

Juvenile Delinquency: The Rise of Moral Decadence in Cameroon Schools

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Abstract:

In this paper, we point out the fundamental causes of moral decadence in Cameroon schools by juveniles and seek the extent to which such moral decadence has on the future of Cameroon. As human rights and technology continues to reshape the society, this article states that the application of laws following children rights and western cultures without considering the culture of the people of Cameroon as far as education is concerned is inherent to human condemnation. The implementations of such laws and cultures affected our students and they portray immoral acts such as fighting, smoking, sex party and beating of teachers in secondary schools. In Cameroon, the school is a center of formation and a child learns with a cane. Teachers are parents and listen to their children then correct them with a cane when it is beyond control. So, taken away the canes from the teachers destroy the teaching culture of Cameroon which is a succinct way to discipline a child. The teacher who is the actor of formation has a formative tune through the cane to fight against acts of moral decadence particularly that of drugs and sex party. The formative punishment is required in our schools via the use of canes by teachers. This human condemnation has future consequences that will emerge probably. In this article, we advanced some methods that can be used to return a peaceful citadel of learning in our schools and the society. The study emphasizes the significance of moral values in school.

Keywords: Juvenile Delinquency, Moral Decadence, Formation, Formative Punishment, Culture, Human Condemnation, and Teachers.

Introduction:

The journey to a sound life has led us to the pursuit of education. Our education is geared towards a particular career. At this, one noticed that education is the process of growth that leads to the realization of particular results. This implies that education is not different from living and our living is a process of learning which embodies

skills, attitudes and knowledge acquired in the course of life. So, to educate implies the process through which one goes on through life irrespective of time and place. Imperatively, to be educated presupposes that one has undergone a series of life's experiences and has acquired a wealth of wisdom (philosophy). The used of the word philosophy here indicates a daily activity that

beacon of intellectual light which is the guiding instrument of our thoughts through profound questions and concepts.¹ It is worth to note that education emerged in the ancient period with the development of the various writing systems and the oldest Alphabet in Egypt around 2000BC. In this period, children learned by apprenticeship but tiny number received formal education.² The choice of apprenticeship was through character and moral of the person the candidate was to be as an example. On an ancient Egyptian tablet discovered by archeologists, a child wrote, "Thou didst beat me and knowledge entered my head." (Harris, 1989: 149). From this perspective, we realized that education cannot be separated from flogging which is a form of discipline and reminding the candidate of moral values. It continued to the medieval period where traditional subjects were taught with religious assumptions. One was to interpret and expound the accepted doctrines. Knowledge was an authoritative revealed truth and one was not allowed to question but discover the truth by oneself (Verger, 2003; Koterski, 2005). There came a shift in thought with the modern period which was the period of reformation. This period brought enlightenment to the people who could now question the existence of everything. This light in education shines till present day but the Cameroonian school authorities or those in charge of education are reshaping the educational system into a revolutionary center where students think they are more than their teachers and can even beat them. This is the excess rights giving to them. The school authorities fail to see that education has a dialectic character. The teacher must nurture the independence and newness of each child through discipline (Arendt, 1972, 89-96). That is why Plato says that education should be rigorous in bringing about a just society. In this, through education the

basic ideals of justice and peace could be clarified and that clarification of such language would ultimately result in effective actions (Plato, Republic: 1968). Therefore, education is inherent in morality. From birth to old age, we go through several distinct stages of life. For the purpose of clarity, the human life circle is made up of; infancy, adolescences, adulthood, and old age. Most humans developed a criminal personality at the adolescent age of the human circle, this stage is a developmental transition between childhood and adulthood; all humans found in this stage are labeled: juveniles or teenagers. A juvenile is a young person below the age of 18. The term juvenile is synonymous to words such as; child, adolescent, youngster and school boy/girl. Under national and international law, a juvenile is defined pertaining to age; is a child who has committed a crime or an offence different from an adult.³ According to Black's Law Dictionary, a juvenile is a person who is below the age of 18 years and is not treated as an adult.⁴ The United Nations Convention considers a juvenile as any person under the age of 18 years.⁵ From the definition and considerations of the status of a juvenile, one can uphold that the cause could be due to lack of character formation in secondary schools. Morality refers to the sum total of values, good practices, principles of right behavior, as well as their opposites, that is, bad practices, wrongful types of behavior recognized by individuals, society or cultures.⁶ Bartley maintains that a moral being is one who can think and reflect on the course of his action.⁷ The propagation of human rights in the world caused the minister of Secondary Education in Cameroon to promote such rights and wants Cameroon system of education should be like that of Europe and America. She fails to implement a system which goes with the Cameroonian culture.

¹. Nelson Shang, *Studying Philosophy: A Bright Idea*, Generis Publishing, 2023, 23.

². Valentine Ngalim et Nelson Shang, *Critical Thinking in Education: Introduction to the Philosophy of Education in the African Context*, Bamenda, 2022, 1-27.

³. STA Law Firm, *International Perspectives On Juvenile Justice*, <https://www.mondaq.com>, 29/07/2023, 2:12PM.

⁴. Bryan A. Garner, *Black Law Dictionary*, 871.

⁵. United Nation, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, Art 1, 20 November 1989.

⁶. J. DREIER, *Contemporary Debates in Moral Theory*, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, London, 2006, 4.

⁷. W. BARTLEY, *Morality And Religion*, Macmillan And Co. University Press, Glasgow, 1971, 1.

In Cameroon, the child learns with a cane. The cane is a formative punishment and instills or reminds the students of moral values. This human right of the child and the European method of education is human condemnation in Cameroon. The problem of applying laws in Cameroon without considering the culture of the people is causing us not to see the future consequences that will emerge in the society. This shows that Cameroon secondary schools have deleted ethics, moral studies, religious studies and moral education from their educational system which is the heart of formation of juvenile in schools. The biological determinants of adolescences are universal; however, the defining characteristics of each adolescent may vary across time and culture. Most secondary school students fall within the adolescent age. This could account for a general perpetration and practice of juvenile delinquency in Cameroon Secondary schools. Juvenile delinquency is a term commonly used in academic literature to describing antisocial behaviors committed by teenagers/juveniles. In another sense, it is a word used in defining the criminal conduct or criminal activities of a person below 18 years. When these same conducts are perpetrated by adults, we talk of crime or social ills. Juvenile delinquency has been a newcomer in our contemporary Cameroon schools. Let us cite some acts of moral decadence in Cameroon schools; on the 14th day of January 2020, a 15 years old student of quartrème (Form 3), stabbed his mathematics teacher to death, Njoni Thakounté Maurice, at GBHS Nkolbisson (Crtv.cm/202/01- horror at GBHS Nkolbisson). This act shows that the student has no respect of human life and is not aware that no one has the right to take another man's life since life is a gift. On the 10 of November 2022, 25 students of the Technical High School in Samilima were surprised by the police in the middle of a "sex party" in a house, during school hours. The students lost the sense of the secret where they do not respect the serenity of the citadel of learning by performing sexual acts meant for two persons who have come to age and such act is private to the two and not to groups. Students need to be aware that sex is not meant for juveniles in Cameroon. On October 22, 2021, 17 students of Government

Bilingual High School Mendong-Yaounde, were caught in a room having a sex party. This shows how our juveniles are excited with the practice of sex and are doing it in a wrong way. In such situation, what really went wrong and how can we redress the situation? Its fundamental cause emanate from peer pressure of the kind of friends the juveniles interact with in and out of school. Parents need to check the friends of each juvenile. On November 11 2021, nine students of a private secondary school in Douala, were arrested in an orgy process at Makepe Misoké neighborhood. After consuming alcohol in excess, they are said to have watched pornography videos before doing the act in school uniform. In January 2024, many students were injured during the stampede at Lycee Bilingue d'Etouge-Ebe. The students were late and rush to enter the gate which was closed and this act caused massive destructions of properties. The taken away of the cane from the teachers have caused the students to be lazy and have taken away the spirit of consciousness from them. They now do what they like since they are aware that they cannot be punished or corrected by the teachers with the use of canes. Many other Secondary school juveniles in major towns like Bafoussam, Kribi, Garoua have been apprehended perpetrating criminal conducts, to wit: drug abuse, assault against fellow schoolmates, commercialization of drugs like marijuana, aggression against teachers, ad infinitum. The acts of juveniles portray moral decadence in the society. The juveniles fail to uphold sound morality in the society. Society has therefore pondered on the reason underlying the rampant surge in juvenile Delinquency in the Cameroon Secondary school Milieu.

Reasons for The Rampant Surge in Criminal Behavior by Juveniles in Cameroon Secondary Schools

Our lives are tilted towards a universal consent. The universal consent is the foundation of our morality. The universal consent is to form a fundamental character which follows the laws of nature. Morality is strengthening by the laws of

nature.⁸ The task of the teacher is to form the juveniles to moral person in the society. But different cultures have promoted the moral decadence noticed in Cameroon Educational system. Here, "Culture" refers to the perceptual, cognitive, and evaluative behavior of a people.⁹ With this definition in mind, the implication therein is that culture plays a great role in the formation of a child as dissatisfactory in some cultures. There is an adage that "Today's children are Tomorrow's Citizens".¹⁰ This adage portrays a good moral conduct that every young citizen is supposed to emulate in order to become a great personality tomorrow. Despite that, these juveniles who are expected to be future leaders of our society are the ones destroying the society. In spite of what is said, what becomes of the statement "if gold can rusts, what then iron will do."¹¹ This statement speaks a lot to the mind of the people and those in charge of education. In Cameroon, we come to witness that some of the wildest crimes are committed by juvenile, who are the supposed leaders of tomorrow. Many factors contributed to the building of their criminal personality and pushing them to committing grave crimes. Some of such include;

1- Social factors:

The interaction of people in the same environment and that of different environments plays a pivotal role in the life of a juvenile. Their friends play a great role in their formation journey due to the fact that they introduced them to social ills in the society which leads them to crimes. The social factor includes a broad range of social and family influences that builds in juveniles a criminal character. One of the main caused of juvenile delinquency is broken homes. One can consider a

broken home as that which one or both parents are separated from the child as a result of divorce, work, serious health problems, and mutual agreement to stay apart. It is very important for parents to educate and interact with their children.¹² Broken home is a serious caused to juvenile delinquency in Cameroon. A child from a broken home is affected socially and psychologically. When a home is broken for the listed reasons, it might leave an impact on the growth of the child and thus making him to develop a criminal personality. Parents who stop showing their parental love and control towards their children, opens them vulnerable to anti-social behaviors which will be introduce to them by their friends from home environment or the school environment.¹³ The parents are to teach their children some crimes which are against the law. The presence of parents in the home is not self-sufficient for the right moral upbringing of juveniles because, parents who have antisocial and criminal conducts can directly or indirectly influence the conduct of their young children.¹⁴ Juveniles are quick to copy the bad examples of their parents. For instance; violent parent would always ignite the deeply embedded violence in their youngster, a perverted mother would always influence her children towards becoming promiscuous, directly or indirectly. This indicates that some parents are responsible for the predicaments of their children. They bestowed all sort of evil spirits in them by the types of lifestyles they introduce to them. One can consider them to be the bridge moral decadence in the society.

Another category of social factor is the influence of social media. This makes students to learn all kinds of deviant behaviors such as; pornography, assault against persons, drug abuse, sex party and

⁸. Asongwe Pride Tabifor et Al., *Substance: The Foundation to Aristotle's Metaphysics*, Social Science and Humanities Journal, Vol. 08, 34737, <https://doi.org/10.18535/sshj.v8i03.975>, 02/04/2024.

⁹ Cfr. G. O. LANG, "Culture," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia* Vol. 4, 522-532.

¹⁰. Cheryle Sally, *Quote's and Writings*, <https://images.app.goo.gl/881cMPgngNt6zWE28>, 29/07/2023, 6:03PM.

¹¹. Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, George Routledge and sons, London, 1867, 7-27.

¹². Carol Watson, *Shock-Responsive Social Protection in the Sahel: Niger, Maurotania and Senegal*, Brighton: Intitute of Development Studies, DOI: 10.19088/IDS.2023.038, 26/07/2023, 3-32.

¹³. Pamela Nyawo, "Law South African Mothers Living in Poverty and the COVID-19 Pandemic" in P.E.R, 19/04/2023, 1-27.

¹⁴. Temba Mathebula, "Transitioning Old Order Mining Rights into New Mining Rights: A Critical Analysis" in P.E.R Journal, 19/04/2023, 1-19.

prostitution. It happens because social media beautifies the practices of pervasive conducts thereby leading juveniles to conclude that it is a smart and courageous thing to be defiant. Also, bad companies stemming from peer pressure, influence of members in the same neighborhood and other companionship have a major impact on a juvenile's behavior. If they are into bad companionship, they are led into committing crimes. If the child joins a bad companionship or group, it might lead to a change in attitude of the child and thus exposing him to criminal activities.¹⁵ Therefore, parents should avoid violent activities in front of their children. Also, they need to teach their children who minors are and good moral values so that they can copy as they grow older. This will prevent the high rate of juvenile delinquency in Cameroon secondary schools.

2- Personal factors:

Mental instability and emotional imbalance are also roots of juvenile Delinquency. Juveniles who often feel rejected or having the feeling of being considered as outcast by friends, family and the community would normally be involved in antisocial behaviors.¹⁶ This happens as such because it lures them into psychological trauma that further pushes them to engage in drug addiction and drug consumption, aggression, rape and mass shooting. Studies have shown that most juvenile who perpetrated the gun violence in America suffered from psychological trauma that led them to act the way they acted.¹⁷ This personal causes leads to emotional problems such as; jealousy and Inferiority complex. Poverty and the inability of a juvenile to have their basic needs satisfied, expose them to the vulnerability of juvenile Delinquency. For example, most juveniles in Secondary schools become agents of drug

trafficking simply as a result of the high need for money.¹⁸ This could have been avoided if their needs were well catered for by their parents and guardians.

3- The Authority in Charge:

In thinking about the proper relationship between the individual, the teacher and the society one inevitably confronts issues and problems of justice. It is common to think of justice in terms of crimes and punishment (retribution) alone. But we can also think of justice in terms other than retribution. In fact, in a larger sense, justice deals with distribution, that is, questions and issues relating to how things should be allocated among individuals given the relative scarcity of a society's resources. The distribution may involve wealth or goods, privilege and power. This question of distributive justice cannot be considered as an antiquated piece in the museum of philosophical ideas. Justice is designed principally to protect and respect the rights of the individual. Individuals in a state with rights which are non-violable for whatever reason and by whosoever are causing chaos in the country. The school authorities center on this to enforce the rights of the students. This singular act has caused many principals to talk to teachers as if they are kids and even insults them in front of the juveniles. If a teacher who is a formator, an informant and a transformer and one who helps the child to feel needed and feel better in school is abused in front of those he is forming and instilling moral values is disregarded, then how do we expect the juveniles to accord them such respects. This act(s) by administrators is slowing the burning teaching zeal in the teachers.

Also, the pursuit of our daily goods, the common good must be prioritized over and above the individual good, for the good of the whole is better

¹⁵. Zaida Essop, "Children's Right to Education versus their Right to Religion and Culture in South Africa: With Specific Reference to the Wearing of a Headscarf in South African School" in Per Journal, 19/04/2023, 1-28.

¹⁶. Raheel, "The Influence of Reasonableness in Determining Delictual or Tort Liability for Emotional Distress or Mental Harm in American and French Law" in Per Journal, 19/04/2023, 5-23.

¹⁷. Raheel, "The Influence of Reasonableness in Determining Delictual or Tort Liability for Emotional Distress or Mental Harm in American and French Law" in Per Journal, 19/04/2023, 5-23.

¹⁸. Willie Shumba, "Towards the African Economic Community: Legal and Historical Perspectives" in Per Journal, 19/04/2023, 7-21.

than the good of the part. The common good in education is the moral values instill in the children by the teachers and not the students. With this in mind, one begins to wonder whether the minister's theory to eradicate punishment in schools can guarantee an atmosphere where the common good could be sought and what the possible effects could be, given that more stress is placed on the individual's rights rather than on the good of all. The minister is destroying the culture to implement another culture in the name of human right. In the culture of maintenance, we can modify by maintaining without destroying in order to implement a new one. It is important we consider future implications. The new instructions from the minister are giving excess freedom, liberty and rights to the students. Tomorrow, it will be beyond our control. Let us imagine a situation where students organized a sex party and in the course of the party there are more boys than the girls; some of the boys engaged into anal sex and are definitely caught by a teacher. The teacher cannot punish the students with the used of the cane. He or she reports to the school authority that will be at a quagmire and a state of confusion. The juvenile is dismissed and the parents are not aware of the real situation. Some years ahead, the only child of a parent comes telling them that he has a fellow man as a fiancée then we will understand the meaning of the cane in our culture and then understand the view of human right implemented which is against our culture. At this point, we will realize that the cobra or viper we brought home and was pampering has sting us and we are suffering from the venom. Now, we are all observing the situation in our educational system and no one is offering a word but tomorrow we will all drink our own poison as stated in the analogy of the viper. Today, students are hailed and given titles who challenged constituted authorities. Not all claps are applauses like we will fall in the story

of the baby mosquito and the mother. Let us be just in our decisions or instructions as authorities in charge of education bearing in mind that history will not forget your names. In all, justice passes the test of valuing the dignity of the human person.¹⁹ Justice should bring about obedience, adequate collaboration from the students who are ready to abide to rules and regulations setup and handed. To be disciplined, obedient, orderly and respectful is the code of conduct. This is the system of Cameroon education.

Man is endowed with 'natural rights' and these rights may not be violated by whosoever and for whatsoever reason. Nozick in his own words, he says:

Individuals have rights and there are things no person or group may do to them without violating their rights. So, strong and far reaching are these rights that they raise the question of what, if anything, the state and its officials may do, how much room do individual's rights leave for the state...?²⁰

In answering these questions, one can drive towards a deliberate turn in the direction of libertarianism. A state that will not violate the individual's rights is justified. Now, given that rights can be violated, neglected or overridden²¹ without voluntary consent from subjects, protection becomes necessary. How then could these rights be protected or enforced?

There is another option which is contrary to the idea of empowering the state in order to enable it enforce the rights of the individual:

An individual may himself enforce his rights, defend himself, exact compensation and punish (or at least try his best to do so). Others may join with him in his defense, at his call. Groups of individuals may form mutual protective

¹⁹. Libertarianism is a political conservative position which presses free enterprise and individual rights to an extreme, relegating government to a role purely subservient to individual (as opposed to societal) interests. L. MILLER, *Questions That Matter-An Invitation To Philosophy*, McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc, New York 1996, 527.

²⁰. R. NOZICK, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, New York 1974, ix.

²¹. In June 1814, the people of the highlands of Strathnaver in Scotland were subjected to legal eviction from their ancestral home. Cfr. J. PREBBLE, *The Highland Clearances*, Penguin Books, London 1963, 14.

associations: all will answer the call of any member for defense or the enforcements of his rights... In union there is strength.²²

These protective associations cancel any reason for the institution of an extensive state on the grounds that it is necessary in order to protect and enforce the individual's rights. The state and authorities in charge of education needs to protect the rights of the teachers and grant them the respect they are entitled to rather than enforcing the rights of juveniles in schools which are promoting moral decadence. Many authorities are the center of monopoly and force in schools where they do not dialogue with their teachers. The authorities are the center of brutality and a pest to teachers. Their tyrant nature has caused many teachers to be dormant even at staffs meeting, seminars or other activities. The teacher's preferred to be silent or feared not to be sacked from the school. In fact, the state always monopolizes and uses coercion to enforce and protect rights. It also punishes (the use of coercion) those who violate this monopoly. In punishing, the state violates the individual's rights and so there is no right an individual will violate in punishing that the state will not also violate when punishing.²³Hence, these crucial facets of the state constitute the subject of the individualist anarchists' condemnation of the state as immoral. The libertarian system will require no or less coercion to enforce rights than other systems, since it takes precautions not to enter into people's affairs without their consent. A cogent argument which has stood the test of time in the debate of the legitimacy of the existence of the state is that the state is the sole instrument that can ensure distributive justice. The state needs to consider the law on education which prohibits punishments in schools by teachers. Still, if such law is not considered, the moral decadence will be in a continuous increase and teachers will be force to keep traveling out of the country for fear not to be killed by their own students. School authorities should distribute justice and also enhance certain

rights over students by teachers in order to reduce the rate of juvenile delinquency in schools.

4- Human Formation:

The formation of children and students should be considered a great priority. Both parents and schools need to form children physically, morally and intellectually. The lack of such formation at home has cause many juveniles to be influenced by bad friends. Parents need to make their children their best of friends and playmate so that they will be able to know what is going on within their children. The first discipline masters are parents. If you are not then you fall short of qualities of good parents. In recent times, we noticed that parents preferred to give their children (students) money and food than buying them a novel to read. Such act is promoting laziness in the students. Sometimes, parents even instill in their children certain corrupt values that they turned to practice in school. A child prefer not to prepare for examination and hopes to get makes from the teacher(s) through corrupt means like bribing the teacher or having sex with the teacher in exchange for marks. From these, it is important for parents to give a solid formation to their children at home. This can be done through the use of the cane which will remind them of the right way. On the other hand, the school is a center of formation. The school continues the formation of parents. The teachers ignite in the students certain discipline with the use of the cane. The power of the teacher is the cane as it commands respects and a means of instruction. Taking away the cane is promoting indiscipline and laziness in the students. In schools, juveniles need to be taught subjects that will form them to be an integral person or personality in the society. Most of the schools in Cameroon focus in the intellectual life of students and forget the human formation of the students and that is why they fall into more crimes. The following are responsible;

Let us begin by asking a question: Is love an art? If yes, then it requires knowledge and effort. Love is the foundation and the bedrock of children which

²². R. NOZICK, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, 12.

²³. *Ibid*, 23.

when neglected or suppressed only help to retard human growth. Most people see the problem of love primarily as that of being loved, rather than that of loving. Hence, the problem for many people is how to be lovable and in pursuit of this aim they follow several paths: success, riches and making oneself attractive. Of such an attitude Erich Fromm declares that “What most people in our culture mean by being lovable is essentially a mixture between being popular and having sex appeal.”²⁴ This notion is the rampant rise of juvenile delinquency in schools. This is exactly what the French culture considers as love, “the pursuit and achievement of pleasure”²⁵ which is not an African or Cameroonian culture. However, it is another type of the displacement of love.²⁶ Love for its own sake is that love which is a principle of motion directed towards the end, which is the thing loved.²⁷ Parents must love their children for love’s own sake, and so treat them as those with absolute value.²⁸ The lack of love leads to moral decadence in the society by juvenile

Freedom always has a negative and positive side: the absence of external constraints and the presence of opportunities for choice. As there are many kinds of constraints and choices so too are there types of freedom. However, freedom is not primarily the absence of constraints but the presence of opportunities to participate in the decisions that affect one’s life, and supporting framework that can make love and freedom possible.²⁹ Thus, freedom should be seen as shaping one’s actions to conform to an ideal as against acting without constraints. This means that the individual is not blocked from what ought to be done. It is the duty of parents, therefore, to see that children do the ought for the level of freedom in a human act is directly proportional to the lucidity of

the intelligence and the dominion of the will. Flowing from this, one could see the need for parenting, as the intelligence and the will power of children need to be brought to actualization by the guidance of parents. To achieve this, parents must “make love and freedom possible,”³⁰ in their homes all for a successful realization of the child’s ultimate end: happiness. A home where children cannot talk to their parents freely can cause moral decadence because their children will be influence in school

Many children are into juveniles acts in schools due to restrictions at homes. The school is their arena of exercising their freedom. Home should be comfortable and not a living hell for children. With the levels of intelligence and the will found in children, parental guide is greatly needed especially in a world where “the hand of society’s moral preconceptions is much less felt, and with removal of its weight goes the removal of its support.”³¹ Parents are the only people who can give the necessary support. This, however, cannot be attained by an uncontrolled freedom or self-expression on the part of the child. For E. Schmiegeler, children need control, they need to feel a strong hand directing, restraining, limiting, and steadying them, for only in this way can they acquire real strength of will and character as opposed to stubbornness, wrong-headedness, and the lowest degree of desire.³² Parents must exercise their authority to provide a supporting framework to enable children “counteract the creed of softness which has become the characteristic of the modern world.”³³ However, restriction can be accepted when the purpose of it is worthwhile.³⁴ And it can only be worthwhile if and only if it is done in love, which remains the pivotal aspect of the child growth.

²⁴. E. FROMM, *The Art of Loving*, Unwin Paperbacks, London, 1978, 9.

²³. R. M. HAUGHTON, *Love*, Penguin Books Ltd., England 1970, 12

²⁶. *Ibid.*

²⁷ D. Q. MCINERNEY, *A Course in Thomistic Ethics, The Priestly Fraternity of Saint Peter Elmhurst*, Pennsylvania, 1997, 101.

²⁸. R. M. HAUGHTON, *Love*, 31

²⁹. I. G. BARBOUR, *Ethics in an Age of Technology*, Vol. 3, Harper San Francisco, Scotland 1991, Vol. 3, 51.

³⁰. R. M. HAUGHTON, *Love*, 31.

³¹. *Ibid.*, 30.

³². Cfr. E. SCHMEIDELER, *Your Child’s World*, The Paulist Press, New York, 1951, 75.

³³. Cfr. *Ibid.*

³⁴. R. M. HAUGHTON, *Love*, 29.

The Combat Against Juvenile Delinquency in Cameroon Secondary Schools

Juvenile delinquency is highly practiced in Cameroon secondary schools due to the fact that the children spend more time in school than home. To prevent juvenile delinquency, it requires a lot of effort on the part of the entire society because when the whole society contributes; then, there can be successful eradication of juvenile delinquency in our community. The prevention of juvenile delinquency is an essential part of crime prevention in the society.³⁵ By applying the legal, socially useful activities and adopting a humanistic orientation towards the criminogenic behaviors of young persons, is putting out a great chunk of crime in the community. This fight is carried by a diverse section of the social spectrum, to wit; the family, the school, the church and the society as a whole via the law, a manifestation of the general will.

1- The school and the fight against juvenile delinquency in Cameroon.

The school is a center of formation of character and the reshaping of personality. The school has a great role to play as far as the prevention of juvenile delinquency is concerned. It is a place where the juvenile spends most of his or her time; it is a place where the juvenile is being molded in preparation towards adulthood; it is a place where the juvenile constantly receives diverse ideas on a variety of issues regarding life and the school is a formation center. The school environment can either make or mar a juvenile as a person. To combat this phenomenon, school authorities have to set up a rigid discipline department, regular search on students has to be introduced in all schools, the meticulous screening of students before admission, the recruitment of guidance counselors in schools, sensitization programs against delinquency has been adopted by schools, the dismissal of deviant

students should be taken as a measure, and ad infinitum. Every child has rights and dignity that ought to be respected either by the parents or the state. These rights and dignity must be taken into account when laws are made and passed concerning children. On their part, parents must do everything possible to protect the rights and dignity of children. Underscoring this point, Rosmini maintains that “the parents have full domination over the child with the exception of his personal dignity, which is essentially free and seen as an end coming not from the parents but the Creator.”³⁶ Besides the child’s personal dignity, the child has an absolute right over its own body³⁷ but since the child does not immediately make use of its own faculties, the parents can make use of the child to his/her advantage without doing him/her harm. It is also the duty of civil society to maintain and protect, not pervert, impede or destroy the rights, which, according to natural and rational law, belong to every single individual.³⁸ When one looks around, all one sees are government laws that threaten the very dignity and rights of children in particular and man in general. Sexual liberalism is propagated under the canopy of sex education; the use of contraception and the abortion course are threats to humanity especially to children. This is a contradiction to what Plato says of laws: “The fundamental purpose of our laws was this, that the citizens should be as happy as possible, and in the highest degree united in mutual friendship.”³⁹ According to James Dobson, the task of forming healthy sexual attitudes and understanding in children should be retained in the home. Unfortunately, there is a growing trend for all aspects of education to be taken from the hands of parents, particularly in the matter of sex education. But man fails to see that the best approach is that which begins in early childhood and extends through the years, according to the policy of

³⁵. An understanding of patterns and causes of juvenile delinquency as expressed by secondary school students, <https://we.researchkey.net>, 29/03/2023, 1:34pm.

³⁶. A. ROSMINI, *The Philosophy of Right, Rights in the Family*, Vol.5, D. CLEARLY (trans.) et alii, Rosmini House, Durham 1971, 204.

³⁷. Ibid., 1459, 175

³⁸. Cfr. A. Rosmini, *The Philosophy of Right, Rights in the Family*, Vol.5, 1553.

³⁹. PLATO, *The Laws*, 743C – D.

openness, frankness, and honesty.⁴⁰ Only parents can provide this lifetime training. On the other hand, the instructions to schools by the minister of secondary education to permit students who are pregnant to come to school are something which needs to redress. This instruction is permitting more pregnancies in schools through sex party. The U.S Supreme Court's decision prohibiting prayer in schools caused teachers and administrators to be extremely conscious about any subject having religious overtones. But again relevant sex education cannot but involve the obligation to teach moral attitudes, and even religion. And as Dobson further suggests, "These components should never be separated as long as the issue of morality is considered important; sexual sophistication without sexual responsibility is sexual disaster."⁴¹ Today, society offers children no support in this regard and the child very much needs support. This support can only be given by the parents.⁴²

Any activity that is directed towards the care of the child implies some degree of acceptance of the child by the parents. There are unexpressed feelings of acceptance even when the evidence is hard to find. The level of acceptance is judged by different kinds of provision and they can be summarized as material needs and non-material needs. The material needs are those upon which life depends: food, clothing, and shelter, protection from injury and disease, and treatment and care of injuries or illnesses that might occur. Without these provisions, no child could survive.⁴³ The emotional needs of children; but we can only afford to emphasize on this because we take for granted that the material needs are met. Love as a non-material need is given to a child as a right and not as a reward for being a particular kind of child or for a particular kind of behavior,⁴⁴ as when we talk of the mother's love for the child, we can recognize

the general potential of mothering or parental feelings, which is present in all human beings. The child is relatively more active than the adults are and has lesser capacity for sitting still or for being quiet. On the contrary, in every family the ideal child seems to be one who is almost silent, and above all one who is uninterested in other children.⁴⁵ This is actively frustrating the child's emotions, which can only lead to an inability to relate with others in the society properly. Such attitudes fail to meet the child's emotional needs. For a child to develop a healthy relationship with people in the society, he or she must be aware of the importance of his existence both in the family and in the society. By all means the child should know he/she is wanted, loved and cherished both by his parents and the society. A child who is despised both in the family and the society does not see any reason to live or to relate with others in a loving way. The sense of rootedness or belonging is expressed in both parental and societal love and care. Every effort should be made to build up in the child a sense of worthiness.⁴⁶

From time immemorial, all human societies have had as their prerogative the education of children for adulthood. Such education is intended to provide vocational training.⁴⁷ Giving children objectives in life enables them to be independent, to become parents someday, to attain selfhood. Children need "support that will enable them to find their feet and develop properly."⁴⁸ It is not enough to put children under long hours of work or studies because we want "to prepare them for a financially successful future."⁴⁹ Children need clear values that cannot be taken away by the contemporary social upheaval. They get confused, especially when they hope to acquire a set of values according to which they can live in a world that is seen as *turned upside down*. Children need

⁴⁰. J. DOBSON, *Dare to Discipline*, Tyndale House Publishes, Illinois 1984, 148.

⁴¹. *Ibid.*

⁴². Cfr. R. M. HAUGHTON, *Love*, 30.

⁴³. Cfr. J. H. KAHN, *Human Growth*, Pergamon Press, New York 1971, 89.

⁴⁴. *Ibid.*, 93.

⁴⁵. Cfr. R. M. HAUGHTON, *Love*, 10.

⁴⁶. Cfr. E. SCHMEIDELER, *Your Child's World*, 127.

⁴⁷. Cfr. G. A. BENNAARS. *Ethics, Education and Development*, East African Educational Publishers, Nairobi 1993, 41.

⁴⁸. R. M. HAUGHTON, *Love*, 30.

⁴⁹. *Ibid.*, 11.

standards, which are provided first within the family and then the community.

While one sees in some societies a higher standard of living and a higher standard of loving, it is also true that there are still children who are grossly deprived of appropriate love opportunities. However, we are very much concerned with those who are grossly deprived of love which is man's greatest desire. In fact, of all the elements that go to make up the child's world, the most important is love. Without love, there is no genuine home atmosphere and the absence of love creates a void in the child's life which subsequent events cannot wholly fill.⁵⁰ This need must be moderated for a proper development of the child. Commenting on love, Benedict XVI says:

One of the deepest forms of poverty a person can experience is isolation. If we look closely at other kinds of poverty, including material forms, we see that they are born from isolation, from not being loved or from difficulties in being able to love.⁵¹

Amidst the modern tempest, the above quote reminds us that love remains the only remedy man can give to children together with a sense of discipline. Love is what matters.⁵² Children need love to be able to develop the ability to love. If it is true that man is his thoughts, then it is the duty of parents to cultivate in the minds and hearts of children that inner voice and attitude of love. Children need freedom not to do what they want or like but as a necessity for proper development. Hans Jonas asserts that the development and increase of freedom constitutes the principle of all progress in the evolution of life.⁵³ In his emotional life, the child needs freedom to express his feelings in relation to the individuals closely associated with him by family ties.⁵⁴ The discipline framework provided within the family and the

community should be appropriate to the age of the child and the general culture. The framework should not be so severe that the child is inevitably bound to go beyond it. Freedom is thus to act responsibly and not freedom to achieve and advance solely by personal effort.⁵⁵ For Immanuel Kant, freedom is a property of all rational beings and we could not prove it to be actually a property of ourselves or of human nature unless we are free.⁵⁶

No parent wishes to have a child that will be a disappointment or a cause for despair. When it happens, parents painfully search their consciences for some explanations. The question of child discipline is an intricate and difficult one. Yet upon it may depend in no small measure, the feature well-being of children.⁵⁷ Child discipline cannot be reduced to rule-of-thumb methods. Discipline should never be taken to mean punishment. It is an external control that has for its ultimate purpose the establishment of self-control.⁵⁸ The modern child is in need of discipline, a discipline that is neither extremely rigid nor excessively lax. The discipline is enforce with the cane.

Haughton categorically states that "harshness to children, an excess of discipline and the restriction of natural childish pleasures and activities would be the things that would adversely affect the child's emotional development."⁵⁹ This is not the school culture of Cameroon but that of the West. On the other hand, a discipline that is too weak and easy-going is much more common today than the rigid type. The spirit of 'do as you please' has infiltrated our homes and the modern society. And all one gets from such a spirit is social disaster. Children need discipline; they need to feel a strong hand directing, restraining, limiting and steadying them. Thus, can they acquire real strength of will and character as opposed to stubbornness and

⁵⁰. Cfr. E. SCHMEIDELER, *Your Child's World*, 12.

⁵¹. BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate* (2006), n .16.

⁵². R.M. HAUGHTON, *Love*, 31.

⁵³. Cfr. H. JONAS, *Mortality and Morality*, Northwestern University Press Evanston, Illinois 1996, 66.

⁵⁴. Cfr. J. A. KAHN, *Human Growth*, Pergamon Press, New York 1971, 94.

⁵⁵. Cfr. R. M. HAUGHTON, *Love*, 27.

⁵⁶. Cfr. I. KANT, *Critique of Practical Reason*, Longmans, London 1967, ⁶ 8: 60.

⁵⁷. Cfr. E. SCHMEIDELER, *Your Child's World*, 69.

⁵⁸. Cfr. *Ibid.*, 70.

⁵⁹. R. M. HAUGHTON, *Love*, 21.

disobedience. Disobedience is not to be condoned on the grounds that children must develop their individuality. Plato tells us that “he that obeys shall be free of all penalty; but he that disobeys shall be punished.”⁶⁰ In Cameroon schools, the cane is the tool that reminds students of obedience.

2- The Family and the fight against juvenile delinquency in Cameroon.

Nature has generously equipped most animals with a fear of things that could be harmful to them. Their survival depends on recognition of a particular danger in time to avoid it. Man is no exception. Man becomes excited about sudden dangers that confront him. However, if a threatening problem arises very slowly, man often allows himself to “boil” in happy ignorance.⁶¹ This blindness to gradual disasters is best illustrated by the way we have ignored the turmoil that is spreading systematically through the young generation. Suppose the parents of yesterday could make a brief visit to our world to observe the conditions that prevail among our children, certainly, they would be dismayed and appalled by the juvenile problems that have been permitted to take root and spread widely.⁶² Character formation which gives the child the disposition to act in love should be the ultimate goal of both the parents first and then the society. Plato shades more light on this when he says: “to his children it behooves a man to bequeath modesty, not money in abundance.”⁶³

In the world today in which the society now sees no difference between good and evil, where immorality has been embraced as right and proper, where laws are passed on the rights of sexual freedom, and liberty granted to so-called homosexual unions, parents are the only people who can help children develop firm and unshakable

character. And the most effective way is not by admonition, but by plainly practicing throughout one’s (parents) own life the admonitions which one gives to them.⁶⁴ Parents need to teach children the sense of responsibility. Responsibility in respecting the dignity of others and the capacity of giving up immediate gains for an eternal one.⁶⁵ This can only come about when the parents have that sense of responsibility themselves. Children need to be given a sense of pride and to be told of the beauty they possess inside.

It can never be stressed enough how important it is first and foremost, for parents to have a good relationship with their children. A good relationship means that parents care enough to be interested in them, that they share with them especially by giving them their time, the support they need, correct them when necessary, challenge them and give them the lead by example.⁶⁶ This obligation calls for constant alertness and unending patience, for a sacrificial living, and an unwavering sense of responsibility. It calls for the marshalling of all the resources of mind, hand and heart that God has given parents. It calls for spiritual aid to conquer the social conditions that seek to defeat the purposes of God in order to write their dreadful story in the physical, mental, and moral disaster of little children.⁶⁷

The power of parents over children is derived from the fact that they brought them into the world and it is their duty to bring them up. Commenting on this, Aristotle insinuates, “it is as natural for a father to rule his children, and forefathers those descended from them, as for a king to rule his subjects.”⁶⁸ The authority given them is to perform their duty effectively. It is not for them to lord it over children. It is rather to protect, nurture, and provide for children. It is not an authority of

⁶⁰. PLATO, *The Laws*, 800A.

⁶¹. Cfr. J. DOBSON, *Dare to Discipline*, Tyndale House Publishes, Illinois 1984, 6.

⁶². *Ibid.*

⁶³. PLATO, *The Laws*, 729B.

⁶⁴. Cfr. PLATO, *The Laws*, 729B – C.

⁶⁵. Cfr. E. G. NEISSER, *Your Child’s Sense of Responsibility*, The Public Affairs Committee, U.S.A., 1969, 43.

⁶⁶. P. SIUNG, “Encouraging and Cherishing Teenagers,” in L. POWER (ed.), *Parenting in the Nineties*, Nurture Press, Booter Town Avenue, Ireland 1998, 7.

⁶⁷. Cfr. E. SCHMEIDELER, *Your Child’s World*, XIII.

⁶⁸. ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1161a2.

deciding the life and death of children. In fact, parents are warned not to frighten children; they should keep an atmosphere of comradeship, friendship, mutual help and the common interest.⁶⁹ All men need heroes, people whom they honor for outstanding qualities and whose accomplishments give them some guide. With the child, Clayton Barbeau writes, “his first heroes will be his own parents, particularly the father, he who holds the position of authority in the family.”⁷⁰ The parents’ place as heroes in the life of their children is one that rests on positive leadership of the home, especially the father. If he has allowed his business interests to cut him off from his family, “then his children will seek a hero elsewhere. The child does this because he needs an authority and that guide must be a person.”⁷¹ Contemporary parents and children are faced with real hazard as some government laws are passed on the rights of children that threatened the authority of parents and the dignity of the child. Today, one observes, a framework which emphasizes the competing interests favoring an increased autonomy for children at an earlier age than traditionally has been the case. One sees an increase state intervention into the lives of children without the authority of the parents, thus infringing into the power of parents to control the education of their children.⁷² We do not advocate for absolute parental authority; of course, it is the place of the state to intervene in cases of parental brutality. But what we decry is the neglect of parents’ rights as the first and foremost educators of children.

The effort put in by the school to erase juvenile delinquency becomes useless, if the family fails to play its own role. The family is the best way towards combatting of juvenile delinquency and to tackle criminal conducts of juveniles. The family interactions play an indispensable role in shaping the personality of a juvenile. The family should inculcate core moral values in their youngster, but

also build in them the spirit of patriotism. The family should put out rules and regulations to be respected by every kid at home. The family should also watch over the personal affairs of their kids, and spy on them from time to time. The family should permit genuine criticisms on their children’s behaviors, especially when made by close family members, religious leaders and school authorities. The family should watch over the categories of friends kept by their kinds, and if possible must try to know such friends personally. The family should also sternly discipline and reprimand the kids whenever they go astray, this should be done without any fear of hurting their feelings (See proverb (29.17)

3- The Criminal Law and the fight against juvenile delinquency in Cameroon.

When a child comes to know he is loved for what he is and that this love of his parents for him is unconditional, such love conditions his thoughts and actions in a kind of responsive love. When parental love is there, it is like a blessing; and if it is not there, it is as if all beauty had gone out of life and there is nothing a child can do to create it.⁷³ When a child does not feel that inner voice of parental love that says, “I need you because I love you,”⁷⁴ he or she becomes miserable, feels alienated and worthless. This feeling of alienation leaves a void in the child’s heart which he must fill, and he does this by associating with his peers who claim to love him. These peers are often those who like him have been denied the love of parents. False ideologies, criminality, prostitution, suicide, and other anti-social behavior are the result. Thus, the lack of parental love leads to children with no human feelings and probably evil in their intentions.⁷⁵ It is to no small measure that if there is any society that can call itself a natural society, the family has the best claim to this title. It has existed from time immemorial. That marriage is considered a natural institution is no human

⁶⁹. R.M. HAUGHTON, *Love*, 21.

⁷⁰. C. BARBEAU, *The Head of the Family*, Henry Regnery Company, Chicago 1961, 78.

⁷¹. *Ibid.*, 79.

⁷². S. DAVIS *et alii*, *Children’s Rights and The Law*, Lexington Books, Toronto 1987, 52.

⁷³. Cfr. E. FROMM, *Art of Loving*, 38.

⁷⁴. Cfr. E. Fromm, *Art of Loving*, 39.

⁷⁵. R.M. HAUGHTON, *Love*, 3.

convention. Aristotle explains that the friendship between husband and wife appears to be a natural instinct since man is a political creature, inasmuch as the family is an earlier and more fundamental institution than the state, and the procreation of offspring a more general characteristic. It is a privileged setting where everyone learns to give and receive love. Today, we find that the very institution of marriage and its traditional functions is widely questioned by some individuals and political forces in the society. However, what contemporary man fails to see is the fact that whatever attacks are made on the family affect the society. Moreover, with the advancement of science and technology, modern man seems to fail to recognize the fact that the family is an intermediate institution between individuals and society, and that nothing can completely take its place.⁷⁶ There is no known society without a family structure and the family remains an indispensable foundation for the society and a source of great security for children. The implication here is that modern man would not be able to overcome those anti-social behaviors unless the very institution of marriage and the family and their traditional functions are respected.⁷⁷ Juveniles are also targets of the criminal law. The fact that juveniles are still minors does not make them to be outside the sanctions of the penal code that prescribes crimes and punishments. A crime is an unlawful act committed by individuals against the criminal law. When such a criminal act is committed by a person below 18, it becomes juvenile delinquency. Examples of crimes include; murder, rape, theft, drug abuse, prostitution, assault, and ad infinitum. Like adults, young persons/juveniles have the inherent responsibility to be law-abiding. When the young person breaks the law he must be charged, prosecuted and sentenced like adults. A juvenile delinquent under Cameroonian law is every human being under the age of 18 who has committed a crime. However, Cameroonian law exempts a child under 10 years of age from criminal responsibility. This is done because of the

presumption of *doli incapax*. The Cameroon Penal code provisions "no criminal responsibility shall arise from acts or omissions of a person aged less than 10 years"(Article 80(1) of the Cameroon penal code). It goes further in providing that "minors between 10 and 14 years of age are criminally responsible but special measures would be taken against them" (Article 80(2) of the Cameroon penal code). To conclude on the issue of juvenile delinquency, it ends by providing; " minors between the ages 14 and 18 are criminally responsible but would benefit from mitigating excuse." (Article 80(3) of the Cameroon penal code). This is to the effect that only children that fall below the ages of 10 are somehow free from the heavy hands of the criminal law, juveniles between the ages 10 and 14 are criminally responsible, but they would be judged following a special procedure put in place by the criminal law through the criminal procedure code (See article 700 and subsequent of the Cameroon criminal procedure code). This procedure include amongst other things; the use of a special court, a special compositions (The composition must include a judge and two accessories), a special detention centre, (Juvenile delinquents between the ages 10-14 must be remanded or imprison in Boastal institutes) a special period for detention. Those juveniles who are between the ages; 14-18 years of age only benefit from legal mitigating excuse which are provided for by the penal code. This mitigating excuse is known as; minority excuse.

In the absence of a birth certificate of the child, his age shall be determined by a medical officer who shall issue a medical certificate of apparent age (Article 703(1) of the Cameroon Criminal Procedure Code). Where only the year of birth of a person is known, he shall be presumed to have been born on the 31st day of December of that year. This is a great cause because the medical personnel are not permitted to issue birth certificate at the point of birth at the hospital. A child is delivered but the mayor issued a birth certificate to the parents. Some parents goes for issuing of birth certificate of their

⁷⁶. BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate* (2006), n. 5.

⁷⁷. R. M. HARPER, *The Children We Deserve*, 69

children after some years causing a problem as one will not know the actual age of the child. Therefore, one cannot say for certain if the child is a juvenile or an adult.

Conclusion:

Every country in the world had faced the problem of juvenile delinquency. However, the problem of juvenile delinquency is much higher in developing countries like Cameroon. This is as such because of the numerous factors which come to play that affects the moral personality of young children. Despite the increase in criminal activities amongst youths in Cameroon schools, efforts have not been relented to put it out. This is the fundament task of the minister of Secondary Education Prof. Nalova Lyonga whose wish is that the deficiency attacking and affecting Cameroon Schools be eradicated at all cost so that Cameroonian Youths can be Civic in nature. In the present day, the level of waywardness in the school milieu is terrifying. Knives and other harmful tools are common in the schools. Today, drugs, sex party and other forms of moral decadence are common in schools. The era of today is different from that of years ago due to the fact that discipline was the core of the schools by teachers and administrators. The students were conscious but what actually happened to this consciousness of students. It is the implementation of the law by the minister of secondary education prohibiting punishments of students which gave them more rights than the teachers and the administrators. This act has caused school authorities not to play their role well and the government is dormant about the situation affecting our schools due the policies of the minister of secondary education. In disciplining a student today, you would hear, “you are not my mother or my father. You are not my elder brother or sister.” Are we going to allow anything deter us from engaging in the collective sanitation of the school milieu? Are we going to fold our arms and watch the situation get worse without adding our voices in fighting this moral decadence in our school milieu? The fight is a collective actions and our voices matter as they will create awareness and give power to those who are fully concern to

engaged and see to it that our schools are safe again. All stake holders need to go back to the drawing board to see how to ameliorate this high rate of moral decadence by juveniles in Cameroon. Finally, the law makers need to revisit and revise the law on education which has giving more rights to students than school administrators and teachers. If all these are considered, then our school milieu will be sound again and will become a citadel of learning and not a citadel of drugs consumptions and sex parties.

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