

FORMATION OF CHRISTIAN CONSCIENCE FOR THE COMMON GOOD IN NIGERIAN POLITICS

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Abstract

The question of the formation of Christian in the context of Nigeria's politics has become an imperative. It is definitely the most obligatory imperative for the survival of Christianity and the Nigerian polity. With the upsurge of relentless religiously inspired terrorism against Christianity, coupled with the official assent to such terrorism, the Christian conscience comes in as a proper response to this callous situation, and as measure of authentic Christian personality. Bound in conscience to actively participate in the life of Nigerian politics, the Christian must resolutely defend the call for an enduring system of justice as the basis for evolving a common community living within our pluralist body polity. This does not warrant laxism but forthrightness. This position is arrived at by a social critique of our politics.

1. Introduction

The question of the formation of Christian conscience in the context of Nigerian politics has become an imperative. The issue

places the human person in his integral moral, spiritual and material aspirations in a wider perspective of religious and social evolution. For Christians it becomes an invitation to bring the light of his spirituality to bear upon personal, inter-personal and community endeavours. The question implies that his source of action and moral integrity must reflect his transcendent ancestry in understanding his identity and vocation in the context of his concrete historical inseterdness. The question as well admonishes that he must rise above all encumbrances of concupiscence, greed, hatred, clannishness, fear, prejudice et; and every other forms of impositions of his material nature, to embrace the call of conscience to a nobler and more dignifying existence characteristic of Christian love. This task to be achieved by the Christian in the Nigerian context must be preceded by a social critique of the normative and historical type.

2. Understanding Conscience

Conscience refers to a natural moral capacity or endowment that is inherent in every human being. This moral phenomenon presupposes an understanding of the human person as ordained towards action and consequent moral judgment upon action in relation to his material and spiritual development. “Merriam's Collegiate Dictionary 10th Edition,” defines conscience as the “sense or consciousness of the moral goodness or blame worthiness of one's own conduct intentions, or character together with a feeling

of obligation to do right or be good”¹ It describes it as, “a faculty, power, or principle enjoining good acts.” *The operative feature in*

the analysis of conscience is that it is the cradle and transmitter of command, admonitions to a person to act in a known morally desirable manner. It therefore, enjoins a person in the innermost of his or her being to act in conformity with its own dictates and sensitivity to that which is just and fair. Our analysis of this phenomenon called conscience indicates the reality of a moral code which conforms to the nature of man as intellect and actor, and that it is by adherence to this conscience that man's activities receive character of moral wholesomeness. Morality implies that man is originally condemned to live and act according to the light of conscience. This is the meaning of conscientiousness.

This dictionary exegesis of the phenomenon of conscience in man opens the discursive impetus for a brief philosophical and theological illuminations of it. Dario Composta explains conscience as, “the principles or efficient causes of the moral act ... interior ... the concrete synthesis of objective – subjective ends in the concrete human person.”² Here, distinction is made between conscience as interior principle of moral act in relation to the exterior principle of morality, the moral norm to which it conforms in an actual concrete historic situation of the acting person. Here, conscience enjoins every man and woman to conduct his or her activities in manner

reflecting respect for a moral universe or law. As man acts in the historic, temporal and concrete situations of culture, reason understands his obligations to a moral law which transcends the temporal order and, which gives accomplishment, dignity and integrity to all his 'creative works of reason and virtue. Conscience and virtue are interior principles of morality that direct human reason to achieving its ultimate end, the truth. And the truth in question here is that in morality human reason should acknowledge the supernatural order of morality to which conscience engages it. Here we see that conscience is a unitive principle bringing harmony to bear upon the spiritual faculties of man., “reason” or “intellect” by which he seek after the truth and the “will” by which he seeks after the good. Though neither reason nor will, conscience is gifted with the rare insight of moral discernment as required in every particular concrete situation. Some philosophers have used different terms to refer to these moral tendencies in man, in reflecting the universal character of the moral in every particular activities of man.

The philosophical implications in analysis of this phenomenon of conscience have given rise to its diverse interpretations in relation to the moral law or norm. Broadly, these interpretations are categorizable into two camps, namely, *the anthropocentric and theocentric interpretations of conscience*. These interpretations have far-reaching consequences for man's

cultural initiatives and, by implications his dignity and integrity. An extreme anthropocentric interpretation assigns to man's reason or will the exclusive determination of the precepts of morality. This is generally the path that is towed by all individualist and materialist evolutions in culture. A Christian understanding of conscience is both anthropocentric and theocentric in that it is one "that indicates to it the task of indicating and revealing the ontological and thus moral order, and proposes a conscience of all".³ The danger with exclusive anthropocentric interpretation of conscience is that, "it proposes an autonomous, creating conscience of the moral order and works from the void of itself, ..."⁴ On the other hand, the Christian interpretation has the merit of interpreting conscience as illuminated by God. This view point enables man to build a cultural milieu of a temporal order that is oriented to supernatural values of reason and virtue. This interpretation in the contrary provides the safeguard for human dignity and autonomy against any totalitarian culture. It also provides the frontiers of christianly inspired temporal civilization or development.

The scriptural and theological interpretations of conscience recognize its transcendent ordination. They acknowledge conscience as bound to an absolute moral norm as regulating its judgments. These interpretations align with the Christian philosophical view point. They therefore, recognize the temporal order as legitimate domain of man's freedom of expansion in the light of its super-elevation by the spiritual. In this context they

indicate what is necessary for formation of Christian conscience in the context of politics. The Old Testament narrative uses guilt, punishment and reward, justice to indicate the reality of conscience and a moral order that should not be violated in temporal affairs of men. The sin and fall of Adam and Eve and the consequent punishment in (Gen. 3: 7-10), implied a sense of guilt arising from disobedience to God's command. Also experience of condemnation accompanies even evil acts done in secret as in the case of the murder of Abel by Cain in (Gen. 4: 9-10). Maher observes that, the implied phenomenon of conscience which condemns is noted in the sense that, "Cain can be seen as a model of the average human being who can be led by envy, anger, or greed to a practical denial of family bonds, and his punishment is a reminder that even what we do in secret against our neighbour has a bearing on our relationship with God."⁵ Also to be noted is the phenomenon of conscience which praises a person for acting in accordance with justice and will of God. In the calamities that befell Job, he was certain of the judgment of his conscience against those who challenged his faith in God and his commandments. I hold fast my righteousness, and will not let it go, my heart does not reproach me for any of my days".⁶ (Job 27: 6). Job's acknowledgement of the obligation imposed by his conscience to act aright is very manifest in this statement just quoted. It means that the natural knowledge of the law of good and evil is interior to man. By reconsidering and defending his actions

and loyalty to God, Job emerges as a model of faith. Ultimately, “the experience of condemnation for sin committed and of praise for justice maintained ... points to a voice in a human being, which demands of a person to do the known good, and which accuses one who refuses to obey this dictate.”⁷ Job's testimony explains conscience as the “heart” of man. This means something interior to him, the seat of intelligence, reason, emotions and actions. Werblowsky explains that in the O.T. perspective, “conscience and knowledge in general are the affairs of the inner person or heart.”⁸ As an individual, a human being has an inward part that constitutes the inside of a person and, is concealed from other persons. It is in this heart that is concealed from people, that the vital decisions are made. But before God what is hidden from the eyes of people cannot be hidden. Richard Rwiza explains that, “in the anthropology of the Old Testament, the heart can be upright, stubborn, hard and ... God, who sees into or knows the inward parts, “weighs the heart.”⁹ (Prov. 21:2; 26:2). This inward part that instructs a person comes close to reason, and is a witness. At the same time this inner person is the battle ground of two inclinations, good and evil inclinations. In Old Testament account conscience implies “the knowledge vouchsafed by God's revealed law of right conduct and of salvation.”¹⁰ Therefore, God is considered to function as the conscience of the Old Testament culture and civilization. This approach explains conscience by appealing to an extrinsic reality to a person, the voice of God. It is therefore, not proper to equate conscience with “the

law, written on the hearts of men.” “Conscience does not make the law nor is it itself a law, but rather it recognizes the law and by it assesses conduct.”¹¹

The New Testament conception of conscience though relying on the Old Testament, shifts emphasis from the knowledge of the law of God to love founded on faith in God as indicating the presence of a good conscience in a person. However, “St. Paul adapted the common secular term, identified it with the traditional Old Testament concept and formed a new insight for Christian conscience.”¹² The emphasis placed on the evolution of Christian conscience is to nurture love in the community of faith. For this reason St. Paul cautions Timothy against all false teachings pointing out that the “aim of such instruction is love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith.”¹³ (1 Tim 1:5). Good conscience founded on faith in God becomes the characteristic mark of a good citizen. St. Paul therefore, differs with the prevailing stoic philosophy that maintains the freedom and autonomy of conscience based on man's knowledge of the laws of nature. St. Paul accepts the autonomy of conscience but only in the context of its orientation towards faith in God. Conscience is for a Christian “theonomous,” and its judgment is subject to God. However, let it be pointed out that for both the stoics and St. Paul, conscience is not self-legislating. It does not make the law it recognizes it and judges

conduct according to it. But for the stoics it is the law of nature, for the Jews the law of Moses, for the Christians it is the law of Christ, the commandment of love. It is in this context of its ordination to a law other than the self that both the stoic's and Christian notions of conscience are save from individualism.

According to Fitzmyer¹⁴ the notion of conscience as ordered to some knowledge of a law is not limited to the Christians. It extends to all pagan cultures as well. All peoples have a way of knowing what is prescribed or proscribed and, judge human actions by that standard. However, the Christian imperative is to overcome the shortcomings of the pagan morality and to elevate same up to true Christian standard. St. Paul makes explicitly what is important in the formation of Christian conscience, namely, clear minds motivated by fraternal love. In this sense, the judgment of conscience is not only natural insights, but also judgments enlightened by faith.

The traditional Catholic understanding of conscience follows upon the teachings of St. Thomas Aquinas. Molnery points out that, "Aquinas' views on conscience are rooted in a rethinking of Biblical teaching in the light of the philosophy of Aristotle, Plato, Augustine and the stoics".¹⁴ Aquinas teaching on conscience begins with the natural knowledge or habit which man has generally about the moral law designated as "synderesis". Synderesis is considered a natural habit by which we readily conceive the basic principles of

our moral life. While synderesis is concerned with the understanding of the good at the level of very general principle, conscience is considered to be an act dealing with applying the general principle of morality to particular concrete situation. Aquinas implies that it belongs to the essential nature of synderesis not to err because; it can provide principles which do not vary. The possibility of error in applying synderesis to concrete situation may arise with the judgment of conscience. Aquinas declares that, moral life without the first principle, 'good is to be done and evil is to be avoided' is just as impossible, for without it there is absolutely no basis for morality.¹⁵ Aquinas posits that the moral journey begins with understanding the nature of the moral principle, hence, synderesis is the property of the intellect. Conscience then is but an act, the act of applying knowledge to conduct. In this regard, “the term conscience denotes knowledge ordered towards something, since it means knowledge-along-with another. The notion of knowledge with somebody indicates a communal dimension of an ethical judgement.”¹⁶

According to Aquinas, the Natural law precepts stipulate the general principles of moral judgment. This implies that there are certain judgments as to what one should do and that everyone is capable of making. Aquinas conceives Natural law as that “participation in eternal law that is peculiar to rational creatures.¹⁷ For the intellect to realize true judgment of conscience it

needs enlightenment of faith. It is in this context that Delhaye explains that, “synderesis does not have by itself the intuition of faith, faith on the contrary must enlighten the intuition for it to be right.”¹⁸ Aquinas account of conscience recognizes that, “the supreme authority of conscience is ... not only in the negative sense that one is forbidden to act against it, but also in the positive sense that one is obliged to follow it, provided of course that one's conscience is for and in good faith.”¹⁹

The Vatican II maintaining a scriptural and dynamic approach to a notion of the human person understands “conscience as the sanctuary of a person, where one is alone with God. “*Gaudium et Spes*” gives a biblical concept of conscience, and states that; “in the depth of his conscience, man detects a law he does not impose upon himself, but which holds him in obedience ... for man has in his heart a law written by God, to *obey it is the very dignity of man* according to it he will be judged”.²⁰ Vatican II affirms both the autonomy of conscience as well as for the need for the guidance of God's law. Man assents to this law freely as expression of his own dignity and responsibility. The basis of this dignity is the individual personal conscience, according to which every person has to attune his behaviour. The implied dignity arising from freedom, is not an absolute one driven by a person's whims and caprices. Even some pagan philosophers did not believe that the individual could simply decide what is to count as true or false in moral matters. In this regard, Aristotelian and Stoic ethics maintain

the same point of view as Vatican II that the ability to make conscientious judgment is what is specific to human dignity. But it is the individual that have to make decisions as expression of his dignity and freedom. “Gaudium et spes” affirms as St. Paul that it is love of God that forms the constitutive force of Christian conscience. In a wonderful manner, it echoes, “conscience reveals that law which is fulfilled by love of God and neighbour.”²¹ It is a law that obliges communication, openness to others, in charity. Benard Haring opines that, “conscience is the person's moral faculty, the inner core and sanctuary where one knows oneself in confrontation with God and with fellowmen. We can confront ourselves reflexively only to the extent that we genuinely encounter the other and the others.”²² In the opinion of Vatican II, conscience constitutes the basic norm of one's activity, because it is conceived to be the locus of divine inscription. Hence, conscience is conceived as the voice of God. By affirming the objectivity of moral norm, “Gaudium et Spes” also breaks the barriers of individualism. But it needs to be stressed that following such understanding a person is obliged to fellow the dictates of conscience in every aspect of his life situation. What is specified is the fact that conscience must be the guiding principle of human acts. It is only by doing so that man can achieve true peace and development

What is implied in the cultural life of man and society is that, “transcendence of conscience, its non-arbitrary aspects and objectivity cannot be brushed aside. By implication, obedience to

conscience means an end to subjectivism, a turning aside from blind arbitrariness, and produces conformity with the objective norms of moral action.”²³ Richard Rwiza opines that, “conscience is seen as the principle of objectivity, in the conviction that careful attention to its claim, indicates the fundamental common values of human existence.”²⁴ Reference is always made to the content of liberty, in relation to the dignity of the human person. This implies argument on the absence of coercion. However, affirmation of human dignity in freedom involves an obligation, which consists in seeking truth and freely adhering to it. Hence, a person who seeks truth and adheres to it utilizes his freedom meaningfully not responsibly. In this regard, we affirm that, “the act of faith is of its very nature a free act.”²⁵ It does not undermine the dignity arising from judgment of conscience. The Vatican II upholds that the judgement about right and wrong that arise from within human conscience should confirm to the objective norm of morality. The proximate and subjective ethical norm is one's conscience to be guided by sacred and certain teachings of the church interpreting objective moral law. There are two practical rules for action in following the judgment of conscience. First, one is enjoined to always obey a certain conscience. Second, one is never to act on a doubtful conscience. It is in this context that the need arises for the formation of a good Christian conscience, one that is always certain that its actions are sufficiently illuminated by charity. It is on this level of proper

magisterium and catechesis will be accorded primary place. However, this does not dispense the lay faithful from a mature reflection on the teachings of the church and applying it to concrete cultural situations. “DignitatisHumanae” states; “in the formation of their conscience, the Christian faithful ought carefully to attend to the sacred and certain doctrines of the church.”²⁶ We affirm that the norm of conscience is the objective law of God as interpreted by the church in accordance with the principles of reason.

2. Formation of Christian Conscience

Our discussion on conscience indicates preference for values that are necessary for formation of a good conscience, a Christian conscience. This will suggest a need for adequate consideration of moral motivations in the formation of Christian conscience. Motivations and motives are critical factors that move people to act. They are therefore, involved in the evaluation of human conducts. It is not enough to know the good to be done; it requires motivation to do it. Formation of Christian conscience therefore, has theoretical and practical aspects. In theory it provides a world view or cultural perspective for judgment of conscience. This is in terms of a Christian view of a person and his or her orientation to God. “If such a metaphysical view is Christian, it will have existential motivations and will result into practical judgments and actions. In this sense, Christianity provides religious motives.

and actions. In this sense, Christianity provides religious motives. Such motives contain their own moral quality and in turn contribute to the specificity of Christian conscience.”²⁷

The aim of Christian morality in formation of conscience is Christian maturity. This ... “compels us to raise the Christian's capacity to reason about moral issues in one's concrete and existential situations ... moral growth is basically not changing one's point of view on a particular issue. It means transforming one's way of reasoning, expanding one's perspectives to include the criteria of judgment that were not considered previously.”²⁸ This requires of a Christian constant vigilance and consciousness of his own vocation as rooted in Christ. It is therefore, a challenge to a dynamic appropriation and application of Christian values to our ever changing historical and cultural situations. This is the fundamental aim in the development of Christian conscience. Formation has to aim not just at transmitting knowledge, but, “also to improve individuals by engaging their reasoning, feeling and action ... to offer the individual the capacity to engage in moral judgments ... this implies discernment.”²⁹ Its focus is a “concern with creative freedom and fidelity and dynamic understanding of the person”³⁰ In consideration of this issue of fundamental importance, “the church's moral teaching argues that behavioural sciences cannot be considered decisive indications of Christian moral norms”.³¹

Christian conscience is characteristically distinct in form. Faith in Christ is the truly distinguishing or formal cause of the specificity of Christian conscience. It forms the pivot of its norms and motivations. Rwiza affirms that, “our identity as followers of Christ is the foundation for forming a distinctively Christian conscience whereby we think, about all, of our solidarity with humanity. Faith operates distinctiveness in the manner and intentionality of living common moral demands.”³² Christian consciences make its demands on the whole human community of faith. From faith it derives the creative liberty that enables a Christian to respond creatively to problems of human common living and culture. St. Paul explains that, “faith and good conscience are inseparable “(1 Tim 1:19). “Having faith and good conscience, by rejecting their conscience, certain persons have suffered shipwreck in the faith.”³³ It is therefore, argued that there is intimate connection of faith and good conscience. This forms the true motivations for Christian morality. It is this intentionality brought to the authentically human which specifies Christian conscience. According to Joseph Fuchs; “This Christian intentionality is what makes the moral behaviour of the Christian truly and specifically Christian, at every moment and in every aspect even when it appears at first to be simply conduct conforming to human morality.”³⁴ The Christian conscience and morality has the whole world of human affairs and culture as its theatre of operations.

It is the light and power of grace and not law that makes effective the operations of Christian conscience in the world. It enables us to distinguish what is of sin and grace. In the truly Christian conscience, grace and faith come to prominence. As St. Paul explains; “for sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace”³⁵ (Rom 6:14). Grace elevates human freedom and capacities to the super natural life of love. In so doing, it enables us to transcend the constraints imposed by material necessity of worldly existence. As Rwiza explains; “the 'Kyrios' of Christian life is not legalism of any sort but the inspiring spirit of God whence comes grace ... that favour, or divine gift which indicates God's relation with the human race with special focus on the fact that these relations are loving, generous, free and totally unexpected and undeserved.”³⁶ Grace unites human actions in cooperation with Divine action hence, imposing that responsibility that arises from faith and love. Christian conscience as applied to the worldly affairs of culture has a transcendent orientation. This is to bring the spiritual energies of the Gospel in the direction of affairs of men in Justice and freedom. As Rwiza highlights; “Each act of Christian conscience and its formation should be considered in the context of the eschatological virtues that allow and call for creative fidelity and liberty.”³⁷ He states that in the contemporary world of diverse human endeavours, Christian conscience should be a real symbol of our hope of the world already battered by so many evils. It is in this context of a beatific that the Christian conscience is wholly

consumed” by the wealth and the tensions of the economy of salvation.”³⁸

3. The Human Person as Fulcrum of Christian Conscience

We cannot achieve the ultimate end in formation of Christian conscience, without focusing on the importance of the subject or the acting person as a moral agent. This in moral terms implies the evolution of socio-autonomous moral responsible persons, capable of realizing in practical life the religious imperatives of a Christian conscience in worldly engagements. Formation of conscience deals with persons by indicating what he should be like. This is a search for a human centered morality that provides the basis for the human community in fidelity and liberty. It follows that understanding of conscience must give a central importance to the self-the very person who acts and the characteristics of the person. This implies a fundamental analysis of the notion of the person as involving freedom and self-determination. We shall therefore, inquire into the structure of human nature to a source of action which transcends the determination of law of nature, and which opens him up to the infussment of the life and power of grace. Human action is not truly capable of good save in its super-natural elevation in liberality and charity. In this context, “formation of Christian conscience must ... stimulate or motivate the acting person to grow to maturity as a free and faithful follower of Christ.”³⁸

The analysis which Jacques Maritain makes of the distinction between “individuality” and “personality” in human nature fulfills this requirement. For Maritain, the Natural law of human action reflects not only his nature as characterized, but as well the end to which that nature is ordained. Human nature understood as “reason” or “rational” defines the natural law of humanity as freedom. On the other hand, since man is also a cultural being, this idea of natural law plays significant role in determining the moral character of his individual and social conducts. Hence, “Natural law seeks to explain law as a phenomenon of social necessity based on the moral perceptions of rational persons ... moral principles that derive from man's rational nature”.³⁹ However, the contention between the “secular” and the “theological” perspectives within natural law theory needs elaboration in the context of the person and conscience. While the “secular” theories of natural law do not go beyond their conceptions of human to ascertain the laws of human conduct and social organization, the “theological” approaches do not recognize any form of dichotomy between faith and reason in their interpretations of the origins of laws that govern the human and social order. In reality, both approaches do not separate law from morality. The moral import of rationality as interpreted by the two perspectives implies “that man is a being gifted with intelligence and Acts with an understanding of what he is doing, and with the powers to determine

for himself the ends which he pursues.”⁴⁰ While secular theories of human conduct assign absolute autonomy to human reason, the theological theories do not. They instead assert that humans “possessed a nature of an ontologic structure which is a locus of intelligible necessities, man possesses ends which necessarily corresponds to his essential constitution and which are the same for all ...”⁴¹ Human freedom for them serves an end which transcends and perfects human nature. Maritain consequently, defines the natural law of a thing as, “the normality of its functioning the proper way in which, by reason of its specific structure and specific ends, it should achieve fullness of being either in its growth or in its behaviour.”⁴² In the natural order, with which the temporal society is concerned, Maritain argues that it is not through reason alone, but through reason bound to its inclination towards the transcendent, that man comes to know the law of his nature. Maritain opines that the current preoccupation with autonomy is plagued by individualist conception of man's freedom. Consequently it needs restructuring to allow the person to expand according to the dictates of his own conscience. Egocentric interpretation of autonomy has brought attention in discourse on natural law, to obligations of man to society. True autonomy however, demands that freedom be conformed to man's theocentric orientation. Walter Schultz opines that, “... man's coming of age ... means that man should now

become what he must be in accordance with his own nature and the will of God.”⁴³ It implies that man's maturity in judgment of conscience as such, does not entail unbridled license but responsible behavior in freedom and charity.

The notion of person in Maritain is fundamentally oriented towards society. Consequently, the distinction which he makes between “individuality” and “personality” within human nature is very crucial in articulating the role of conscience in human endeavours. He explains the individual in human nature as, “that concrete state of unity and indivision, required by existence, in virtue of which every actually or possibly existing nature can posit itself in existence as distinct from other beings.”⁴⁴ Individuality designates a situation of singularity. In human composition, it corresponds to the material nature of man, it is rooted in matter. Individuality as related to the material pole has existential implications for conscience and morality. Maritain argues that; “individuality, since it is that which excludes from oneself all that other men are could be described as the narrowness of the ego, forever threatened and forever eager to grasp for itself.”⁴⁵ Individuality destroys the moral powers of conscience. It consigns human reason and actions to determination of laws of material necessity. Individuality is consequential to conscience simply because it undermines the capacity for creative freedom and justice in man. It is the seat of human animality, giving vent to injustice, violence, corruption and alienation.

But, the whole of man is not subjected to the law of material necessity and unfreedom. Man has in his nature an aspect that fulfills the requirements of true moral consciousness, liberty, responsibility and transcendence. Maritain posits that, “our whole being subsists, in virtue of the very subsistence of the spiritual soul which is in us a principle of creative unity, independence and liberty.”⁴⁶ So man is fundamentally a person, and morality and conscience is prerogative of personality. In personality human reason acknowledges a law that is perfective of its moral potentials and goodness. In personality reason is illuminated by grace, and, reason becomes compatible with love. Love is at the basis of discovery of personality and true freedom. Maritain explains the person as, “a centre inexhaustible ... of existence, bounty and action, capable of giving and of giving itself, capable of receiving not only this or that gift, bestowed by another self who bestows himself.”⁴⁷ The core ideas in Maritain's notion of person is “freedom”, independence”, and “subsistence.” That is, “as a reality which subsisting spiritually, constitutes a universe unto itself, a relatively independent whole within the great whole of the universe and facing the transcendent whole which is God.” It is in this context of a metaphysics of love with its relational and existential character, that the notion of person is able to break the barriers of individuality rooted in matter. For Maritain, personality has its ontological roots in the spirit. He sees in God, the sovereign personality, “since the very existence of God consists in a pure and absolute super-

existence of intellection and love.”⁴⁸

Personality, not individuality is the cradle of conscience in man. Personality as subsistence, freedom or independence signifies interiority to self. However, it is an interiority that is faithful to its spiritual source, and at the same time a disclosure of self in existence. Hence, conscience derives its power of moral integrity from personality. Maritain's notion of personality presupposes communication in the vertical and horizontal dimensions. But, it is precisely because it is the spirit in man which makes him ... cross the threshold of independence properly so called, and of interiority to oneself, the subjectivity of the person has nothing in common with the isolated unity without doors or windows”⁴⁹ of individuality. The notion of the person in Maritain safeguards freedom of conscience and, indicates the direction for the formation of Christian conscience in temporal affairs. Christian conscience is realizable in the practical works of reason because of the spiritual rootedness of the person in God. “The person has a direct relation with the absolute, and only in the absolute is he able to have his full sufficiency. His spiritual father land is the whole universe of the absolute and these indefectible good which ... transcends the world.”⁵⁰ The judgment of conscience is saved from the corrupt influences of material individuality because Maritain's notion of personality is securely founded on religious thought. It is only Christianity that teaches that the person is the image of God. “God is

spirit, and the human person proceeds from Him having as principle of life a spiritual soul capable of knowing, of loving, and of being uplifted by grace to participation in the very life of God so that in the end, it may know and love Him as he knows and loves Himself.”⁵¹

The socio-cultural implications of Maritain's distinction between individuality and personality, is designed to defeat both individualism and totalitarianism. Its primary aim is to secure the grounds for dignity of person by balancing freedom with responsibility in the context of the common good of society. Man is a social being. He enters society not as individual, but as person. His need for society is not primarily material but more importantly, “the needs for development of reason and virtue are more important than material needs.”⁵² It is in this context that Rwiza affirms that, personality, is the bearer of independence, creativity and the discovery of value ... a self – starting capacity for insight, a seat of responsibility, a capacity to assess conduct, which is the role of conscience.”⁵³

4. Person, Culture and Development of Conscience

The realization of the ideals of Christian conscience for today's society presupposes an appropriate socio-cultural framework. This new cultural outlook is designated as a “New Christendom”. The fundamental focus of this new Christendom is

to harmonize the man's aspirations for freedom with his spiritual orientation. The first step in this regard pertains to the conception of body politic that will accord with human dignity and freedom of conscience; a truly democratic society. In the context of present Nigerian situation, the triumph of a new Christendom will presuppose a pluralist body politic. Christian conscience will manifest a dynamic insight aimed at achieving, “an organic heterogeneity in the very structure of civil society, whether it is a question ... of certain economic, political or certain juridical and institutional structures.”⁵⁴ Pluralism seems to be for our new Christendom the only rational alternative to achieving true freedom of conscience and development of society. This political structuring will reflect the principles of subsidiary that permit freedom of expansion of persons and groups. Its focus is aimed at, “... bringing together in its organic unity diversity of social groups and structures, each of them embodying positive liberties.”⁵⁵ The principle of subsidiary as underlying the pluralist structure of modern Nigerian society will be opposed to the liberal and totalitarian conceptions that undermine the evolution of responsible conscience. It is argued that pluralist structuring of the body politic recognizes the fact that civil society is not made up of individuals but, of particular societies, “formed by them, and a pluralist body politic would allow them the greatest autonomy possible and would diversify its own internal structures in keeping with what is

typically required by their nature.”⁵⁶ It is observed that the achievement of Christian conscience in the context of a pluralist body politic belongs to true conquest of freedom. In other words, the flowering of true Christian conscience in a pluralist society demands a guarantee, a charter, a democratic charter as safeguard of freedoms. It implies in the concrete that both the common good of society its body of laws and machineries of administration will be motivated and directed by that common charter.

The democratic charter in question is the life force that enables the Christian conscience to vitalize the temporal order of earthly civilization. It is an integral component of the pluralism that characterize the new Christendom. This common democratic charter is a kind of declaration of faith in democratic tenet. As against the mediaeval society and civilization that built the life of the earthly community on the foundation of the unity of theological faith and religion contemporary situation demands a distinction within the temporal order between the “secular realm” and the “spiritual realm”. This implies that, “civil society has come to be based on a common good and common task which are earthly, temporal or secular order, and in which citizens belonging to diverse spiritual groups and families equally share.”⁵⁷ The critical challenge to the Christian conscience in this common charter is to resolutely debunk the modernist temptation to model our democracy on mere human reason purely separated from religion or to allow the misuse of religion arising from ignorance and mischief. The charter in

question will ensure that, “men belonging to very different philosophical or religious creeds and lineages could and should cooperate in common task and for the common welfare of the earthly community, provided they similarly assent to the charter and basic tenets of a society of free men.”⁵⁸ The democratic charter will only inspire common faith in a common basis of action in a pluralistic society. It does not on its own, “belong ... to the order of religious creed and eternal life of culture and civilization.”⁵⁹ It is purely secular in nature, belonging to the matters of practical rather than dogmatic agreement. It deals with practical convictions which the human mind can try to justify, rightly or wrongly, from quite different, even conflicting philosophical out looks, because they depend basically on simple, natural appreciation, of which the human mind becomes capable with the progress of moral conscience.⁶⁰ The Christian conscience must contribute in the general education towards this ideal and insisting on it. It is therefore, a charter which makes possible common commitment for society of free persons. Its content is built upon truth and intelligence, human dignity, freedom of conscience, brotherly love, and the absolute value of moral good. This is truth which a Christian conscience must uphold as valid for a pluralist body politic like Nigeria. Its aim is the total emancipation from all cultural constraints. This democratic secular faith does not ignore religion, it is invigorated by religion. It is such that, “... it must bear within

itself a common human creed, the creed of freedom.”⁶¹ It is a faith of religion in justice and freedom. It is in this context that Maritain affirms that it would be wrong for any body politic, “to impose on its citizen or demand from them as a condition for belonging to the body politic any philosophic or religious creed,”⁶² for that will undermine the evolution of good conscience.

This democratic charter provides the moral tools which a Christian should employ in the transformation of Nigerian's political culture. It must illuminate and guide politics to respond to true aspiration of the person. It belongs to conquest of freedom. Its ideals must be reflected on all structures of cultural life of the body politic. The historical ideal demanded by the new cultural milieu of good conscience in the Nigeria context calls for regime of values that promote democratic energies. In this context culture will entail, “systematic living, for an organized system of mutual relationship and for peace and happiness”.⁶³ Culture in this context of promotion of Christian conscience will entail a fundamental principle of order whose ultimate end is meaning for society and persons. Then the realization of freedom of expansion of persons will demand respect for dignity of persons as principle of order. It is in this context that the philosophical sense of culture amounts to cultivation of man by the body politic. It is a cultivation which the whole community of persons embarks upon through the instrumentality of reason and virtue in accord with the natural law of

human nature. Therefore, the goal of the new Christendom is to achieve the values of personality, not individuality.

The sense of social development that will indicate the triumph of Christian conscience will imply material, spiritual and moral development of persons in promotion of the common good of society. Here, insistence will be upon acknowledging development as pertaining to the temporal sphere of society, but open to the spiritual. "It must be subordinated to eternal life, as an intermediate end to the ultimate end". It means that an absolute materialistic conception of development is a perversion of culture, and one at variance with the aspirations of a good conscience. But, most importantly it is in the religious sphere that the Christian conscience must exercise influence to make cultural life of Nigerian attain a super-elevation. The notion of religion which Christian conscience requires is one that retains a supernatural ordination. By this is meant, "... its power of universalist appeal capable of influencing positively the course of things in the temporal order."⁶⁴ Christian conscience in the political affairs must not allow that religion be confused with politics. This will entail theocratic totalitarianism.

The end point in this regard is that politics as cultural initiative must be understood as a temporal affairs to be animated by the spiritual initiatives of Christian conscience. Every political activity is therefore, subject to the supreme law of the spirit. To neglect this

of the spirit and conscience, that practical contempt for the human person and his dignity.”⁶⁵ Without the assurance of the spiritual foundation, of conscience, human reason alone cannot accomplish for our body politic its lofty values. This is because the system of morals and values that guarantee the corporate existence of Nigeria are ones internal to the Christian conscience. Materialist humanism cannot attain the moral ideals of liberty, dignity of the human person and fraternal communion that characterize Christian humanism that is transcendent. Cultural milieu that engender materialistic conscience will fail to secure for our pluralist body politic solid foundation based on freedom, truth, justice and communion. This is a foremost challenge which a Christian must regard as pertaining to true conquest of freedom.

5. On Christian Conscience and Politics

A good analysis of politics is inseparable from morality. To this extent it is of concern and consequence to the Christian conscience. Politics signifies group activities towards a common goal, a human goal, a common good. This common good has the human person, his material and spiritual security as its foremost concern. Politics refers to a definite form of social organization geared towards the achievement of some common goal. It is

geared towards the achievement of some common goal. It is therefore, essentially, about governance involving the structuring of authority for achieving same articulated goal. By and large, it is about the human person in his temporal and spiritual aspirations that politics and governance are directed. Two levels of operations of governance in politics can be distinguished as embedded in a cultural purview; the external and internal levels. While the external level concerns the structuring of the administrative organization, the internal refers to the undergirding ideology which informs policy”.⁶⁶ In the actual fact these two levels go to indicate that the final questions of politics is morality. Because culture and politics have the human person as its focus, politics must concern itself with responsible power. That is to say, power and authority is attuned to the ultimate end of the state as a political society in the realization of human happiness. This implies politics that is responsive to the people in their integral socio-cultural aspirations for being. Social progress and peace is hence, brought about in politics through commitment to moral ideals of the person. Social and political nature of man presupposes the attainment and preservation of values of the human person in the common good of society. When John Paul II defines politics as a “prudent concern for the common good” he has in mind the safeguard for the moral integrity in the temporal organization of the body politic. It is in the relationship between the common good and governance in politic that the

strength of Christian conscience is put to test in the general task of social construction. Jacques Maritain articulates the content of the common good of a body politic to reflect a rational balancing of the temporal and spiritual aspirations without which a good human life and community is jeopardized. The common good is a condition demanded by both the development of persons and society. It includes though not limited to, "... the collection of public commodities and services which the organization of common life presupposes ... sound fiscal conditions, a strong military force, the body of just laws, good customs, and wise institutions which provides the political society with structure, the ... sociological integration of all the civic conscience, political virtues and sense of law and freedom ... material prosperity and spiritual riches ... of moral rectitude, justice, friendship, happiness ..."⁶⁷ Maritain summarizes this idea as meaning ... "the good human life of the multitude, multitude of persons ... their communion in good living ... common to the whole and parts, the person into who it flows back and who must benefit from it"⁶⁸. The common good is the foundation for justice explained, as communication or redistribution to the person's the very possibilities or conditions for full human life. It is therefore, what is common to the whole society and person, and should not be seen as private good of a person or a group. Therefore, its actualization in the politics of Nigeria as well belongs to conquest of freedom. Its true realization must be of

concern to a Christian conscience. Christian conscience must work to ensure that law and authority preserve the dignity of persons by upholding the common good.

6. Nigerian Political Culture and Crisis of Conscience

It is apparent that the political history of our country indicates a dearth of conscience. This is the inability of our political culture to meet up with demands of true personality and common good. This is reflected in the perpetual failure of independent Nigeria to harness its multi-cultural potentials in evolving a dynamic democratic order safeguarding the aspirations of all peoples, and promote a frame work of rule of law, justice and equity in the context of national unity. Conscience is imperiled by the fact that our socio-cultural foundation is one highly immersed in conflict, designed to impose hegemony of the Hausa-Fulani. This situation presents a picture of master – slave relationship that is at variance with the evolution of values of human person and common good. Conflict as the intelligible category of our political culture is crucial in understanding, isolating and identifying the underlying problem which aggravates the ideals of a Christian conscience in the political struggle of Nigeria. The intelligibility of conflict in Nigeria's political culture is explained by the intractable menace of ethnicity and Islamic religious aggression. This in its negative dimension is antithetical to a common good, and tends, to justify an ethos of violence against the state, and amongst ethnic groups. Ojo

opines that this situation has, “... prevented a Nigerian nationalistic consciousness ... reinforced separation between ethnic groups and transforming ethnicity and religion into an identity by which to gain political power ... emphasized ethnic nationalism.”⁶⁹ It goes to indicate that this persistent wave of political, interethnic and religions violence means that Nigeria is not yet a polity in the conscious deliberate sense of it. This situation puts the evolution of Christian personality and conscience in an endangered scheme of things. Not even the emergence of a democratic order seem to have opened the space for unhindered expression of a Christian conscience since, the Christian seems to be under a renewed wave of attack like never experienced under the long years of military authoritarian regimes.

To realize the ideals of participatory democracy in the context of the demands of Christian conscience, C.B Okolo, has offered us insight into the Christian passivity and alienation to his conscience. The insight also explains why the Christian is not resolute enough in accepting his condition as one demanding true conquest of freedom. Okolo's insight yields a cultural form that indicates a unique form of materialism and individualism with attendant consequences for the human person and its values in social life. In essence, it means that Christian conscience has not lived up to the ideals of Christian charity. This crude materialism and individualism is explained by Okolo in the context of “Squandermania mentality or consciousness” of the Nigerian

Christian. This constitutes violation and corruption of the person and his commitment to the common good of his society. It is succinctly, “the Nigerian mind in its basic tendencies and attunement described as, an outlook on reality, the tendency ... to look as really worthwhile and worth pursuing, only those things which have materialistic or consumable values.”⁷⁰ The values that are consequent upon squandermania mentality are hardly the ones under which self-conquest and society of free persons is made possible. This cankerworm has not enabled the Nigerian Christian to creatively shed the light of the Gospel sufficiently on different facets of our cultural life. Okolo's advocacy is for a “philosophy of Being” as addressed to the Nigerian Christian and his conscience for active vitalization of our cultural milieu with values and truth of Christianity as means of salvaging our Nation. In a similar spirit, Jerome Madueke observes the adverse impact of consumerism on Christian values and conscience. He warns that these are dangers that put our “Christian faith on a fast track of extinguishing”.⁷¹ Joining the voice of Madueke Simon Okafor observes that a scenario of Christian inactivity in politics undermines our “vocation to holiness of life and social responsibility.”⁷² It is hoped that active participation in the public life of our body polity that is propelled by Christian conscience, will help to strengthen the faith of fellow Christians and leads to conversion of non-Christians. Through this means Christians, “share in the mission of Christ for the growth of

the church and sanctification of the world.”⁷³ And it is by this means that we come “to cooperate with all men and women of good will”⁷⁴ in the task of social transformation of Nigeria. In summation the Vatican II document “*Apostolicam Actuositatem*”⁷⁵ no. 15. Enjoins the Christian world and Nigeria Christians to be resolute in shedding the light and truth of the gospel on every facet of culture. It echoes that;

In their patriotism and fidelity to their civic duties, Christians will feel themselves bound to promote the true common good; they will make the weight of their convictions so influential that as a result civil authority will be justly exercised and laws will accord with the moral precepts and the common good ... for by a worthy discharge of their functions, they can work for the common good and at the same time prepare the way for the gospel ... collaborating with all men of good will in the promotion of all that is true, just, holy, all that is worthy of love.

The weapon with which the Christian embarks upon political

struggles in Nigeria is moral power of his conscience fully informed in Christian truth and love. It is with it that he will wrestle power and not wait for it to be surrendered to him. It is his guide to authentic Christian life and love.

Conclusion

It is obvious that formation of Christian conscience in the context of Nigerian politics must be embarked upon in the midst of the challenges facing our faith. Anthony Obinna brings to our consciousness the fact that “spiritual and moral development takes place in specific historical, cultural and socio-psychological contexts and not in a vacuum.”⁷⁶ This admonition should serve as source of strength to Christians in battling all forms of challenges that are deliberately placed on their faith in Nigeria. The dynamics of these challenges are obvious and multifaceted. In general these are challenges that put to serious question our abilities to impact positively on our politics and preserve our Christian identity. They are situations that bring about violations and corruption of the social order. Christian charity demands that they be confronted with equal force. “Besides the blood – stained face of violence that can be easily recognized and identified, there are multiple acts of violations of humans at various levels of life ... violations of codes of right conduct in private and public life.” These scenarios question the Christian conscience in his contributions to building a human

society in Nigeria. Self-examination and new resolve unto transformative action is sinequanonic. Finally, let us conclude by saying that egocentricism or turning away from God has become the burden of the western world, now threatened to its very foundations by materialism, and rampaging barbarian Jihadism.

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