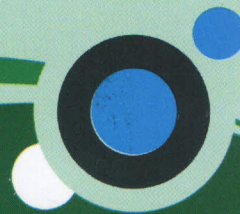




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Dr. P. A. Nwosu



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The journal considers for publication relevant articles that falls within the scope of the journal. Those adjudged to be relevant and of high standards are been subjected to a very through editorial review and assessment by the journal editorial review board made up of seasoned scholars of varied backgrounds in social and humanities disciplines.

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UNITED NATIONS ORGANIZATION AND TODAY'S QUESTIONS: A HISTORICAL APPRAISAL

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Abstract:

In the 21st Century, there is an increased effort to protect human dignity. This effort is now a common concern based on the fact of the universality of human nature. In other words, the protection of human rights and dignity is now an international affair that calls for international action. Again, given to social change, human life has assumed much varied and complicated forms that make the regulation of the attitudes of nations a necessity. This is further made inevitable considering the human experiences of two separate world wars. Hence, the United Nations Organization (UNO) being an international organization has the power to guarantee the freedom of nations and people. By virtue of common humanity, rights and justice flow from human nature. The paper, using historical and analytical methods, discusses the nature of history and the emergence of the UNO. It attempts to evaluate the extent the organization has achieved her set goals and objectives. The paper concludes that even though the UN has recorded great success more challenges are yet to be addressed by the body.

Keywords: World Community, Human Destiny, Nature of History, Today's Question, Human Rights

INTRODUCTION

It seems axiomatic to begin the examination of the United Nations Organization (UNO) and Today's Questions with some clarification of terms and concepts. In other words, for the purpose of focus and comprehension, it is necessary to explicate common assumption and the context in which the words: "historical appraisal", "UNO", and "Today's Questions" are used in this study.

In general, it is a common assumption that the history which is remembered, and which continues to linger in subsequent historical accounts reflects the interest of those who possess power after the event. Put another way, it is the point of view of the winning side that survives. This assumption has two major contents. Firstly, people can have direct access with the past. Secondly, it becomes possible, in principle so to say, to establish the facts in a relatively simple way. Historical appraisal, as the study sets out to do, then orders facts in a proper sequence by reference to dates and periods. In this regard, Schaff (1964) argued for the value of historical appraisals. For him, "the historian's task was instructive" (p.167). This point was made clearer by Stewart (1862), who wrote that:

History is replete with instruction, and suggestive of duty. It takes the experience of others and offers it to ourselves, admonishing us to shun their faults and copy their virtues. It may be said to extend our days, as well as experience, by carrying us back into the past, where we seems to live with the men of other years, to participate in their labours, sympathize with their feelings, and share in their woe (p. 1).

For Stewart (1862), engaging in historical appraisals and clarifying basic assumptions, brings one into a participatory role with others who lived before the days; thereby extending one's own willingness to join with that of others in the past. Therefore, historical appraisal in this study is quite suited considering the fact that "the quest for world community is not... a mere abstract vision for the future; but a reality that indicates that the future is partially present" (Fahey 2005:177).

The UNO, on the other hand, exists and functions in relation to the basic truths of human beings regardless of religious affiliation and ethnic differences. It is a World Community that asserts the following facts:

- all human beings are created in the image of God;
- war will be abolished when people follow God's path;
- peace between nations is based on the work of justice; and
- a common humanity transcends all ethnic and religious associations (Fahey 2005:155-156).

It was in the light of the above that Pope John xxiii (1881 – 1993) expressed his support for an international public authority that would guarantee fundamental human rights without bias. In his historic papal letter "*Pacem in Terris*", "Peace on Earth" (1963), he voiced out his concern for UNO thus:

It is therefore our ardent desire that the United Nations Organization – in its structure and in its means – may become ever more equal to the magnitude and nobility of its tasks, and may the

time come as quickly as possible when every human being will find therein an effective safeguard for the rights which derive directly from his dignity as a person, and which are therefore universal, inviolable and inalienable rights. This is all the more to be hoped for since all human beings... are becoming more consciously aware that they are living members of the whole family (p. 145).

The papal teaching and support for the UNO anchors on the fact that every human being is entitled to basic rights by virtue of common humanity. This means that essentially rights and justice flow from human nature itself, rather than merely from the legislations of human persons in power.

In the twenty-first century, has the UNO been able to achieve her set goal and objective of universal peace based on justice? By meeting and negotiating, have nations and human beings come to discover better bonds and unity deriving from the common human nature? The foregoing throw up the context in which today's Questions are raised in this study. How would the success or failure of the UNO be measured, for example, in the face of terrorism?

In the light of the above, the paper discusses the United Nations Organization and Today's Questions with focus on the fact that no problem of human destiny is beyond human beings. The paper proceeds under the subheadings of: the Nature of History; the Term United Nations; some of Today's Questions and then conclusion.

THE NATURE OF HISTORY

One's first encounter with history is often at the level of what historical writers have to offer. The account of history is, in fact, many steps removed from what actually happened. Bright (1980) confirms this fact when he argued that there is always a time gap between actual event and written record. Setting out from the perspective of biblical narratives, he wrote:

Not only is it impossible to relate the Biblical narratives with even approximate precision to the events of contemporary history, but the narratives themselves are such that they constitute the major problem of Israel's history (p. 67).

Obviously, Bright (1980) made his point to demonstrate the reason why sacred sciences claim immunity from historical scrutiny.

A belief in the direct access with the past is limited by the fact that historical accounts are always partial in two contents. Firstly, they offer only part of the whole story and secondly, they express the assumptions of the individual that is writing the account. In the context of the foregoing, Sheldrake (1995) has argued that historical accounts are essentially the outcome of edited and interpreted version of "what happened". He wrote:

Historical revision may conclude that previous accounts reached conclusions for unsound reasons and yet we cannot simply assume, from the start, that the conclusion was undoubtedly false. All that can be said initially is that there are new questions which must be asked (p.19).

The corroboration of Sheldrake (1995) helpfully denotes that the past is approached in order to explain predetermined results. The consequences of such a process of revision may not be fully anticipated.

Nevertheless, with Huizinga (1936) one notes that history is always specific, and its understanding is a task to be achieved. According to him,

In reality history gives no more than a particular representation of a particular past, an intelligible picture of a portion of the past. It is never the reconstruction of a given past. It is always the comprehension and interpretation of a meaning which we look for in the past (p. 7)

So, as a reflective practice, history is infused with intentionality.

Since "the goal of historical work is to make the historical process intelligible" (Goff 1992:108), the relationship among past, present, and future is not quite peculiar to contemporary historians. Again, the challenges of change that are inherent in the worldly structures of human existence are perennial in the experience of human communities. It is along these lines that Irvin (1998) notes that "in the wake of the intellectual currents of the modern European Enlightenment, a number of historical ruptures have occurred which have increasingly severed ties that would bind the various presents of the contemporary world to their... diverse historical past (p. 21). In this regard, the effects of social changes call for platform that would unite people as one community. As the material forces of modernity have swept

across the globe, disruption has been experienced in virtually every concern of the world (Irvin 1998:22), necessitating a global union like UNO. In other words, at the end of human experience of wreckage upon wreckage of wars, through the UNO the question tends to be how people are to live in history when life seem uncertain. Hence, the paper focuses attention on UNO in the next subheading.

THE TERM UNITED NATIONS

The establishment of UNO is one of the signs of a global effort that people have exerted over time to arrive at norms of justice and equity for the common good of all. Notably, Kanu (1991) submitted that it is a gross violation of justice to do anything to reduce the growth of a people. In the backdrop of the emergence of the UNO, he wrote:

The protection of human dignity is an international affair that calls for international action. Presently, social life has assumed much varied, complicated and rapidly changing forms that people everywhere have either won their independence or are on the way of willing it (pp. 62-63).

Following the outcomes of the world wars, the UNO encourages individual nations to make good effort to observe standard of civilized behaviour in relation to law and justice. The above was the animating force which enabled world powers to come together at a time under the nomenclature of the United Nations Organization, (UNO).

The term United Nations came into existence at the beginning of the World War II in 1942. It was an attempt by four world powers, United States of America, United Kingdom, Russia and China, to

employ their common strength against their common enemy and to negotiate for peace. With other interested bodies joining, the four world powers signed a declaration which later became the United Nations Declaration. With Fahey, it is important to stress that World Community like UNO, "is a social philosophy that advocates the creation of an international democratic union of states that will abolish war, defend human rights, secure social justice, and protect the environment for future generations (Fahey 2005:148).

In the course of human existence on earth, no nation has succeeded in living in total isolation from the neighbouring nations (Jacobson 1979:3-11). There is always the need to network and interact. The platform for interaction has always been necessary. Fahey (2005) captured well the need for generally agreed machinery for state interaction when he averred reasons for the failure of League of Nations. He wrote:

after World War I (1914-1918) the League of Nations was formed to do what the Great War could not: end all war. Although the League had a World Court and a deliberative body, it lacked the essential enforcement powers that alone could prevent war. And so it collapsed before the marching boots of fascism in Italy, Japan, and Germany. The fact that the United States isolated itself from the World Community and refused to join the League also contributed to its failure (pp. 177-178).

So, towards the end of World War II, there came a proposal for the formation of an international organization, vested with enforcement powers, to replace the League of Nations. The proposal received general acceptance and in 1943 the UNO was

established, for the maintenance of world peace, elimination of tyranny, slavery, oppression and intolerance. This was the resolution of the 1943 Moscow Pact.

Therefore, the United Nations was founded to unite the strength of nations in the maintenance of world peace and security. This time the United States did join the global community and "the number of member states of the UN has risen from 51 in 1945, to 104 in 1961, to 191 in 2005" (Fahey 2005:178). In the context of the foregoing, it could be said that the UN represents almost every human person on earth; making the global body a resounding success.

Be that as it may, today's question of equity and stability, disarmament and terrorism; and the scourge of corrupt leadership call to question the success of the UN and reflect on apparent failure. It is beyond the scope of the paper to enter into these issues in detail. But suffice it to say that genuine concern for today's challenges could be pursued as priority of international action. Hence, the paper, now, turns attention to some of today's questions.

SOME OF TODAY'S QUESTIONS

Today's challenges are questions of human rights and dignity. As a matter of fact, there are no human rights which are products of any international body. According to Henkin (1988), "the international human rights movement did not invent the concept of human rights" (p. 25). Put another way, the United Nations did not create any legal rights for people. Human rights are inherent and inalienable rights; they are moral foundation under natural law upon which international law of human rights builds and depend (Kanu 1991:80). The UNO consolidates the extent

of relationship between nations and institutions based on human rights to "establish order, peace and harmony" (McNeil 1963:20-40). It is from this prism that the organization is associated with contemporary challenges or questions.

The origins of political instability in most countries, particularly in Africa, are associated with human right abuses, corrupt leadership and injustice. In most cases, economic development cannot be guaranteed by the government to eliminate it. In fact, the Niger-Delta militancy and *Boko Haram* insurgence in Nigeria, for example, are linked to highly unequal development; development which creates and defeats new expectations. This has continued to threaten the political stability of the country. Thus, Brandt (1983) succinctly submits that "development which relieves men and women from the indignity of poverty, which replaces social deprivation with social will work in the opposite direction" (p. 37). Brandt's concern is the environment that has produced various restiveness in many African countries. In this regard, the UNO consistently supporting equitable development, especially in all African countries, is both morally preferable to and less expensive than ethnic militia insurgence and other measures its absence may warrant.

Another aspect of worsening international environment that poses serious challenges to the UNO presently is the increase in arms production and expenditure. Brandt (1983) has argued that the complete failure of the UN special session on Disarmament in the summer of 1982 was one of the most dispiriting of recent terrorists events in the world today. From a historically conscious perspective, he made a valuable proposal to the UNO. He pleads that:

genuine disarmament be pursued as the first priority of international action, to rid the world both of the growing insecurity of the proliferation of weapons, and of their unacceptable costs, which now pose a serious threat to several industrial and developing economies (p. 38).

The danger of neglecting the above appeal is experienced in most countries today. In Nigeria, it has triggered series of bombing incidents and killings which have literally become a routine in some parts of the country (Adeyemi 2011:13).

These are sensitive challenges for the UNO which go a long way to determine the question of peace in the world today. Thus, the challenges of today require careful handling. In this context, Kanu (1991), quoting Eisenhower, laments the danger of today's challenges. He notes that "every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed" (p. 88).

In all of these, one of the reasons for the formation of the UNO comes to mind. The opening section of the organization's charter states that one of the main reasons of UNO's existence is, ...to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind. Therefore, the UNO needs to master courage to continue to play her role over member states, no matter the limitations. Friendly relations among independent and dependent states based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination should be pursued. It is the role of UN to mount rigorous

campaign against huge spending on running governments and sustaining military warheads.

In all, the UNO cannot address all the challenges of the 21st Century. The way forward becomes for people to realize that they are equally called to be signs of solidarity in the world. Should men and women eschew all forms of corruption, ethnic discrimination and hatred, then some other contemporary challenges like terrorism would disappear.

CONCLUSION

From the discussion so far, it is quite clear that the United Nations was created in 1945 with the mandate to save succeeding generations from the havoc of war. Therefore, the organization has the statutory role to regulate the attitudes of nations towards one another. If the world would experience peace, then there must be concerted public reaction against factors that bring about instability in governance, arms trading and insecurity of different kinds.

It is also obvious from these discussions that history is the salient aspect of human existence. In order to guarantee peaceful resolution of today's challenges, nations must learn from history and be resolved to better the world for generations to come. The basic rights of every human being must be protected since rights originate from human nature itself rather than from the legislations of governments. In this regard, giving each individual the platform to be a citizen of the world, the UN could be seen as a resounding success. Yet, the organization could do more.

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