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BENEDICT XVI AND THE AFRICAN INTEGRAL HUMANISM IN A CONFLICT-DRIVEN WORLD

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Abstract

The issue of a lack of relative peace and social justice is very much evident in our society, especially in the domain of African political and religious congruence, where there is motivated violence and conflict. And it is the very nature of the human person to desire peace and justice. In fact, this is one of the clauses of the justification of the establishment of law and the institution of government in human society. It is on the value of the attainment of harmonious living amongst humans that issues of peace are envisaged for the realization of Integral Human Development (IHD). But the contrary is widely witnessed, all because of the conflict of human interests. In all this, without the value of peace and justice, there will be no authentic development. This paper seeks to ascertain the relevance of building national development policies and strategies for the attainment of peace and justice on the values of human 'Charity in Truth' in Catholic Social Teaching. In an attempt to contextualize the thesis, an evaluation is made of the church's Africentric concern for the realization of IHD. It concludes to ascertain that Catholic Social Teaching has the aim for the holistic formation of the human person that guarantees healthy living and positive symbiosis amongst the ecology of existence, and it must be preached in order to curtail the negative waves of contemporary developmental demands and interests.

Keywords: African Integral Humanism (AIH), Charity in Truth, Church, Human Person, Integral Human Development (IHD), Justice, Peace

Introduction

We remember and reemphasize the valued message of Benedict XVI's *Caritas in Veritate*, after fifteen years of its issuance, simply on the value of love for the healing of the conflict-driven world. The quest for Integral Human Development (IHD) in "charity in truth" or "charity of truth" is indispensably hinged on the values for the *Culture of Peace*: the world being in harmony with itself in God, since God is love, and peace is the fruit of love. This consciousness is hinged on the values of creation, where the human person, as a subject of lived experience, selflessly expresses the inevitability of human rights and dignity through the recognition of natural law. According to Douglas Roche;

A culture of peace is an approach to life that seeks to transform the cultural tendencies toward war and violence into a culture where dialogue, respect, and fairness govern social relations. In this way, violence can be prevented through a more tolerant common global ethics. The culture of peace uses education as an essential tool in fostering attitudes supportive of non-violence, co-operation, and social justice. It promotes sustainable development for all, free human rights, and equality between men and women. It requires genuine democracy and the free flow of information. It leads to disarmament (Roche 2006: 100).

With *Caritas in Veritate*, Pope Benedict XVI reminded the world that there has been a lingering quest for peace in human society. This is due to the experiential dominance of societal negativities against the unity of human persons (Kanu & Isanbor 2021a). Anyway and all times, the unity of people in a nation-state cannot be underestimated nor overemphasised for a peaceful coexistence of the people (Isanbor & Samuel 2025). Every positive-minded individual longs for the unity of the people and their development in peace and justice. For the course of the unity of the people, the sense and operational values of peace, justice and equity are always and necessarily inferred. This is because the world is only in the workability of these factors of development, especially peace. That is, the realization and sustainability of IHD in the face of conflicting world values and interests in developmental civilization. It is in peace, justice and equity that the valuation of the human person is positioned to express the true meaning of IHD.

On the contrary, with the reign of contemporary conflicting interests, ideologies, ethnic, religious and political differences, there have been a lack of factors such as peace, justice and equity that necessitate the courses of IHD (Kanu & Isanbor 2021b). Of course, "the human person is the measure of all things," but he or she is not the guarantor of all things except when he or she recognises his or her essence as co-guarantor of things. The human person is the focal point of earthly consideration for every issue that leads to the courses of IHD (Isanbor & Samuel 2025). That is, the human person is the steward of development, and it is recognised that there are some factors that he or she must possess to attain the courses of IHD. These factors include peace, social justice and sincerity of purpose. Hence, we consider peace, among other factors, in reference to the religiosity of development, in accordance with the social teaching of the Catholic Church. This is with great emphasis on Benedict XVI's social, philosophical cum theological concern for the courses of IHD (Kanu & Isanbor 2021a). At the end, we look at the developmental effect of the social teaching on the quest for African integral Humanism (AIH), which is the Afrocentric development civilization of interests. We consider it as the Church's concern for AIH because the Church has taken the African continent as one of the mission territories, an area of intensive and emphatic interest in human evangelization.

The development of these areas of human socialization and modernization needs to be preached in order to achieve their needed salvation. The development of regional philosophical studies in the religious circle stimulates ontological consciousness for the values of truth and makes it desirable to be charitable with it in sustaining God's presence in all human languages (see, Idamarhare 2014). It

is on the remembrance of the universality of human salvation, as the church will always preach, that we consider the political, cultural and religious concerns of peace and development in truth as an important district for authentic human civilization (Kanu & Isanbor 2021b). The world concern on peace and development is known to stimulate the values of self-dynamism, self-participation and self-authenticity among persons and nations, above the influences of human race and colour.

Hence, the thrusts of African development consciousness, which are the courses of AIH, are about the development and emancipation of the Africans and the African continent in the face of imperialistic civilizations. Even the church recognises this hinge of development. However, in the name of conflicting interests and desires, even in the pavilion of embraced foreign religions and other ways of development, African humanity is seen to be off track. In this condition, the culture of insecurity has increased in an environment which was known for peace and cultural serenity. We (Africans) have been beclouded by all forms of individualism, segregationism, relativism, religious fanaticism and particularism, and the like, that are inimical to proper human and societal development. But the centrality of the paper is limited to the explication of peace and development in relation to AIH, as evidently situated in Benedict XVI's social teachings or socio-philosophy.

The Church, as a community of earthly persons, is longing for heavenly glories and peace, and continues her quest for the attainment of better humanity as she advocates cultural symbiosis and positive coexistence, with the instrument of her social teaching or doctrine, the respect, protection and promotion of the Universal Declaration of Fundamental Human Rights and the quest for IHD. In this paper, we will use Pope Benedict XVI's *Caritas in Veritate* as a guide to examine the role and efforts of the church in the realization of integrative human cohesion for the definition and sustainability of AIH. It is for modern advocacy of respect for human rights, life, dignity and development, as humanity must consider developmental peace as a right and for the establishment of an ecology of peace in the reign of civilisation of love.

Benedict XVI on *Charity in Truth*

The encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* (Charity in Truth) issued by Pope Benedict XVI on the 29th June 2009 is an appraised social document to celebrate the 40th Anniversary of Pope Paul VI's *Populorum Progreessio*. *Caritas in Veritate* is the only social encyclical of Benedict XVI, hence very strategic in considering the courses of IHD as its major social concern. The history of the social teaching of the Catholic church, so far, has taken Leo XII's *Rerum Novarum* and Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio* as the thrusts of consideration on which the agitations for administration of social justice, respect of human rights and dignity and initiation of positive social change are effected and gained.

As a responsive entity, the ecclesial community through the pontificate reacts to the needs of humanity. The sense of futuristic hopefulness for the realisation of IHD is the main interest of Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio*, in which Benedict XVI's *Caritas in Veritate* is a reflective agency of the former. This concern, according to Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio*, which Benedict XVI seems to consider as the basis of *Caritas in Veritate*: these teachings, as philosophical and theological engagements of the world in a modern world, recognise 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 disease 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.

From the above, there are many issues of human welfare which concern the church. It is always not easy for the church not to comment on socio-political issues, because the church is situated in human society in order to make its presence felt. It is a tradition that needs to be followed and this is what Benedict XVI upholds, and then upholding that these social issues are always challenging and demanding, depending on the suffering conditions of humanity in modern and then contemporary

worlds. This is a tradition of concern that *Caritas in Veritate* follows in addressing social issues. To address the social issues of his time, he had his encyclical preoccupied with many clauses of interest that relate to the developmental strides of contemporary humanity.

Benedict XVI, with the mindset of achieving success in evangelising humanity through the ecclesial tradition of social teaching, discussed the following: ‘human development in our time’, ‘fraternity, economic development and civil society’, ‘the development of people based in rights and duties and the environment’, ‘the co-operation of the human family’, and ‘the development of peoples and technology’. With the encyclical, Benedict XVI sought and visualised the possibilities for the holistic realisation of IHD through the expression of charity in Truth. The “Truth” is God and the understanding of His creative and supervisory workability, capacity and essence, brings humanity to true development, as He relates His divinity with the progressive perfection of humanity in peace, justice and equity. This improvement in humanity can only be achieved by the application of *Caritas in Veritate*: Charity in Truth.

It is obvious to ascertain that *Caritas in Veritate* is very timely and contemporarily eventful in outlining issues of development and peace towards the realization of IHD. The preaching of truth must be linked with charity; that is, our collective gifts of self and resources in quest of meaningful development must be in the domicile of truth. The ecclesial and academic personage of Benedict XVI does not need to adopt the detailed explicatory conception of the personhood of God in order to philosophically discuss the metaphysical or transcendental end of humanity. His social teachings exemplify his belief in the workability of God in the development of humanity, despite his own weaknesses in some social relations. With this social teaching, Benedict XVI considers the needs of IHD as the propelling force and interest of this encyclical, which is also the basis of *Populorum progressio*. The above social speculation is possible through the engineering of human togetherness and common goodness (Kanu & Isanbor 2021a). According to him, the problem of development in human society has been a historical phenomenon because there is a lack of the sense of human *charity in truth*. That humanity should value the culture of truth, which is the basis of creation and existence, that is seated on the practice of sincere charity of desires, interests and purposes, becomes the trusted reason for the accommodated adhesive advocacy of IHD.

Ecclesial Concern For African Developmental Experience: A Hinged Consideration Of African Integral Humanism

The philosophy of Afro-cultural humanism is situated in African consideration of the human personhood as a relational being. Man, as a communal being with others and with God, is called to live in peace and harmony as he acknowledges the love of God and for making him the central being in creation (Kanu & Isanbor 2021a). The stewardship of the universe is entrusted to man through the monitoring of God, looking at the activities of man in making of the earth a harmonious habitation (Isanbor 2014). From the pragmatic conceptualization of Afro-cultural humanism come the considerations of AIH (Idamarhare 2014). The church talks about the African developmental agenda and interest because she is situated everywhere; we mean, she is evident in the human race. But the talks of AIH are challenging, and the church must be concerned with the hope of redeeming the wholeness of the African person. Here, we evaluate the effect of *Caritas in Veritate* on the quest for AIH. We link this social teaching with the demands of the church on “African Commitment”, an apostolic document that focuses on the evangelization of the African continent in terms of its developments and salvations.

Be that as it may, Christians believe that the objection to violence in society is to seek out ways of expressing love by respecting responsible opinions, obeying civil laws in reference to the natural law, and ultimately obeying God’s commands. Hence, the calls for peaceful civilization are hinged on the view developed on the values of human life, rights and dignity (Kanu & Isanbor 2021a). It is an absolute act of development, by promoting the philosophy of non-violence for the development of society. This principle of nonviolence must lead to ways of acting that are valid expressions of

authentic love of neighbour, as one is defined by the operation of human interrelatedness and interconnectedness (Onimhawo & Ottuh 2010). The recognition of the workability of authentic development that is based on love, justice, and truth, and the church always links the Africentric concern on peace and development to the culture of African theology. According to Idamarhare (2014), “African theology is borne out of the desire to relate the Christian faith to religio-cultural traditions of Africa. It was a theological expression of the quest for African identity in neo-colonial Africa.” The religiosity of peace and development in Africa must always have a connection to the conception of God in Africa as well. This is what Benedict XVI recognises when explicating the African commitment towards her meaning and authentic development, and recognises that the threats to Africa are the same to the world. The church has recognised that Africa is the heartbeat of evangelization. It needs to be evangelised and used to evangelise the rest of the world. So, the development and peace of Africa are that of the whole world.

This is the thrust of Benedict XVI’s Africentric concern in relation to peace and development. To this end, the church’s social teaching can be summed up as the obligation of every individual to contribute to the good of society, in the interest of justice and in the pursuit of the “option for the poor.” This is the context most likely to foster human fulfilment for everyone, where each individual can enjoy the benefit of living in an orderly, prosperous and healthy society. A society with insufficient regard for the common good would be unpleasant and dangerous to live in, as well as unjust to those it excluded. From a conceptual and historical analysis of Paul VI’s *Populorum Progressio*, which is about the ‘development of the peoples’, the characteristics of *Caritas in Veritate* are examined for the proper understanding of the course for the *Culture of Peace*. For the issues of peace and development, Benedict XVI recognises the workability of faith in hope, and for him, faith does not work alone, but with reason, as he says that;

Faith is not merely a personal reaching out towards things to come that are still totally absent: it gives us something. It gives us even now something of the reality we are waiting for, and this present reality constitutes for us a “proof” of the things that are still unseen. Faith draws the future into the present, so that it is no longer simply a “not yet”. The fact that this future exists changes the present; the present is touched by the future reality, and thus the things of the future spill over into those of the present and those of the present into those of the future (Benedict XVI 2007, no 7).

To achieve this, the church has been making a lot of efforts in various ways and through her various organs to promote the common good, especially through education, healthcare, fostering marriage and family life, and the promotion of human rights and dignity. To this end, every individual and group has the privilege to interpret the situation that is evident. The ecclesial community is not left out of it. The church’s mission is religious, not political, economic, or social (Troy 2008). However, her religious mission is not limited to spreading the gospel, but includes the renewal and improvement of the whole world. The religious mission of the church motivates political activity, providing “the source of commitment, direction, and vigour to establish and consolidate the community of men according to the law of God.” This does not bring something foreign to political life. Non-religious people are motivated by various non-religious beliefs, such as a belief in the dignity of the human person, the role of religion in society, and the purpose and limits of law (Isanbor & Ojebun, 2022). These people act on their beliefs when they become involved in politics. They attempt to maintain or reform existing institutions to reflect their beliefs about how to structure society and the state to serve the common good (McGarry 2012).

In universal brotherly recognition of the importance of African development to the states of the world, especially in terms of the salvation of human souls, and *Africae munus* (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation: On his part, Benedict XVI, during his visit to Angola, attributed the man’s conflicts in Africa to injustice. He described Africa ‘as a continent filled with hope yet so thirsty for justice and peace.’ From the foregoing, it is not out of place for the Nigerian government to negotiate with

aggrieved individuals, groups, nationalities and sects that constitute the nation. This is a veritable alternative to armed conflicts (Ehianu 2013). The duty to respect the dignity of each human being, in whose nature the image of the Creator is reflected, means in consequence that the person cannot be disposed of at will. Those with greater political, technical, or economic power may not use that power to violate the rights of others who are less fortunate. Peace is based on respect for the rights of all. Conscious of this, it should be posited that the church champions the fundamental rights of each person. In particular, she promotes and defends respect for the life and the religious freedom of everyone. Respect for the right to life at every stage firmly establishes a principle of decisive importance: life is a gift which is not completely at the disposal of the subject (Benedict XVI 2005). In the midst of these social changes, the way forward cannot be anything other than a rediscovery and appreciation of the fundamental truth of human existence, that is, no one owes his/her being to him/herself. This indicates and necessarily leads to the affirmation of a greater being from whom life emanates. And if it is true that human beings owe their existence to someone other than themselves, it follows that they cannot and should not be the sole architect of their and destiny. There is a need to always keep in focus this human dependence on the author of life, whom we could conveniently identify as God.

Considering African Peace and Development

With the centrifugal consideration of the transcendental end of humanity, one talks about holistic development which promotes the totality of the human personhood. Peace necessarily facilitates this condition; then, peace is development itself. Human beings with rights that are inevitable to their nature demand progressive change and growth. These cut across all facets of all states' legislation and policy formulation (Ekiugbo & Isanbor 2014). For Benedict XVI, the power for holistic realization of IHD is the duty of every individual and the state. The state works to alleviate the conditions of the individuals of the state, which is regarded as 'pragmatic development.' The holistic consideration of the human person and his/her society agitates for the consideration of development that should be associated with his/her nature as the determinant figure of the State.

Thus, in every sphere of personal, family, social and political life, morality founded upon truth and open in truth to authentic freedom, and this renders a primordial, indispensable and immensely valuable service not only for the person and its growth in the good, but also for society and its genuine development (John Paul II, 1993, no. 101). Using religious cum socio-cultural principles with philosophical colouration, the paper posits that the true course of development is adversely vested in the value of peace and justice. Then, if generally promoted and respected, the protection of human rights and dignity, when human life is taken as an end, not a means, in every human activity, policy, or invention, will be, if not the actual measure, to redeem man from the shackles of limitation he exhibits in recent times.

The questionable recognition of human rights and dignity confronts the wide and wild culture of hedonism, secularism, corruption, materialism, consumerism, terrorism, armed robbery, hired assassination, kidnapping, abortion, and other forms of social manipulation, exploitation and insecurity that besiege and debase humanity, even within the domain of religious practices; much needs to be desired that is savagery and remediable to save humankind in the course of peace and justice (Ekiugbo & Isanbor 2014). The guarantee of these factors is beyond the power of the human person alone. God is greatly involved. There is a demand for humans' cooperation for their maximum actualisation. Therefore, a consistent, repeated and continuous teaching of necessary ethical and religious values will free the African society from the hands of the cynics who pauperized it through various means of intimidation (Isanbor & Ojebun 2022). It will also help it to overcome some of the crises and tensions that are challenging its corporate existence, contribute to its socio-cultural, religious and economic development and bring about desired progress and stability in its polity. There is a demand for authentic national consciousness that is based on the value of love and peace.

Hence, national consciousness becomes the awareness of or knowledge of certain that make up a nation, such as a nation's history, language(s), cultural values, political system, economy, etc. national consciousness requires that a people are not ignorant of these features hence poses a quite substantial knowledge of them and conduct themselves in ways that show their possession leading to national unity or the desire to cherish and sustain national sovereignty, pride of one's nation, patriotism to the nation (home and abroad), the promotion of her good name and working for her growth and progress (Akinyode 2000). This demand rests on the relationship between humanity and divinity that is cemented with the value of love and peace, which the Church advocates as the 'Civilisation of Love'.

The possibility of having a world with the influence of the conscience is based on the selfness of love and values, not on the expressions of emotions. A world with reason without faith and morality is one without respect and obedience to the natural law. The world knows that only faith will destroy society and only reason will create a society without values. But, for a safe and healthy society, the operational unity of faith and reason is greatly desired, as the dialogue for peace in our troubled world is never under the foundation of theistic and atheistic convictions. Rather, it is a naturalistic aura of common survival that peace is greatly indispensable in the minds of everybody, with the moves of intelligence and rationality.

Hence, the questions of peace are hinged on the understanding of human personhood, a being with the intelligence to initiate and sustain the causes of development. This is only reasonable and meaningful when the human person as subject of lived experience. On the contrary, the human person becomes a wolf to himself or herself and to fellow persons when he or she lacks the sense of truth or is unconscious of the values of truth as the consciousness that makes the world possibly visible in the minds of all. With truth, the human person becomes an invincible moral power with the recognition of the divine, to sustain the world with values. This it is what must prevail today and in the future in the world, for Benedict XVI, to be based on the *civilization of love*.

With love as a consciousness for authentic and transcendent civilization, peace becomes a method of living; that is, living with the hope of the indispensability of God's union with humanity. We enthusiastically greet the efforts of the modern person to give conscious affirmation to the values of love for the institution of the *Culture of Peace* in the world. Peace remains a method; as culture is a way of life, it demands the reconsideration of what makes groups of peace as nations, as groups of people with different interests towards the attainment of IHD, and it is about some sincere negotiations of wills and power that make nations what they are. It is about the self-discipline of wills and powers in overcoming territorial and social disputes among nations and towards others, as the avenues to overcoming questionable desires for conflicting reprisal and revenge in the name of *Culture of War*.

The conviction for naturalistic vibes for peace, with the nuances of the presence of transcendence in human affairs, plays host to the works of Teilhard de Chardin, Hans Küng and Karl Rahner. These personalities with existential-theological ethics lovingly processed the placement of the human person as a subject of development, whose actions and choices are expected to promote and sustain the transcendental values of world peace, justice, harmony, sincerity, continence and trust. The vibes of development transcend one's personal belief and racial coordination and cultural supremacy, but the drive towards the development of harbinger of integral humanism. It is in peace and authentic development that we talk about the happiness of life. The divinity and humanity recognise the visibility of peace and authentic development in human living. According to the dictates of the social teaching of the church, every man has a duty to respect human life and its dignity. The whole essence of developmental peace is based on the legal and human regulations and policies that have regard for the dignity of the human personhood, by anybody or group whatsoever. This is about the promotion

and protection of human life that encompasses all rights and privileges. The valuation of healthy humanism is the valuation of human rights, and the bedrock of IHD.

Evaluation

From the foregoing, we have seen the social concern of the church on the issues of peace and development. It is not exhaustive, but it can be considered adequate to understand the salvific missionary directions of the church in reacting, commenting on, and engaging with secular social issues, in terms of peace, justice, equity, social conscience, cultural spirituality, environmental sustainability and political stability (Ekuigbo & Isanbor 2012; Isanbor & Ekiugbo 2014). Moreover, we have explicated the church's concern for AIH, especially within the preview of the social philosophy of Benedict XVI, on the ardent need for development and peace in Africa as a commitment of necessity and purposefulness of her salvific history.

In all, certainly, the importance of putting on the right dispositional consciousness in maintaining the natural arrangements for the attainment of healthy environmental habitation and peaceful living is very courteous and demanding. This is the demand and conviction of Benedict XVI. And that such conviction will necessarily engender development and progress towards achieving the salvific mission of Christ, which the church preaches unrelentingly, that is, the beatific end of humanity. The church trusts that men must always speak of Peace, in order to have positive lasting development (Ekuigbo & Isanbor 2012; Isanbor & Ekiugbo 2014). More emphatically, as matters of continuous missionary engagement and service, the church will have to continue to evangelise Africa with the instrument of togetherness, and so, by the preaching of peace and justice as exemplified in her social teaching or doctrine. The social doctrine is regarded as her social mantle in recognising her place in secular human society. With it, the church reminds herself of the need to redeem the wholeness and vastness of created order, towards its transcendental ending.

Conclusion

The collective concern is the need for Africa's developmental capacity and capability, which should be based on her role in global competitiveness in contemporary growth processes, especially in science, technology, education and politics. The United Nations Organization (UNO) always focuses its attention on Africa. Africa is considered the adult of underdevelopment, and with this, the issues of authentic development will always make meaning in the hearts of meaningful Africans. The church has taken evangelical advantage of this factual conception, and she is religiously concerned to preach peace towards the realization of AIH. The thrust of this concern for peace is exemplified in the personhood of Jesus Christ, who is the "Bride of the Church" and the "Prince of Peace". This is because, without peace accompanied by justice and equity, there is no development, and when there is no development, the Christian message on salvation will have little or no effect on the life of the typical African person, who is predominantly vested with many limitations. The African person will always need the sense and culture of miracles in all facets of consideration of what is traditionally of one's own conviction, even in the matter of salvation!

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