartial distribution of goods and resources of a certain state to the citizenry. He rejects the idea of classical utilitarianism as a basis of justice because it does not offer any principle of justice beyond the basic view that everyone's happiness counts equally. The resultant theory is

⁴ Ibid.

known as “Justice as fairness.” In *A Theory of Justice* (Section 2), he examines the two principles of justice: liberty and wealth. On liberty, each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all; wealth, social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged, consistent with the just savings principle and attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity.

For the understanding of his principles, he sets out what he claims are principles of justice through the use of an entirely and deliberately artificial device he calls the “original position,” in which everyone decides principles of justice from behind “a veil of ignorance” – a purely hypothetical situation that essentially blinds people to all facts about themselves that might cloud what notion of justice is developed. He is of the opinion that rather, they (people) would safeguard themselves against the worst possible outcomes⁵. He acknowledges the fact that there are possibilities that these principles would be in conflict but rather than compromise, he takes the position that there is a specific priority, which is that of liberty. He says that principles are, therefore, to be ranked in lexical order according to him and, therefore, liberty could be restricted only for the sake of liberty⁶. The two principles are a fair way of meeting the arbitrariness of fortunes and while no doubt imperfect in other ways, the institutions that satisfy these principles, are just.

In the dispensation of justice as Plato asserts that it is a virtue not for the individual alone but for the society. It, therefore, means that as one expects justice to be done to oneself, so also, there is the utmost need for individuals to perform their duties and obligations to the state. In this way, he sets that there are duties and obligations every participant owes the community, that is, there is the need for individual to support just institutions.⁷ In this sense, only the just institutional arrangements need to be respected and vice versa; admitting that civil disobedience to unjust institutions and laws are needed for the restructuring of the society and or the state. Civil disobedience is an act responding to injustices internal to a given society and appealing to public’s conception of justice.

Taking social justice at a glance, she thinks about justice not as a set of debts we owe ourselves but as a set of relations between social groups. She investigates the rhetoric power that underlies old ways of discussing justice in terms of distribution, denying justice is a finite community-oriented justice that revolves not around the interlocking and often villages but around the interlock-

⁵ J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, London: Oxford University Press, UK, 1972.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

ing and often messy communities that exist side by side.⁸ To her, social justice means the elimination of institutionalised domination and oppression. Any aspect of social organisation and practice relevant to domination and oppression is a principle subject to evaluation by ideals of justice. The concepts of domination and oppression rather than the concept of distribution should be the starting point for a conceptual analysis of what social justice should mean. She is of the opinion that many discussions on social justice not only ignore the institutional contexts within which distributions occur, but often presuppose specific institutional structures whose justice they fail to bring under evaluation.⁹ This means individual culture is important to the notion of social justice and not individual persons.

In her arguments, she affirms that a distributive paradigm of justice corresponds to the primary formulation of public debates in societies. It is inherent from the views of Young that justice could be discussed extensively in a democratic state where participation in public discussions and decision-making is embedded. She says that democracy is a condition for public to arrive at decisions whose substantively just outcomes include distributive justice.¹⁰ This means that all differences, interests would be transcended to seek a common good. In order to put an end to all forms of oppressions and injustices, Young endorses the social movements that promote a notion of group solidarity against the individualism of liberal humanism. She argues that the idea of eliminating group differences in a just society is both unrealistic and undesirable. Instead, justice in a group-differentiated society demands social equality of groups, and mutual recognition and affirmation of group differences.¹¹

In her explanation, she brings out new insights to debates about welfare, affirmative action and disability. She offers a thought-provoking analysis of a communitarian society showing that the idea of self-sufficiency is unworkable. To have a just society, she holds that those interconnected yet distinct societies would show the way to not only survive but flourish in the contemporary society. To her, justice does not compete with differences either based on race, sex, and social, psychological but that it grows out of it. In the search for a just state, she explains oppression as forms of injustices where she states five categories of oppression in forms of exploitation, cultural imperialism, powerlessness, marginalisation and violence that must be rooted away from the society.

⁸ F. Olatunji, *Review of Young's Justice and the Politics of Difference*. A paper submitted to the Philosophy Department, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria, Nov. 2004.

⁹ I.M. Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, USA, 1990.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

2. Post-colonial Africa

It was not long after 'political independence' and not 'mental and psychological independence' was granted to many African states by the imperialists that so many issues began to raise their ugly heads and the consequences are enormous for the continent to bear. It has been a utopia to find and have peace, happiness and tranquility since the imperialists departed and thus generating one problem or another on daily basis because the soul has been mitigated. And the reason Ehusani posits that:

(...) Africans see colonialism as synonymous with material exploitation, cultural expropriation and anthropological impoverishment (...) the African survivors of colonialism suffer gross ego distortion. Their continent has become the most bastardised and misused continent, and they themselves have been milked dry of their self-confidence. In one word, they have been dehumanised.¹²

Some of the so many issues that have been confronting African states and still calling for adequate attention would be examined here below.

The highest of all problems facing the continent today is that of ignorance or poverty of ideas. And it is on this basis that the Caucasoid are of the opinion, call it erroneous, that if you want to hide any important information from the blacks, insert it in a book. This is absurd, degrading and dehumanising! This opinion is tenable in our society today as we study or even read less in a way to searching for controls over our problems. For a society to develop, the generation of ideas is a *sine qua non*. Izibili and Enegho in *Development in Africa: The Challenge of the African Philosopher* opine, quoting from Iroegbu's book, *The Kpim of Politics, Communalism: Towards Justice in Africa* that:

Development is balanced if it fulfils two conditions; the flourishing of natural resources aimed at flourishing of human resources and not vice versa; two, the development of human resources does not neglect or reject one or some of the aspects of the human person as indicated above. Development, therefore, calls for total development, realised by the utilisation of natural resources at man's disposal, perfecting and co-ordinating them toward the ends of both the individual and the community.¹³

If the above is a truism, then, there is a problem as what could be termed as because leaders are bereft of good ideas and ideals. What interest our so-

¹² G. Ehusani, *An Afro-Christian Vision "Ozovehe" Towards A More Humanised World*, University Press of America, USA, 1991.

¹³ M.A. Izibili, F.E. Enegho, "Development in Africa: The Challenge of the African Philosopher" in *Enwisdomisation Journal*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2002–2003, pp. 84–93.

called “leaders” are those things that will promote their own interests and selfish needs. A society of this nature and one that neglects historical past cannot attain any meaningful development as Edward Carr writes that it is possible that our society may be destroyed or may perish of slow decay¹⁴ and that history is not only a record of progress but a ‘progressive science’, or, if you like, that history in both senses of the word – as the course of events and as the record of those events – is progressive¹⁵. The knowledge about our existence is the one that refuses to learn from yesterday with the anticipation of projecting to the future and for this reason; it has been difficult for our society to develop as it might be termed as a human society.

The aftermath of the direct and indirect rule all over Africa led to tribal and regional crises years after independence was granted to major African states. Given example was the crisis that rocked the boat of governance in Nigeria in the 60’s and still till the moment. Nigeria as an instance is a replica of what transpires in other African states. There was a bit of honeymoon for Nigerians and Nigeria at the earliest stage of their historical era. The rate at which Africans have refused to learn from past mistakes is at geometric ratio! The issue of elections has been and still a ‘do-or-die affair’ of which the end-result has not been palatable to all and sundry. We see how humans were being inhuman to their fellow brothers in African continent just because of positions; we see and experience sit-tight leaders of less importance and significance to the citizenry. Examples abound all over the states of Africa.

Another of such problem to be examined is that of religious crises among the Christians and the Moslems in Africa and particularly in Nigeria are enormous. Ehusani in *An Afro-Christian Vision “Ozovehe” Toward A More Humanised World* has this to say:

The religious climate is no less cataclysmic. Africa has not only been the dumping ground of all religious systems, sects and movements from the East and West, but has also been their battle ground. As if the crisis of ethnicism among many African peoples were not enough, new religious affiliations have pitched brother against brother in bitter rivalry; and in countries where religious clashes have not taken the dimension of a full-scale war, there have been at least hundreds of lives lost to sporadic religious skirmishes. The result of all these is that human life is becoming increasingly cheaper by the day. Human blood is beginning to lose its traditional sacredness, because it is so frequently spilled for the flimsiest of reasons, while the awe traditionally associated with corpses is disappearing because they now litter African roadways and highways unattended.¹⁶

¹⁴ E. Carr, *What is History*, Pelican Book, UK, 1961.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ G. Ehusani, *An Afro-Christian Vision “Ozovehe”*..., op. cit.

An important question comes to mind and which will affect the rational minds in our society that if our faith could not bring us out of our crooked ways and carnivouristic tendencies; then, what is the necessity and significance of calling and nick-naming ourselves as followers of and adherents of the two 'foreign religions'? That is the state we find ourselves today in African continent; our habits and characters are not different from those of the animals.

3. Situating social justice in Africa vis-à-vis the Church social doctrines

Social doctrines refer to the developing body of Catholic thoughts about political, economic, ethical and cultural questions as these relate to the common good. The Church has no political or economic theories since these belong to the realm of human reason and experience, and remain the responsibility of the lay people. But the Church can judge social theories and practices from the stand-point of faith and morals, especially in the light of the virtue of justice. So, the modern emphasis by the Church on societal responsibilities in justice and charity to promoting the common good appears to be arisen primarily in response to industrial revolution, which had resulted in urban-dwelling, workers who had no property other than their labour. Social justice has thus been seen as in part a demand for social supports and accompanied by a call for the re-ordering of social priorities, both within societies and in international relations.

As contents of social teachings, it promotes the interests of the poor and marginalised, and it also calls for the creation and maintenance of a well-ordered social mainstream. Late in the nineteenth (19th) and in the whole of twentieth (20th) centuries, Catholic social doctrines developed rapidly in response to questions and anxieties posed by dangerous political ideologies in the world particularly socialism, fascism and democratic capitalism among others ... The aim of social justice is at empowering all conditions that allow all sectors to participate in society; society ensures social justice when it provides the conditions that allow associations or individuals to obtain what is their due, according to their nature and their vocation. Social justice is linked to the common good and the exercise of authority.¹⁷

The dignity of man cannot be under-valued as this is the main target of both the Catholic social doctrine and the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights (1948). It should be inculcated, well accepted and respected as the ba-

¹⁷ *Catechism of Catholic Church*, Kenya: Paulines Publication, 1994, no. 1928.

sis of human worth. In *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (On Social Concern), John Paul II writes:

What is at stake is the dignity of the human person, whose defence and promotion have been entrusted to us by the Creator, and to whom men and women at every moment of history are strictly and responsibly in debt. As many people are already more or less clearly aware, the present situation does not seem to correspond to this dignity.¹⁸

The above will lead us to the discussion on social justice *vis-à-vis* the Church doctrine as different myriads and cases of injustices would be examined.

The nature of our society has really put women-folk into the mud as sub-human to the men-folk. We live in a patriarchal society where all power and authority belong to men. This is not as different as Freud sees nothing good in women; the society subjugates against women and their rights, so also the state authorities. In family and public life, women are at disadvantaged. Door writes that kind of work that is usually done by men is generally better paid than 'women's folk'¹⁹. Enegbuma avers clearly that in the last (thirty) 30 years, the situation of women has significantly deteriorated. In fact, it would not be an exaggeration to state that even the decade dedicated to them was a total loss.²⁰ (2004:52). Other area of injustices against women is in the political realm where women find it difficult to gain recognition and equal role. There are various forms of abuses against women daily where they are portrayed as nothing beneficial to the society other than for sexual gratification. This injustice still operates in the use of language in the society where women-folk has been fitted in the nomenclature for 'men' even in the religious circles.

Contrary to the above, John XXIII affirms in *Pacem in Terris* (Peace on Earth) the part being played by women all over the world in public life saying:

(...) It is obvious to everyone that women are now taking a part in public life. This is happening more readily in nations of Christian civilisation, and, more slowly but broadly, among people who have inherited other traditions or cultures. Since women are becoming conscious of their human dignity, they will not tolerate being treated as mere material instruments, but demand rights befitting a human person both in domestic and in public life.²¹

In the same vein, John Paul II reiterates that:

¹⁸ John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, no. 47

¹⁹ D. Door, *The Social Justice Agenda*, op. cit.

²⁰ M. Enegbuma, "The Church and the Liberation of Women" in *NACATHS Journal of African Theology*, vol. 14, 2004, pp. 49–56.

²¹ John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, no. 41.

Respect for the full equality of man and woman in every walk of life is one of civilisation's great achievements. Women themselves, with their deeply-felt and generous daily witness, have contributed to this, as have the organised movements, which, especially in our century, have put this subject before world attention.²²

Every form of injustice to women is an injustice against mankind because justice is, at one and the same time, a moral virtue and a legal concept ... it defends and promotes the inestimable dignity of every human person and is concerned for the common good ...²³ It is urgently necessary to cultivate everywhere a culture of equality, which will be lasting and constructive to the extent that it reflects God's plan. The implication of this is to see women-folk in all sectors of human endeavours.

Tribalism as a form of racism exists in our society and no one could deny the evils that spring up daily from the stock. It affects the society in totality be it education, culture, politics, religion and economic. In *Iustitia et Pax* (The Church and Racism), it is affirmed that, "racial prejudice or racist behaviour continues to trouble relations between persons, human groups and nations."²⁴ It is the idea that there is a causal link between inherited physical traits and certain traits of personality, intellect, or culture and combined with it, the notion that some races are inherently superior to others.

It is a common knowledge that some sects or cultures ostracise some human beings as less human. The issue of *Osu* caste system among the Ibos in Nigeria for instance, is a peculiar example, which affects one's relationship with the "free-born". Here, Dorr says, at times, two fairly equally balanced ethnic groups may each discriminate against the other; but more commonly there is a gross imbalance – one group has a near monopoly of power and uses it to keep the others in a sub-servient position.²⁵ It is in the interest of the Church that such evil should be uprooted from the society as Luther King Jr. opines in *A Christmas Sermon on Peace* that ... let me suggest first that if we are to have peace on earth, our loyalties must become ecumenical rather than sectional. Our loyalties must transcend our race, our tribe, our class, and our nation; and this means we must develop a world perspective.²⁶

Experiences have shown that Africa and its leaders had turned unemployment into an institution and 'a thing of joy' seeing educated bodies without the

²² John Paul II, *Culture of Equality Is Urgently Needed Today*, 1995, no. 1.

²³ John Paul II, *From the Justice of Each Comes Justice for All*, 1998, no. 1.

²⁴ Pontifical Commission *Iustitia et Pax*, *The Church and Racism*, 1998, no. 1.

²⁵ D. Door, *The Social Justice Agenda*, op. cit.; cf. *The Church and Racism*, op. cit., no. 13

²⁶ M. Luther King (Jr.), "A Christmas Sermon on Peace" in M. James (ed.), *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King Jr.*, Washington & New York: HarperCollins Publishers, USA, 1986, pp. 253–258.

hope of getting a gainful or formidable employment. It is only the children or wards of the rich and the well-offs in the society that get good jobs whereas those of the poor are put to the “background” where they wallow in abject poverty. Luther writes in *If the Negro Wins, Labour Wins* that hard-core unemployment is now an ugly and unavoidable fact of life. Like malignant cancer, it has grown year by year and continues its spread.²⁷ Ehusani corroborates the idea of Luther saying:

Millions of Nigerians (African), including family heads, are unemployed, and have practically no source of income. Many of them are now and again ejected out of their rented houses along with their wives and children. They take refuge under the over-head bridges, in motor parks and in petrol stations, or they parade the streets like vagabonds, and are daily exposed to the elements. As the times get more critical, these poor Nigerians have resorted to scavenging. Thousands of them can be seen daily, rummaging through garbage dumps in search of sour food, rotten fruits and used clothes.²⁸

This affirmation is an immediate effect of social injustices of which “all” are affected in one case or the other. It would be impossible for one to take active role in the society for its growth and development if people are jobless and unemployed; Luther simply puts it in *Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution* that if a man does not have a job or an income, he has neither life nor liberty nor the possibility of happiness. He merely exists. John XXIII avers thus:

The dignity of the human person involves the right to take an active part in public affairs and to contribute one’s part to the common good (...) “The human individual, far from being an object and, as it were, a merely passively element in the social order, is in fact, must be and must continue to be its subjects, its foundation and its end.”²⁹ (1963, no. 26).

John Paul II in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (Concern for the Social Order) also identifies the injustice posed by unemployment. He says that another indicator common to the vast majority of nations is the phenomenon of employment and under-development.³⁰ This is another area the Church should fight for the rights of men and women in order to find a gainful employment for all to contribute to the common good of the society where peace and tranquility will reign. The issue of common good in all contributing to the good of the society is an impor-

²⁷ M. Luther King (Jr.), “If the Negro Wins, Labour Wins” in M. James (ed.), *A Testament of Hope*, op. cit., pp. 201–207.

²⁸ G. Ehusani, *An Afro-Christian Vision “Ozovehe”...*, op. cit.

²⁹ John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, no. 26.

³⁰ John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, no. 18; cf. John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens* (1987), no. 37.

tant factor in the mind of Gandhi as Moniz quoted from *The Diary of Mahadev Desai* by Gandhi that:

I do not believe in the greatest good of the greatest number. It means in its nakedness that in order to achieve the supposed good of fifty-one percent, the interest of forty-nine percent may be, or rather should be, sacrificed. It is a heartless doctrine and has done harm to humanity. The only real, dignified, human doctrine is the greatest good of all, and this can be achieved by uttermost self-sacrifice.³¹

It would be a utopia if men are unemployed to contribute their little efforts and quota to the growth, development and sustenance of the society. And for man to do this, there must be an efficient form of employment that could cater for him and his family, then, complementing the efforts of others in the society.

Human rights refer to the concept that human beings have universal status regardless of legal jurisdiction and likewise other localising factors such as religion, ethnicity, nationality, tongue and race. Of importance to the notion of human rights, the sayings of Luther's *The Ethical Demands of Integration* put it right that ... man is not a thing. He must be dealt with, not as an "animated tool," but as a person sacred in himself. To do otherwise is to depersonalise the potential person and desecrate what he is.³² Okere opines that human rights are the rights of human beings as human beings, safeguarding the minimum necessary for their life and dignity as human beings.³³ The philosophy underlying human rights addresses questions about the existence, content, nature, universality and its justification. The strong claims made on behalf of human rights often provoke skeptical doubts: through the independence of human rights from legal discourses, of which we cannot discuss human rights in its application to man without involving the issue of legal aids and other aspects of the rule of law. It is put in a better way in *The Catholic Faith*³⁴ that the principle of human rights is of profound concern to the area of social justice and is the measure by which it can be tested in the life of political bodies. The issue of rights is also in private ownership of property; the right of the workers to receive just wage, and to form labour unions as a platform for negotiating with the employers. This is the thrust of *Rerum Novarum* (The Condition on Labour). Leo XIII puts it that private ownership is in accordance with the law

³¹ J. Moniz, *A New World Order: Mahatma Gandhi & Pope John Paul II*, Mumbai: Better Yourself Books, Bandra, India, 1999.

³² M. Luther King (Jr.), "The Ethical Demands for Integration" in M. James (ed.) *A Testament of Hope*, op. cit., pp. 117–125.

³³ T. Okere, "Human Rights and Democratisation in West Africa" in F. Uwaigbo et al., *Church and Democracy in West Africa*, Port-Harcourt: CIWA Publications, Nigeria, 2003, pp. 30–46.

³⁴ J. Dupuis (ed.), *The Christian Faith* 2001, Bangalore: Theological Publications, India, 2001, no. 2137.

of nature.³⁵ The issue of just wage is a right of the employee that... the employer makes free agreement, and in particular let them agree freely as to the wages...³⁶ There is a support for free associations and or unions for the employees to drive home their points and grievances.

Apart from the above-examined issues of social injustices, there are many others like issue of resource control, when people from areas where resources are being generated daily without paying the people back either in cash or kind. An instance here is that of Niger-Deltans (Nigeria) fighting for their rights. Another issue is that of education in less advantaged states of the federation, which has affected some innocent students of being admitted into the best federal institutions citing the claim of federal character to admit people from northern states of Nigeria especially into institutions not on the same pedestal with their counter-parts from the southern part. Kukah explains such issues of social injustice in one of his lectures thus:

The acrimony that resonated over power sharing; oppression, victimisation, discrimination, blatant corruption, all led to a search for alternative source of refuge. Today, more and more of our patriots of old have retired to the backwaters of ethnic atavism where the moral bankruptcy of the political system has now unleashed the deep-seated devils of bigotry.³⁷

4. Pivoting issues of social change in Africa: The Church to the rescue

At the 'dangerous culture of silence' by so many institutions in Africa, the Church in adhering to the daily search for justice from the stand-point of the universal call for justice ought to rise as an organ in the face of problems facing the citizenry. Here, Ehusani opines with the assertion of Suenens that, "it is useless to speak to the world's outcast about prayer, about heaven and the rest. He says the world will not listen. Instead ..., "speak to them of justice, labour with them to obtain indispensable reforms and then Christianity will have some meaning to them." It would not be enough to preach daily and people develop spiritually without its efficient realities. This, the Church in Africa must do and perform in faithfully following the so many strategies that could be undertaken in the over-all struggle for justice and social change.

Door writes that Christians accept that there is a clash between good and evil in society. But not very many of them have come to think of this as a strug-

³⁵ Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, no. 9, cf. no. 13.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 45.

³⁷ M. Kukah, "Christians and the Vision of Nigeria" in *The Catholic Witness*, Ede: Provincial Pastoral Publications, Nigeria, pp. 13–20.

gle between sin and grace, between the forces of evil and the power of God.³⁸ In Kukah's opinion, he states that, "it is my belief that, if Christians are to become relevant in consolidating the stability of our nation, then it must be at the highest level of policy formulation and articulation."³⁹ Ehusani corroborates this, saying:

The Nigerian Christian elite have a role to shape the direction of their society. They cannot be passive onlookers in the unfolding of events in their country ... they must make a definite commitment to the evolution of alternative, social, economic and political structures that will make for justice, good governance, peace and posterity.⁴⁰

So, to put an end to this, the Church hierarchies ought to encourage her children to participate actively in the day-to-day activities of the society as Door opines:

To struggle against injustice means committing oneself to changing the structures of society so that there is a better distribution of power. The aim is to give effective power to those who have been left out on the margins. This involves reducing the excessive and unchecked power of those in the centres of power in the various sectors of society.⁴¹

Gandhi's vision of "Village Republic" was based on participation. Instead of a minority holding power and deciding for the majority, Gandhi wanted that everyone should participate in decision making.⁴²

Rawls in *A Theory of Justice* writes in favour of civil disobedience. To him, only the just institutional arrangements need to be respected. Following Rawls' explanation, civil disobedience including tax evasion, peaceful rallies, public lectures condemning injustices are welcome ideas. Again, Door adds to the above that:

(...) There is need for carefully planned and concerned action at the political level to challenge the injustice, it is clear that there should be a certain gradation in such action. At first there might be a private protest; if this does not succeed there might be letters to the newspapers; then, perhaps, a public protest march, and so on.⁴³

³⁸ D. Door, *The Social Justice Agenda*, op. cit.

³⁹ M. Kukah, "Christians and the Vision of Nigeria", op. cit.

⁴⁰ G. Ehusani, *A Prophetic Church*, Ede: Provincial Pastoral Publications, Nigeria, 1996.

⁴¹ D. Door, *The Social Justice Agenda*, op. cit.

⁴² J. Moniz, *A New World Order*, op. cit.

⁴³ D. Door, *The Social Justice Agenda*, op. cit.

In the process of putting this idea of civil disobedience into practice, it should be noted again as civil protests and non-violent actions that could endanger lives and property. Examples of such could be learnt from the “saints of non-violence” – Martin Luther King (Jr.), Gandhi, Romero, Tutu, Sin and Christ who came to preach the gospel of *social change, restoration and peace* (cf. Lk. 4:18ff; Is. 61:1–2; 58:6). In this realm, Ehusani reproduces the affirmations of Aniagwu in support of peaceful rallies thus, “the time may well have come for the Church in Africa to borrow a leaf from the examples of the Philippines ... and take to the streets to drive home all her sermons about justice and rights that have so far gone unheeded”⁴⁴

In this analysis of civil disobedience based on non-violence, Moniz reproduces the words in *The Mind of Gandhi* that:

The world of tomorrow will be, must be, a society based on non-violence. It may seem a distant goal, an unpractical utopia. But it is not in the least unobtainable, since it can be worked for here and now. An individual can adopt the way of life to the future – the non-violent way – without having to wait for others to do so. And if an individual can do it, cannot whole group of individuals? Whole nation? Men often hesitate to make a beginning because they feel that the objective cannot be achieved in its entirety. This attitude of mind is precisely our greatest obstacle to progress – an obstacle that each man, if he only wills it, can clear way.⁴⁵

In *I have a Dream*, he says:

Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred. We must for ever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence. Again and again we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force.⁴⁶

In *Non-violence: The Only Road to Freedom*, he again stresses that, “Along with the march as a weapon for change in our non-violent arsenal must be listed the boycott. Basic to the philosophy of non-violence is the refusal to co-operate with evil ... But again the boycott must be sustained over a period of several weeks and months to assure results”⁴⁷

The youth remain the centre and pivot of all activities in the world today be it politics, science, sports, arts, crafts and all other human yearnings but this age bracket should be given a proper identification and identity against all forms of

⁴⁴ G. Ehusani, *A Prophetic Church*, op. cit.

⁴⁵ J. Moniz, *A New World Order*, op. cit.

⁴⁶ M. Luther King (Jr.), “I have a Dream” in M. James (ed.) *A Testament of Hope*, op. cit., pp. 217–220.

⁴⁷ M. Luther King (Jr.), “Non-violence: The Only Road to Freedom” in *ibid.*, pp. 54–61.

problems and evils like armed gangs, cyber crimes, corporate prostitution, advanced fee fraud popularly known as “419”, examination malpractices among others. The Church should continue in her good works for the inculcation of good cultures, virtues and values in order to get them trained for the leadership positions in the society. For our rays of hope to be realistic, the advice of Luther must be adhered to and followed. In *The American Dream*⁴⁸, he writes:

We must keep our moral and spiritual progress abreast with our scientific and technological advances ... Civilisation refers to what we use; culture refers to what we are ... If we are to survive today and realise the dream of our mission and the dream of the world, we must bridge the gulf and somehow keep the means by which we live abreast with the ends for which we live.

The need to develop characters in the veins of the leaders of tomorrow is an asset that the Church must not shirk from her responsibility. Apart from being dedicated to the formation of good characters, the ability to forge ahead in fighting for one’s rights is plausible. Luther in *Speech Before the Youth March for Integrated Schools* reiterates as follow:

Whatever career you may choose for yourself ... let me propose an avocation to be pursued along with it. Become a dedicated fighter for civil rights. Make it a central part of your life ... Make a career of humanity. Commit yourself to the noble struggle for equal rights. You will make a greater person of yourself, a greater nation of your country, and a finer world to live in.⁴⁹

Conclusion

My contention in this paper has been that the quest for social change in the atmosphere of social injustice would be a futile exercise not until diverse institutions in Africa take the bull by the horn that the masses could experience social change. Then, the Church must not dash the hopes and aspirations of all in the pursuit of justice and equity. Therefore, the Church as the ‘mouth-piece’ of the down-trodden ought to fight for positive social changes and for the worse-offs in the society as Luther writes in *I see the Promised Land*:

Who is it that is supposed to articulate the longings and aspirations of the people more than the preacher? Somehow the preacher must be an Amos, and say, “Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.” Somehow, the preacher must say with Jesus, “The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to deal with the problems of the poor.”⁵⁰

⁴⁸ M. Luther King (Jr.), “The American Dream” in *ibid.*, pp. 208–216.

⁴⁹ M. Luther King (Jr.), “Speech Before the Youth March for Integrated Schools” in *ibid.*, pp. 21–22.

⁵⁰ M. Luther King (Jr.), “I See the Promised Land” in *ibid.*, pp. 279–286.

The above should be situated in the quest for better society for all where the Church as an institution should be able to play those fundamental roles of preaching the social gospel (cf. Is. 61: 1–3; Lk. 4: 16–19). It is from above views and which is inherent in the position of Marion Young that justice could be discussed extensively upon in a democratic society where participation in public discourses and decision-makings are embedded. She believes that democracy is a condition for public arriving at decisions whose substantively just outcomes including distributive justice would affect all and sundry in the society. This would be desirable that justice in a group-differentiated society (like African multi-ethnic society) demands social equality of groups and mutual recognition of group differences (cf. Young, 1990:191).

Summary

It would not be out of place to state from the outset that injustices in all forms pervade African society, and that one should not be put in the dark as if things are normal either for the better-offs or the worse-offs in the society respectively. One could imagine a society where all kinds of social perversions hold sway, an individual would not find it difficult to assert in clear terms that such is yet to develop as acceptable by the citizenry. The age-long political instability in Africa has been the result of injustices in all ramifications. So, this portends great dangers for African society in the struggle for a positive and organised social change in a new world order.

This paper will, therefore, thematise the functional and compulsory roles the Catholic Church as an institution ought to play in the over-all strategies for social change in Africa through the veracity of her social treatises. This is not to deny the fact that other religions and Christian sects are doing something worth-while concerning the issue of social justice. But it emphasises the fact that the Church is at the fore-front of the struggle for social justice in all its ramifications examining it from her traditions and history.

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