CHRISTIAN HUMANISM AS THE SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM OF DEPERSONALIZATION IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD: A PERSPECTIVE ON NIGERIA

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Abstract

The human person as an abstract universal concept has been subject of academic research in many fields of learning. One fact which is clear is that all disciplines that engage in these inquiries about the human person, some without being conscious of it, uphold the supreme value of the subject of their study above the values of all other subject matters within created reality. The human person is therefore, a subject of many inalienable rights. These fundamental, connatural rights of 'the person' have however been denigrated, suppressed an, in extreme situations obliterated by certain systems and conventions as the world snowballs across epochs and civilizations. The consequence is that the 'subject' of the human person which invests him with these rights is often lost sight of. The subject for who's well-being the rights exist is thus 'objectified' and used as a means to an end thereby reducing the intrinsic, highest value which the human person possesses to the level of 'thing-ness', his life equated with that of any other lower creature. This paper captures this phenomenon as dehumanization and depersonalization. It argues that the only way out of the worrisome trend is a return to the principles of Christian humanism.

Keywords: Christian, Humanism, Personalization, Contemporary World

Introduction

A group of English free-thinkers who described themselves as 'secularists' emerged in the 19th century. Since this wild rough lemon budded and bore fruits until this 21st century, the socio-religion cum cultural atmosphere of the world has never been the same. This is more pronounced in the area of scale of values. An age-old value system ran amok. That was not unexpected. Secularization –Secularity – Secularism was certainly an ill-wind that blew the world a lot of evil. As church property was confiscated and all cases and opinions about man began to be determined extensively by the State (secularity), as well as a process (secularization) with 'salvific' ideology (secularism) took center stage, societal equilibrium was bound to fail. Although, one does not deny the existence of this phenomenon alongside strong religious control of society as the Christian Church did from the very beginning of the

Christian era, Christianity virtually lost control at the wake of secularism ante-dated by the Enlightenment.

Consequently, man-as-man literally became the measure of all things. God and religion except as these served man's immediate selfish ends were relegated to the corner. What the Nigerian society and other countries of the world suffer today are therefore, the offshoots of secularism. Dehumanization/depersonalization which implies treating the human person as an object rather than a subject, the issue which is mainly the interest of this paper, is unarguably the highest level secularism can reach in its outright disregard for God and revealed Religion.

This writer however contends that there is still hope even in the midst of the various forms of depersonalization prevalent in Nigeria and the world today. That beacon of hope is the Christian Church, through her teaching on principles which uphold the supreme authority and power of Creator-God over entire creation: for the good of man. Christian Humanism is both the perspective and system through which this can be achieved, even as the Church herself may not be totally exonerated from some sorts of depersonalization.

What is depersonalization?

It will be beneficial to explain the term depersonalization at least briefly before we look at the different angles from which it is constituting a herculean task to all well-meaning peoples across the globe. This further requires us to see what 'person', which basically is the English root of depersonalization means.

'Person' is etymologically derived from two Latin words *per* (through) and *sonare* (to sound). Rendered in coherent English *per sonare* would translate: 'to sound through'. There is also the other meaning

as obtains in classical Latin which is *Persona*. This meaning applies more to the part which an actor/actress plays in a drama, originally in ancient Roman and Greek theatric acts; but we also use the same meaning today when we speak of '*dramatis personae*', (literally: persons of the drama). One important point to note in the explanation is that 'person' is a subject, not an object. It is in line with this understanding that Boethius (6th century AD) defined it thus: *persona est substantia individua rationalis naturae* (a person is an individual substance of a rational nature), (Ryan, 1993). We consider it contextually adequate to leave our explanation of 'person' at this ontological level, without going into the psychological, existential, and other shades of meaning of the term.

Now going back to our observation that 'person' is eminently a subject and not an object. We then ask ourselves, what does it mean to be a 'subject'? What are the implications of the 'person' being a subject? In our context, subject would mean that which is so ontologically unique and complete that its wholeness cannot be undervalued/devalued or denigrated. One of the implications of 'the Person' being a subject is that he is not an object (meaning here: 'a thing'). He is also a subject of rights (most of which are inalienable in normal settings) such as rights to life, freedom, etc. He has also privileges. His consciousness of these, his efforts at enhancing them within the society and the society's consistent upholding of the subject's rights and privileges add value to his subject-ness, his person-ness, his human-ness. Anything in the contrary denigrates these rights and privileges and automatically objectifies the subject, depersonalizes the Person and dehumanizes the human being. The human person is simply thus reified, converted to a mere thing. This is depersonalization which can also be rendered

'dehumanization'. So how does the evil of depersonalization stare the contemporary world in the face?

Challenges of Depersonalization in Our Time

Marcel (1962), one of the foremost existentialist philosophers of our time, once argued that "From the very fact that I treat the other person as a means of resonance, I tend to consider him as a sort of apparatus which I can or think I can dispose at will". Lacoste (1974), corroborated this, asserting that "Whenever I consider my neighbor as a thing, as an object or function, he is nothing more than a he or she or it for me". These two contentions constitute the hallmark of depersonalization evident in the multifarious incidences of dehumanization and dehumanizing structures which are increasing by the day in our world. We shall, as briefly as possible, discuss depersonalization/ dehumanization here from two angles: as it stares the secular society in the face, and as the adulatory status of this phenomenon within, and from the precincts of the sacred today calls for caution in the form of *cave ne cadas* (take care that you may not fall).

Depersonalization and the Secular

This statement may sound too flat, and therefore seem like an over-generalization but it is true. All totalitarian governments/regimes as well as all none truly democratic administrative structures are agents of depersonalization. Essentially, it is characteristic of these leadership structures to suppress human rights, suffocate freedom and enthrone timorousness in the psyche of a greater percentage of the citizenry. Such a socio-political atmosphere does not have much respect for the rights of many people who make up the populace, be these rights fundamental, moral, political, economic, religious or otherwise. Human dignity, by the implication of the fore going is at best, marginally upheld and respected. In extreme situations, it is even obliterated.

This situation persists despite the wide acceptance of the opinion that "recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world", (Ekwealor & Asalu, 2011). It is against this background that the 1948 United Nations General Assembly made the following universal declaration in its article: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood". Nigeria, though not yet born as an independent state when the UN made this declaration, has been signatory to the UN Charter through the decades. And the constitution of our country states same in unmistakable terms, though there have been periods when the constitution was either over-ruled or suspended, more especially in military junta regimes. During such dark eras of Nigeria's political history, depersonalization was simply the order of the day, as it was outrageously employed by the powers that be to achieve its totalitarian, power-drunk goals. Nigeria is also a member of the Common Wealth of Nations which, in its Harare Declaration of 12th November, 1995, ruled against all forms of human rights abuse and suppression in strong terms.

All these beautiful legislations in favor of the human person not-withstanding, "Successive military rule (sic) came to delegitimize Nigeria politically and morally that she became a pariah nation", (Onyebuchi, 2004). The phenomenon of total disregard for human rights and the human person in Nigeria was so shocking that even when a respected Nigerian,

Emeka Anyaoku, was Commonwealth Secretary General and the body had her summit in New Zealand, November 1995, Nelson Mandela could not restrain his usual diplomatic astuteness from the following flabbergasted impression about Nigeria: that the summittees were actually brainstorming about an illegitimate, barbaric, arrogant military dictatorship which has murdered activists using kangaroo court and false evidence. That is what we are against. Our impatience at the development in Nigeria is that a nation that we look up to should not be subjected to tyranny", (Odion Akhane, 2004). He was obviously referring to the Abacha regime which had killed Ken Saro-Wiwa and his other eight Ogoni compatriots by hanging. His junta had also dealt summarily with M.K.O Abiola who had declared himself, or been declared the President of Nigeria in the famous Epetedo Declaration of June 12, 1994, following his popularly upheld victory at the presidential polls of June 12, 1993, which the preceding Ibrahim Babangida junta callously cancelled.

"Who killed Dele Giwa?" remains an unanswered question in Nigeria, at least to the ordinary Nigerians. And that act of impunity of total disregard for the value of human life, besides that against the Ogoni activists, was a flagrant violation of the different sections of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, as amended. Section 33, article (1) for example provides that the sanctity of the human person shall be recognized and the human dignity shall be maintained and enhanced. Section 34, article (1), in more concrete and soul-lifting terms states thus: "Every individual is entitled to respect for the dignity of his person and accordingly no person shall be subjected to torture or inhuman or degrading treatment" (Constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999.) Of course nobody should be horrified at the degree of non-conformity of the foregoing wholesome principles to what obtains in practice, given the fact that no government in Nigeria since Independence has administered the country by the rule of law up to fifty percent. This is why the law enforcement agents in Nigeria can act with impunity in their handling of perceived/alleged breakers of the law.

Take the Nigerian Police Force, for instance. Of course policing philosophy is traceable to European social history within which man's inhumanity to man necessitated that the police be an extension of the monarchy and organized like an army, paid total and unquestionable allegiance to the king. The police could therefore contain crimes and social upheavals in society, deal with people of contentious political opinions, besides that "an individual could be spirited away and kept in custody indefinitely on an unknown charge", (Randinowicz, 1966). Although the Renaissance period dealt a debilitating blow on powerful monarchies across Europe, leading to democratization, vestiges of near absolute governments still remain with us in Africa, nay Nigeria, with the use of which our leadership makes of the Nigerian Police Force as only but one concrete example. This wouldn't have been the case had our colonial masters not employed crude inhuman measures, including the police force to facilitate the subjugation of their colonised communities. The police as an organ of government today across the continent of Africa including Nigeria is modeled after the colonial police; thus our police works from the background of the colonial police psyche. This is why members of the Nigerian Police Force today have a slogan: "obey the last order!" With this, the police in Nigeria does not care about the moral quality of the order given, but only minds the authority from which the order emanates. In crime control and crowd

control, members of the Nigerian Police Force are ridiculously both at their best and at their worst. In each of such situations, the Nigerian police is very likely to achieve the feat, but not without another resultant sad situation. There are, no doubt, exceptions! But the former is more common with us. Extra-judicial killing, unlawful detentions, induced crime confessions, and so forth, and not excluding revenge killings, are some of the activities of the police in Nigeria which leave much to be desired.

What we are trying to push through is the argument that in the Nigerian secular society, governments that should see to the enhancement of value of the human person consciously or unconsciously encourages dehumanization and depersonalization of the same person whose value and rights it ought to protect. This our government do either directly by unrestrained use of organs like the police force, or by promoting or over-looking the excesses of such security outfits. In this regard, one feels that our governments should heed the following words of wisdom from the Episcopal Conference of Kenya:

Human dignity has always been, and still is, a binding force in the African society and the Bible reinforces and confirms our understanding of human dignity. It reveals to us that everybody is created in the image of God. This image of God in us is the source and foundation of our human dignity.

It is important to underscore the fact here, that all acts of depersonalization / dehumanization offend against the high premium which the African society places on the human person and his life as not only inviolable but sacred. No quality of life can be devalued, so it seems in a typical African setting: no matter how carefree the possessor (the person) of such a life could

be, his life cannot be considered equivalent to the life of any other lower creature. This is why the upsurge of reckless killings (through conventional warfares and other brutal, non-conventional means) taking place today in many parts of the continent are a source of gruesome pains to Mother Africa.

Saddened by the ignominy with which human life is terminated today and other crimes committed against the personness of the human being on the African soil without any fear of the Creator-God, Mother Africa laments the mythic withdrawal of God from the world of man. She however warns us as Eboussi Boulaga reasons, that God's withdrawal from our human world (as it were) is "to allow man to exercise his freedom and his responsibility". However, we must face the truth that since God is (paradoxically) transcendentally immanent as Catholic Theology also admits, "the remoteness of God does not exclude his proximity (such that) immanence and transcendence meet in him without any dichotomy or confusion and that he(God) sits on the back of every one of us", (Mununguri,1998). If the key actors on the 'secular stage' of our earthly but mysterious world were conscious of this, depersonalization and all dehumanizing measures and structures would be handled with the urgency they deserve in the contemporary age. All we have said is only as the phenomenon of depersonalization affects the secular society. But how far does it also confront the 'sacred' segment of the same society in which we live?

(b)   In the Precincts of the Sacred

What we have said in the fore going (a) sub-section of this thinking aloud on depersonalization is but an overview on the topic in the Nigerian society. It is a tip on the iceberg as it concerns man's excessive

and irresponsible use of freedom which contradicts and negates divine purpose and plan for man in the world. But such is the scenario in reference to upholding and enhancing the value of the human person in the purely 'secular' (though by this delineation) Nigerian environment/society is the religious ('sacred') atmosphere free of the same atrocities? To what extent has the religious milieu upheld and promoted the sacredness of human life, the dignity of the human person, the inalienable rights of the individual, all in obedience to the one Creator-God which virtually all world religions recognize as the source and owner of (human) life? Skipping African Traditional Religion (ATR) which is the third of the major religions in Nigeria, we shall briefly look at Islam and Christianity in reference to the phenomenon of depersonalization (non-observance of the supreme value of the human-person/life) in Nigeria today, in its varied forms. One unfortunate observation we are not too quick to make in this regard is that the score sheet rates religion (especially Islam) in Nigeria very low as an agent of peace and convivial co-existence.

Until the early eighties, there had prevailed an uneasy calm and co-operation on the Nigerian religious terrain, though there had been pockets of religious violence between the adherents of Islam and Christianity, more often than not caused by the Muslims. That was the situation until religious violence reached a new height in 1980 in Kano, the largest city in the north of the country, where the Muslim fundamentalist sect Yan Tatsine ("followers of Maitatsine") instigated riots that resulted in four or five thousand deaths. That was the inception of intermittent, religiously master-minded unrests that became the lot of Nigeria and Nigerians, more especially in the northern part, for the next two decades before the faceless, insurgent Boko Haram.

"Insurgent" means that Boko Haram is primarily fighting the government. It however beats one's imagination how far the Nigerian government and government officials have been directly affected by the activities of this group so far. Is it not rather innocent, indefensible masses that are directly affected? Former governor of Borno State, Ali Modu Sheriff who has denied the allegation is a living example. Ali Ndume, currently a senator from Borno State was also accused of fraternizing with Boko Haram. (TELL, July 27, 2015. P.22)

With the Bauchi jail break in September 2010, following the killing of Mohammed Yusuf, leader of Boko Haram, subsequent take-over of leadership by Abukabar Shekau, killing of about 700 of its members along with some 600 others by the members of a joint military task force against 'Operation Flush' of the Boko Haram, the battle line had been drawn. By 2011, the superior weapon used by the group, coupled with the ever improving sophistication of its strategies, led observers to speculate that Boko Haram was affiliated with Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), which was active in Niger, Nigeria's north-eastern neighbor. Accordingly, Boko Haram attacked many targets: security, religious, political and, most devastatingly, civilian targets.

In the history of the continent of Africa, suicide bombing strategy had only been employed by al-Shabaab in Somalia, and less disastrously by the AQIM mentioned above before its current rampant use in the almost weekly multiple attacks by Boko Haram in Nigeria.

The election defeat of former military dictator Muhammadu Buhari in 2011 increased ethno-religious political tensions, as it broke the terms of a total agreement that the presidency would alternate after two terms of office between

candidates from the Christian south and Muslim north of the country. Sectarian riots engulfed the twelve northern states of the country during the three days following the election, leaving more than 800 dead and 65,000 displaced. The subsequent campaign of violence by Boko Haram culminated in a string of bombings across the country on Christmas Day in 2011.

The insurgents executed 115 attacks in that year alone. Death toll was about 550 persons; more than half of which number were also killed in similar attacks within the first three weeks of the year 2012. It was as a temporary solution to this state of affairs that a state of emergency was then declared by President Jonathan in only Borno State (extended in 2013 to the three states). But two days after this, Boko Haram handed down a three-day ultimatum to all southern Nigerians residing in the north to leave. In the attacks that followed almost immediately, "Christians and members of Igbo ethnic group" were targeted by the terrorists. Lives and property lost have remained unquantified till date, while many Igbo people fled the north.

The abduction of 276 school girls (said to be writing the SSCE) from a school in Chibok in April 2014 became the most dehumanizing atrocity perpetrated by the terrorists. At different occasions, these girls have been said to have been forcefully converted to Islam, married to Boko Haram members, sold into trans-border slavery in Niger, Chad or Cameroun, and so forth; though these remain unsubstantiated. More than fifty of these girls were said to have escaped on-transit from their abductors, leaving some 219 girls in the trauma of Boko Haram depersonalizing unknown enclave for over two years now. This, however, was only but the beginning of the siege the group had to unleash on Nigeria especially in the north-east from 2014 to 2016 and beyond until as eagle eyes foresee, they over-run Nigeria and the Koran is dropped in the Atlantic Ocean predicted by a foremost First Republic Nigerian 'nationalist'.

Direct attacks and suicide bombings (more often used lately) are the strategies both are occasionally cleverly used in one attack as a report has it regarding a village in Adamawa State that a large number of gunmen invaded the village, forcing residents to flee to a nearby bush. Two female suicide bombers disguised as fleeing villagers detonated explosives in the bush where many people were hiding, killing 12 persons". Such have been the terrorist attacks more especially in Adamawa, Kano and Yobe States with Nasarawa State and the Capital territory also receiving some fair shares of the attacks.

It is said that a good number of the Boko Haram terrorists fought in affiliate Al Qaeda groups in Mali in 2012 and 2013, then returned to Nigeria with their expertise in terrorism. Hence Abu Qaqa, spokesman of the group, admitted their collaboration saying: "We are together with al-Qaeda, they are promoting the cause of Islam, just as we are doing. Therefore, they help us in our struggle and we help them, too".

Over 2.3million people have been killed in Boko Haram terrorist attacks in Nigeria since its inception, most especially between 2009 to July 2019. For instance, in 2019 alone over one thousand lives were lost to Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. About triple that number have become refugees within and outside Nigeria within the period. The number of those wounded defiles all statistical accuracy. Property destroyed is only short of the federal troops devastation of the Biafran territory during the last months of the civil war. All this is

done in the name of Allah, although the Boko Haram terrorists also fight their fellow Muslims. At the same, ironically, the holy book of Islam, the Qur'an, is replete with such holy rulings as: "Do not kill yourselves, for verily Allah has been to you most merciful" (4:29); "take note, life which Allah has made is sacred" (6:151). It thus stands to reason that Islam as a religion condemns all forms of killing. To what extent the Muslims live by the teachings of this 'holy' book is another question.

As Nigeria contends with the Boko Haram insurgency as a faceless group, Fulani herdsmen have become another threat to the southern and, most especially eastern parts of the country. In this regard, a concerned and affected Ecclesiastic vouches that the Fulani, Boko Haram and the rest of them have a religious undertone….The Fulani herdsmen are moving down….Last time it was Oyo and now it is Enugu. If they succeed in destabilizing the whole of these Christian communities, then Islam will scale through. It is not just about grazing. It is more about religious fanaticism….we are making these Fulani become untouchables in this country. They move up and down with their cattle and kill people and nobody is talking.

Between January and May 2016 alone, at least 1000 people from the middle belt, the southern parts of Nigeria, and more especially the south-east have been murdered by Fulani herdsmen, most often, in cold blood through co-ordinated attacks! Look at the following startling information from The Global terrorism Index 2015: "Fulani militants" killed 1,229 people in 2014 – up from 63 in 2013, making them the "fourth most deadly terrorist group" as issued by the News Team of Chinua Achebe Centre for Leadership and Development, 2016. These herdsmen are said to be 90% non-Nigerians who are employed by the wealthy northern cattle rearers, most of whom are either senior military officers, high-ranking police officers and politicians presently in government or were there in the past, as security men for their animals, 80% of which herds security men 'reside' in the places we popularly call "Ama-Hausa" and "Garki".

Most of the Fulani herdsmen terrorists are believed to be migrants from Chad, Niger, and other nearby Islamic terrorist enclaves. It goes without saying, therefore, that the (fanatical) Muslim eminently hates the Christian, he hates the Confucian, the Shinto, the Taoist, the Buddhist, and so forth; indeed he also detests some of his fellow Muslims with perfect hatred, especially those peace-loving Muslims whom the fanatics brand 'infidels'.

What we have tried to show so far is that in Nigeria, dehumanization and depersonalization, to the point of untimely, gruesome deaths of vulnerable, innocent people – all in the name of fighting the cause of Allah constitute our bitter pill from Islam as a religion. But has nothing been happening within the next major religion (Christianity) in Nigeria, also 'in God's name'?

As much as is within the knowledge of this writer, with the exception of the Crusades of the 11th, 12th and 13th centuries, the Christian Church has not had the cause to engage in full military arms. Even the Crusades seemed to be the last resort in the series of efforts and strategies employed to recapture the Holy Land (Palestine) from (again) the Muslims who unlawfully occupied it.

Christianity the world over, has therefore remained a religion of peace and indeed a Messenger of Peace (shalom) to the human race; even as the angels sang at the birth of

its Founder (Jesus Christ). "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to men of good will" (Lk. 2:14). The words of the Prophet Isaiah 52:7, by extension, apply to all good Christians: "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation". And Matthew Henry Commentary says that "The gospel (good news) proclaims liberty to those bound with fears. The good news is, that the Lord Jesus reigns. Christ himself brought these tidings first". These are but pointers to the striking difference between Christianity and Islam, between Christians and Muslims and their founders and followers although, as observed earlier on, many Muslims are very peaceful and peace-loving. So Christianity shuns dehumanization and depersonalization. It rather promotes and enhances the human-ness, and the person-ness of the individual. In fact, when Christianity embarks on agenda "Proclaim Peace", it works for the total well-being of man – spiritual, moral, social, physical, economic, political, environmental, intellectual, name it! That is what *shalom* means. That is the mission of the Christian church to the world!

Having said this, there are some areas of the Christian church's life and system that need a careful revisitation: so that excess may not become the norm. Let us isolate the phenomenon of *clericalism* as an example, clericalism understood as "a division between ordained church leaders – that such church leaders have an exclusive society unto themselves and the lay followers". Our source also describes this understanding of clericalism as close to the perjurative manner in which it is "often used to denote an ecclesiolatory approach to issues beyond the church by either clergy or their supporters, as well as to describe the cronyism and cloistered political environs of Christian denominational hierarchy mainly in reference to the Roman Catholic Church." It goes further to insinuate that while the Catholic Church is most commonly at the center of issues germane to clericalism, it is not the only denomination or religion in which charges of clericalism have been brought forth by those who feel the clergy has too much influence or should be reformed.

The sheep-shepherd (pastor) symbolic language we use in many Christian churches seems to throw us open to overlooking a lot of matters of fact in our lives as a family of God, *Ecclesia*. In the Catholic Church for instance, the Bishop who, by virtue of his office as the immediate successor of the Apostles has the fullness of the priesthood of Christ in all its ramifications. This is why every catholic priest shares in the same priesthood of Christ by his participation in the *sacerdotis plenitudinis* of his local ordinary (for diocesans) or ordaining prelate (perhaps) for the religious. By a wide content-coverage validly ordained deacons are incorporated into the clergy. These three hierarchical orders constitute the body of ordained leadership in the Church. Below them are the lay religious men and women who, in very remarkable ways, are effective collaborators with the ordained ministers in executing the mission of Christ. Then come the large population of the laity we ordinarily refer to as 'the flock', 'the sheep'.

It is important to note, at this juncture, that the Church is truly *Ekklesia* because of these two segments that make up its membership, hence the expression "*corpus et capitis*", head and body. As it applies to Christ (the Head) and the Church (His body), so it applies to the clergy and the laity. Within the ranks of the *presbyteroi* (Bishops and their priests) and the incorporated rank of the *diakonia*, mutual

respect should prevail, while each person tries his best to discharge the duties proper to his clerical rank, without usurpation, suffocation, suppression or uncanonical appropriation of each rank's lawful duties, rights and privileges. The gainful outcome of such a convivial, collaborative pastoral atmosphere is "the joy-of-being" in the ranks and file of the clergy and a bountiful harvest in the Lord's vine yard. That will be the spirit of leadership with service as Jesus urges on the leaders of His Church in Lk 10:41-45. It is in this same spirit that mutual respect should obtain among the clergy. That respect helps each member and rankof the clergy to feel his worth as a human being as a person not treated as an object instead of the subject he is, subject of rights and privileges, entrusted with responsibilities. The deacon or the priest can then most accurately make meaning out of the connotation of his vow of obedience as a commitment to doing the will of God in the will of his ordinary/superior.

In the same vein the clergy especially priests, whose daily life and ministry are spent among the flock, the sheep, as it were, ought to relate to and with these 'sheep' not as objects to be manipulated and intimidated, but as human persons, subjects of respect, fair hearing, even freedom (including to come to 'your' church or go to someone else's). The shepherd should handle the 'sheep' not as those animal-animals we humans know for always 'sheeping over the fence', but as human-animals (like himself) who can also make use of their reason and intelligence. The priest should not catch on the gullibility, which has largely characterized the posture of the lay members of Christ's faithful people in dealing with the clergy and look down on them or disregard the intrinsic worth or value of each one's human-ness and person-ness. To do so would amount to nothing less than pastoral

callousness and lack of prudence the queen of all virtues. That is dehumanization and depersonalization. It is a type, a new wave of clericalism which, if not checked among ministers of the gospel here in Nigeria is bound to boomerang or back-fire and the clergy (and the Church as a whole) will be the worse for it. The wisdom of the fathers of Vatican Council II admonishes in this regard that "Contemporary man is becoming increasingly conscious of the dignity of the human person; more and more people are demanding that men should exercise fully their own judgment and a responsible freedom in their actions and should not be subject to the pressure of coercion". In another place, the Council Fathers counseled that for the priest to be effective in the ministry, he ought to cultivate those virtues highly esteemed in human relations such as "goodness of heart, sincerity, strength and constancy of mind, careful attention to justice, courtesy and others". It is taken for granted that the priest had acquired these virtues in the course of his many years of formation before ordination. Therefore, not to possess or exhibit them is a serious, debilitating, culpable lack.

Mention must be made here also of the priest who, after proclaiming the gospel during the mass, instead of explaining the word of God, starts barking at the congregation, at times out of annoyance for one shortfall in his expectation or another; on other occasions, as purely a misdirected anger. Think also of the priest indulging in pedophilia. These are dimensions of objectifying the human person and thus depersonalizing him or her.

So in as much as Christianity is not known to overtly engage in depersonalization by outright killing and maiming and culpable warfare, there are one or two subtle ways it could be involved in under-valuing the dignity of the human person and that by

objectify him rather than accord him the rights, respect and privileges due to him as a subject. Here is where Christian Humanism presents itself to us and to all peoples as a paradigm, more especially as other forms of looking at the intrinsic, connatural and inalienable value and rights of every human person across the centuries have fallen short of expectation. Briefly, therefore, let us see how Christian Humanism evolved, and remains the last resort among all advocacies of the human person in all aspects.

How came Christian Humanism?

Kelly (2010), in one of his works: *Rediscover Catholicism* prophetically adduced that "As we look to the future, there are a great many challenges that face the church…There are a great many people who think the problem with the world today is that people don't come to church. They think the challenge is to bring people to church, but the real challenge is to bring the Church to the people". It would not be incorrect to say that Kelly is, through this factual statement, evaluating the mission of the Church in the 21st century. Besides, the statement is also projective: in the sense that the status quo as it concerns the success-and-failure of the Church's mission today invariably anticipates the nature and quality of an uncertain future, not only of, and for the Church in her mission "ad gentes", but also the (secular) world as both the arena and the receptacle of the mission. After observing glibly the Church's hopeless marginalization from societal life "due to the process of secularization", Vincent Cosmao came hard with an antidote that spurred by concern over its identity and social function. The church today is more attentive to the course of world history and the signs of the time. To that extent it is also open to the new tasks facing humankind, as it comes to realize that those tasks coincide with its own mission, (Cosmao, 1984).

One would say that despite occasional failures and short-of-expectations of the Church across the centuries, she has equally remained a beacon of light and hope to the world in the face of a considerable number of historic-developmental outcomes that would have otherwise spelt doom for the world. One of such dark sides of world history was the emergence of humanism as "the deliberate effort to justify the Renaissance (which) arose in the 14th and 15th centuries as an intellectual movement among the nobility, especially the merchant aristocracy of the Italian city states", (Rahner, 1975). Petrarch, generally upheld as the real founder of humanism, had appealed to Cicero in his efforts at 'humanizing' the erstwhile virtues that made the Roman empire the center of the world. Greek philosophy subsequently overturned the table of influence against that of Christianity especially in the medieval era.

With humanism dominating the then "cultured" world of Europe, it was no longer a movement identified with an emerging social stratum but assumed the dimension of intellectual revolution. Humanities as a field of study was born, in addition to an intensified interest in many other areas such as natural philosophy, historical theory cum practice and historical research. The influential synthesis of Christianity and philosophy done by scholasticism now became merely a medieval age stalemate.

Humanism then posed a fresh challenge of how to reconcile the classical pagan cultural autonomy with Christian culture anchored on divine revelation. As an isolated, independent movement, humanism bowed out of the stage with the reformation. The period of the

Enlightenment came with neo-humanism within which scenario, the issue became how to mend fences between man's autonomous self-understanding and that understanding imposed on him by revelation. German idealism (especially in Lessing and Kant) subsequently projected the human spirit, emphasizing that practical reason remains "the sphere of religion" and is the only credible judge of whether religious truths are compatible with one's responsible self-understanding or not. Finally, humanism, in the form of a reaction against the rationalism of the period of the Enlightenment, underwent a sort of renaissance from the end of the 18th to the beginning of the 19th centuries. A harmonization was attempted of all the benefits of the new understanding of human individuality falling back, as it were, on the Greek concept of humanity and humanness. It was like the 'third humanism', a Western reversal to values of antiquity.

When in the 20th century Marxist humanism came on board, with the overriding emphasis on man being able to actualize all his hopes and possibilities with his spirit penetrating matter as the route to his self-realization, humanism, in concrete terms, depreciated to the realm of mere socio-economic policy wherein through purposeful planning of the production process/processes, an ideal 'personness' is produced which makes the individual person 'at home' with himself and in a harmonious participatory existence with other people. This was the "total man". It was after this and a brief neo-Marxism that followed it that Existentialism (championed by Jean-Paul Satre and Martin Heidegger) with its fanaticism about man's absolute freedom and responsibility within his ideal status of authentic existence saw itself also as a 'salvific' humanism. It is the uncompromising position of existentialist humanism that the only "true humanism is that within which one allows oneself to be opened to the "thereness" of "being", to the realm of the coming of the wholly sound", (Rahner, 1975).

A close consideration of these brands of humanism would show that God is either totally out of the picture of man's journey to actualized, authentic selfhood or personness, or is at best, considered not-necessary. But Christianity would not remain neutral and indifferent to non-Christian humanism, for Christianity does not see itself as an extrinsic alien imposition upon man but rather as God's summons to man which is mediated through and begins its transformative work at the very point where the hearer of the call is most authentically and responsibly himself and hence "human" in the highest sense.

This is how and why Christian humanism advocates that any understanding and picture of man not based on and that does not emanate from Catholic-Christian teaching on the Incarnatio and Escathology has no lasting values to offer the world in general and to man: the 'homo viator' in particular. So falling back on her glorious heritage in this regard, particularly as it concerns these (atheistic) shades of humanism, thereby recoursing to Erasmus, the early Christian apologists, the medieval theological-philosophical synthesis; the teachings of people like John Henry Newman, H.U. Balthazar, Henry de Lubac, etc; the Church takes a stand: The position – even if this does not say it all – is that true humanism cannot be contained and realized in a particular social system or order (like Marxism and existentialism) but in the actuality of the fact of man's freedom being both realized and shown to be so, within the context wherein man remains the unobjectifiable reality he is, which is eminently proper to the being, the

nature of the self. So that even as Christian humanism, through some seasoned theologians, engages the other brands of humanism in continuous dialogue, the rewarding anticipated outcome is expected to be a synthesis of all these humanist persuasions, ramifying into that noble humanism that authenticates man as the creature which, in freedom, realizes his being and achieves interpersonal harmonious existence with fellow humans through societal living, while at the same time remaining in a convinced faith and dependence on God.

Gabriel Marcel's Theistic Humanism versus Depersonalization

It is worthwhile to underscore the fact here, as established by Kard Barth, that in the Christian sense, humanism should be understood within the context of the humanity of God: The God whose kindness alone avails man of those free gifts which make him really himself – the image of God – "most authentically and responsibly himself and hence "human" in the highest sense". This sense and idea about every individual person is in our opinion, what Gabriel Marcel presents in his Existentialism as he distinguishes between problem and mystery. When we understand that dehumanization/ depersonalization involves and negatively affects us even if not directly as individuals but in the long run as one human family, then we will have taken note of the dimension of mystery wherein this phenomenon belongs. Within this mystery-context, we can then situate the human personality within the theological bastion of "The Word was made flesh". This understanding refuses to abstract the human person either from his source or from his lived concrete experiences, thereby objectifying him. The greatest harm to the human personality in this connection has been the Cartesian 'cogito'

whereby Rene Descartes harzaded establishing his existence as a thinking, rational being purely as an abstract existent, independent of any anthropological links. Thus the Cartesian dualism (body and soul) seems to be at the basis of all dehumanizing/depersonalizing tendencies and systems; as against the body-soul unity which validates and gives ever-increasing meaning and value to the human personality as midwived by the World-made-flesh.

Certainly Marcel's perspective in 'Incarnation' differs from its pure theological understanding, but does not exclude the logical connexion we have been making above. For him, 'incarnation' means "that I, a person, am not a self-enclosed ego but I am 'in the world': I am 'present' in a situation', (Marcel,1967). This introspective understanding of himself saves man the risk of the facelessness of the anonymous individual who automatically degrades himself simply to "an anonymous unit of that anonymous entity 'one' within which platform it is easy to conceive and treat the other person as a 'thing', an object. Against the background of the foregoing, Marcel introduces his 'I-Thou' relationship as antidote. Thus,

> "Whenever I consider my neighbor as a thing, as an object…he is nothing more than a he or she or it for me. When on the other hand, I look upon him or her as a Thou, I begin to see him as a person". (Marcel, 1967)

One remarkable characteristic of the 'I-Thou' relationship is its emphasis on 'Presence'. Within this quality relationship, I am mutually open to the other person in a genuine encounter vivified by a generous availability to the other, wherein everyone together, will become available-in-service to the

community of persons to which we individually and collectively belong. We can then and only then, see ourselves no longer as isolated entities, as strangers, indeed as 'poir soirs' (Jean-Paul Satre) who plot to plunder one another instead of enriching their person-ness. It is within this socio-religion anthropological arrangement that every human person attains his ontological status created in the image of God, and redeemed in the word-made-Flesh.

Vanier (1999), beautifully captures this quality of relationship as Belonging (which) is the fulcrum point for the individual between a sense of self and a sense of society. For him we can understand belonging as both a process and a place within which each of us "can accomplish his or her mission to work for justice, to struggle for peace and to serve others. In healthy belonging, we have respect for one another. We work together, cooperate in a healthy way, listen to each other. We learn how to resolve the conflicts that arise when one person seeks to dominate another." He goes further to affirm that it is because we belong with others and see them as brothers and sisters in humanity that we learn not only to accept them as they are… but to see each one as a person. In that way, we become "more fully ourselves, more fully human."

So one can justifiably interpret Gabriel Marcel's theistic humanism as that understanding of the human person as a subject whose intrinsic value and inalienable positive rights emanate from his privilege as a creature which alone among all created reality, bears the mark, and reveals the glory of the Creator-God. To tamper with such a creature, by any measure whatsoever, is thus an affront to God. In this understanding, any form of depersonalization destroys the joy of being among creature beings and of these beings in relation to Creator Being. This is the hallmark of Christian Humanism.

Conclusion: The Antidote to Depersonalization

At the root of depersonalization in all its forms today is the loss of grip with wholesome values. It is not like humanity has lost the sense of what is good and what is bad, what is right and what is wrong as much as it has lost the moral courage and the desire to live by the synderesis. This we think, is why much lower values are preferred to such a highest value as human life. Thus if human life is to be lost for a politician to win an elected position in government as we often witness in Nigeria, the value of political power automatically supersedes the value of human life/lives that go in for it. Money is the next thing after power in the order of values for the contemporary man. To arrive at affluence, many a man today is ready to do away with human life/lives. This comes in different ways: charms for money, human trafficking, come first to mind. But such other nefarious activities like kidnapping, armed robbery, assassination and so forth, are for purposes of getting money, irrespective of the scores of human lives destroyed to attain the goal. More unimaginable is the case of those who fight in (religious) fundamentalist groups across the globe, most of whom are said to receive their pay upfront, which money so-received is either spent or left for other beneficiaries before embarking on the mission: while signing a 50-50 contract of life and death. In this case for instance, a Boko Haram fighter or suicide bomber completely devalues his/her own life and that is why the lives of others who die or are harmed in his/her action don't mean anything. The person-ness of both the perpetrator of killings and his victims is logically reduced to 'thing-ness', purely objectified; at least so it appears to the

agent, even if only at the moment of action. Here is where the need arises for us to propose a 'cure', a panacea to the phenomenon of depersonalization in Nigeria and other parts of our world.

The conclusion of this paper is already contained in its title: "Christian Humanism as the Solution to Depersonalization in the Contemporary World". It's the view of this writer that accepting and applying the principles of (catholic) Christian doctrine especially on the origin of man, the value of his life, respect for his person-ness more so as shared-in by The Word-made-Flesh and thus highly elevated (deified?). All these and other teachings of the Church on human well-being and societal harmony and progress will extensively serve as antidote to dehumanization and depersonalization in Nigeria and the world.

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