

POLITICS OF MEDIOCRITY AS THE CAUSE OF UNDERDEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Ideas are crucial in confronting political challenges of society. The right ideas, when contemplated by leaders, are deployed to develop society for satisfactory and comfortable existence of citizens. Yet, this is sometimes not the case in some societies. Leaders, who ought to contemplate right ideas for developing society sometimes contemplate wrong ones or act complacently to existing wrong ideas. This is problematic. It leads to either total underdevelopment of a society or an averagely developed one. Since individuals are never completely evil and, as such, leadership ideas are never completely wrong, societies organized by averagely right leadership ideas are constantly poorly developed. This characterizes the political mediocrity and its consequential poorly developed state of affairs plaguing the Nigerian nation. This essay utilizes analytical method of philosophizing to posit that the human person, being an embodiment of ideas (both right and wrong), needs to deploy the right ones to govern society so as to develop it. Specifically, it avers that Nigerian leaders (both actual and prospective) need to avoid deploying mediocre ideas in governance so as to develop the nation and offer citizens satisfactory and comfortable living. Also, the followership, which works to elect into public offices corrupt persons who buy votes or are nepotically connected to them, needs to shun such acts if genuine development is desired.

Keywords: Mediocrity, Politics, Development, Underdevelopment, Corruption

INTRODUCTION

Politics can be defined by societal development. A politically developed society is one whose leadership and followership are interested in and committed to achieving satisfactory and comfortable existence of citizens. Contrarily, a politically undeveloped, poorly-developed, or totally underdeveloped society is one whose leadership and followership are either averagely interested or completely uninterested in satisfactory and comfortable existence of citizens. Both kinds of societies are organized by ideas. And the ideas are expressed in government policies and their implementation. For the society whose leadership and followership interests reside in comfort of her citizens, government policies and implementation processes are carefully formulated with critical ideas that aim at delivering the good life. This characterizes the right ideas. On the other hand, wrong ideas characterize the leadership and followership interests in a society whose government policies and implementations deliver poor or averagely good life. What all these point to is the view that ideas are crucial in confronting political challenges of society. The right ideas, when contemplated by leaders, are deployed to develop society for satisfactory and comfortable existence of citizens. Yet, this is sometimes not the case in some societies. Leaders, who ought to contemplate right ideas for developing society sometimes contemplate wrong ones or act complacently to existing wrong ideas. This is problematic. It leads to either total underdevelopment of a society or an averagely developed one. Since individuals are never completely evil and, as such, leadership ideas are never completely wrong, societies organized by averagely right leadership ideas are constantly poorly developed. This characterizes the political mediocrity and its consequential poorly developed state of affairs plaguing the Nigerian nation.

In Nigeria, there are problems in all areas that identify a developed nation. In the most visible areas, there are poor states of physical and social infrastructural developments evident in compromised quality of roads, medical facilities, schools and education, etc. The society is inundated with conditions of life that make it impossible to sustain reasonable standard of living for the human person. This leaves the masses with constant feeling of helplessness and hopelessness in the face of deep longing for the good life. It denies them the state of existence that characterizes dignity of humanity. The ugly situation is especially appalling when considered in the light of what obtains in developed nations where human beings also exist and lead (World Bank 1).

This essay utilizes analytical method of philosophizing to posit that human beings or, specifically, Nigerian leaders – being embodiment of ideas – need to deploy the right ideas to govern the nation so as to develop it. It avers that in doing so, the leaders (both actual and prospective) need to avoid deploying mediocre ideas in governance so as to offer citizens satisfactory and comfortable living. Also, the followership, which works to elect into public offices corrupt persons who buy votes or

are nepotically connected to them, needs to shun such acts if genuine development is desired. By analysis – as the philosophical method utilized in the essay – we mean breaking down of complex terms, notions, concepts, or views into simple ideas in order to present them and explain their implications more understandably than they were in the complex form (Etukudoh 47).

THE HUMAN PERSON AND SOCIETY

Very often, in defining the human person, elements of body and soul come to mind as components that characterize it. This presents a dualist view, which emphasizes a bifurcation of the elements as two separate components of a human person – with each having its own different constituents. From Plato's philosophy (Copleston 210), for instance, the body is the extended material aspect which, if followed, leads to all values below the ones required to organize life and society. Contrarily, the soul is the non-extended rational aspect which, when applied, contemplates and organizes all of the right values that characterize a good life and society. Plato, therefore, recommends that the soul should lead the body in order to develop society and provide comfort and security for the human person or citizens. But the dualistic definition of human person leads to problem of interaction between the body and the soul. This is the sort of problem encountered by Descartes in his rationalist study. Formulating the problem interrogatively, the question is: if the body is material and the soul is immaterial (rational) and both of them constitute the human person, how do the components (material and immaterial) interact to make a person the entity it is (Omoregbe 25-29)? This question has since become one of the perennial problems of metaphysics and philosophy of mind which, although has received various responses, thinkers are not yet settled on which should be the generally accepted position. There is need, therefore, to advance beyond the dualist conception of the human person to understand what it is.

The Organistic definition presents another view of the human person. Its intention is on how to overcome the problems associated with the dualistic conception of the human person. It therefore holds that the human person is one whole harmonious unity of both body and soul. With the unity, the human person is capable of performing actions that are considered both material and spiritual (Oladipo n.p.). This conception of the human person as a unity certainly helps to overcome the problems associated with the dualistic perspective of the human person as it lays emphasis on the human person as one substance that has the ability to engage in acts regarded as spiritual and acts regarded as material. Problems only emerge when the human person is divided into material and spiritual without any point of unity of the human person.

In the light of the dualistic and organic definitions of the human person as above, Ortega Y Gasset simply perceives the body and soul as means through which the

human person lives. In other words, for Gasset (*Man and Crisis* 73), emphasis is on living. And by living, the human person is a project, something that is not yet completed, but which is in the process of being completed – with continuous striving for better life. Such striving involves applying the best of ideas at a time, as one can get. Looking at the Platonic, Organistic and Gassetan conceptions of the human person, there seems to be disparity among them? But are they really contrary? And if they are, can they be reconciled? The Organistic conception of the human person, for instance, does not deny the human person having soul and body, which is also the Platonic position. It focuses, however, on the idea that the two elements are not separated in the human person – which is the nexus of Plato's conception. Organistic notion fuses the soul with the body. It emphasizes wholeness of the human person rather than dividing it into parts. Also, both the Organistic and Platonic conceptions are not opposed to the Gassetan conception. With respect to the two conceptions, the Gassetan conception merely emphasizes the idea of living. Gasset avers that the soul and body are parts through which the human person achieves the all important project of living. Living, for Gasset (*Man and Crisis* 74), is a project that the human person has to achieve. It is not already made and handed to the human person. It is always in the process of construction. The human person continues to construct how he wants his living to be. Hence, it is in the hands of the human person to determine how he wants to live in society.

THE HUMAN PERSON AS EMBODIMENT OF IDEAS

When the human person finds himself in existence, it is always in a specific society – with already made ways of doing things. The human person, therefore, becomes socialized with this already made ways of society. The societal culture then programs him/her and determines what he/she calls right and wrong. Within this setting, there are two types of people: the Noble-man and the Mass-man (Gasset, *The Revolt* 61). Gasset, in his *The Revolt of the Masses* (61-68), explains that the Noble-man makes extra effort to go beyond the culture he inherits from society and makes sacrifices to discover why society is the way it is and how it can be made better. The efforts and sacrifices culminate in invention of ideas. And the ideas are, oftentimes, the right ones. That is because they are geared towards betterment, improvement or development of society. On the contrary, the Mass-man is complacent with the culture he inherits. He does not bother asking questions about the way society is and whether it can be made better. He lacks the capacity to generate new and right ideas and bothers less about reorganizing society. Indeed, he fails to understand that ideas that reorganize society are generated from contemplating the best possible world in the light of the challenges of life presented by society. The Mass-man is only aware of and interested in traditional or already existing ways of doing things. And he lives that way.

Yet, in spite of the fact of his complacency, the Mass-man – just as the Noble-man – is not completely without ideas. The difference is only that one – the Noble-man – attempts to generate new and right ideas to reorganize society while the other – the Mass-man – merely lives by ideas that already established society. The Mass-man has idea to live by old ideas and not to generate new ones. To this end, the two kinds of persons are constituted of their ideas.

POLITICS AND THE IDEA-MAN

When contextualized within notions of government and governance, the two kinds of idea-people described above play different roles in policy formations and development of society as far as leadership and followership are concerned. Politics is about the process of recruiting leaders to govern society. Consequently, politics is not only concerned with leadership, it also extends to those who bring about the leadership – the followership. And both them are embodiments of ideas. As embodiments of ideas, they jointly determine the quality of society that emerges at any point in time – whether developed, averagely developed, poorly developed, or totally undeveloped. Followers with right ideas always recruit leaders with right ideas. And, contrarily, those with wrong ideas always recruit leaders with wrong ideas. A society where right thinking followers recruit right thinking leaders always develops, while the alternate society where wrong thinking, complacent, or mediocre followers recruit mediocre leaders always develops averagely, poorly, or is totally undeveloped.

Politics, in this sense therefore, becomes the determining platform for the direction and activities that ultimately provides the quality of life experienced by citizens in society. Based on the kind of leaders that the process of politics produce, citizens may live satisfactorily and comfortable or wallow in hopeless poverty, insecurity, and other forms of suffering. While a right thinking leadership elected by right thinking followership provides a comfortable society, a mediocre leadership elected by mediocre followership provides an uncomfortable society.

THE NIGERIAN POLITICAL EXPERIENCE

The Nigerian experience of politics is glaringly that of the Mass-idea-man. The followers who recruit the leaders do so from mediocre considerations. The leaders therefore turn out to be much less than satisfactory in approach to challenges of living. Time has not been taken to reason through citizens' condition of living in the face of poverty, insecurity, and other inconveniences of life. The zeal to turn things around for satisfactory and comfortable living is not in the horizon. If the followership were interested in recruiting right leadership, they would ask themselves vital questions that would help in selecting the leaders. Such questions would include: (1) what can the aspirant leader offer me to improve my life and common good? (2) Where does he/she stand in terms of rational and moral background characterizing rightness or wrongness

of character? (3) Do I really know him/her to be able to deliver on his/her campaign promises? (4) Is he/she experienced in leadership? Can he/she lead? (5) Does the person have ideas that would transform society for decent living? What we find rather is the followership asking questions such as: (1) how is the aspirant related to me (in terms of his/her community or region of origin)? (2) Is the person dogged enough to siphon the collective treasury in favor of himself/herself, his community, and region of origin? (3) How does the person's ascension to political office benefit me, right from campaign time? Will the person remember me personally with favors while in office? All these are wrong questions. They are questions from mediocre minds.

Consequent upon asking wrong questions as above, Nigerian followership often recruits wrong persons for the job of leadership. The wrongness in the selection is characterized by the leaders being, first and foremost, members of the same followership who also understands, from the point of view of the followers, the disinterestedness of the people in transformative leadership. Furthermore, he/she does not have the right ideas to transform the society. Not only does he/she lack the ideas, he/she is often unwilling to explore such possibilities because he is not personally and collectively required to. The emergent situation is the manifold insecurities staring at us in the face.

THE WAY FORWARD

The situation of wrongly recruited leadership cannot continue in Nigeria if we desire satisfactory and comfortable life. There has to be a change if we, as a nation, must achieve the goal of living reasonably. It is pertinent to note that when we talk about reasonable living, we are referring to the best sustainability of the human person possible. We are therefore thinking of the best 'good life' that contradicts the infra, toilsome and far below best possible rational life prevalent in our society today. To achieve the good life premised on reasonable living, there is a need for enlightenment of the followership involved in the recruitment of leadership in our nation. They need to know that it is not by magic that development is able to sustain the human person in the society. It is through right action, consistency and determination on the right path that a human sustaining society is built.

It is to be appreciated that life is a task. As Ortega Y Gasset (*The Revolt* 157) would describe it, it is a shipwreck. As a shipwreck, life on its own does not sustain the human person without the action of the human person. The shipwreck nature of life therefore is meant to reveal all challenges to experiencing decent human sustenance. Such challenges include: those of wrong ideas in form of wrong policies that are applied and challenges of non-availability of devices from technology to effectively ease miserable existence in our space. The nature of human life then needs the right action for the good life to emerge. It is this idea that Gasset expresses when he opines that life is a shipwreck, while culture, that is human's response to the nature of existence that is

a shipwreck, is the security, the satisfaction and comfort that the human person invents to confront the shipwrecked nature of human's condition (*Gasset, Man and Crisis* 97). In essence, the human person cannot just sit down, fold his/her arms and expect life to be good; or even approach life irrationally and carelessly and expect life to be satisfactory and comfortable. There has to be the right action in a decisive manner.

CONCLUSION

It suffices to understand that people who put themselves forward for election into leadership positions, at the same time, represent ideas and devices. By that is meant that they represent the culture they intend to launch as a response to human existence. That is a "shipwreck" requiring a life jacket or a culture in order for it to be experienced in a satisfactory and comfortable way. The followership that determines who emerges at the leadership position must be schooled in the above idea of the shipwreck nature of life and the right action in form of culture to ensure the good life. Consequently, the kind of life that the larger population wants is what prevails. As leaders represent ideas and devices to confront the shipwreck nature of life to achieve the good life, the followers have the responsibility to choose the leader that represents the best of ideas and devices. Such constitute those that would confront challenges of life based on the promises of their political campaigns. If the followers go for the best of representatives, they would transcend the mediocre considerations enumerated earlier.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. There should be education of the recruiting larger population on the insecurity and security nature of human existence.
2. The larger recruiting Population should be educated on how their actions are confrontations of the insecurity of human existence to bring about a satisfactory and comfortable life
3. Education on how the concept of culture is an encapsulation of both the insecurity of human existence and the labor of the human person to bring security into his existence.
4. There is the need for effective enlightenment of the larger recruiting population on the connection between actions at voting centers and the provision of the good life for the populace in the society.
5. A course should be developed on the insecurity and security of human existence via the concept of culture and introduced into tertiary institutions under the general studies departments of our institutions
6. In Universities of specialization like those of Sciences, Social Sciences and Technology, students are adequately to be enlightened under general studies courses on their identities as human beings before becoming by training/studies a scientist, social scientist and an engineer, and this should produce genuine

respect for humanities conception of culture as espoused in this discourse, in these students.

7. Exposure of followership to the shipwreck nature of life and their action in choosing the best of those who put themselves forward for elections into leadership position on the basis of what they represent, in ideas and devices to confront the shipwreck nature of life, truly provide hope for the good life in our society to be realize

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