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The Impact of Labour in Human Development: A Biblical and Moral Assessment

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Abstract:

Human labour refers to the physical or mental work or services performed by workers to earn wages as to sustain life. Human Labour has achieved a measure of success mainly on material aspect without the corresponding spiritual, moral or redemptive aspect. This has made profit the exclusive norm and ultimate end of economic activity but its dignity is lost. This paper sought to discover the reason for this deviation, and assess the biblical and moral impact of labour in human development. Qualitative method of inquiry was used in this research and it was discovered that there is a misunderstanding of God and His reason for Labour. This has resulted to economic exploitation, hunger, profiteering, business fraud and social injustice. The paper concludes by enjoining all to return to Gods words.

Keywords: Labour, human, development, biblical, moral

1. Introduction

Labour is defined as the activity that provides the goods or services in an economy. It can also refer to the services performed by workers for wages as distinguished from those rendered by entrepreneurs for profits (www.merriam-webster.com). Likewise, human development is defined as the process of enlarging people's freedom and opportunities and improving their well-being. Human development is about the real freedom ordinary people have to decide who to be, what to do, and how to live (www.measureofamerica.org). This concept of human labour can be traced to as old as human existence as the key to humanization. This is understood from the creation of man where God destined that work should be a fact that distinguishes human being as the principal of the universe (Gen. 1:26-28). It is through human absolute obedience or submission to this divine order "fill and subdue the earth" (Gen. 1:28), that the true nature of a human being as the "image of God" is brought into clear vision. The acceptance and acknowledgement of this basic truth has attracted the concerns of many great minds of different fields of human endeavor, through the ages. And the church in her social teachings based on the scripture has continued to defend her conviction that work is fundamental dimension of human existence. That labour is the basis of human dignity. This research sought to re-discover the moral elements that constitute human labour as the source of humanization. And using the church's social teaching on labour as the focal point, this work intends to evaluate the devastating condition of workers in the society.

Some scholars are of the opinion that, human labour has achieved a measure of success mainly on material aspect which is attributed to motivation (Mullins, 2005; Armstrong, 2006; Osabiya 2015). However, there seem to be a disconnect in the corresponding spiritual, moral or redemptive aspect of labour. Thus, deviating from the original purpose of human labour which is the total well-being of human beings on earth. The bible shows possible starting points in Genesis 2, which brings out the fact that work is central to fulfilling our potential as human beings. We were created not merely to exist, but to be active. Genesis 3 emphasizes the difficulties that beset mankind because work now involves toil and frustration. The immediate consequences of this ugly situation resulted into moral ills namely: - economic exploitation, hunger, profiteering, business fraud and social injustice. Under this situation which makes profits the exclusive norm and ultimate end of economic activity, the condition of workers became so devastated and distressed. An environment where the dignity of Labour has been lost and human being are treated as an economic object of work instead as the subject of labour. Against this background therefore, this paper intends to assess the biblical and moral perspective of human labour to underscore the fact, that: although humans are material beings but they are also spiritual; human Labour, even-though it supplies material needs to mankind, yet its spiritual benefits must not be neglected in economic activities.

Work sanctifies, saves and fulfills the salvific essence of human existence on earth. It is a participation in the creative work of God. It makes human being brothers and friends of Jesus Christ, through the participation in his cross and resurrection. The moral

investigation will also change the people's attitude towards labour - as a means to existence, which will help to secure the dignity of Labour in the society.

2. Relationship between Labour and Capital

For the purpose of clarity there is need to explain the type of relationship between labour and capital which promotes the dignity of human labour. The conflict between the basic concept either in practice or ideology leads to exploitation of the workers. While their interdependence relationship provides efficient economic environment which elevates the dignity of workers Labour. This is in relation to capital referring to demand of manpower supply in the process of production. And capital is understood as material aspect or material content of production process. Capital for Marx "consists of raw materials, instruments of labour and means of subsistence of all kinds, which are utilized in order to produce new raw materials, new instruments of labour and new means of subsistence" (Marx, 1891) From these basic concepts, labour is simply understood here as the worker or the employee, while capital is taken to mean the employer, owner of the production or entrepreneurs. The conflict or class struggle between the two categories in the process of production arises "in the fact that the workers put their powers at the disposal of the employer who because of the principle of maximum profit tried to establish the lowest possible wages for the work done by the workers. This may lead to exploitation of the workers. Because both were seen under the same common level. The conflict or class struggle between the workers and the employers as understood gives rise to exploitation because in most cases it creates occasions of profiteering. That is a situation where the employer's total interest is fixed on making profit without considering the dignity of workers; hence the employee is treated as mere instrument in the process of production. The implication is that the profit or material goods are given higher value over the moral well-being of the workers. That is, the priority of things over persons, by the rich over the poor workers. (Marx, 1891

Alienated Labour: The term alienation in Latin means "*alienation*". It means an estrangement, transference of ownership. It is variously used to describe different forms of estrangement or separation from something. For instance, in the biblical setting, the fall of Adam and Eve into sin is referred to as an alienation from God. And in the legal point of view, the transference of one's property to someone else is referred to as alienation. In the socio-economic set-up, Marx identified four aspects of alienation: alienation from nature, from oneself, from one's specific being and from other workers. Thus in an alienated Labour the worker is related to the product of his labour as an alien object, expands himself in work, the more powerful becomes the world of objects which he creates in the face of himself, the poorer he becomes in his inner life and the less he belongs to himself. In line with these descriptions and forms of alienated Labour, this paper refers to the exploitative condition of workers in our society as alienated labour.

The Dignity of Human Labour: The dignity of human labour has been a socio-economic problem confronting human beings all through the ages, both at the civil and ecclesiastical levels. The issues erupted from the very moment human beings realize that nature has endowed them with innate power to subdue and conquer the earth (Gen. 1:28). And the problem becomes more sophisticated as people grow more conscious of themselves as working beings. Thus, many theories and economic ideologies have been postulated in an attempt to elevate human dignity through work. These various approaches can be grouped into two basic categories: argument from socio-political perspective and the argument from economic development viewpoints.

Socio-Political Perspectives: Scholars have written on the dignity of human labour, based on socio-political view point. They agree on a basic conviction that labour or work is the source of socio-political development. The effort to make human work the key to authentic humanization depends so much on the socio-political structure adopted in a given social and political systems. Heilbroner (1965) citing example with the condition of workers in America rejected the liberal capitalism as a means of exalting the dignity of labour. He pointed out that:

The operation of capitalism as functional system results in a structure of wealth and income characteristic of capitalism as a system of privilege a structure in which the top two percent of all American families own between two-thirds and three-quarters of all income receivers, enjoy incomes roughly ten times larger than the average received within the nation as a whole.

Long before Heilbroner, the progenitors of socialism and communism, Marx and Engels in Ike,(1986) had attacked capitalism as a means to restore the dignity of human labour. Marx's works, especially, Communist Manifesto (1847) and The Capital (1906) were centered on re-creating a socialist community of persons, where each can contribute what he or she can and take what he or she needs. Marx adopted this theory as a way of fighting alienation caused by capitalist oppression of the workers and the metaphysical interpretation of the world propounded by religion. This socio-political condition as marked by statelessness, classlessness, godlessness and less of property ownership for him will liberate workers to regain their lost dignity. Nnoli (1978) arguing from the socio-political perspective in the promotion of the dignity of workers traced the exploitative condition of workers in Nigeria today to political ethnicity. For him, this has given rise the political injustice, imbalance in economic distribution and poor working condition. He posits that an adequate remedy lies only in the creation of a nationally integrated economy. Nnoli also pointed out that the political structure which enhances the dignity of workers must be characterized by the absence of class consciousness, internationalization of ethnic sentiments or the use of ethnic and indigenous based for political competition. This is similar to the point raised by Akukwe (1988) he pointed out paternalism, apathy, value disorientation and unjust social structures as socio-political system that obstructs true social development which affects the dignity of the workers. He argued that these obstacles arise out of non-recognition or lack of respect for the dignity and rights of the human person.

2.1. Economic Development Perspectives

Apart from socio-political consideration of the dignity of human labour, some other authors have viewed it from the economic development perspectives. Those authors who have argued from this perspective understood human labour as the key to human

development. They pointed out the possible strategies or economic situations which should promote the dignity of workers in the society. Nwabueze (1980) argue that the organization of workers into effective and virile trade unions, regulation of wages, conditions of employment and industrial relations with their employers through the mechanism of collective bargaining. Management of the internal affairs of the union and education of workers will promote dignity of labour. Similarly, Rein, (1970) argued that with radical case-work, social workers try to activate those values that they accept as morally right and which society accepts but fails to act on. They then organize their research and action to serve as moral witness, the failure of society to implement the ideals it has already accepted in law or policy. Roger (1973) observes that:

the economy works better for the good of all if productive goods are mainly owned by private individuals or companies operate subject to the laws of competition in a free market. Though government has an economic role in a mixed economy, but it should be united as much as possible.

Okechukwu, (1990) in his book: *“The Right to Life and the Right to Live”* went deeper than Rogers. He indicated that the socio-economic rights that go to promote the dignity of human labour depend on the level of development of a country’s social and economic infrastructures. For him the society can only guarantee these rights as economic development permits. The right to work for instance presupposes government’s administrative capacity and the creation of jobs. The social rights specify conditions for the preservation of well-being of the person in societal interaction and communal life. And among such rights include: the right to food, clothing, shelter, rest, medical, adequate working condition and just wage.

On a particular note Oloko, (1983), Eleanor (1979) Iwe (1986) considers the dignity of a given work on its ability to satisfy some basic needs of workers such as: Psychological needs: food, water, and clothing, Safety needs: freedom from bodily threat, Love and belongingness/special needs: friendship, affection, Self-actualization, self-fulfillment, Esteem needs: achievement. To substantiate this, the “United Nations Declaration on Human Rights” state that, in this personal and dignified character of human Labour, the laborer has a right to humanly, descent conditions of work. Based on human dignity as a free rational being, a worker has the basic right to choice of work and should not be unjustly subjected to any work or associations.

2.2. Church and the Dignity of Human Labour

The church's teaching on the dignity of human labour is as old as the church herself. This repertoire of social wisdom is derived from the natural law, scriptural insights, tradition of the church fathers and theological reflections. The church’s social doctrine on human labour is also drawn from the contemporary experience of the people of God, who are struggling to live out their Christian faith amidst conflicting political ideologies, oppressive socio-economic structures and rapidly changing cultural setting. The teaching of the church on the dignity of human labour is essentially focused on the promotion of a civilization of love; for the church believes that work/labour is the crucial to man which is based both in the Old and New Testament of the Bible.

2.3. The Old Testament

The dignity of human labour in the Old Testament is centered on the fact that work is natural to man and not punishment. Gen. 1:15 says that “the Lord God created man put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it”. And the Lord God having created the universe entrusted upon the hands of man as the master and co-creator to God. He gave man the divine power and charged him with the duty to command all created beings. “Fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth” (Gen. 1:28) Again the Old Testament image of the dignity of human labour dwells on the facility and structure of divine creation. According to Psechke (1994) “the sequence of six days of creation and a duty of rest on the seventh day is set before the people of God as a model and motivation for their own rhythm, of week - day labour and Sabbath rest”. This means that human work draws its dignity in obedience to God’s order – “six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord” (Ex. 20:19ff). If God created man in his own image (Gen. 1:26), man also has divine obligation to imitate the creator by the structure of six days of weekday labour.

This follows that the Old Testament does not regard work as low and degrading contrary to the surrounding pagan nations for work is both a curse and punishment from gods. The divine command to work is a universal obligation. Everyone shares in it; “man goes forth to his work and to his labour until the evening” (Ps. 104:23, cf Deut. 5:13, Ps. 90:19). In Isaiah 28:23-29 God is described as teaching men their work. The wisdom books reproved the lazy sluggard and praise the industrious labourer (Prov. 6:6-11, 28:19).

Again in spite of the high esteem for work, the Old Testament is also realistically aware of the painful toil and hardship which are connected with it. This is as a result of human fall into sin:

To the man he said; because you listen to the voice of your wife and ate the fruit of which I had forbidden you to eat, accursed be the soil because of you. Painfully will you get your food from it as long as you live.....? By the sweat of your face will you earn your food (Gen. 3:17-19)?

As a consequence, to this, the true image of human labour is infected by sin and loses its real glorious nature. Hence, it becomes laborious and sterile, which leads to caprice, violence, injustice as factors of dehumanization. Instances of these include: workers are deprived of their wages (Jer. 22:13-17), “you will sow your seed in vain for your enemies will eat it (Deut. 26:17).

To protect the dignity of human labour against these factors of sin, God after reconciling with man again, codified some moral principles: “you shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy, whether he is one of your brethren or one of the sojourners who are in your land within your towns; you shall give him his hire on the day he earns it (Deut. 24:14-15). Against fraud in business transaction it says: “if you sell to your neighbor or buy from your neighbor, you shall not wrong or cheat one another” (Lev. 24:14). “You shall not pervert justice, you shall not show partiality; and you shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and

subverts the cause of the righteous, justice and only justice you shall follow? (Deut. 16:19-20), There were also stipulations against usury as one of the crimes that militate against the dignity of laborer's in Israel. "If you lend money to any of my people with you who is poor, you shall not be to him as a creditor, and you shall not exact interest from him" (Ex. 22:25-27).

2.4. *The New Testament*

The dignity of human labour prefigured in the Old Testament acquired an Christological connotation in the New Testament. Here, Jesus Christ the true image of God was incarnated in the family of a poor carpenter. As a man of work he spent the greater part of his life as an employee in the service of Joseph in his workshop in Nazareth. Jesus Christ always showed special relationship with the working man, with work itself 'Jesus Christ elevated the dignity of labour by considering it natural and integral part to human life. The immediate disciples of Jesus for instance were mostly the laborers who earn their living by manual work, that is as fishermen (Matt. 4:18-22; Luke 5:1-11). And indeed Jesus through his life and teaching gave special prominence to the value and dignity of: human labour, the son of God that chose to spend his life as a workman.

Again, it is true, that in the New Testament the dignity of man can be elevated through labour, but there are warnings against too great absorption by work, preoccupation and business. For Luke 12:15 says: "Take heed and beware of all covetousness; for a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possession". Unchecked trust and solicitude about material needs must not suppress the spiritual concerns which are openness to God's word, His kingdom and His justice (Matt. 6:25-34, Luke 10:38-42).

Similarly, the New Testament cautions against the greedy accumulation of wealth. Those who strive to accumulate riches cannot follow God faithfully. This is because it is hard for a rich man to enter into heaven (Matt. 19:24). And it is impossible to serve two masters, God and mammon at the same time (Matt. 6:24). Unanswerable is an absorption in work which leads a man to the extent of neglecting God's eternal banquet (Luke 9:25, Luke 14:15-24).

In line with the Gospel teachings on labour, Paul in his letters epitomized Christian attitude to work. In fact, he requires quiet and steady work from his Christians. As a Jew he himself practiced a trade in accordance with rabbinic custom (Acts 18:3, 20:34f). Even as a preacher and apostle of the gospel who in principle had the right to be supported by the congregation (1 Cor. 9:13f, 2 Thess. 3:8f; 1 Timothy 5:17f), he often still worked as a tentmaker in order to provide for his living and not to burden anyone (1 Cor. 9:3-15, 1 Thess. 2:9, 2 Thess. 3:7f).

To emphasize on the dignity of human labour and the necessity of work, Paul says: "We exhort you to live quietly, to mind your own affairs and to work with your hands, so that you may command the respect of outsiders and be dependent on nobody" (1 Thess. 4:10-12). For Paul "If anyone will not work, let him not eat.... (2 Thess. 3:10-12). Work is a general obligation and idleness is disorderly living, (1 Thess. 5:14, 2 Thess. 3:6). Human work guarantees man's independence and personal freedom, It also provides for the Christians for their livelihood Labour makes it possible for the Christians to exercise charity and serve the needy (1 Timothy 6:17-19). For St. Paul, let the thief no longer steal but rather let him labour, doing work with his hands, so that he may be able to give those in need (Eph. 4:28).

To maintain the dignity of labour, slaves or employees should be obedient to their masters "work, willingly for the sake of the Lord and not for the sake of human beings". "And those of you, who are employers, treat your slaves in the same spirit, do without threats...." (Eph. 6:5-9, 1 Timothy 6:1-2). The foregoing has been the background to the church's teaching on the dignity of labour. And other sources of the church teachings on labour include the church fathers.

2.5. *Evaluation*

The effort of this paper has been an attempt to explore the impact of labour in human development. It has tried through the Holy Scripture, philosophical teachings and contemporary theological opinions which projected human work as the key to human existence. From the spiritual exploration it has been discovered that the dignity of human labour stems from man's obedience to God's command (Gen. 1:28). The devastation nature of work was as a result of human sins especially the sins of idolatry and selfishness. In which case, selfishness leads into capitalistic exploitation while idolatry brings atheistic materialism. This is a displacement of values, the primacy of material or technological values over spiritual and transcendental realities. This paper also discovered from the official documents of the church that the effect of human sin brought unhealthy conflicts between classes of rich and poor, employers and employee, labour and capital. It is pointed out that the greedy pursuit of material wealth and loss of the sense of God invited the application or acceptance of just or unethical socio-economic system. Such economic system like socialism and capitalism, are regarded as enemies of the dignity of workers. In most cases such system favors or promotes the alienated or exploitative condition of the workers. It has been indicated in this paper that the only way out of devalued condition of workers is by building up socio-economic systemization within the moral principles. That is restructuring the economic programmes according to ethical demands, in that way, the atheistic pursuit of material things in favor of rich few as against the poor masses will be eliminated. Such situation will see human work as source of humanization, by placing persons over material things. To realize this reconstruction or reordering of the socio-economic system in line with the moral order, this paper calls for the cooperation of all and sundry, rich and poor individuals and nations, the church and state. This involves conversion of heart, reorientation, application of the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity. Under such environment, The United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Right (1948) said that the basic rights of human persons as the subject of work will be protected and promoted namely: the right of private property, just wage, right to life, good condition of work, right to join association, movement etcetera.

3. Conclusion

The main concern of this paper has been the respect to the dignity of human labour. Right from the moment of creation, labour has distinguished human beings from other creatures as a co-creator of God (Gen. 1:26-28). And every religion and culture directly or indirectly has affirmed and proclaimed that human being is divinely destined to actualize himself or herself through labour. A lot of efforts have been made and are still being made today to protect the moral dignity imbedded in human labour or secure it from any obstacle against the attainment of the ultimate goal of human labour. It has been explained and expressed in this paper that the structure of sin and the conspicuous absence of moral norms in the socio-economic system are the root causes of exploitative nature of human labour. This has given rise to so many moral evils namely: selfishness, hunger, unemployment, unjust wages etc.

All the positive efforts made so far have not yielded much fruits because the root causes have not been eliminated. To emphasize more on the solutions or recommendations proffered on the above, this paper still calls for more solidarity efforts to restructure the socio-economic system in line with the moral principles. It involves ethical reconstruction of the economy which gears towards God, such effort should emphasize on the spiritual aspect of labour and places human values above all material values; brought about by social changes in the society. This is the realization of the spiritual significance of labour and the salvific aspect of labour. This brings into focus the role of the church as the conscience of the nation, the voice of the voiceless and protector of the poor. The local church(s) has it as her duty to help the government to rescue the dignity of laborer's that have been devastated by economist and materialism. For the church to express her prophetic role in moral leadership, the church herself must lead by example. With this therefore, this paper calls for more intensive solidarity efforts from all and sundry and recommend the following:

4. Recommendations

1. Rediscovering the Moral Attitude to Work through Reorientation: The dignity of human labour in the society can be recovered if the people are reoriented to look at work as an integral part of human being and never a punishment.
2. Moral Reconstruction of Socio Economics System: Another strategy by which the dignity of labour in the society can be elevated is moral reconstruction of the socio-economic systemization. This brings out the role of religion in rational economic management. Religion will help to bring into central focus another essential aspect of labour, the spirituality of work.
3. Establishment of More Skill Training Centers: Apart from the occasional seminars and workshops being organized in the society for the workers, there is an urgent need to establish skill training centers, at least in the remote villages in the society. Such skill training centers will provide the workers with the necessary facilities to improve in their labour skills.
4. Giving Priority to Local Production: It is acknowledged today that in every development process, agriculture is of paramount importance. There is no doubt, that the dignity of human labour in the society will be improved if modern agricultural productive system were established. This entails giving pride of place to the internal development through proper planning and committed implementation.
5. Building of More Development Projects: One of the threatening problems against the dignity of workers is lack of employment opportunities. A great number of the population is unemployed. Because of this, the fortunate few who have no option engaged themselves into degrading jobs. The available industries could not match up with the fast growing population. Such problems can be at least minimized if not eliminated, by erecting more industries or development projects in most parts of the societies. This calls for the cooperation of individuals, the church and the state government.
6. Promotion of Self – Help and Communal Effort: The fact that government cannot provide everything free at the same time for everyone, the dignity of human labour can be elevated via self- reliance and community effort. The individuals in the community can help themselves by embarking on small self - help projects and reduce the absolute dependence on what the government can do for them. The state government can in addition to the provision of some basic amenities like electricity, water, hospitals, schools et cetra, support individual initiative by providing credit loan facilities Supporting community initiatives and relying on local partners can prevent the persistence of an aid-driven approach, making it possible to gradually lay the foundations for integral development.
7. Promotion of Incentive Productivity: Jesus Christ in Matthew 10:10 say that “a labourer deserves his wage” which means that just wage or adequate remuneration is an entitlement to the workers. When the workers are properly paid for their labour, there will be increment in productivity which also enhances human dignity.

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