

## ISLAMIC APPROACH TO THE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

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### Abstract:

The paper examines the nature of development and argues that individualistic and materialistic approach of the western paradigm of development is repugnant to Islam. Islam is deeply concerned with the problems of socioeconomic and political development, but treat them as an important parts of a wider problem, that of integrated human development. The primary function of Islam is to transform the individual morally and reconstruct his social environment on correct lines and in the right direction. The paper holds that there are four types of talents that we have been granted. They are: physical, mental, moral and spiritual. Islam teaches that we should try all we can to bring these talents to perfection and that we should strive hard for it, In an Islamic framework, therefore, development means moral, spiritual and material development of the individual and society leading to maximum socioeconomic well-being with the establishment of a just order resulting in the ultimate good of mankind here and hereafter. The paper opines that religion has a crucial role to play in this regard and concludes that religious leaders must as a matter of necessity de-emphasize the message of material prosperity (which is the trend at the moment) and shout on roof-top the fundamental tenets and doctrines of religion that can foster adherent's moral and spiritual consciousness. Also parents and guardians of youth must constantly show concerns for youth moral development through demonstrable role modeling and enviable acts. This critical need for youth's moral development cannot be compromised if Nigeria is to be one of the great nations in the emerging global order.

**Key words:** development, globalization, moral, *shari'ah*, *tazkiyyah* and youth.

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### **Introduction:**

During the era of colonial rules, the Third World heard many stories of Western development; in the postcolonial period, it was invited to follow the growth path pursued by the West. Economic development was offered to the people of the Third World as an answer to all their problems. But the development strategies based on Western models, as they were introduced in the Third World, contained a host of simplifications, carefully wrapped in sophisticated jargon, and not without an element of arrogance about the superiority of the Western way of life. (Khurshid Ahmad, 2003:7).

Such an individualistic and materialistic approach of the western paradigm of development is repugnant to Islam. Islam is not a religion, in the limited sense that divides life in to two separate compartments-life-mundane and life-spiritual. In fact, Islam is a complete system of life that embraces all aspects of life including socio-economic and political dimensions. (Sayed H.A. Malik, 2001:26). No sphere is left in which the thoughts and deed of a Muslim-both in his personal and public life-are inconsequential to his fate in the hereafter. While in some other religious traditions there is a line of demarcation between religion and the state, in Islam however, everything belongs to Allah including what Caesar possessed and Caesar himself. (Sayed H. A. Malik, 2001:27).

Islam is the only religion, which makes no distinction between what is religion and what is secular. Thus, all aspect of life has their legitimate place in all inclusive system of Islam. Therefore, a Muslim expected to submit his whole life to Allah. This is clearly stated in the following verse of the Qur'an: "*say, 'my prayer and my sacrifice and my life and my death are all for Allah, the Lord of the Worlds'*" (6:162). With this fact, what role can Islam play today in ameliorating the influence of Western development philosophy on the youths. This is the burden of this paper.

### **Youth and Globalization:**

Youth is the state, quality or fact of being young. It is the early life, often specifically between childhood and adulthood. Youth refers to the enthusiasm, rashness, etc associated with people in this period of life (Mairi Robinson, 2007:1648). Thus, youth is the season of hope,

enterprise and energy to a nation as well as individual, youth is the time when we have such immense capacity for exertion, for learning and for development in a variety of ways. This development potential invariably leaves as such scope for guidance as also for misguidance (M M Maishanu, 1982:5).

The irretrievable moral depravity of Western Societies should serve to warn us about what Nigeria is capable of becoming as we slavishly ape and copy everything Western. Unbridled passions and bestial appetites which have molded the temper and aspirations of our youths in school and in work or general life have in a large measure given Nigeria as bad a reputations as any capitalist Western country. (M.M. Maishanu, 1982:7)

The process of civilization and modernization in Africa has unleashed certain centrifugal forces, which have made the quest for youth development a daunting task. We need to recognize the influence of feminism, Western technology and globalization, came the rapid spread of modern technology, especially the rising tide of information Technology, with corresponding crisis of moral degeneration in the today's youth. Youth's aspirations have become heightened owing to access to information technology, which is a key to the emerging global World. There are different gadgets produced by development in information technology, which the youth actively patronize as consumer and recipient. The internet, satellite television and foreign films for instance are part of the avenues by which youth enjoy the fruit of modernization. However, these electronic gadgets often mirror and reflect certain debased characters and acts which invariably inform the consumer orientation (Ayo Fadahunsi, 2008:7). The consumers in this light are majorly the youth. For the most part, the information, pictorial and symbolic representation derivable from these multi-media do not lead the youth to acquire moral, social religious values, which are necessary for personal development and well ordered society.

Globalization has encouraged the establishment of powerful mass media and their agents whose main aim is to expose foreign values, norms, ideologies and a way of life to the rest of the World. Comics and cartoons which are of little or no relevance to character formation of youth in their childhood days are fast replacing our folktales and moonlight stories. While there are other benefits accruable to the youth as a result of the globalization trends, the points remains that any damage done in the moral life of our youth is more devastating to society than any possible benefit gained there from (Ayo Fadahunsi, 2008:9).

Our youth have come to accept what happenings in the Western society as their yardstick. But unfortunately they have not realized that what they admire in the youth of Western society are indeed inherent catalyst to hasten the destruction of the Western World as they had reached the Zenith of their civilization and in obedient to the law of nature, decay must set in to give way to another civilization. Regrettably, African youths whose chances are high for nurturing the next World civilization, are aping those who are fast on decay. Unless our youth appreciate the danger their present tendency constitutes to African civilization, it is difficult to make any progress (Z. O. Elias, 1970:5).

One area of contemporary African life in which modernization through feminism has played a decisive role in demoting youth moral development is that destruction of family bond and ties. Feminism is gaining momentum especially in its radical agitation for equality in all spheres of existence with the male gender (Ayo Fadahunsi, 2008:9). One of the nefarious consequences of this agitation in Nigeria is the alarming rate of loosening parental control on the adolescent partly due to more of outdoor engagements of parents and their seeming lost of interest in almost Spartan up-bringing of their children in tradition of indigenous African society and due to the unrestrained company that most youth associate themselves (Z. O Elias, 1970:4).

Given the above, the question now is why has it not been possible to subvert the undue influences of Western civilization and modernization on youth moral development and nurture the spirit of moral uprightness in our youth? Ayo Fadahunsi observes:

One good answer to this is that the historical background from which the advance to modernity began in Africa was not one that was supportive of moral development. One, there is this inability of African leaders to provide shining examples to the youth with a view to making them good ambassadors of morality when they eventually become leaders in their respective callings. The explanation for this vulnerability is to be found in the corrupt nature of these leaders, their disrespect to the rule of law, and lack of legitimacy to political power. Besides, educational system in Nigeria has equally failed in being a vanguard of morality. The religious institutions have exacerbated the moral crisis as a result of their failure in helping nurture a society where the tenets and doctrinal principles of

religion are adored and demonstrated. Given these internal difficulties, with the unavailability of being part of the modernization trend, it becomes more Herculean to raise youths of resounding moral character. (Ayo Fadahunsi, 2008:9-10).

### **Impact of Religion on Youth:**

It is no exaggeration to say that Nigerians are becoming more and more irreligious, what might probably be responsible could be materialism. The inordinate desire to get rich quick has made us lose all our qualms for decency. We no longer consider the propriety of our actions rather; we seem to count our gains, whereas materialism surely drives to Godlessness, which is the root-cause of the wave of violence, moral bankruptcy and debauchery of the West. This resultant situation confirms the view held out by Islam that the remembrance of God is indeed the greatest virtue, which drives man away from all indecencies and immoralities. Allah says: "*And observe prayer surely, prayer restrains one from indecency and manifest evil; and remembrance of Allah, indeed, is the greatest virtue*" (29:46).

Two things have been mentioned in this verse, viz. observance of prayer and remembrance of Allah. The purpose of all two is to deliver man from the bondage of sin and to help him to rise morally and spiritually. A living faith in a Supreme Being is the basic principle of all revealed religions because it is this faith that can serve as a potent and effective check on man's evil propensities and actions (Malik Ghulam Farid, 1969:864). These two approaches of Islam constitute its absolute superiority over the African culture and custom which merely appeals to good judgement of the individual (Z. O Elias, 1970:4).

Youths in Nigeria today want to be successful through dishonesty, lies and unlawful earning but ultimately they are bound to meet failure. Allah says: "*O you who believe! Fear Allah and seek the means of approach unto Him and strive in His way that you may prosper*" (5:36).

Three things had been mentioned in this verse. Taking the words *wasila* in *wabtaghoo ilahi wasila* signifies a means of access to a thing; honourable rank with a king; degree; affinity, a tie or connection (Malik Ghulam Farid, 1969: 252). Thus *wasila* actually means knowledge,

worship and high moral thought by the *shari'ah* which actually means that nearness of God could be obtained only by having knowledge about Him, by offering our acts of worship to Him, and by following the dictates of *Shari'ah*. In other words this shows that man quite often goes astray on the path to success and he is led to failure. There are many examples of such failures and all of them go to prove that man cannot find out the way of success by himself; he stands in need of heavenly guidance.

Religion sets for society rules of loves, mercy, forgiveness, justice, patience and endurance. These are immutable laws framed by a Being who knows the hidden and the future who has based them on truth and wisdom. Religion should therefore be an instrument for the mental, social, moral and spiritual development of a nation (Abdul Wahab Adam, 2004:24). More human blood is said to have been shed in the name of religion by its self-motivated votaries than in the name of any other institution. But the real religion does not mean disputes, abuse and harsh word which are indulged in, in the name of religion (Ata Ullah Kaleem, 1992:32).

At the bottom of the manifold ills and disorders from which human society suffers today and to which it is a prey, is the lack of a living and life-giving faith in a wise and beneficent creator. When we say this we do not mean just a lack of religion in the sense of doctrine, dogma worship and ceremonial. Religion as such, is today suffering in the same way as morality, for morality has its basis in religion and is the practical expression in daily life of one group of religious values (Mujeebr Rahman 1994:32).

The realization that every human being, without exception, has been created for the worship of God and to enjoy communion with him, is the key towards the solution of all human major problems. Islam is a religion that furnishes guidance in all spheres of life and sets forth a standard of values which should help to make life on Earth totally beneficent in all aspects. The choice, thus belong to man on earth.

### **Islamic concept of development:**

Islam is deeply concerned with the problems of socioeconomic and political development, but treat them as an important parts of a wider problem, that of integrated human development. The

primary function of Islam is to transform the individual morally and reconstruct his social environment on correct lines and in the right direction. It deals with all aspects of man's economics and political life put always in the frame work of total human development (Khurshid Ahmad, 2003:13). The true assets of a man are his God-given talents and the true wealth of a nation is the aggregate of the capacities of its membership. Allah, the sublime, has posited in every species flashes of His attributes; most of the flashes of His attributes are however manifest in the human personality. It is, therefore, that man has been rated as the noblest among the creation (Mirza Nasir Ahmad, 1972: 68). Allah says: *“Indeed, we have honoured the children of Adam, and we carry them by land and sea, and provide them with good things and have exalted them far above many of those whom we have created” (Qur’an, 17:70)*. This means that God has equally honoured all the children of Adam and has not favoured any particular nation or trib. Thus the verse demolishes all foolish notions of superiority based on colour, creed, race or nationality ((Malik Ghulam Farid, 1969: 598). We see multifarious qualities in different measures in man. Basically their faculties and talents are of four kinds, physical, mental, moral and spiritual. Islam teaches that we should try all we can to bring these talents to perfection and that we should strive hard for it. We are not permitted to ignore any of these talents; all the four must be looked after (Mirza Nasir Ahmad, 1972:73). Allah says:

And Allah has favoured some of you above others in Worldly gift. But those more favoured will not restore any part of their Worldly gifts to those whom their rights hand possess, so that they may be equal shares in them (16:71).

In every age some individuals or Nations, by their superior intellect and harder work, come to acquire ascendancy and control over other individual on Nations. This is neither unfair nor unjust so long as proper opportunities are not denied to the less fortunate people also to make proper use of their talent and intelligence to earn the good thing of life (Malik Ghulam Farid, 1969:567).

God has created rivers but has not restricted the use of their waters for the benefit of any section of mankind. He has made oceans and has thrown them open to His entire creature. He has set up mountains and has not excluded any class from their benefit. He has made arable land

fit for cultivation and has created no monopoly of its use. The same principle should govern the exploitation of natural resources by man. In Islam the principles that regulate a people's culture are based to a much larger degree upon moral and intellectual rather than upon material considerations (Muhammad Zafrullah Khan, 91:32).

The Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW) had instructed us that if knowledge was to be acquired from China, we should go there. He said: "*The seeking of knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim.*"

While the faith brings about the spiritual and moral development of man, knowledge brings about his intellectual development, and therefore stands next to in importance to faith. (Maulana Muhammad Ali, 31). The philosophical foundations of the Islamic approach to development are as follows:

- 1) *Tawhid* (unity of God). This lays down the rules of God-man and man-man relationship. In another words *tawhid* is man's commitment to Allah, the focus of all his reverence and gratitude, the only source of value. (Muhammad Nejatullah Siddiqi, 2005:1)
- 2) *Rububiyyah* (divine arrangements for nourishments, sustenance and directing things towards their perfection). This is the fundamental, law of the universe which throws light on the divine model for the useful development of resources and their mutual support and sharing. It is in the context of this divine arrangement that human efforts take place. In another words our attention is drawn to the fact that one man's good is really linked up with, and dependent on, the good of all mankind. A true believer should, therefore, look not only to his own good but to the good of all. One who does not do so has failed to grasp the true spirit of Islam and the universality of God's providence. Happiness for one lies in happiness for all. (Mirza Bashir-ud-Din Mahmud Ahmad, 1988:10).
- 3) *Khilafah* (man's role as God's vicegerent on earth). This defines man's status and role, specifying the responsibilities of man as such, of a Muslim and of a Muslim nation as the repository of this *Khilafah* (vicegerance). From this follows the unique Islamic concept of man's trusteeship, moral, political and economic, and the principles of social organization (Khushid Ahmad, 2003:13). For man to be capable of discharging this great and sacred trust he had first to attain to Divine knowledge and obviously he could not achieve this without a correct concept and comprehension of his creator. To achieve this, God first



implanted in man the free will and the needful capacity for the comprehension of His attributes, and then He gave him knowledge and creative qualities to make unlimited moral progress and rise spiritually so high as to become the mirror in which Divine attributes are reflected thus becoming fit to discharge his great responsibility. (Maha Dabbus, 1992:37).

- 4) *Tazkiyah* (purification plus growth). The mission of all the prophets of God was to perform the *tazkiyah* (purification) of man in all his relationships—with God, with man, with the natural environment and with society and the state. (khushrd Ahmad,2003:13-14).

The Islamic concept of development follows from its concept of *tazkiyah*, as it addresses itself to the problem of human development in all its dimensions: development is concerned with growth towards perfection through purification of attitudes and relationships. The result of purification (*tazkiyah*) is prosperity (*falah*) in this World and the hereafter.

There are many verses of the Holy Qur'an which have direct bearing on the formation of an Islamic concept of development.

And the Earth we have spread out, and set there in firm mountains and caused everything to grow therein in proper proportion. And we have made for you therein means of livelihood and also for all those whom you do not provide. And there is not a thing but are limitless treasures thereof with us and we send not down except in a known measure (15:19-21).

O you who believe! When the call is made for prayer on Friday, hasten to the remembrance of Allah, and leave off all business. That is best for you, if you only knew. And when the prayer is finished, then may you disperse through the land, and seek of the bounty of Allah: and celebrate the praise of Allah. Often (and without stint): that you may prosper (62:9-10).

Some of the sayings of the prophet which brings into sharp focus some of the priorities of an Islamic developmental strategy are given below:

Any Muslim who plants a tree or cultivates a field that a bird, or a human being, or an animal eats from it, this act will be counted as an act of charity (al-Bukahri quoted by Al-Sha'rani, 1965:240).

He who begs the property of others to increase his own is asking for burning charcoals, so let him ask for little or much;

It is better for one of you to take his rope, bring a load of fire wood on his back and sell it, Allah thereby preserving his self respect, than begging people whether they give him or refuse him;

Acts of begging are scratches with which a man disfigures his face unless one begs a ruler or a situation in which begging becomes very necessary (Al-Hafiz Ibn Hajar Al-Asqalani, 1996:221-222).

In the light of the above quoted fundamental principles and values as well as specific guidance in respect of certain aspect of individual and collective economic developmental effort, different element of the concept of development can be derived. The following are its essential features.

- a) The Islamic concept of development is comprehensive in character and includes moral, spiritual and material dimensions. Development becomes a goal and value oriented activity, devoted to the optimization of human well-being in all these areas. The moral and the material, the economic and the sociopolitical, the spiritual and the physical are inseparable. It is not the well-being of a few individuals or certain groups of society that Islam aims at; it is the well-being of all human beings that is the target. (Khurshid Ahmad,2003:17)

- b) The focus for development effort and the heart of the development process in man. Development, therefore, means development of man, his attitude and ambition, his behaviours and life style and his physical and socio-cultural environment. (Khurshid Ahmad,2003:18)
- c) Development is looked upon by Islam as a multi dimensional activity. As efforts would have to be made simultaneously in a number of directions, the methodology of isolating one key factor and almost exclusive concentration on that would not work. Islam seeks to establish a balance between all the different factors and forces and as such all of them would have to be harnessed and mobilized. (Khurshid Ahmad, 2003:18).

In an Islamic framework, therefore, development means moral, spiritual and material development of the individual and society leading to maximum socioeconomic well-being with the establishment of a just order resulting in the ultimate good of mankind here and hereafter. This is to say that Islam recognizes the diversity of capacities and talent, which is in itself beneficent, and consequently the diversity in earnings and material rewards (Muhammad Zafrullah Khan, 2004:54). Allah says: "*And covet not that whereby Allah has made some of you excel others. Men shall have a share of that which they have earned, and women a share of that which they have earned. And ask Allah of His bounty*" (4:32). Thus Islam does not approve of dead-level equality in the distribution of wealth, as that would defeat the very purpose of the diversity, and would amount to denying the favour of Allah. Allah says:

Allah has favoured some of you above others in worldly gifts. But those more favoured will not restore any part of their worldly gifts to those whom their right hands possess, so that they may be equal shares in them, knowing this, will they still deny the favour of Allah (16:71).

The verse shows that the principle asset of a man is his capacity, his faculties and talents that Allah has granted him. Now there is a talent engaged in manipulating earth, we called it agronomy. Another human talent is manipulating gold, this we called goldsmith, a source of income to him. Another talent is called surgery. A doctor employs his appliances, his body and mind have so developed that when he uses his lancet he draws a straight line without defecting.

As against him there is another doctor gifted with average capacity but he did not make any advance in knowledge and could not develop his talent properly; he operates on a kidney but inflicts a couple of cuts further because his talent missed full measure of its growth. In all these fields a living people should not settle for less than hundred per cent proficiency (Mirza Nasir Ahmad, 1972:71).

It is obvious that if the incentive of proportionate reward for labour, effort, skill and talent were to be removed, not only would initiative and enterprise be adversely affected, but intellectual progress would also be arrested. That is why the theoretical doctrine of equal reward irrespective of the diversity of skill, capacities and talents that have gone into the production of wealth has never been maintained for long, even where it has been proclaimed as state policy, and has had to be modified through recourse to various devices designed to secure diversity in reward (Muhammad Zafrullah Khan, 2004:54). On the other hand, Islam does not leave the principle of competition and of proportionate rewards to work itself out mechanically; that too would lead to hardship and injustice, and would retard the moral and spiritual development of individual and of society as a whole.

If all the citizens of Africa were to exert their individual talents to capacity to a man, the continent shall become one of the richest and loveliest states of the world. Since morally speaking we are a religious nation attributed to Islam we shall be progressively growing mentally, morally and spiritually. Even America would not be able to compete with them in material progress and material wealth, or china. Although these nations have in the field of material advancement travelled very far yet they have not yet reached the limit of their capacities, being still far short of the acme of their material, mental, moral and spiritual development (Mirza Nasir Ahmad, 1972:70).

In fact, in the moral and spiritual sphere they are lagging far behind but even in material and intellectual fields they have not yet attained to the apogee of advancement. If every youth should exert himself pushing himself hard the way God commands. If every individual should see to it that the true potential of his talents as granted to him by God is advantageously developed to capacity. If every youth of Nigeria, Egypt, Libya, Kenya, Sudan and South Africa develop their talents to their full extent, the entire face of the continent will change. In other words if we accumulate the maximum of emoluments that we can collect in all the four field the

assets of the continent will multiply in such a proportion that no other power of the world will be able to challenge it.

China outstripped many Africans country in the material and intellectual field; for the simple reason that God, had not assured the Muslims that He would keep his talent in trim condition even if they remained immobile, nor did He tell a non-Muslims country that their development will fall short of the maximum pitch of their talents, in spite of exertion on their part (Mirza Nasir Ahmad, 1972:73). This is the law in force, the law that whoever exerted to the full to develop the light of his talents, his shall become illumined God, had told the Muslims that He had placed at their disposal uranium, He had told them clearly about it, but Americans, Russians, Japans and Chinas derived the benefit. It is a great shame indeed, but that is the law of Allah. He says: *“Whoso acts righteously, whether male of female and is a believer, we will surely grant him a pure life; and we will surely bestow on such their reward according to the best of their works (Qur’an, 16:97).*

### **Conclusion:**

Since the moral problems associated with our youth are to greater extents products of the negative impacts of Western Civilization and Modernization, which are primarily those of consciousness, it follows that there is an urgent need for moral re-orientation in the Nation's social fabric. Religion has a crucial role to play in this regard. Religious leaders must as a matter of necessity de-emphasize the message of material prosperity (which is the trend at the moment) and shout on roof-top the fundamental tenets and doctrines of religion that can foster adherent's moral and spiritual consciousness. It is a great shame that a people who were granted such a beautiful teaching forth clearly should lag so far behind china or America or Russia or Europe in this material world, in material affluence, in intellectual wealth and in mental development.

The way people think, act and live both socially and morally often depend on what they hear and see around them, particularly through films. Given the malicious effects of modernization especially through information technology on youth moral development, the need for censorship becomes apparent. However, with respect to the mal-functional nature of the censorship board in Nigeria particularly, and in Africa generally, the parents and guardians of

our youth have more roles to play in taming the undue influences that our youths are exposed to as a result of movies and internet resources. Parents and guardians of youth must constantly show concerns for youth moral development through demonstrable role modeling and enviable acts. This critical need for youth's moral development cannot be compromised if Nigeria is to be one of the great nations in the emerging global order.

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