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The Value of Values

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Chapter One

The Value of Values

I. Conceptual Definition of Values

The English word VALUE comes from the Latin root “**valere**” which means “to be of worth; to be strong, to stand for something”. Value literally means “something that has a price, something precious, dear and worthwhile; something one is ready to suffer for and sacrifice, including readiness to die for if necessary”.

In casual language, Values are understood as something that adds quality to human life. The dictionary gives further meaning about value as something of ‘relative worth, utility or importance; degree of excellence, something as a principle or quality intrinsically valuable’.

Universally, values have come to be accepted as a “set of principles or standards of behavior regarded as desirable, important and held in high esteem by a particular society in which a person lives; and the failure to hold them results in blame, criticism or even outright condemnation”.

History records show that every human society hold certain traditions as culture and an accepted way of life, a practice and norm of behavior for the members of that particular society, held sacred and transmitted from generation to generation.

From the above, it could be said that without values, one would be floating like a piece of driftwood in the swirling waters of a river however exciting it may appear first. A life without proper values will become chaotic and disastrous. It will be like a boat without a rudder.

Of the various philosophical interpretations and hermeneutics around the subject, the following ideas retain place in virtually all cultures and societies when values are referred to namely:

- Values give meaning and strength to a person’s character and occupies a central place in one’s life;
- Values reflect one’s personal attitudes and judgments, decisions and choices, behavior and relationships, dreams and visions;

- Values influence the thoughts , feelings and actions of people;
- Values guide persons to do the right things;
- Values help human beings to act morally and be morally sound;
- Values give direction and firmness in life and give meaning to actions;
- Values give motivation for a person to live and act;
- Values identify a person, giving him name, face and character.

To guide our life in the right path and to embellish our behavior with good qualities, we need values. A life without proper values will become chaotic and disastrous. It will be like a boat without rudder. Values and Ethics are inter-related and often used inter-changeably. Ethics which are founded on values are necessary codes of human conduct. Ethics promotes harmonious life of integrity. It is also a general framework within which harmonious societal development is facilitated. Ethics deals with the integrated development of human personality. It touches the human person, human dignity and all the obligations that flow from the nature and dignity of human person in relation to oneself, others, community, society and the world. Ethics focuses the attention of people on the ultimate human goal which influences all good values to replace every evil value in the world.

From a global perspective, there is noticeable consensus and rejection of the world and its governance structures as it is currently experienced because many believe that it was meant to be different and much better. These worldwide challenges do not leave us in apathy or lethargy but challenge renewed, urgent and value-driven action to redeem humanity at this time.

Despite the many successes recorded against hunger, diseases and world poverty, the information in global connectivity and media communication, space travel and ability to feed over seven billion human beings daily with several technological achievements, there are other difficult challenges posed by wars and terror, a rise in global insecurity due to poverty and economic uncertainty; growing agitation for inclusion by many citizens leading to political turmoil and migrations in nations; the challenges and abuse of technology which today controls the human person and not the other way round; natural catastrophes and the climatic changes experienced in virtually all countries and continents due to the overuse of the earth's resources.. It is not that these problems are new but they seem to have assumed greater proportions and increased in their intensity.

The continuing disrespect for human life and the dignity of all persons and the seeming lack of Political Will and Value-Driven-Leadership to solve these problems pose urgent imperatives on the discipline of Ethics to call humanity to order. Like many have gradually realized, *“it is clear that the most important challenges humanity face are not simply political, economic or technical. They are rather Ethical, Moral and Spiritual. Our time and countries face fundamental questions of life and death”*.

In his recent address to the Pontifical academy for Life, Pope Francis characterizes these points with clear words:

“the study of the virtues in the ethics of life is a subject of academic interest which addresses an important message to contemporary culture: the good that man does is not the result of calculations or strategies, not is it the product of the genetic order or social conditionings, but it is the fruit of a well-disposed heart, of the free choice that tends to true good. Science and technology are not enough to do Good. Wisdom of the heart is necessary...” (Cf. Zenit, Vatican News Agency, 3rd March 2016, Vatican City).

Ancient African and Hebrew wisdom teach that “it is in the heart that both ‘Reason’ and ‘Will’ reside. The heart is the seat of decisions, of the way of thinking and acting. The heart, in sum, is the synthesis of humanity molded by the very hands of God” (Cf Genesis chapter 1;). The first nature to protect therefore so that it will bear fruit is our own humanity, so Pope Francis...

“We must give our humanity clean air of freedom and the vivifying water of truth; protect it from the poisons of egoism and life. Then on the terrain of our humanity, a great variety of virtues will be able to flower”.

2. The Value of Values

Human beings are described generally as social by their nature and desire to stay in society, not in isolation. Persons cannot grow or mature in isolation but need the influence of others to be fulfilled. As persons living in a society, human beings need to acquire certain values and manners which are essential for a respectable and successful life within that society and is generally accepted as norm for that social context. In simple language, values are *‘the rails that keep a train on track and help the train move smoothly, quickly and with direction’*.

Values are often transmitted through education. Education in itself is a key component of knowledge and the communication of skills, attitudes, values and behavior patterns that are desirable in a person both as an individual and as a member of society. Thus through education, the society seeks to preserve and promote its values. Through value education, we develop the social, moral, aesthetic and spiritual sides of a person, which are often not highlighted in formal education. In many countries, the government provides education policies which guide teachers and institutions of learning towards communicating set knowledge and principles to the young. These are part of the educational curriculum of studies set as standards for all teaching institutions.

Human beings naturally strive for the Good and all people according to Aristotle “*desire what brings happiness*”. Experience teaches that the only way for a person to grow to maturity is for that person to get involved in action, while trying to develop a personal relationship with others. This is why society in itself sets specific values, considered good manners as standards for its members. It measures compliance to these standards as right conduct and acceptable. Those who comply are regarded and rewarded. Those who do not comply are treated with disdain, punishment, rejection or even rejected and labelled accordingly.

To guide our life in the right path and to embellish our behavior with good qualities, we need values. Hence it is essential that we take time to reflect on them, identify and clarify them, question, evaluate, confirm or change them, in order to live a happy, productive and worthwhile life. People have to be trained to take a definite stand against forces of inhumanity of our times. People have to cultivate an awareness of higher and transforming values of life, lest they settle down with a mediocre contribution to society.

All over the globe, there is seeming agreement by parents, teachers, psychologists, scientists, pastors, sociologists and anthropologists that the young and even the adults and elderly are confused about their values and the entire basis of the value system in itself. People are confronted daily with value conflicts and dilemmas and are at a loss at how to cope with all these. Many young people are looking for meaning in their life, alongside searching for models and guides in order to understand their place in it and which decisions of life to take. The dramatic and far-reaching socio-cultural and technological changes affecting many traditional and modern societies make them vulnerable. In the light of all these, it is but natural that people are confused about proper and sound values.

Many young people openly reject some of the traditional values and question dogmatic beliefs held sacred for centuries. Often it happens that people do not find replacements for the traditional values and hence a kind of vacuum is created in their life. This is not desirable because in the absence of values, they have no principle or foundation on the basis of which they can face life situations and make choices and decisions.

Generally, there is a breakdown of traditional values without replacements, lack of role models, conflicting ideologies and double standards. There are new questions, new challenges, much doubt and disbelief, illusions and discontent; dreams and disenchantments. Cases of corruption at all levels exist and the traditional sense of modesty, decorum and decency including guilt and shame seem to diminish. Dark realities of oppression, social injustice, neglect and poverty increase in nations and people are at a loss of what to do about this. There are scandalous inequalities in the distribution of material resources, power and responsibility. The political elite are too far away and high to understand or even tackle these problems.

Societies struggle with the diminishing role of the family and parental responsibility; the rapid and uncontrolled influence of the means of mass communication in private life without having any opportunity to withstand the aggression; the greater degree of freedom and multiple choices enjoyed often without control; and a permissive society which tolerates everything.

This is where value education sets in. It fulfils the primary purpose of the inculcation of value in the minds and characters of the beneficiaries. The concept of Value inculcation is a training to question, explore, clarify and understand our own values, beliefs, attitudes and customs. In inculcating values, all human faculties such as knowing (head); feeling (heart); and doing (hand) play a role. Not only should people be enabled to know the right and the good, but also to feel the appropriate emotions and exercise their will to do the right thing. In other words, knowledge, ideas and concepts that are known are accepted, personalized and lived in daily life with conviction and commitment. The objectives of value inculcation include the following:

- To clarify values and analyze problems
- To analyze human development down the ages
- To achieve an approach to life
- To have concern for others

- To be critical and develop a critical consciousness
- To spell out good values and counter values
- To achieve a humanistic attitude
- To understand the relevance of ethical life

Through value education, we learn to sift, understand and finally decide for ourselves, the correct and noble values that should guide and shape us. Value education teaches us to preserve whatever is good and worthwhile, in what we have inherited from our culture. It helps us to accept and respect the attitude and behavior of those who differ from us. Value education does not mean value imposition or indoctrination. It is rather a help to develop proper values, attitudes, feelings, behavior patterns and moral character. It helps us to become fully human persons. Thus value education covers the entire domain of learning, developing rational thinking, educating the emotions and training the will – the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains.

3. Sources of Values and Kinds of Values

Values have their sources through human traditions, history and myths associated with humans. The primary source of values comes from the family where parents, relations, elders, teachers, peers and friends play a vital role. Secondly, documented materials communicate value. These are found in visuals, religions, customs, traditions and nations. Thirdly, values are sourced from co-curricula activities where young people grow in experience include such activities as the Scouts, Guides, red cross, Field Trips, Social services, sports and games all of which provide opportunities for sharing, solidarity and common ideals of value communication.

Fourthly, values emanate the Constitutions of all countries where the values and fundamental principles of state Policies are enunciated. These Constitutions mention such ideas as Unity, Freedom, Brotherliness, pursuit of Justice, equality, tolerance, humanism, compassion and harmony. Finally, through the various religions and traditions, values are sourced. The many rich religions of the world, including the monotheistic and polytheistic ones, the codified and oral traditions such as the African traditional religions all contain rich sources of values which are necessary for Life. Most of the values of religions emphasize Life, the respect and protection of life and the sacredness of life.

In describing the kinds of values that are universally considered basic and fundamentally acceptable, the following guideline assists the effort. There are broadly classified, four kinds of Values that fit into this category namely:

- **Personal values:** Such values that are desired and cherished by an individual, founded on personal faith and beliefs, irrespective of social relationships, and built on personal motivation and life's targets. Some examples of personal values are ambition, cleanliness, contentment, courage, creativity, determination, diligence, dedication to labour, discernment, excellence, honesty, hope, maturity, punctuality, self-control, self-motivation, simplicity,
- **Social values:** These refer to those values which are oriented towards others. These values are practiced and cherished because they link two or more persons beyond the person alone and are always practiced in relation to our neighbour, community, society, nation and the world. Some examples of social values are accountability, brotherhood, concern for environment, courtesy, dialogue, dutifulness, forgiveness, freedom, friendship, gratitude, hospitality, justice, love, magnanimity, patience, repentance, responsibility, service, sharing, sportsmanship, sympathy, team spirit, tolerance;
- **Moral and Spiritual values:** Under this category are such values that are related to an individual's character and personality conforming to what is right and virtuous. These values touch upon principles, duties, conduct and practice. Moral and spiritual values reveal a person's self-control, self-purification and knowledge. Quite often, moral values depict a person's spiritual convictions since morality and spirituality go hand in hand. Some examples of moral values are detachment, faith, loyalty, non-violence, obedience, prayer, purity, renunciation, truthfulness,
- **Behavioural values:** These refer to all good manners certified by society that are needed to make life joyous and successful. These are often called character like dressing, manner of speech, relationship with others, gentility, etc. These values include: uprightness of mind and

moral goodness. Such values are practiced at home; at the school; at college; in interaction with other students; on the play-field; on the streets; in writing letters; general etiquette; table manners; tact and delicacy; independence of character; personal habits; life's experiences.

4. Application of Values for Life to SDG's 2030 and the Globethics.net Agenda

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG'S) replaced the Millennium Development Goals (MDG'S) on 15th September 2015 as World Leaders gathered at the United Nations in New York to adopt the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. The 2030 Agenda comprises seventeen new Sustainable Goals, which guide policy and funding for the next fifteen years, beginning with a historic pledge to end poverty, everywhere and permanently.

The SDG's applies to all countries, aims to promote peaceful and inclusive societies, create better jobs and tackle the environmental challenges of our time on climate change. The SDG's include the following:

1. End Poverty.
2. Zero hunger.
3. Good health and Well Being.
4. Quality Education.
5. Gender Equality.
6. Clean water and Sanitation.
7. Affordable and clean Energy.
8. Decent work and Economic Growth.
9. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure.
10. Reduced inequalities.
11. Sustainable Cities and Communities.
12. Reasonable Consumption and Production.
13. Climate Action.
14. Life below Water.
15. Life on land.

- 16. Peace Justice and Strong Institutions.
- 17. Partnerships for the Goals.

The SDG's are guided by indicators and factors with measurable mechanisms to ensure that they work and are realized. The aim is to improve on the limitations of the MDG's and the hope for a world that resembles the realization of the kingdom of God here on earth, all in fifteen years.

It is important to mention that these SDG's contain in themselves values for life. These values circle around Life, the quality of Life, protection and enhancement of life. They promote Life for humans, animals, flora and fauna. Thereby the SDG's seek for a fundamental and robust indicator to achieve the greatest extent possible of the Goals.

The Globethics.net with its Agenda 2016 to 2020 sets out to pursue the realization of a global ethics program in a period of the fourth industrial revolution, namely, the digital revolution through its advantage of a visionary and ethical approach to values-driven leadership through programs and services that present itself universally through its on-line platform, as a best-in-class leading online ethics provider.

With its manifold publications, educational materials, online library, conferences, advocacy, interventions, partnerships and global presence through networking around the theme of Values, Ethics, people, Leadership, Education and Action, Globethics.net is set alongside the SDG's to pursue Values for Life and achieve the ideals of these values through partnership and the drive for ethics in higher education amongst other interventions.

Our world does not lack for threats to human life. We watch with horror the deadly violence of terror, starvation, wars and innocent children dying from easily preventable diseases. Humanity faces a new and insidious mentality that denies the dignity of some vulnerable human lives and treats killings as a personal choice and social good. The eradication of poverty is supported by equal access to quality education and a fairer society so that

everyone who receives education can have more options in their lives and fulfil their aspirations.

Universal access to education and a fair society are not about promoting economic growth. They are about ensuring human dignity. These challenges call upon our sense of ethical responsibility. It is this challenge that the SDG's and the Globethics.net seek to confront in their interrelated networking through various levels of activities and services to Values for Life. There is no better alternative for a world for everybody, founded on Values and virtues that touch all cultures and peoples.