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Laying the Foundation of Holistic Education in Cameroon Schools

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Authors' contributions

This paper was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Author LMS initiated the concept, did the literature search and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Author VBN proofread the draft manuscript and developed the literature searches and structure of the publication. Both authors read, corrected and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that the absence of moral and religious education from the curriculum of schools in Cameroon is due to the secular nature of the educational system and such absence has led to the weak moral health of the country. Hence, there is need for holistic education which involves the whole person exercising habits that enable him/her acquire knowledge, good thinking, the desire of a good heart, and the willingness to do good; and that oral traditional knowledge and cultural values provide a strong basis for holistic education. The paper proposes that one must avoid ethical relativism that radically denies the objectivity of moral values and since the human intellect is incapable of attaining absolute reality, therefore, people should rely on the light of revelation when reason has failed. It concludes that holistic education should become the urgent task for education in Cameroon.

Keywords: Cameroon; holistic education; values; secular; religion.

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1. INTRODUCTION

A cursory look at the history of education in Cameroon reveals that from the advent of colonialism (Germany, France and Britain), education was in the hands of missionaries, who reserved a very important place to the study of religion, morality and the inculcation of the fear of God. These missionaries were fully conscious of the fact that the quality of society depends heavily on the quality of education received and that religious and moral principles, that form the basis of holistic education, were to direct the operation of society. Religion is the voluntary subjection of oneself to God, in whom man recognizes the source of his perfection and happiness. It is a system of values and an art of upright living that empowers individuals to promote the good in the face of real evil. During the colonial period when schools were solely controlled by the western missionaries, religious education devoid of all sectarian undertones, was compulsory. All and sundry, no matter their denominational affiliations did religious studies. To an extent, education in Cameroon was holistic.

After independence from the British and French colonial masters in the early sixties, the government take-over and control of schools from the missions in 1972 ushered in secularism and secular education. The Rural Institute of Applied Pedagogy (IPAR) in Buea and Yaoundé and the National Centre for Education (CNE) in Yaoundé were charged with the responsibility of reforming the curriculum of primary schools with a rural bias. Instead of the traditional separate approach with subjects like General Knowledge, English, French, Religious Studies, Arithmetic etc, there was an anticipated orientation grouping subjects under Language, Environmental Studies, Mathematics and Village technology that replaced the missionary orientation. [1] By this token, religious studies which deals with morality and whatever has to do with God, were on account of this secular out-look of the educational system in Cameroon scrapped from the programme of studies both at the primary and secondary school levels. In line with this government take-over of schools, the Five-Year Development Plan (1971-1976) that led to the constitution of 1972 stipulated that: "The organization and control of education at all levels are the bounden duty of the state". [2] This exclusive organization and control by the state ushered in secular education and the onset of a waning of moral values.

As a result, Cameroon has remained a secular and pluralistic society in which people are exposed to contradictory opinions about right and wrong or about good and evil. In such a secular society whose educational legacy originates from western imperialism, religious and moral values which form the basis of good are painfully acquired and very often, there is a conflict of values. The main objective of this article is to expose the absence of a well elaborated programme of moral and religious education in Cameroon schools, while attributing this absence to the secular nature of the educational system. It contends that such absence has led to the weak moral health of the country. The main problem is to know if our educational system provides values that lead to the service of the nation or for cultivating a holistic personality. Whose morality and values are should be stressed?

Strange and sad enough, religious studies and moral education do not even form an integral part of the official school curriculum. It is not clear whether education based on religion and morality in public schools is even feasible, let alone desirable. These problems are going to form the focus of this paper. Although adequate responses may not be provided to all the issues raised here, it is expedient to note that the deep concern over Cameroon's moral health and condition prompts a re-evaluation of the school's role and feasibility in teaching values that form the basis of holistic education.

Theoretically speaking, and contrary to praxis and daily experience, Law no 98/004 of April 1998 *to lay down guidelines for education in Cameroon* recognises the importance and necessity of holistic education when it states that the "general mission of education is the formation of the child in view of his intellectual, physical, civic and moral fulfilment and for his harmonious insertion into the society, taking into account economic, socio-cultural, political and moral factors." [3] Although religious education is not clearly stated in the above citation, it should be presumed that there is no morality that is devoid of religious values. Holistic education is impossible when there is no synergy between morality and religion.

Even with the recognition of some aspects of holistic education by the education law, one notices with dismay, a wide gap between this objective and the reality on ground. The approach to holistic education requires that the educator takes the child's life as a whole. But the reality in Cameroon, rather encourages

secularism or secular education, with its demoralising repercussions at the expense of holistic education.

2. IMPACT OF SECULAR EDUCATION IN CAMEROON

The secular, is that which stands in contrast to the sacred, marking an approach in life divorced from the influence of religion and determined by temporal or worldly concerns. [4] Secularism is the view of life that limits true values to those temporal qualities that contribute to man's perfection, both individual and social to the actual exclusion of the supernatural. In fact, it limits itself, to quote the U.S Bishops, "not just to the material in exclusion of the spiritual, but to the human here and now and to the exclusion of man's relation to God here and hereafter". [5] Man's relationship with God, is thus, relegated to a private and relativistic sphere.

Each society educates its population according to the definition it gives to education. For that reason, man cannot become man except through education, since he is what education makes of him. [6] The preamble of the *Cameroon Constitution* states inter alia: "The state shall be *secular*. The neutrality and independence of the state in respect to all religions shall be guaranteed; - freedom of religion and worship shall be guaranteed." [7] Article 1 of the said Constitution also stipulates that the State "shall be one and indivisible, secular, democratic and dedicated to social service." [8] Hence, there is no gainsaying that a secular state invariably encourages secular education. That is why in line with the Constitution cited above, *Law no 98/004 of April 1998 to lay down guidelines for education in Cameroon* clearly reinforces the point that: "Public education shall be secular. Its neutrality and independence vis-à-vis all religions shall be guaranteed." [9] For that reason, Cameroonians can only become products of a secular educational system with its accompanying devastating consequences on their moral probity.

In line with this secular outlook, Fonkeng contends that the education system is "more concerned with ensuring efficiency and relevance, through decongestion (increasing access), good management of pedagogic matters, demoralisation of the education milieu, partnership and to a large extent decentralisation." [10] That secularism has deeply penetrated and continues to penetrate the Cameroon culture is a fact that is self-evident, manifesting itself in various negative attitudes.

Religion has waned and lost its significance for the operation of our society. Supernaturally oriented activities are also on the swift decline. There is diminishing recourse to supernatural explanations and fewer resources are being employed for supernatural ends. Support for agencies and activities that are religiously motivated has also diminished. Loss of a sense of the sacred as it pertains particularly to places, property, activities and worse of all human life is also abundantly in evidence. There is less allusion to God's will as the guide for attitudes.

[11] In order to rescue this situation, various attempts to reinsert religion in the official school curriculum were for a long time vehemently resisted by the powers that be. It took such a lengthy, tedious and demanding task to include Religious Studies in the official school programme as an academic subject. The Final Report of the *National Forum of Education* held in Yaoundé is quite revelatory of this resistance:

The idea of religious education being introduced into Cameroon educational system raised a lot of dust and arguments came up again and again until the closing session. Advocates of this course argued very strongly that with the moral decadence gradually setting into our society, it was imperative to instil in our youths, through religious instruction the fear of God and love of the good...But the chair person as well as a good number of members of the committee evoked in very strong terms the secular nature of the state which should be applicable in schools [12].

By evoking the secular nature of the state to counter the introduction of religion in the educational system (as if other members of the committee were oblivious of the fact that Cameroon is a secular state), the then Minister of Education (MINEDUC now known as MINESEC meaning Minister of Secondary Education) and his supporters in the above report made it quite clear that Cameroon is squarely determined to operate independently of God. This line of reasoning is not new in history and is surely inherited from the French colonial master to whom Cameroon owes part of her educational orientation and legacy. As far back as 1845, it was argued in France that "since the state is laic, the instruction given in the name of the state ought to be laic." [13] This wind of secularism that is very heavily felt in the Cameroon educational system is understandable since after more than fifty years after 'theoretical' political independence, France

still has a very big impact on policy making in almost all spheres of life in Cameroon.

It is worthy of note that after the above agitations with regard to the inclusion of religion in the school curriculum, the Cameroon General Certificate of Education (GCE) Board took a bold step to introduce Religious Studies in its examinations. It is however sad to mention that although this subject has been accepted and is being written in the General Certificate Education (GCE) examinations, religion does not enjoy the same academic significance as other subjects. Religious Studies is not appreciated as a qualification subject for entry into universities or other higher institutes of learning in Cameroon. The common slang that guides candidates' suitability in Cameroon when competitive examinations are launched is: *Two GCE papers excluding Religious Studies*. Even recently, the Ministerial Order No. 2014/0299/MINESUP of 26 June 2014 to launch the competitive common entrance examination into first and second cycles of the Higher Technical Teacher's Training College (HTTTC) Kumba, stipulated that amongst the required diplomas or certificates, "the paper titled 'Religious Knowledge' is not considered" [14].

In addition to the above disheartening scenario for those candidates who may succeed in two subjects where one is, I dare say, 'unfortunately' Religious Studies, the Cameroon government vindicates its monopoly to educate citizens and frustrates the efforts of private institutions in providing holistic education, by depriving them of trained teachers and state subventions and subsidies. This explains why private mission schools which exclusively offer holistic education remain very expensive and beyond the reach of most parents in Cameroon. It is needless to say that these very mission schools are heavily patronised by the same Government officials who vehemently reject religious education from the school curriculum in public schools.

This absence of ideological convictions in public schools is expressed in the MINEDUC *Handbook for Heads of Secondary and High Schools* that "educational institutions have as an overriding concern, the integration of the professional and the citizen, that is, the human person. State schools have, as a common objective, the nation in all its components, which is bound to be essentially neutral as far as ideological convictions are concerned." [15] This absence of

any ideology that teaches and reinforces morality must inevitably lead to chaos and anarchy in our society. In this way, morality which is based ultimately on the conscious awareness of right and wrong, which in themselves are anchored ultimately on the knowledge of, and acknowledgement of the supremacy of God, is timidly taught in public schools by some religious bodies.

So far in Cameroon, there is no uniform or elaborate scheme of work or curricula from the Ministries of Basic and Secondary Education with regard to the teaching of moral instructions. With this confusion, different religious denominations end up teaching their various doctrines rather than using a common platform for moral education. In congregational schools, the problem of what to teach in the domain of religious and moral education does not arise. Here, even non-adherents of each confessional school have to toe the line with whatever is taught in such schools.

Regrettably, the present Cameroon educational system is largely geared towards knowledge acquisition, material progress, and passing examinations at the expense of sound development of moral character and religious values. In such a set-up of course, it becomes very difficult to achieve the main purpose of education, corresponding to the development of the whole personality (holistic) of the individual and his sense of value here is placed in jeopardy.

Education seems to become more and more utilitarian, focusing on providing jobs, so that capitalism can be sustained by a qualified work force. As a result, "an intellectual without moral principles is a danger to himself and to society. A man without moral principles is to be feared. He is capable of any evil act." [16] In Cameroon, therefore, children's heads are stuffed with academic material while their hearts are deprived of moral and religious values. This situation spells danger for the country since there is no personality development, increased responsibility, integrity, positive creativity and self-reliance.

The effects of secular education transcend the school milieu. The family structure is adversely affected by the influence of science and technology with its emphasis and liberalism on sex and drugs.

As a consequence of changes in the family, schools and church, traditional values and a sense of community are being undermined. The alarming increase in juvenile crime rates is often attributed to the erosion of moral values caused by secularism. The waning of traditional moral values leads to a situation whereby in Cameroon, one notices that education has become narrow, short-lived and leads to frustration with rapid progress.

Thus, the fundamental problem facing education in post-colonial Cameroon is the rapid and significant decline in the ethological aspects of the education offered in the country. Even after being subjected to a plethora of reforms down the years, all in an attempt to decolonize the system, make it holistic and re-orientate it within our cultural heritage, the system still falls short of meeting the local realities and exigencies of contemporary Cameroon. But, the efforts to revamp the system, "though laudable and commendable, are, to say the least, still remain grossly inadequate" [17].

There is a decline in the quality of men and women due to the exclusion of religious values. This exclusion gives the impression that man has himself become a simple piece, an object without a soul. Since machines can do no wrong as they have no soul, man has to equate his own actions with those of machines. The higher many intellectuals go up the educational ladder, the further they drift away from God. Having swallowed a reasonable chunk of the secular culture, their eyes open, so to speak, in the same way as Adam's and Eve's, when they ate the forbidden fruit (Gen.2:15-17). They now know good and evil and can tamper with and threaten religious dogmas and principles. They can easily manipulate younger and gullible minds for their personal interests. The effect is that "in this secular and disordered frame of mind, they start proclaiming another set of dogmas – those of anthropocentric universe in opposition to a theocentric one" [18]. The over-riding question therefore is: how can we make up for obvious religious and ethical deficiencies in the present educational system? Does the answer lie in holistic education?

3. THE NEED FOR HOLISTIC EDUCATION

From a wider perspective, education is the process of establishing habits of critical thinking, intellectual development and independent appraisal of human values and qualities. For that

reason, every educational endeavour must be holistic. According to Fonlon, this kind of education implies "the physical, the aesthetic, the intellectual and the moral upbringing of man." [19] It is meant to develop the individual intellectually, physically, and morally and prepare him to function effectively in society. If education is to perform its fundamental function of nurturing the individual, it must, of necessity be holistic. The nature of this holistic education, will depend, in the main on what sort of individual the Cameroon society wants to produce, on what is her idea of a perfect man. And this idea of the perfect man will depend, to a large extent, on the problems that beset the society; for their ideal man will be the man best equipped, best able to meet these problems. Thus, the Cameroon educational system must promote and encourage holistic education that meets the specific and concrete needs of her citizenry. This kind of education is also referred to as the education of the 'whole person'.

What needs to be done in this situation and who should be assigned to handle such education? There is need for a careful selection and preparation of teachers of religious studies and moral education who have a mastery of content and methods of teaching. It does not suffice to think that 'self-acclaimed' pastors or men of God are qualified, just by virtue of their calling. There is need for a symbiosis between pedagogical methods and contents in the teaching of moral education. Also, the personal exemplification of the teacher of holistic education in what Noddings calls 'modelling' is very necessary and important. The influence of such teachers is ascribed not to their superior learning, but to their witnessing. They must be truthful as they teach the truth; honest as they instil honesty; be just as they teach justice and loving as they teach love. [20] The young see in their teacher, a representation of their parents and mentors. And so, the teacher educates not simply by what he teaches, but also from how he lives and how he carries himself before his pupils and students. In public schools, religious instruction has to be integrated into the overall education of the students at all levels. Such inclusion safeguards harmonious integral development which guarantees discipline and the inculcation of values.

Since holistic education is the focus of every educative endeavour, the person's mind, heart and hands need sound and solid education. The heart has to be filled with "eager love for all that

is good, true and beautiful, and his hands must love the salutary desire of labour.” [21] This is the kind of education that responds to the needs of the Cameroonian society. This is because no educational system stands apart from the society which establishes it. It has purpose that must be achieved if that society is to continue in the right direction. The educational system must be embedded in the society, drawing inspiration and nourishment from it, and in turn contributing to opportunities for growth and renewal. Therefore, such holistic education, for it to be useful and credible, must engage in training the hand, the head and the heart.

According to Mahatma Gandhi, one time Indian leader, the hand of the child should be trained to draw geometrical figures and design things before he learns how to write. In other words, good handwork should be taught and the child should learn to produce what it learns. Also, education of the head consists of helping the child to know how to read and write, to reason and understand. The child should know the why and whereof of every process of what it does. And lastly, education of the heart consists of the refinement of its emotions and impulses. It is the awakening of the deepest feelings of love, sympathy, fellowship and aesthetic sense through social relations, morality and spirituality. Without this, human life degenerates to the level of animal existence [22].

Holistic education in the way depicted by Gandhi, should become the essential goal of education in Cameroon. It should involve the whole person exercising habits to know the good (mind), desire the good (heart) and to do the good (action). This implies moral knowing, moral feeling and moral action. Educating the whole person is important for us to use our natural talents wisely and to respond to life's challenges. It draws out the potential in everyone, to replace error with truth, to move from ignorance and incompetence to knowledge and competence. It reveals how all the arts and sciences reflect who we are as human beings and how we need to act.

In a bid to propose something closer to holistic education in Cameroon, Fonkeng refers to the *National Forum on Education (1995)* which declares that the mission of the new Cameroonian school would be to bring up a complete citizen. Such a complete citizen must possess the following characteristics: individual, collective and community, moral, intellectual and

politics and civil. He further continues by opining that:

In essence, the type of individual envisaged to emerge from this mission is one “educated to fit as a patriotic citizen, enlightened, bilingual (French and English), rooted in his culture, but at the same time open to the world, creative, enterprising, tolerant, loving his identity, responsible, integrated, respectful of ideals of peace, solidarity and justice and endowed with knowledge, know-how and good living [23].

Going through the above mission and the *Education Law (1998)*, one cannot but notice the obvious absence of religious education.

Hence, Lavngwa maintains that it must be the function of education to “produce the skilled man, the cultivated man, the free man and the good man – indeed, the whole man.” [24] To arrive at this cultivated and whole man, Fonlon believes very strongly in religion as the basis of moral education. That is why he says: “I believe in God, as the fount and origin, the final end... I believe that no right-minded makers of universities should ignore (not to speak of spurn) that science which strives to make man's knowledge of Him more profound; they will be omitting the vital link, in the chain of college knowledge” [25].

So in the midst of these problems in Cameroon, we need to “behold and discern again what can be beheld and discerned eternally. The educator who helps to bring man back to his own unity will help to put him again face to face with God.” [26] This reliance on the divine and on objective morality is a panacea to the vices that plague us today. Thus, religion and morality must go hand in hand.

3.1 Synergy between Religion and Morality

Religion and morality are two sides of the same coin and should be fully integrated into our educational system. Don't they say that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom but fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Proverbs 1:7)? So, morality and a unified cultural ethos cannot be sustained in any institution of learning in the absence of religion. There should be a synergy of morality and religion.

Religion has as its formal object the attempt to answer the most fundamental questions of man; who he is and what he ought to do in relation to

God. Thus, all religions have a moral undertone. There is a strong affinity between the religious and ethical view. Buber criticises any ethics that is cut off from human existence.

Religion, certainly, has this advantage over morality, that it is a phenomenon and not a postulate, and further, that it is able to include composure as well as determination. The reality of morality, the demand of the demander, has a place in religion, but the reality of religion, the unconditioned being of the demander has no place in morality [27].

The problem of the relation between ethics and religion was first posed in the dilemma found in Plato's dialogue, *Euthyphro*. Does God love what is good or command what is right, because it is good or right; or is it good or right because he loves and commands it? In the light of his theistic conception of ethics, the second option, which holds that an action is right or good because God loves or commands it is preferable. Why is this stance necessary? This is because, even when the individual calls an absolute criterion handed down by religious tradition his own, it must be referred to his personal relation to the absolute if it is to become valid. Of course, God who is all Goodness cannot but command or love what is good and right. So, there is an intimate link between moral principles and religious beliefs.

From the above, it implies that religion is neither hostile nor autonomous to morality, because one cannot be said to adhere to or accept a religion unless one accepts its moral precepts. So, morality depends upon religion, gets its meaning and its sanctions from the relation between God and man. Hence, to separate morality from religion, as is the case in Cameroon, is to destroy it: we cannot worship God without keeping the moral law, and we cannot keep the moral law, without worshipping God. The two are interdependent.

By implication, true education in Cameroon, would have no meaning without sound morals, produced by rigorous and meaningful religious studies. Regrettably, Cameroon finds itself running education, without such clearly defined values. What can be done in this regard? How feasible and desirable are morality and Religious Studies in Cameroon?

The philosophical rationale for our thesis that religious education is feasible and desirable in Cameroon is based on the fact that man is a religious being by nature. Human existence is

linked to religious beliefs. Sadly, people delude themselves with sophistries when they imagine that they could dispense with religion or that they do not need religion to improve their life and make moral decisions. Religious values are essential for holistic education, because any genuine philosophy of education must of necessity be based on man's nature, in outlining its goals and objectives. It must consider his material and spiritual needs in the service of society. For educators in Cameroon, there must be a sort of sacred and loving attention to the mysterious identity of pupils placed in their custody. Unfortunately, such religious and moral values that represent any authentic educational philosophy are missing in the Cameroon education system.

These inadequacies caused by secular education tend to indicate that education in Cameroon must require relevant values and priorities linked to moral principles that should inform children's action and meet the vision of humanism. Teachers without exception are responsible for the total development of each child in school: morally, emotionally, physically and academically. From this perspective, Fonkeng puts more emphasis on the triple significance of moral development of the child when he opines that education should: "explore the whole range of opportunities, responsibilities and experience that the curriculum must address, for the provision of moral development; re-examine the basic assumption about the process of moral development, and recognise and come to terms with the social and political implications of promoting moral development in the society" [28].

The desirability of religion as a value system in Cameroon schools, thus, becomes very imperative because the attitudes and behaviours of youth indicate a social disorder, a personal loss of coherence and a cultural disintegration. To this effect, we need a radical re-orientation, in bringing about an adequate holistic education with a sense of moral values especially on children. That way, the children will mature with that moral consciousness which should be made compulsory from nursery, primary, and secondary to university levels. On a more practical note, there is need to adopt and implement a curriculum that entertains the study of good basic religious values which usually carry profound moral implications that would permeate the curriculum of both private and public schools. Such values would enhance the development of

the 'whole man' and the "child can learn about his uniqueness, his relation with others, his attitude towards the common good and the invaluable importance of his total dependence on God" [29].

Religion is urgent because now in our times and with the customs prevalent today, when so many and so various are the dangers, which, on all sides, threaten the tender age and innocence of children in Cameroon, there is no better plan than to import knowledge in conjunction with education in religious truths and morals. When the contemporary Cameroonian society neglects religion and embraces secularism, it undermines the moral fibre of society. Yes, religion, as reason itself shows, is the hope of the people and it should become the base and the bulwark of the Cameroon nation that is being constructed for posterity. It is, therefore, incumbent on schools to quicken religious consciousness in the souls of the students so that the present atmosphere of fear, distrust and hatred, will give way to peace, trust and love. In the school curriculum, religion should not be an optional subject, but the atmosphere, the unifying principle and the directing guide of all the subjects studied and taught.

Francis Cardinal Arinze, in a moving homily delivered to students in Nigeria, poses the following thought-provoking questions relating to the desirability of religion in the school curriculum; what will prevent a public servant from using his position to favour his relatives? What will restrain a high executive from sexually harassing his female secretary? What will discourage a school girl from indulging in sexual immorality to succeed in examinations? What is it that can restrain man from telling lies, thinking unkind thoughts, oppressing the weak, betraying his marriage partner in secret, committing acts against chastity, stealing, hating and revenging? It is religion, born out of conviction, sincerely believed and lived [30].

At this point, one can safely conclude that religious sentiments must permeate our daily lives at school, home and as well as in our places of work. This is because, "a religious attitude toward life which tries to establish itself only through the influence of the Church and home, leaving school out of account, will either fail or will create within the mind, the heart and will of children a most painful schism" [31]. Thus, the claim that schools should be free of religious

and moral values is an evasion of corporate and professional responsibility.

Secular education in Cameroon, has led not only to the rejection of the religious and moral values, but also to alienation from their ancestral patrimony which is tremendously religious. What does oral tradition offer in the area of holistic education? What elements of Cameroon orature can promote holistic education?

3.2 Oral Tradition and Holistic Education

In another dimension, our oral tradition which contains indigenous knowledge, anchored in our traditional religion and morality, equally provides a strong basis for holistic education. Since our educational system still remains alien to Cameroon's concrete culture and practices, it follows, logically that there is an urgent need to re-orientate and relate it to the rehabilitation of Cameroon's culture, tradition and value system. In this guise, holistic education must be geared towards "self-realization, better human relationships, the right types of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the society." [32] This return to a full understanding of traditional principles and a full grasp of how they can work especially in changing times and circumstances is what Cameroonians really need if they are to break away from the cultural limbo that is destroying the social and educational health of their country.

Due to continuous colonial foreign influences, our educational system continues to be a "victim of a resilient colonial and colonizing epistemology." [33] This situation leads to a devaluation of our indigenous creativity, value systems and alienation from our cultural heritage, just for the simple gratification of colonizers. This colonial and colonizing epistemology has serious weaknesses, especially when compared with popular and more endogenous epistemologies. It tends to limit reality to appearances (the observable, the here and now, the ethnographic present, the quantifiable), which it then seeks to justify (without explaining) with meta-narratives claiming objectivity and a more epistemologically-secure truth status [34].

Therefore, what is imperative today, is for us to re-familiarize ourselves with, and re-assimilate our cultural values. For that to become a reality, there must be a mandatory and thorough grounding of our educational curriculum in the positive practices of our rich cultural heritage in

areas of folklore, spiritual and moral values, participation in traditional ceremonies, rituals, poetry, riddles, songs, story-telling, proverbs, word games, puzzles, tongue-twisters, dance, music and environmental education. By so doing, we might in time achieve, once again, a Cameroonian society in which the observance of proper form translates into stability, harmony, and collective ease.

In line with the above, Plato raises a general concern about the effects of cultural heritage and environment on educational values. That is why the actual culture of Socrates and his interlocutors, becomes a breeding ground for "good education and upbringing" that would produce "good natures, and useful natures." [35] He argues that good education makes a man to eagerly pursue the ideal perfection of citizenship, enlightening him on how rightly to rule and to obey. Mere acquisition of academic titles, wealth and political positions, without justice, that is common in Cameroon today, is bad education. Education must aim at making a person good, virtuous and desirous of being an ideal citizen and a good leader [36].

Hence, there is a clarion call for a critical discourse regarding the utility of customary education, the placement of indigenous theoretical and philosophical ideas at the center of our educational policy formation; the resurrection of indigenous epistemology, and the institution of a corrective critical theory of indigenous education and knowledge. This approach is beautifully captured by Dei in his elucidation of Afrocentricity and pedagogy, when he maintains and proposes an "investigation and understanding of phenomena from a perspective grounded in African-centered values" [37].

In this perspective, all educational agencies and stakeholders must be ready to validate and fine-tune our educational philosophy and structures to embrace and respond to our socio-cultural exigencies. Their curricula and pedagogies must be in touch and in tune with our local predicaments. One cannot afford to be blind to the plight of Cameroonians whatever the pressures they face and regardless of their own levels of misery and need for sustenance. Only such a truly holistic education can form "genuine intellectuals dedicated to the common weal." [38] In this case, such intellectuals have to be liberated, and must continue liberating others from colonial claws.

Our oral tradition expressed in storytelling forms one of the non-academic media of education that provides moral values. The African traditional system of education has a very rich patrimony of techniques that lead not only to the acquisition of knowledge, but extend to religious and moral formation. Such techniques like tales, riddles, legends and proverbs, raise the child's cognitive, religious and moral consciousness.

In the old African traditional form of education, the intellect and the heart develop through participating in discussions, listening to narratives on folklore, folktales and legends. Children acquire their language, capacity for abstraction and a critical and moral probity that enable them be responsible, honest and cooperate with others in the society. Accordingly, such education that is typically holistic, does not train the mind at the expense of the heart, body or social order. These stories are relevant to holistic education when they possess a critical function with respect to morality and should regularly challenge vices like greed, corruption, cheating, thievery, vanity, pride and vaulting ambition, which seem to characterise prevailing Cameroonian attitudes. Basic moral virtues like love, loyalty, generosity, honour, chastity, fidelity and prudence, upon which most people generally agree could form the contents of stories told to children at school and at home.

Revisiting our problematic, which religious stories are appropriate in Cameroon public schools? Any story that provokes moral reflection within children and strengthens the bonds between persons is, for that very reason, 'religious'. The question becomes more difficult when the story's import cannot be separated from the sectarian context (or religion) in which it appears. Whether sacred or secular, good stories awaken the affective element of moral consciousness. They "teach by attraction rather than compulsion. They capture the imagination and touch the heart" [39].

Why then, is it that, without embracing a particular religious system, or 'believing in God' for that matter, one may still find inspiration in stories recounting, for example Satan's temptation of Jesus (Mtt. 4:1-11)? This is not to suggest that Cameroonian stories must have a 'happy ending' or that characters must fall into clear categories of 'good' and 'evil'. Stories reveal the moral ambiguity of the human heart. Great Cameroon oral literature can use this sense of ambiguity to enlighten the reader, by

tracing the moral development of a character with whom the reader forms an emotional bond. Stories create a forum within which the reader might engage in ethical reflection - as an emotionally engaged subject, not just an observer.

Finally, there is another important moral element to a story: Its power to arouse human beings to action. Obviously, no one who listens to a story is forced to do one thing or another. Still, a compelling narrative keeps before him the urgency of moral and religious behaviour. Occasionally, a situation demands immediate moral response, even though a person cannot articulate the reasons for his course of action, but this is not an excuse for inactivity. How can one act in a situation of conflict between the reasons of the mind and the promptings of the heart? He may not have the abstract categories necessary to explain his actions, but he is convinced it is a right act. Stories do challenge the listener to do what is right, imitate a great hero, or avoid the evil done by one of the actors. Therefore, the culture of storytelling is necessarily an integral part of holistic education.

But, even with the above, there is still controversy with regard to conflicting and confusing values derived there from in Cameroon. How can this conflict be resolved?

4. DEALING WITH THE CONFLICT OF VALUES

The thorny issues of absolute or relative values, human reason or revelation, continue to be controversial concerns in the area of holistic education. Sometimes national and state values which are promoted in public schools inadvertently lack godly intent and contradict moral and religious values and norms.

4.1 Absolute versus Relative Values

Moral values must be absolute and related to God in order to have a binding moral force on all. That is why Buber insists that, "education worthy of its name is essentially education of character." [40] Character education implies the inculcation of absolute values that are real, objective and immutable qualities. They are neither created nor destroyed by man. Ethical relativism radically denies the objectivity of moral values, as is sometimes the case in Cameroon.

If in Cameroon, one wants to know what is right and what is wrong, if he seeks to discover what is intrinsically valuable, he must appeal to the Absolute - to God, who is the source of all values and of moral obligation, for whom all men are accountable to. Over all people, there is an authority without which man cannot make basic value distinctions, for only an absolute can give the quality of absoluteness to an obligation. When a man affirms that he is duty-bound to act in a certain way, he is affirming that he is bound absolutely. So, to deny God a place in one's life and educational experience is a contradiction in terms.

The awareness of duty is the key to morality, because each man does experience the fact of obligation. Kantian ethics claims that virtues have 'absolute values' which become necessary universal maxims. He formulates the moral law as categorical imperatives. These are maxims or principles that are intrinsically valid and good, and must be obeyed by all human beings in all situations. Since categorical imperatives retain their reason-giving force under any situation, they, therefore, have universal validity. This implies that: "I ought never to act except in such a way that I could also will that my maxim should become a universal law." [41] The Kantian moral maxim is very debatable and may not be applicable especially in Cameroon, where most people's actions are to a greater extent divorced from acceptable universal values.

In the task of putting into practice absolute values for holistic education, Kant believes that one must not intentionally say what is false, break a legitimate promise, associate with evil-minded human beings, and pay attention to gossip. Unless one acts on such maxims, it will be difficult to be a person of integrity. Although these maxims have some enduring limitations, in fairness to Kant, his ethics provides a certain universal validity of moral principles, but, it either does not really achieve this task or it merely pretends to do so. This is because the Kantian universalising or absolutising procedure requires that I ask myself if I would be content with universal observance of the rule I want to follow, so that it can eventually become a universal maxim. Thus, his maxim provides no real rule-making, but, only a thought experiment of how I would feel in the other's stead. This is far from taking into account the other's real perspective and claims in a real situation that he finds himself before he can act [42].

Kantians may argue that Kant's 'I' is not really meant to be as an empirical, singular person, but as a rational member of a 'kingdom of ends', which due to its universal reach also comprises the perspective of one's reality, in relation to others. But the problem still lingers. How can the kingdom of ends constitute itself as a forum, where real claims of real persons can be settled? Ultimately, the kingdom of ends remains an abstract idea of a community of pre-established harmony, well-ordered by practical reason, which guarantees universality by itself to all members of society. That is why in Kant's ethics, there is no tension between autonomy and universalism: the will of rational beings is as such, erroneously universal. Thus, Kant falsely insinuates that we could skip the perspective of the concrete 'other', on our way from the egocentric perspective of empirical beings, "to the universal perspective of rational members of the kingdom of ends." [43] This means that the position of man as an end is grounded in the very relationship between rational beings and the ethical sphere. It refers to human beings who respond to an imperative.

Therefore, every moral decision that we make in Cameroon, must of necessity, presume the absoluteness of the claim which is made on us, the absoluteness of duty, which does not derive from us, but which is an ontological reality which we discover when we allow ourselves to face our duty and listen to God address us. That is why Buber believes that we are incapable of conceiving of ourselves as the ultimate source of moral approval or disapproval. No one can claim to be a surety for any absoluteness. For him, "only the encounter with God can guarantee the absoluteness of any value and this cannot be replaced by any self-encounter." [44] True values are only discovered in relating with God. We are not bound by any value-claim if convinced that it was our own invention or it was chosen arbitrarily. If it were, it will not bind absolutely on us.

On this point, religious and moral values that form the basis of holistic education must be distanced from Sartre's relativistic idea that someone is needed to invent values, else life is meaningless. Sartre, an atheistic philosopher understands by value, "nothing else than this meaning which you choose." [45] He argues a notch further, declaring that, there are no *a priori* values. The agent's choice creates values in the same way as the artist does in the aesthetic realm and such values have a universal dimension. [46] This view of Sartre is erroneous

and absolutely subjective, and cannot be useful in our educational system. That explains why Buber does not hesitate to emphatically counter that:

One can believe in and accept a meaning or a value; one cannot set it as a guiding light over one's life if one has discovered it, not if one has invented it... not if I have freely chosen it for myself from among the existing possibilities and perhaps have in addition decided with some fellow-creatures: Thou shall be valid from now on [47].

Our moral decisions and our relationship with God are derived from revelation. What the Bible teaches with such simplicity and strength is that, there is truth and falsehood. Human existence should inexorably stand at the side of truth. Only ethical values that are primarily absolute, revealed by God are needed for holistic education. Religion for Buber is the revelation of the 'Divine Thou', in the 'I-Thou' relationship. Religion is principally that tending towards an Absolute Good. [48] Hence, religious studies and morality principally imply that one must constantly tend towards and yearn for the absolute good. That explains why the great African theologian, St Augustine, emphatically maintains that 'our hearts are restless until they rest in God'.

Therefore, all ethical values of responsibility, freedom, moral duty, equality, openness and moral decision, must stem from God. Thus, only objective values that have eternal and universal validity are material for holistic education. But, the inculcation of objective values must steer clear of certain extremes; ethical relativism and collectivism.

Ethical relativism and collectivism are twin tendencies that threaten the construction of the edifice of holistic education in the Cameroon society. Ethical relativism is more prevalent in the Cameroon secular society because of our arrogant self-sufficiency. This arrogance has enabled individuals consider only absolute values that have relevance and subjective validity for the person concerned. By this, most people have made themselves the standard of morality and, thus, reject universal values and norms. This ethical relativism or individualism is what Buber aptly describes as a "conspicuous tendency of our age" [49].

In another perspective, the 'we' syndrome or collectivism is another canker worm or disease that affects holistic education in Cameroon. The belief and consolation that 'one is not alone' does not augur well for our educational system. Individuals prefer to lump themselves gregariously with the group mentality and hardly ever respond responsibly – they just react according what others are doing. Collectivism is a juxtaposition of people in an external structure which enables them live like monads. In this situation, there is no longer superior to the collectives, any universal sovereignty in ideas, faith, spirit, values, decrees and decisions. Many have sunk into the slavery of collectives, and each collective is the supreme authority for its own slaves.

Many in Cameroon have lost themselves to the 'collective' and cannot be rescued by making reference, however, eloquent, to any absolute values, that have been usurped by uncritical and unreasonable belonging. They incorporate themselves into communal life to the extent of relinquishing their unique personality. Both extremes, wherein the individualistic approach, perceives man only in relation to himself, and the other collective outlook, which does see only society, and not individuals, are not useful in holistic education. That established, how can one resolve the problems of ethical relativism and collectivism in holistic education?

It can be done through an encounter with God. Of necessity, one lost in the group must become an autonomous person again, in order to rescue himself from the fiery jaws of collectivism which devour all selfhood. Therefore, the man for whom absolute values in a universal state do not exist cannot be made to adopt "an attitude which in action gives the preference over all others to absolute values" [50].

With reference to absolute values, the dichotomy of collectivism and relativism is overcome. Relativism which sees man only in relation to himself must relinquish itself to absolute values. Collectivism which does not see man at all, but sees only society, must recognise the worth and autonomy of each person. With the former, man's face is distorted, and with the latter, it is masked. Both extreme tendencies are bad – thus there is need for a mean – since virtue stands in the middle. Can human reason lead to the discovery of absolute values or do we need divine revelation?

4.2 Human Reason versus Revelation

Knowledge of absolute values is indispensable for the right conduct of life and the unimpeded development of the self through holistic education. But reason, the main instrument of knowledge we possess is limited and tells us only about relative values. It cannot give us a definitive answer to the existence of absolute values and how they can be known. Reason, with its cautious experimental approach is constantly revising and reconstructing its scale of values and its moral standard in the light of fresh knowledge. There must be reliance on some other source of values than human reason, because human reason is limited, fallible, relative and subjective.

Put otherwise, there is one and the same absolute standard of values for all rational beings. The question is: can unaided human reason attain the knowledge of absolute values? It is true that absolute values cannot be found wholly and completely in any individual human consciousness. This is because men think differently about moral questions and there is no empirical reason that they will ever do otherwise. Where does the moral ideal really exist and how can this ideal be recognised?

For Rashdall, an absolute moral law or moral ideal cannot exist in human beings. It does not exist in the mind of this or that individual, but can exist only in God's mind from which all reality is derived. Our moral ideal can only claim "objective validity in so far as it can rationally be regarded as a revelation of a moral ideal eternally existing in the mind of God" [51].

This means that no matter the level of our intellectual achievement, academic accolades and prefixes before our names, we must understand that the human intellect is incapable of attaining absolute reality. It can only conceive possibilities. Even the great physicist Einstein, frankly admitted that science can never give us spiritual guidance. It cannot create ends, but it can only supply the means to attain certain ends, conceived by people with lofty ethical ideals [52].

Consequently, it means that in holistic education, in the task of inculcating moral and religious values, academic modesty demands that when the light of reason fails, one should rely on the light of revelation, as our only source of knowledge regarding ultimate values. It is obvious that there are exceptions to any absolute

principle of moral conduct, depending on particular situations, but there must be objectivity in moral decisions. Any good action must give equal consideration to the well-being of everyone affected by it. This is the task of everyone who should be involved in holistic education in Cameroon. Buber intimates that holistic education should be based on revealed absolute values, since in our time, "the eternal is sifted from the pseudo-eternal." [53] The difficulty among Cameroonians, with their background in secular education, is how to reconcile such universal moral maxims considering that, there are no set moral principles, no standard of morality for public behaviour, and most people, especially those in public offices can only come to moral decisions in the light of unique and pressurising situations. Every moral decision, for them, thus, becomes subjective and relative. People tend to act according to their conveniences.

But how can one identify if what is taught in holistic education is actually gotten from divine revelation? Who is a genuine teacher of holistic education? Earlier on, we mentioned the issue of 'self-acclaimed' and 'self-appointed' pastors and men of God who have been assigned to teach or are called to teach religion and moral education in most schools in Cameroon, without any pedagogical training in methods and contents.

One must admit that within spheres of human interactions, dialogue with the divine is the most difficult as it represents a relationship which is at the spiritual and metaphysical realm. When revelation takes place, it is purely a personal experience. He can hear a command and know that demands are made on him. It enables him to see the need of receiving his direction and shaping his life from the dictates of absolute values. In that way, such revelation should transform man into a full and holistic human being, so that he in turn may transform others through modelling and witnessing. How can we be sure such a person has truly encountered the divine and not some kind of fictitious existence?

Surely, we always risk being mistaken especially when commanded by a supreme voice to suspend something which we believe is ethical and religious. In our age and within this period of false prophets, it appears difficult to distinguish the divine voice from others. False absolutes rule over our souls giving us fictitious signs and miracles in the name of reality. This problem is

aggravated in Cameroon because we have, through secular education, lost the capacity to form even crudely valid images of the supreme being, since the "image-making power of the human heart has been in decline." [54] Since man can be mistaken in identifying the divine voice, can we not have another reliable criterion for distinguishing between false and true commands? At times one receives conflicting voices? One must watch against the allurements of false gods and false prophets who so readily command our loyalty and win our devotions.

Another setback is that man who receives revelation is not some kind of *tabula rasa* on which the divine finger writes. What he is, conditions what he receives, since;

The revelation does not pour itself into the world through him who receives it as through a funnel; it comes to him and seizes his whole elemental being in all its particular nature, and fuses with it. The man, too, who is the 'mouth' of the revelation, is indeed this, not a speaking-tube or any kind of instrument, but an organ, which sounds according to its own laws; and to sound means to modify [55].

What a man hears also reflects what he brings to his meeting with the divine. But, can he modify the revelation binding on him? The thorny issue is that man requires absolute values in order to base his moral decisions, and, values cannot bind him if they are his own inventions and from his fallible mind. Hence, it is difficult to disentangle the divine from human elements.

One is obligated by revelation to make a decision in a set of circumstances so unique that only he alone can decide what it is that he ought to do. Hence, how can he recognise absolute values revealed by God? He does not have to violate the absoluteness of the moral demand by making himself the sole, but uncertain, judge of what he ought to do. If this is not done, one would still land headlong into Sartrean relativism, which has been dismissed above.

In effect, revelation which does not communicate with man directly seems to imply a reduction of the divine to the human, and no man is certain that he always gives priority to the right duty due to relativism. If man is explicitly bound by divine commands, only then can he feel secure in many of his decisions with regard to holistic education. This remains a lingering difficulty in Cameroon.

5. CONCLUSION

It is our submission that for us to have a better educational system in Cameroon which thrives in a secular and multicultural environment, the system must first of all, liberate itself from the claws of British and French colonial imperialism and become truly holistic; inclusive of evidence of a well-integrated personality with positive intellectual and physical skills, socio-cultural and emotional dispositions, religious and moral norms. Accordingly, the education of the whole person must be grounded on moral and religious values.

Although different philosophical and educational theories offer diverse proximate aims and ends of education, they all point to the development and formation of one's personality. Education, then, in its fullest sense is a moral enterprise. It is a continuous effort to guide the learner to know and practice what is good and what is ethical, and to guide him to live a life that is meaningful. Thus, education, by its method, curriculum and goal, is supposed to be holistic. Hence, curriculum development in Cameroon must be considered from a holistic perspective.

Any idea that points to the direction of making our schools free of moral and religious values, encouraging secular education, is playing ostrich politics. It is hiding from the moral decadence and a drought in religious values that Cameroon is suffering from. It is, thus, the moral mandate of all educational institutions, be they private or public, to provide holistic education. This moral authority has been vested firmly on both schools and teachers, who must help children, develop a good moral sense, a deep moral wisdom and a deep concern for others. Academic excellence, personal growth and the future of humanity, depend on this moral mandate.

Finally, there is an urgent need for parents, teachers, educational and government agents to re-engage the hearts, minds and hands of children in forming their own characters, helping them to know the good, love the good, and do the good in a holistic manner. The moral challenge placed before us by secular education needs to be tackled with utmost seriousness and caution in Cameroon schools. Holistic education is an urgent task and should be the sole and continuous focus of all schools in Cameroon.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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