

## PROGRESSIVISM, CONSERVATISM AND THE DYNAMICS OF A CHANGING WORLD: TRENDS AND IMPLICATIONS

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### Abstract

*The modern world has experienced tremendous changes. These changes are evident in all areas of its history. Beneath these changes – positive or negative, is a great inclination towards the preservation of tradition. The dynamism of the changing world has therefore come with it the frequent questioning of traditional structures more so, this overlap between the movement of history and the quest for strong identification with traditional structures of human society has made it increasingly difficult to define and verify truth and reality in the modern world. While progressives advocate for positive and continued change in human society, conservatives prefer stability and faithfulness to traditional structures. It becomes pertinent therefore to underscore the middle ground. This is because a historical development that has the mélange of stability, immutability, reforms and progress remains the best option for a healthy human society. This article therefore explores the trends and intricacies of both fronts in human society and states their impacts in both human and societal development. Most importantly, the article seeks to present the possibility of a focal point where these two philosophical fronts meet and the implications of adopting this synthesis in the Modern society. This mélange is done from the perspective of Hegel, who understands the impact of a resultant synthesis from a thesis and antithesis in human history.*

**Keywords:** Progressivism, Conservatism, Changing World, Trends

### Introduction

In human history and indeed in all facets of human existence, there has always been a disposition to self-transcend. The distinguishing character of the human person by which he is differentiated from the brutes is his capacity to transcend and of course self-transcend. This capacity comes often with a lot of constructions and deconstructions of the status quo. This human tendency is properly echoed by G.W.F Hegel thus, “the inherent impulse in every soul is to break away from the rind of mere nature... and advancing from the imperfect to the more perfect.”<sup>1</sup> In the attempt to go beyond what nature has offered, scholars have, over the years, developed different ideologies, which serve either to describe existing forms of human transcendence or to construct a new pathway for such transcendence. Some of these ideologies include secularism, relativism, humanism, conservatism, progressivism and personalism. Of all these, progressivism and conservatism have struggled to define contrasting ideological poles of today, and this further highlights the existential tension in the quest for self-transcendence as most people grapple with ambiguity as to what reality is. The universality of truth and certain realities which have intrinsic moral values have been

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<sup>1</sup>GWF Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (trans. By J. Sibree), New York: Dover Pubs. Inc., 1991, p.34.

relegated to the domain of relativism and its variants. These increasing tendencies come at a time when the dynamism of our present time moves in a geometric progression.

This dynamism has constantly put to question traditional structures and accepted core values. Tradition is here brought into grave interrogations and even in some circles considered as oppressive force that must be jettisoned. This has often caused a certain imbalance in the life of man<sup>2</sup> who is the meeting point of the ideologies and whose life is affected by them positively or negatively. This is because “the dichotomy affecting the modern world is in fact a symptom of the deeper dichotomy that is in man himself. He is the meeting point of many conflicting forces. In his condition as a created being he is subject to a thousand shortcomings, but feels untrammelled in his inclinations and destined for a higher form of life. Torn by a welter of anxieties he is compelled to choose between them and repudiate some among them.”<sup>3</sup> This article seeks therefore to explore the nexus of two evident phenomena within these conflicting forces—conservatism and progressivism, with the aim to underscore their impact in the life of man within the context of the ever-changing world. It seeks to point out the middle point of the existent dichotomy, their problems and challenges, as well as their implications and benefits.

## **Explication of Relevant Terms**

### **Conservatism**

The word that vividly casts light on the ideology called conservatism is ‘protect’. From the root verb—conserve, which is transitive. One understands that this ideology protects the status quo against adulteration, improvement, transition away from the original or traditional. Tradition is here understood as “... the transmission, the customary, i.e. the totality of processes and organizations whereby acquired insights, capacities and institutions are passed on from generation to generation. As such it also constitutes the totality of that which is transmitted.”<sup>4</sup> Tradition in this sense has a very direct relationship with conservatism which presents itself as a process through which that which is considered as tradition is preserved and transmitted. “Conservatism is a preference for the historically inherited rather than the abstract and ideal. This preference has traditionally rested on an organic conception of society—that is, on the belief that society is not merely a loose collection of individual but a living organism.”<sup>5</sup> Conservatism is an absolute commitment or dedication to the protection of traditional values and standards. This protection in words or actions always comes with an opposition to change or innovations (which may seem contradictory to the existing norms). In a sense, conservatism is protecting the status quo. No matter the culture of environment or milieu, this ideology is found, it “tends to favour institutions and practices that guarantee social order and historical continuity.”<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Man here is understood and used in its generic sense. It will be used interchangeably with human person, human being, or even humanity. When used in a different sense, attention will be definitely drawn to that.

<sup>3</sup>*Vatican II, Gaudium Et Spes* no.10.

<sup>4</sup>K. Rahner & H. Vorgrimler, *Kleines theologisches Wörterbuch*, Freiburg, 1961, p. 360. This demonstrates the fact according to Lieven Boeve that „tradition is thus, in the first place, the content of transmission, the body of knowledge, narratives, practices, customs, institutions and organisations of a particular community. This community is thus given from an identity by the tradition it maintains.” (Cf. Lieven Boeve, *Interrupting Tradition: An Essay on Christian Faith in a Postmodern Context*, Louvain, Peeters Press, 2002. 16.

<sup>5</sup>‘Conservatism’ online Encyclopedia Britannica retrieved on 7 December, 2023

<sup>6</sup>‘Conservatism’ online Encyclopedia Britannica retrieved December 7, 2023

Thus, whenever history is challenged, the conservatives stand on their toes to react. Because of its connection with history, a lot of scholars have considered conservatism to be situational—responding to the situation of a particular time and place. In this vein, Quintin Hogg observes that “conservatism is not so much a philosophy as an attitude, a constant force, performing a timeless function in the development of a free society and corresponding to a deep and permanent requirement of human nature itself.”<sup>7</sup> Michael Oakeshott believes that “to be conservative is to prefer the familiar to the unknown, to prefer the tried to the untried, fact to mystery, the actual to the possible, the limited to the unbounded, the near to the distant, the sufficient to the superabundant, the convenient to the perfect and present laughter to utopian bliss.”<sup>8</sup>

From the above, it can be gleaned that there is always a *mélange* between conservatism and tradition or identity (of people or place or time). This is so because, “to be part of a tradition means to possess an experiential familiarity with the content thereof, a familiarity which provides one’s concrete day to day existence with structure and perspective. The transmission of tradition implies the passing on of a particular way of looking, judging, experiencing, expecting, acting, organizing and existing in a society determined by a historically-evolved totality of concrete narratives and customs.”<sup>9</sup> There is an important definition of conservatism which perhaps gives room for the questioning by progressivism. This definition is contrasted from the tradition-based rendition of conservatism to a more institutionalized form. Corey Robin as quoted by Farrell Henry captures this definition, thus, “conservatism is a defense of established hierarchies but it is also fearful of those established hierarchies.”<sup>10</sup>

## Progressivism

This ideology holds that human societies can undergo relevant and unending changes. It questions ceaselessly the status quo in a bid to foster a shift from the situation. Progressives believe that individuality, progress and changes are fundamental to one’s development. Cambridge Dictionary defines progressivism as “a social or political movement that aims to represent the interests of ordinary people through political change and the support of government actions.”<sup>11</sup> The definitions of progressivism, from whichever perspective must take into consideration the need for social reforms, for the good of the society. Progressivism as a philosophical thought underscores the necessity of changes and of movements in the social order.

This ideology stands in stark opposition to conservatism which preoccupies itself with the preservation of the status quo. Epistemologically, it is important to understand that progressivism works on the establishment of new knowledge. The social reforms embarked upon by progressives are sometimes grounded on their presumed advantage to the welfare of humans, by the singular stroke of mere imagination without passing through the crucibles of time and test. Progressivism appears not just interested in the improvement of the social order, but rather more focused on the apparent welfare of its propagators or of

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<sup>7</sup>Quintin Hogg Baron Hailsham, *The Conservative Case*, London: Penguin Books, 1959, p. 155

<sup>8</sup>Oakeshott Michael, *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays*, London Methuen, 1962, p. 168

<sup>9</sup>Lieven Boeve, *Interrupting Tradition*, p.16.

<sup>10</sup>Farrell Henry, ‘Trump is a Typical Conservative tradition’ in *The Washington Post*, retrieved on, 7 December, 2023

<sup>11</sup><https://dichotomy.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/progressivism> accessed on 8 December, 2023.

a very few individuals within the societal setting, but from this little space projects itself as a strong vanguard of the social order. It is a multifaceted philosophical thought that advocates progress and change in all human endeavours. One thing to realize however is that the definition of progressivism has continued to change in time as is the nature of progress itself. Its lack of a definable project or identifiable character and identity disposes one to consider progressivism as a kind of politics based on social progress.<sup>12</sup>

### **Historical Development of Conservatism and Progressivism**

Conservatism as a term was first used within a political context in 1818 by Francois- Rene De Chateaubriand. However, conservatism as a philosophical thought has over the years evolved with time. Edmund Burke, an 18<sup>th</sup> Century politician who opposed the French Revolution is credited as one of the main proponents of this ideology. The idea of rulers by divine right could be considered as one of the crudest concepts of conservatism. Unquestioned rulership based on divine right often opposed liberalism and progressivism and change. The earliest fathers of this philosophical thought which seems to have developed within the context of politics argued for a social order based on tradition since “tradition represented the wisdom of the species,”<sup>13</sup> and valued community and social reforms. The historical consciousness in France made way for a form of conservatism that did not support the separation of the church and the state and also an outright opposition to modernity. Progressivism arose during the enlightenment period because of the firm belief in the advancement of human thought, and it is based on the sophistication of human knowledge especially empirical knowledge. Immanuel Kant identified progress as a movement away from barbarism towards civilization. Thus, thinkers of the enlightenment period felt that progressivism would become a liberating tool from the shackles of barbaric acts such as slavery, sexual inequality and illiteracy which beclouded the conservative atmosphere before the enlightenment era. Various forms of progressivism of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries called for paradigm shift in the socio-economic structures to remove what appeared like traditional embargoes. The historical development of progressivism is marked by different political movements that were aligned to the progressive thought pattern one of which is social liberalism.<sup>14</sup>

Within the cause of history variant ideologies such as radicalism, liberalism, humanism, relativism, anti-clericalism and republicanism that share some notes of similarities with progressivism or are even ascribed to be offshoots of progressivism emerge but with their peculiar concerns. The historical atmosphere heralded by the industrial revolution pitched the path of progressivism. Pope Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical letter, *Rerum Novarum*,<sup>15</sup> served as the intellectual and theological basis for the advancement of the progressive thought but not in the mode and manner that liberalism projects but towards the path of a more human intervention in economic problems within the context of the changing times.

### **A Consideration of Our age**

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<sup>12</sup>Trohler Daniel ‘Progressivism’ in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*, 26, April 2017 accessed on 7 December, 2023.

<sup>13</sup>Morton Auerbach, *The Conservative Illusion*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1959, p. 41.

<sup>14</sup>Social liberalism was influenced by British liberal philosopher John Stuart Mill who conceived people as “progressive beings”

<sup>15</sup>Leo XIII, Pope, “*Rerum Novarum* – Encyclical Letter of Pope Leo XIII on the Conditions of Labor” (1891). Historical Catholic and Dominican Documents. 13.

In the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, the Second Vatican Fathers present a good picture of our current age. According to them, “in no other age has mankind enjoyed such an abundance of wealth, resources and economic well-being; and yet a huge proportion of the people of the world is plagued by hunger and extreme need while countless numbers are totally illiterate. ...there is lastly a painstaking search for a better material world, without a parallel spiritual advancement.”<sup>16</sup> The last portion of this statement from the Council Fathers captures the evident propensity of the modern man to push forward and progress beyond the existing structures. As a result of this eagerness to move the human society forward, “the traditional structures of local communities—family, clan, tribe, village, various groupings and social relationships—is subjected to ever more sweeping changes.”<sup>17</sup>

The modern society is plagued by unsatisfactory yearning for change. Technological advancements, industrialization, globalization and other major breakthroughs in human society have continued to push the human society into deep waters in search of completeness. The world has experienced a dramatic flux and crisis. The crisis in the past few years; ranging from health and economic pandemics has revealed the deep-seated injustice in the socio-political systems. Poverty, climate change, food insecurity, refugee rights, increasing attention in the LGBTQ+ rights, religious plurality, continental wars, global bipolarity and untold inhuman attitudes leave room for questions regarding the core values of the human person. What really does it mean to be human? The core question to be asked while bearing in mind the growing trends of today’s world is whether traditional values can survive in a modern society.

The geometric flux of the contemporary society continues to raise questions about the longevity and relevance of traditional values and norms. More so, while it is expedient that man embraces progressive ideologies and adapt to globalization and techno-scientific advancements, there is a struggle to preserve ancient customs and beliefs within a socio-cultural parlance. In analyzing the interplay between traditional values heralded by conservatism and progressive values heralded by progressivism, one must observe that the emergence of technology has changed most of the way humans live and communicate their ethical cultural norms. Factors such as the rise of relativism, gender roles, and globalization have challenged the traditional ways of living and the overall behavior and standards of human beings in the recent times.

The world of today is a situation where there is an imbalance between honouring tradition and embracing progressive ideas. As society evolves and people evolve with it, there is the tendency of losing traditional values within the changing society. However, traditions are meant to be the nexus holding society together, hence, there is need to properly integrate the desire to sustain tradition and the urge to move forward. This is because “the world hates change, yet it is the only thing that has brought progress.”<sup>18</sup>

The impacts of progressivism and conservatism are felt differently by different cultures and society. The adaptation to progressive trends such as abortion or gay marriage may not be feasible in African continent<sup>19</sup> but would be embraced in the west.<sup>20</sup> How does this

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<sup>16</sup>Vatican II, *Gaudium Et Spes* no. 4.

<sup>17</sup>Vatican II, *Gaudium Et Spes* no. 6.

<sup>18</sup><https://www.google.com/amp/s/toprightpartners.com/insights/20> accessed 6 December, 2023.

bipolar inclination affect the progression of the global human family? It is adequate for traditions to evolve constantly and meet the changing requirements of time and socio-cultural contexts, but how far should these traditions evolve within a particular context. “One of the most compelling reasons to preserve tradition is the rich tapestry of culture it represents. Every culture is like a unique thread in this intricate tapestry, contributing its own colour, patterns and stories. They offer a glimpse into the history, beliefs and values that have shaped societies for generations.”<sup>21</sup> Any attempt to replace core traditional values of a people with strange introductions and attitudes will definitely affect the nexus of the particular people involved. Hence, caution is required in monitoring the extent the evolution is made in a bid to progress.

### **Problems of Progressivism and Conservatism**

One of the major problems of progressivism is the lack of a clear narrative of philosophy. Progressivism tends to move with the supposedly apparent biased convictions of the trappings of the time itself. It aligns itself unwaveringly to the wave of the time and assesses its success to the receptivity of the time it flourishes. Progressivism measures its success by the template of the spirit of the time and values therefrom. It disposes itself to a perennial demand of unceasing adaptability to every pressure and influence. There is no clear cut distinction between what should be adapted to and what change to be ignored. This tendency ultimately leads humanity into an oblivion and continued search for the ideal. In it is a reign of amorphousness characteristic of an unidentifiable character. It shields itself from responsibility and creates a room for unwarranted disinterestedness, which can at best be described as an unnecessary exhibition of irresponsibility. Sequel to this is a creation of hollowness and a disservice to the human person who is pressured to undiscussed changes in the ever changing circumstances of his existence. This hollowness resides at the heart of progressive ideology which lacks a core narrative or worldview to answer what constitutes the values contemporary man want or need. Without a clear definition of the narrative, progressive mind may continue to be in error. The teleological movement of progressives today is more or less not defined and because of this there is no end to what progress really means.

Consequently, the search for a common good is sidelined by the progressive view, who might argue that emphasis should rather be made on the greater good. Interestingly, the greater good in this sense often transforms itself into a relative good and thus inaugurates relativism. In its understanding, history is a vision of conflicts, winners, and losers. In almost every sense and place, modern progressivism appears to uphold anything progressive as good, while all else is evil. This clearly is not evolution but a case of a winner and loser, a form of replacement. Progressivism demands always a victim, and this victim is oftentimes traditions and existing structures and standards, of which its target is

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<sup>19</sup>The recent publication of *Fiducia Supplicans* and the unanimous reaction of the African Bishops to the possibility of blessing same-sex couples outlined in the *Fiducia Supplicans* provides grounds for this conclusion. Their resistance of the content of the document especially as it concerns the blessing of gay couples was forcefully vehement that the Dicastery responsible for its publication had to reconsider few lines and immediately put up a clarification.

<sup>20</sup>Completely different from the reaction of the African Bishops to the publication of *Fiducia Supplicans* is the attitude of the Western Bishops who rather considered the document to be very conservative in outlook and never satisfied the yearnings of the Western Church. For the Africans, it was grossly progressive, but for the Westerners it was unmitigatedly conservative.

<sup>21</sup>Irina Iosif, *Preserving Tradition in a Modern World*, New York: Medium pub, 2011, p. 34.

oftentimes the dismantling of these perceived existing structures and standards. In the Marxian version, it is the class enjoying dominance. But then, if all history comes from the mindset of conflict, the losers would always be dehumanized.

On the side of conservatism, there is a circular reasoning in philosophy which conservatives tend to fall into while trying to justify their adherence to the existing ideology—what exists is desirable because it exists. The justifiable ground for the acceptance of the existing status quo is simply the fact that it exists. How it exists, the reason for its existence and the consequences emanating from the supposed existence may not be of any valuable concern to the docility of the conservative mind. Upon analyzing one of the proponents of conservatism, James Mill, confirms what is considered as one of the major problems of the conservatives: “[Burke] worked himself into an artificial admiration of the bare fact of existence, especially ancient existence. Everything was to be protected, not because it was good, but because it existed.”<sup>22</sup> Thus, the major problem is the absence of an overlying principle justifying their adherence to tradition. John Kekes prefers to use the word ‘traditionalism’ to express this understanding of conservatism. Instead of an unprincipled reverence for the past, he defends only those traditions that foster ‘good lives’—which to him are those that make individual persons “morally wise or virtuous.”<sup>23</sup>

There is a naturalistic fallacy in the thought pattern of the conservative argument which insists that ‘what is, also ought to be’. Another way of rendering this fallacy is thus; ‘what has allowed human beings to survive, ought to be preserved’. Although their reasoning enjoys greater support among those afraid of the decline of traditional structures, it however confuses hierarchy with social stability and Puritanism with morality and ultimately stalls growth. Conservatives need to support their traditional fidelity with solid reasoning and not the *fideistic* glorification and obedience to the old.

### **The Focal Point Between Moral Immutability And The Dynamics Of The Changing World**

While it is important to perceive progressivism and conservatism as opposing ideologies, it is also important to note that these two can become complimentary in the development of the human society. Thinking alongside the German philosopher Hegel may lead to some form of ideological equilibrium, a balance between moral immutability and the demands of an ever-changing world. Hegel believes that moral progress was inescapable.<sup>24</sup> According to him, these varying ideologies push humanity towards perfection. His dialectical approach was necessary to maintain a balance in the course of history and of course within the context of human development. His thought pattern which included a dialectics between the thesis and anti-thesis to produce a synthesis is claimed to have inspired progressive thought, particularly in Karl Marx. However, while judging it to inspire progressivism, it did not jettison the antithesis nor did it relegate the thesis. A focal point between the two would produce a synthesis within the path of development. The introduction of Hegel in this discussion is intended to seek a balance between the changing world and the need to stick to immutable truths. The idea here is that while progressivism

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<sup>22</sup>James Mill, *History of India*, London: Baldwin, Cradock and Joy pub., 1817, p. 200.

<sup>23</sup>John Kekes, *Moral Wisdom and Good Lives*, Ithaca: Cornell University press 1995, p. 35.

<sup>24</sup>For a deeper reading cf. GWF Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (trans. By J. Sibree), New York: Dover Pubs. Inc., 1991

advocates for ideologies that foster change inline with the demands of the changing world, one has to pay attention to the demands of conservatism too which upholds faithfulness to traditional truth which can be sometimes immutable. Hence, there is a need to find a balance. This is where Hegel's resultant synthesis comes in – which is a fusion of the thesis and antithesis. The dialectical pattern in historical thoughts and human development is a prototype of the sort of balance that is imagined here. It will provide an oscillation between progressivism and conservatism. Thereby maintaining a balance and not losing any aspect of the two philosophical thoughts.

While progressives strive to effect change within the moral order, there are certain truths and moral codes that are immutable. To that effect, a balance between these truths and the efforts of the progressives is necessary for resolving the tension between the conservatives and the progressives in view of achieving the equilibrium needed in the world. The immutability of morality is a principle that some moral propositions are so true that they cannot be changed by any ideology or force. For instance, the moral principle that killing someone for pleasure is wrong. No ideology may overturn this proposition.

### **Implications of Conservatism and Progressivism**

#### **Ethical/Moral Implication**

The complex nature of the modern culture has assumed in its own constitution and by its own standards a formidable force that weighs heavily on preexisting ethical norms and values. This has constantly tried to redefine ethical values according to its own perspective within the pretext of social progress. This is seen reflected quite noticeably today in many traditional Christian European societies, especially with the onslaught of secularization and pluralization. Lieven Boeve captures this situation well as follows: “In many traditionally Christian European societies, Christian faith no longer enjoys the monopoly it once had in giving meaning to human existence. The processes of secularization and pluralization have seriously restricted the all-inclusive importance of the Christian horizon of meaning. Postmodernity's criticism of so-called master narratives have undermined the so-called absolutist and universalist truth claims of religious traditions and modern ideologies.”<sup>25</sup> In the face of this redefinition of ethical and moral principles, conservatism demands a return to the original premises of humanity. The rebellious attempt by modern ideologies to move against these original principles has also posed problems on the ethical framework. Conservatism accepts both the moral and ethical limits to our potential for improvement and to our abilities of knowing and doing, all of which progressivism denies and resists.

Conservatives consider the common values of a group as a criterion for inquiry into existing moral truths, conventions and traditions. “The central features of the moral conservatism that gives priority to community's practices ... (is that) conservatism is pluralistic and particularistic, recognizing the diversity of human groups and the internality and flexibility of the rules which define the practices in each. It is pessimistic

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<sup>25</sup>Lieven Boeve, *Interrupting Tradition: An Essay on Christian Faith in a Postmodern Context*, Louvain: Peeters Press, 2002, p.1.

about utopian ideas of progress but sanguine about the apparent permanence of conflict among ways of life and conceptions of well-being.”<sup>26</sup>

Conservatism works primarily under the principle of Kant’s categorical imperative and not a hypothetical imperative. Kant argues that duty should be the motive of any moral act. Inclination or self-interest can never be the motive of any moral act. Thus, for conservatives, morality and ethics should be based on the principle of universality—acting only on that maxim whereby one can at the same time will that it should become a universal law. This is what conservatives have tried to preserve and not ideologies that favour a particular group of persons. This nonetheless, between progressivism and conservatism, moral power is a deciding factor which sets the two ideologies in motion. “In saying that conservatism is a non-moral power, we mean that we cannot regard the old view as true or right because it is old or the new as right or wrong because it is new.”<sup>27</sup>

### **Religious implications**

There is no better way to begin discussions on the religious implications of progressivism and conservatism than with very current and trending discussions in the church on key issues of sexuality and gender. As mentioned earlier, where there are countries that are more receptive of progressive ideas it is important to note that there are some cultures where the imposition of progressive policies on sexuality and gender has been completely rejected. Perhaps, one thing to note about conservatism and progressivism is that they are time-bound. Thus, these ideologies are contextualized responses.

However, the effects of these responses can be negative and positive. While it might be necessary to conserve deposits of faith, stern conservatism tends to stifle the possibility of advances towards the desired interpretation of the same deposits of the faith. Approaches to religious issues are to be evolutionary under the guidance of enlightened reason. It has to be allowed to reflect the spirit of the time, especially as it addresses concrete issues of the contemporary times in a responsible manner and profound consciousness in the preservation and recognition of the worth, value and dignity of the human person

One other negative effect of conservatism in a changing world is the struggle to get the new man<sup>28</sup> to believe in the same old truths while teaching these truths in the same old manner. This is noticeable in some religious circles especially on issues of moral and doctrinal orientations. Thus, “the fact often made much of, that conservative evangelists preaching the ‘old’ doctrines in the old forms, are generally far more successful in persuading large masses of people to a definite profession of faith...than those evangelists whose doctrines are more unfamiliar...”<sup>29</sup> is gradually becoming elusive in the eyes of progressives. However, in some parts of the world, especially where the impacts of progressivism have not taken roots, “religious and moral revival or conversion is far

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<sup>26</sup>Clarke G. Stanley et al, (eds.), *Anti-Theory in Ethics and Moral Conservatism*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1989, p.16.

<sup>27</sup>Cook E. Albert, ‘Conservatism in Religion’ in *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 6, No. 2, (April 1913) retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1507420> accessed 18, December, 2023

<sup>28</sup>By the new man, we mean the modern man, one acquainted with new ways of thinking and new perspectives of acting—and an entirely different worldview.

<sup>29</sup>Cook E. Albert, ‘Conservatism in Religion’ in *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 6, No. 2, (April 1913) retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1507420> accessed 18, December, 2023 p.191

simpler and easier on the basis of accepted and familiar doctrines than on that of unfamiliar ones.”<sup>30</sup>

### Political implications

It is pertinent to begin discussions on the political implications of progressivism and conservatism by posing an important question—what exactly is progressive politics progressing towards? How far do conservatives draw the national politics backward? The dynamics between traditional values (represented by the conservative block) and progress (represented by the progressive block) has occupied the political structure of nations. Policies are drawn to either support the progressive wing or the conservative wing.

Most conservatives believe that a free society cannot exist without social and moral stability. In general they believe that stability is impossible without authority and authority is based on historical precedent and moral imperatives. Contrary to this, the liberal or progressives would embrace a more secularist approach to politics. This often implies adapting to the new trends and making policies to suit the modern man. Policies such as the legalization of abortion, euthanasia, prostitution and same sex unions have been products of progressive ideologies and this mindset has governed the political milieu of many nations without considering the ethical or moral implications. In most democratic nations, conservatives tend to oppose policies that emerge from progressive ideologies like the ones mentioned above. Conservatives are skeptical about individualism. They fear that the penetration of progressivism in the political structure would give room to the rise of individualism which will definitely destroy the traditional structures in place already. Thus, “unless individualism is tempered by and anchored in the awareness of a larger and more compelling cultural context, a context in which the issues of order, obligation and collectively shared meaning are predominant, conservatives fear that our cherished freedom of the individual will lead us into social chaos.”<sup>31</sup>

### Conclusion

It is important to note that the controversies between the conservatives and the progressives in the dynamics of the changing world can only affect the speed of human development and not the destination. Man has always sought to evolve, to transcend beyond himself, This evolution has but one destination—the perfection of man. The philosophical questions to underscore however, are whether conservatism as a philosophical doctrine gives any guiding principles to influence these developments or is it just a useful practical maxim that should not be crossed? Secondly, there is the question of whether progressivism has a well-defined principle towards development or it is just a circumstantial response to the trends of the dynamics of the changing world.

An attempt to answer these questions will only present us with the imperative of a balance between tradition and progress. This means, acknowledging traditional customs as

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<sup>30</sup>Cook E. Albert, ‘Conservatism in Religion’ in *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 6, No. 2, (April 1913) retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1507420> accessed 18, December, 2023 p. 193

<sup>31</sup>Rowland M. Barbara, ‘The Impact of Contemporary Conservatism on Modern Political Thought: A Review Essay.’ In: *Sage Journals* Vol. 41, Issue 2, 1988. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1177/106591298804100212> accessed on 18 December, 2023

valuable and also accepting positive changes as vital to socio-political growth. Positive dialogue between the proponents of these ideologies is important to understand the focal points between these ends. This dialogue will foster an even incorporation of new concepts without losing sight of their original principles.

Modernizing cultural values and truths does not necessarily mean a jettisoning of the substantial tradition for new ones. The ideal option would be to adapt to new realities while holding on to the relevant traditions. To find the right balance between these competing ideologies, there is need for the following: proper education of the younger generation about the desired integration, respect for diversity and multiculturalism, community and social cohesion and government's effort in finding a harmonious coexistence of tradition and progressive principles through wholesome policies.

A lot of persons or groups might consider the church and especially the catholic church to be grossly antagonistic to progressive thoughts. This attitude does not reflect the real situation since the church as an institution has been a strong force to real progressivism. Thus, "the progressive development of peoples is an object of deep interest and concern to the church. This is particularly true in the case of those peoples who are trying to escape the ravages of hunger, poverty, endemic diseases and ignorance, of those who are seeking a larger share in the benefits of civilization and a more active improvement of their human qualities; of those who are consciously striving for fuller growth."<sup>32</sup>

Hence, progressivism should not just be circumstantial or periodic—responding only to emerging tendencies. It should be intentional and tailored to a defined purpose. Only when this is done can it align itself to those truths which conservatism seeks to preserve, and this is the meeting point—the mutual exchange needed for integral growth in the changing world.

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<sup>32</sup>Pp. Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, (1967) no.1.

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