The Ubuntu Principle And Salvation: A Focus On The Impact Of Adult Role Modelling On The Sanctification Process Of African Youth

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Abstract: The primary focus of the paper is to discuss the sanctification process among African youth through the lens of the Ubuntu principle. The study applies the missional hermeneutic approach to link the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:1 "Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ" with adult role modelling of their faith journey to young people in and outside the church. The younger generation carries the hope of every society. Urbanization and modernity have bred individualism and therefore led to a breakdown in the African culture of togetherness where young people's guidance and mentorship were done communally. Each gender was attended to by their seniors; a process that required quantity and quality time. Today's parents are quite busy eking a living that youth are left to find their way around the often- murky waters of youthfulness. Studies show that many young adults find wrong role models, which end up in wrong behavior and relationships. By the time they consider salvation, they are bruised and in need of healing. The church mandate is to care for all members of the body by providing an alternative community where every person feels they belong. This study examines how the older generation can create an environment for the young people who not only need to hear what is taught, but also watch the teacher practice how to live out that Christian faith in the process of sanctification. Church youth workers will hopefully create ways and means for such conversations and processes in the church. This winning lifestyle is recommended to any devoted Christian everywhere.

Keywords: Sanctification, Ubuntu, Adult role modelling, Alternative community, Individualism, Youth

I. INTRODUCTION

During a discipleship session with the youths in a church in Kenya, the pastor was tackling the topic; "Christian living." In the fellowship, out of curiosity, one youth posed some intriguing questions to the pastor: "These things you are telling us, are they practical? Or better said, do people still believe and practice them in this world? I have often thought they are for the people in the Bible alone because I hardly see any of the Christian stuff you teach being practiced among the adults around us." He added, "This is one major reason that has kept me from being a Christian for this long because I concluded, it can't be real, so it isn't practical, and therefore, I won't make it through even if I believe." Such is the case of many young people in today's society. The Bible hardly comes alive in their contexts as they do not see many serious Christians in word and deed around them. The questions raised are profoundly about the efficacy of faith in God, and how that could be reflected in a transformed life of any believer at all times in any place such as school, home, work and in the community. The old adage 'Children learn by imitation' is still valid in the 21st century.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the place of adult role modelling in facilitating the Christian journey of young people using the African lens of Ubuntu principle. From an African Christian perspective, it will draw tenets of the Ubuntu principle and apply them as a backdrop for effective discipleship and therefore sanctification among Christian youths in the contemporary world.

Faith in Christ is a challenging journey that begins with accepting the offer of salvation based on the work of Christ on the cross; the shedding of blood for the remission of sin.

Coming to faith means the person is now a member of the family of God in need of discipleship in order to grow in their knowledge of God. Whereas God sanctifies the person, the discipleship process enables them to experience God's sanctifying work. It is a divine-human process where the believer is actively involved; and it does not guarantee immediate changes because it is a lifelong journey. Holistic discipleship should therefore incorporate telling them how, showing them how and allowing them to practice what they have heard and seen in their leader's life. Sometimes this may mean allowing them to make mistakes and learn from them.

II. AFRICAN YOUTH

Youths are the nerve centre and strength of any society. Biblically, 1 John 2:14 reckons that youth are strong, having God's word and have overcome the world. The current African situation shows that youth have been most influenced by Western culture; many positive African values have diminished and given way to deviant behaviour. Traditional events like Rites of Passage that rubbed in the seriousness of adulthood have been diluted; family nurture of young people is now largely individualistic, tolerant and quite subjective. The young generation is left to wade through the waters of life mostly unattended, just as one would be in a swimming pool trying to make sense of the water. The result can be disastrous; there are neither instructors, life savers nor pool attendants.

For the most part, African youths in the 21st century are often associated with negative behaviour. Promiscuity, drug and alcohol addiction, betting and political riots, just to name a few. A common adult Swahili statement goes *hawa watoto wa siku hizi!!* (Children of these days!!); in reference to delinquent behaviour among young people. Such a pronouncement appears to be a resignation to fate. Does this mean that all youth are delinquent? Whose fault is it that we have many delinquent youths? Is there any way out? These are but a few questions that we ought to find answers to as we discuss matters youth in this age. Yet as shown above, adults are not doing well either; examples of those who display similar behaviour are all over. The sad reality is that role models are becoming rare to find. We contend that going back to African roots to examine the Ubuntu philosophy might give us treasures to glean that can apply to our society and help us raise responsible adults.

III. UBUNTU PHILOSOPHY

Ubuntu is a term with multiple meanings and is derived from the African people even though there is no indication of the time of its first usage. It refers to 'humanness' that is characterized by dependence and interdependence with each other. Mukuni and Tlou explain that Ubuntu denotes interconnectedness of humans, affirming, relating, and working harmoniously and cooperatively with fellow humans.

Humanistic attributes of Ubuntu

In order for us to gain a clear perspective of Ubuntu and relate it to the faith journey of the modern youth, it is important to examine the desirable qualities embedded in the Ubuntu philosophy. These include: "being caring, humble, thoughtful, considerate, understanding, wise, generous, hospitable, socially mature, socially sensitive, virtuous, and blessed: character attributes that veer away from confrontation towards conciliation." In essence, Ubuntu is a communal value system that endears itself to the growth of every societal member regardless of age, gender and limitation. Everyone has a sense of belonging such that as Mbiti says, each person can say, "I am because we are, and because we are, I am." In essence, there is an intentional and patterned system to ensure that individuals find their bearing, being and identity through societal membership.

INCULCATING SOCIETAL VALUES IN THE TRADITIONAL AFRICAN TRADITIONAL SOCIETY

In the African culture, the adults were tasked with inculcating these values into the lives of the younger generations. Morals in African culture were twofold, personal and communal. Without a universal African moral code, each tribe had its norms, with collective morality taking precedence over individual morality. The implication of this was that personal morality was viewed through social lenses. What was right and wrong was largely defined by the community but lived out by the individual.

Morals are important to a community's survival; enhancing harmony and preventing disintegration. Morals cover all aspects of society for common good; yet when one fails to keep up, this leads to shame and dishonour. In the hierarchy of the African family, the older members held a higher status than the younger; with parents endowed with the responsibilities of protection, provision and education of the younger generation. It is important to note that God was viewed as the "ultimate guardian of human morality." Even though society had mechanisms of punishing known offenders, the unknown would be dealt with by God; moral decay attracted divine punishment through disasters like drought and floods. Morality was therefore centred around the fear of such punishment and avoidance of shame.

In the traditional African society, children were taught from an early stage to be respectful and obedient to adults; they were assigned roles that contributed to societal good, for example, fishing, hunting, herding for the boys and household chores for the girls. As they grew older, they were gradually introduced to societal responsibilities: 'physical, social and religious.' The baton of leadership was passed down gradually with the older guiding the young generation. Youth unquestionably conformed to the given cultural norms and values.

Young people often imitate behaviour rather than simply obeying instructions; they need to see examples of the desirable behaviour in real life situations. Traditionally, children belonged to the community; care and discipline was a shared responsibility. Due to the extended family system, all uncles, aunties, grandparents and even neighbours had the moral obligation to watch over the young. They did not need to seek permission from the parent in order to unleash disciplinary action. When a parent learned about the behaviour and subsequent punishment, they would mete out more punishment on the young errant person. If a parent was not

very keen about their children's behaviour or even incapacitated, the community would cover this by nurturing them along with other kids. In the long run, all kids were cared for regardless of their parents' negligence, limitation or weakness.

Learning by doing was always integrated into African culture. Gender roles were clear such that the boys learnt to herd, farm and do all that pertained to being husbands and men. Girls were socialized into being wives and women in their culture. These aspects were learnt by imitation as each gender spent time with the older folk of their particular gender: quality and quantity time. No one questioned their gender roles; they just fitted in as per the societal expectations.

Rites of Passage were very critical in the African culture. They acted as transitional events that imprinted the changing status and roles to the person. Childhood to adulthood was a major transition marked by separation, liminality and reincorporation. During the liminal phase, the youth were taken through symbolic ordeals that demanded courage and endurance. The elders ensured that new responsibilities, access to secret knowledge and sacred objects formed a major part of liminality. The youth also built comradeship and created a sense of belonging to an age-set. This age-set would thereafter become an accountability group later in life, specifically among men. They would stand with each other during major life situations like marriage of their children and conflict resolution in marriage and family. This Ubuntu approach sustained cohesion in the society and prevented disintegration. However, things have changed with the changing times. There is a sharp departure in the way things were done then and now. For example, the liminality phase also called initiation period was a school in itself. Initiates were taught many things about life; values, courage, marriage and responsibility. With the advent of formal education, time and methodological approaches have changed. This can be well illustrated by looking at the characteristics of the generational perspectives.

IMPACT OF MODERNITY ON UBUNTU ROLE MODELLING

Modernity has added value to human life to a large extent, especially in technological advancement. The foundation of Ubuntu is relational, and stands in stark contrast to the Western philosophy that tends to be individualistic. With this in mind, bringing up children has also become a private family affair. In fact, the standards of morality have changed to the extent that siblings can bring up their children quite differently. Value systems are now shaped by a myriad of factors beyond one's ethnic culture e.g. religion, social status, profession, etc. On the other hand, when one attempts to discipline the child of their sister, brother or neighbour especially using the cane, they risk being accused of child abuse. Corporal punishment of children in the home, school and children's homes has been a subject of debate for a while. Despite being outlawed due to excessive use, many parents in Kenya still vouch for the practice. These parents grew up with the practice and do not know any other means of instilling discipline among the youth. The Bible declares that sparing the rod is a sign of hatred to the child (Prov. 13:24) and that

the cane does not cause death but actually delivers his soul (Prov. 23:13-14). The modern Christian is therefore faced with the dilemma of Biblical instruction and African culture on one hand, and the contemporary laws of the land that is largely a Western concept on the other hand. Child protection is key to government policy in a context where many adults are no longer genuinely interested in the transformation of children; some find opportunity to vent out their frustrations on children.

Gender roles have been blurred in the face of modernity. The kitchen is no longer a preserve of women alone; and women are also taking up typically male jobs like political leadership. It's increasingly becoming difficult to define real gender roles in today's society; this easily breeds disorder in the family where roles can be reversed. Marriages have broken up because men feel demeaned while women feel misused; the struggle for power has taken root in marriage.

When it comes to maturity Rites of Passage, there are three ways in which the modern society responds and behaves; with all of them retaining the circumcision rite. There are those who have stuck to the tradition, and despite living in urban areas, they will send their children to the village for circumcision in the traditional way. Some have privatized the rite to family level. A parent will decide that their child is ready for initiation, in particular circumcision of boys. They will take their child to hospital and seclude them at home for recovery; them a small party will usher them out into adulthood. The third category will enjoin their child to an institution, NGO or church where many youths are taken through a program that culminates in circumcision. The girls are also involved in the program minus circumcision. These are attempts to retain a ritual where training and instruction can be done in order to pass down societal values. However, it should never be an end in itself, but a springboard for the adulthood phase; with continuous training in word and deed.

IV. SANCTIFICATION AND THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

Sanctification is "that inward spiritual work that the Lord Jesus Christ works in a person by the Holy Spirit when He calls him to be a true believer." It can also be viewed as birth and growth of the believer into a new way life; which was the goal of Jesus' ministry. Sanctification is therefore a divine process that involves a threefold process: God's reconciling work, Jesus' redemptive action and the Holy Spirit changing man's sinful nature.

Discipleship is the human effort that places the believer, through Christian disciplines, in the right posture to experience sanctification. These disciplines include prayer, Bible study, meditation, fellowship and Christian service. The disciples of Jesus watched Him practice these disciplines and lived them out especially in the Book of Acts when they became apostles.

V. BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF ADULT ROLE MODELLING: THE CASES OF ELI AND PAUL

The Bible is replete with many examples of elder-youth relationship that are both positive and negative. For the purpose of this paper, we examine two characters: Eli the Priest of the Old Testament, and Paul the Apostle in the New Testament. Eli represents a negative role model, while Paul is positive role model.

A closer examination of Eli's life shows that there is a connection between father and sons. In 1 Sam. 2:29, God asks Eli: "Why do you scorn my sacrifice and offering that I prescribed for my dwelling? Why do you honour your sons more than me by fattening yourselves on the choice parts of every offering made by my people Israel?'" A father's influence on sons cannot be underrated. Eli clearly did not set a good example to his sons who were to take over from him as priests in Israel. It is no wonder that they treated the sacrifice of the Lord with contempt; taking the fat portions to themselves, even if it had to be by force before the meat was cooked (1 Sam. 2:12-17). The practice was to take anything that came on the fork from the boiling meat in the pot; but they did not follow this instruction. Based on Eli's example, George reckons that "Your children are observing your life, logging your activities, and repeating your actions, whether good or bad." Eli's sons just followed the footprints of their father. Towards the end of his life, his sons were unfit for priestly service. When he is confronted about their behaviour and subsequent rejection by God, he simply accepted the verdict without taking responsibility to challenge and correct his sons and to repent on their behalf.

Paul was bold enough in 1 Cor. 11:1 to tell the believers to follow him as he followed Christ. He reckoned that he was on a path of growth as he led those behind him towards the same path. This demonstrated the level of seriousness that Paul assigned his and his follower's spiritual journey in sanctification. He served as a good role model to the believers under his care and to individuals that he mentored and discipled. One such individuals is Timothy, his spiritual son. Paul encouraged and inspired Timothy to earnestly follow the Lord. His parting shot shows that Paul had done his part: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:7-8). Before this, he had told him to entrust others with the things he had entrusted him (2 Tim. 2:2). Faith values had to be passed on to worthy leaders who would then disseminate them further. In deed this echoes the African Ubuntu schema of passing down values to the younger generation.

VI. TOWARDS INTEGRATING UBUNTU VALUES INTO THE SANCTIFICATION PROCESS OF THE YOUTH

The African church serves as the alternative community in the modern society where culture has been largely eroded through urbanization and modernization. In the Ubuntu spirit, upbringing of the younger generation is a communal responsibility. Collectively, the adults in the church: parents and church workers should avail themselves to minister to the youth through proclamation, presence and example. These are the instructors, lifeguards and pool attendants who must be present as the youth attempt and master the art of swimming through the unpredictable waters of life; more so in the 21st century. Lewis argues that both parents must be involved in the faith formation of their children as the primary spiritual leaders; this is only triangulated in institutions by teachers and pastors. Christian parents will do well to instil godly values in their children in word and deed since the family is the basic institution for nurture. Marriage and parenting forums should be strengthened in the church in order to provide healthy homes for the spiritual growth and development of the youth. This means that the parents should also consciously be on the path of discipleship so that they can be effective disciple makers. Church youth workers have a great opportunity in "the unique cultural moment facing young people and envision ministry as pointing them to Christ while answering their deepest questions and needs."

The instruction aspect will involve passing down the ideals of the Christian faith at home and in church; and seeing to it that these ideals are practiced in real life situations in the society. Concerning instruction and practice: the ideal and the real need to be as close as possible through regular practice. Authenticity of the adults is vital to this process. The old adage 'do what I say, not what I do' should never be part of the Christian adult vocabulary if we are to realize holistic discipleship and therefore sanctification. Since discipleship is the human effort towards sanctification, the word and deed must be integral aspects of role modelling. Faith and works complement each other towards holiness in the faith journey. This calls for transparency on the part of the adults; allowing the youth to see them as they face various seasons of life, both positive and negative with the lessons that can be learnt therefrom. Practical aspects of ministry will require personalizing discipleship to one-on-one level. Looking at the Ubuntu philosophy, there was the communal and the personal attention given to the youth.

VII. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper was to examine the role of adult role modelling in facilitating the Christian journey of young people using the African lens of Ubuntu principle. The tenets of the Ubuntu principle provided the lens through which we can glean values that the church can incorporate into the discipleship process. In particular, the adults are a mirror through which the youth can discern how to navigate life in the 21st century. Their word and deed play a major role in guiding or misguiding them as seen in the Biblical examples of Eli and Paul.

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