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Fatherhood crisis: Drawing inspiration from hunhu/ubuntu and Saint Joseph

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The article seeks to purvey a moral philosophical foundation to the apostolic letter. The apostolic letter speaks pointedly of the fatherhood crisis as an issue that needs moral philosophical atrention. The research will use two methods: the philosophical (content) analysis and applied ethical theories. Philosophical analysis is a general term for techniques typically used by philosophers in the analytic tradition that involve breaking down philosophical issues in order to bring clarity, consistence, and coherence. The method is used to analyse concepts like parenthood, fatherhood and shepherdship. Applied ethics is a philosophical examination, from a moral point of view, of particular issues in private and public life which are matters of judgement. However, the punch line, 'Children today often seem orphans, lacking fathers', is a direct moral challenge that calls for the application of the ethical theory of hunhu/ubuntu because love is hunhu/ubuntu's character, nature and responsibility. From hunhu/ubuntu's view point, I argue that one must acquire personhood primarily first in order to be a father. In hunhu/ubuntu, personhood and fatherhood are dynamic concepts; morally achieved and acquired. Hunhu/ubuntu is not asking that we replace God as the author of our being, but rather that our being as persons in the world is substantially of our own making. As such, we have a victory to win, and the path to that victory lies in the part of our lived morality (hunhu/ubuntu). God created us, but we must mould ourselves into the persons that God wants us to be.

Contribution: The intention of this article is to encourage the 21st century generation to be good persons and hence be responsible fathers through drawing moral support and inspiration from hunhu/ubuntu and Saint Joseph.

Keywords: hunhu; ubuntu; personhood; fatherhood; shepherdship; parenthood; crises.

Introduction

The article provides a moral philosophical foundation to the apostolic letter '*Patris Corde*' ['With the Father's Heart'] (2020), and the challenge it presents to the 21st century generation. Hunhu/ubuntu is the moral framework chosen and the choice is firmly based on the moral philosophical defence and framework it brings to the understanding of fatherhood. The application addresses the questions of epistemic justice and the need to expand the analytical framework beyond the Western orthodoxy that has often and always been the analytic framework within which to engage with problems. The research focusses on hunhu/ubuntu in order to escape and reject the colonial bias on the fatherhood crisis. The mandate of this article is that the basic premises governing the African people's worldview and existence must take into account the fatherhood issue. This implies that the African worldview must be deemed absolutely necessary to know and infuse the academic field with hunhu/ubuntu's rational interpretation of fatherhood. Hunhu/ubuntu must be reasonably applied in the moral debate and the application must take into account the values of hunhu/ubuntu, and thus apply human personhood and humanness at the core of the life of the 21st century generation. According to Menkiti (2018:173), the concept of personhood is central in hunhu/ubuntu ethics and hunhu/ubuntu is not a replacement of God but teaches that personhood is, in the world, an achievement, essentially of our own making. The task of personhood is not completed for the 21st century generation; they themselves have the job to do, to move the uplift along.

Theoretical framework

In order to attain the main objectives of this research, analysis of the theoretical frameworks is imperative and needed. This research relied on two methods: philosophical analysis and

applied ethics. Philosophical or content analysis is used by philosophers and it involves breaking down philosophical issues in order to bring clarity, consistency, and coherence. Gyekye (1997:vii) acknowledges that the problems confronting the Africans are many, ranging from war, hunger, violence, corruption, nation building and many others, and these problems create wonder, confusion and frustration. In such situations, fundamental questions and inquiries need to be pursued for clarification. Gyekye (1997:viii) confirmed that the pursuit of fundamental questions constitutes the stock-in-trade of philosophy. For Gyekye (1997), philosophical activity helped in the clarification of issues, thus helping to understand them more comprehensively. Philosophers therefore grapple at the conceptual level with the problems and issues of their times, providing conceptual and critical response to and interpretations of the experiences of those times: this fact immediately embeds philosophy in human affairs. Fatherlessness is one of the problems the world is facing and this study is going to employ philosophical analysis as a tool to clarify the issue of fatherlessness.

Applied ethics is a philosophical examination, from a moral point of view, of particular issues in private and public life which are matters of judgement. Philosophical methods are thus used as an attempt to identify the morally correct course of action in various fields of everyday life. Ethical theories help us to think more clearly about principles of action and unravel the logical knots in our reasoning about ethical problems. Social problems provoke more philosophical reflection and debate than personal problems because of their far-reaching consequences and conflicts they involve. When people are affected by a practice, many points of view towards that practice are elicited. The resulting disputes should then be settled by rational discussion. Applied ethics is the effort to resolve conflicts or problems rationally, when our automatic responses and implicit rules of action collide with contrary responses and rules. When conflict arises, it becomes necessary for us to provide reasons for them, and to engage in philosophical discussion. The purpose of such discussion is to refine our conceptual equipment for supporting or rejecting disputed courses of action, so that the course we choose will be rationally justified. There is great need to make an application of St. Joseph and the ethics of hunhu/ubuntu to the problem of fatherlessness that is surrounding us. Being a difficult and controversial moral issue society is facing, fatherlessness has to be assessed from ethical and religious points of view.

Definition and analysis of terms

Through use of the philosophical (content) analysis method, this section proceeds by defining and clarifying the following concepts: person, shepherd, parent, father, and hunhu/ubuntu. According to the *MacMillan English Dictionary*, parent means a mother or a father. What it connotes is that to be a parent one must develop and transcend the gender levels of being male and female, and

become a father and a mother. According to Martin (2000:245), father and mother are a person's parents. And parenting is a duty of promoting and supporting the physical, intellectual, and moral development of a child from infancy to adulthood. Judging from what Martin (2000) says, mother and father are morally loaded concepts and thus demand dedication and commitment of the heart. As parent they ought to be morally good, loving and responsible persons. In the *MacMillan English Dictionary*, the word shepherd has two meanings. Firstly, a shepherd is a man whose job is to look after sheep. Secondly, it means to take someone to a place that you want them to go. What it implies is that a mother and a father, as shepherds, have a socio-moral and religious responsibility to look after and take care of their children.

From what Martin (2000) and the *MacMillan English Dictionary* give, the researcher deduced that the normal end goal to which parents must lead their children is humanness or personhood because no parent would want their children to grow and become bad persons. All parents have a moral and religious mandate to guide and lead their children to good and happy life. The mandate or responsibility is practical and not ideal or theoretical. And thus for any parent, the attainment of personhood is primary and first. Parents themselves must be icons and exemplary for their children. In other words, parents must be good and loving persons so that they become icons and living examples for their children. This is in agreement with a psychological adage that says that children learn more from what they see and experience than from mere speculative theories we teach them (Cencini & Maninti 1985:22). The researcher therefore reaches the conclusion that personhood is an indispensable and necessary foundation to parenthood and shepherdship.

The word father has many meanings, as given in the *Macmillan English Dictionary*, but one that suits the context is: 'As a verb a father is if a man fathers a child, he makes a woman pregnant and becomes a father'. It is clear in the definition that being a father is a gradual process that starts with playing an active role in impregnating a woman. And it processually ends in being a caring and responsible father. What it entails is that fatherhood is the end to which the process tends and for this reason fatherhood is defined as 'a state of being a father'. Fatherhood is thus something which is attained and achieved. Again, something clear and important in the definition is that a father is if a 'man' fathers a child.

Guided by the above analysis, the researcher argues that man/personhood is the simple, logical and foundational key concept in the processual definition of fatherhood. It is socially ethical and normal that man must father the child and from man necessarily develops a father! In common parlance, anyone less than a man (males and boys) must not take up the important task or must not be fathers. The implication is that boys must attain manhood primarily first before causing birth because fatherhood/parenthood depends morally on manhood. What it means is that the 21st century generation are not yet men/persons but males

and boys because they cause birth of children but without being morally responsible and for this reason, children today often seem orphans, lacking fathers. The present-day fathers have a fundamental task to complete: to be men/persons in order to be fathers/parents. Thus, the concept of personhood is central in the development and attainment of fatherhood.

It is a common sense fact that it is not enough for males to just give birth to children and thus reducing themselves to mere beasts or animals. According to Kennedy (1997:45), what makes men distinct from animals is the moral quality of personhood: being good, loving and responsible parents and shepherds. Indeed, at the level of giving birth, men are very close to animals. Chumachawazungu (2010:89) agrees and commented that all the basic bodily functions or desires – pleasure, pain, breathing, eating, fighting for survival, drinking, sleeping, the desire to find a mate and procreate, birth and death – we share with animals. But it is the striving to rise above these bodily functions, especially concern with giving birth, that is uniquely human, and defines true and good human development. Chumachawazungu (2010) further argues that:

> [M]en must tell themselves that enquiry into the ultimate, yearning for beauty, truth, goodness and awareness of the underlying unity, these attributes of wisdom and love are the unique treasures of manhood. (p. 89)

Men must enquire and investigate into the true nature and character of personhood; the beauty, goodness, love, wisdom and the underlying reality that founds the concept of personhood (2010:89). For Chumachawazungu, personhood is a key concept in the definition of man. Chumachawazungu (2010) contributed further by stating:

> Man is man so long he is struggling to rise above nature, and this nature is both internal and external … It is good and grand to conquer external nature, but it is grandeur to conquer our internal nature. It is grand and good to know the laws that govern the stars and planets; it is infinitely grandeur and better to know the laws that govern the mind and will of mankind. (p. 89)

Thus, the moral authority to know and realise the inner self or person, having the moral knowledge of the human heart and its moral secrets of love and goodness, essentially belongs to humans. Humans must be humans and not remain static at the level of animality or culture. They must develop and reach the human level of the heart (morality) and God (religion). Ultimately, unless humans live by higher moral principles and guide their feet by worthwhile moral standards or exemplars, they are animals blessed with intelligence or cunningness (Chumachawazungu 2010:90). Therefore, if humans channel out their rationality at the service of sensual desires, then they are clever animals, which is self-destruction and a sin against humanity. Humans must be good and loving, and hence be responsible of their actions. Genuine dignity and fatherhood depend upon a moral inward turn. We must measure personhood and fatherhood relative to non-human, non-arbitrary standards. Only after we master personhood, we are entitled to claim dignity and fatherhood as our right (Kennedy 1997:43).

According to Socrates (Stumpf 1993), one's greatest concern should be to take care of one's soul and thus maintain the soul good. Love defines or makes the soul what it is. One takes better care of his or her soul when one practically knows the difference between experience and rationality, and builds his or her life on rationality: what human life really is. Socrates wants us to know that intellectual and moral awareness/consciousness is the personhood, the foundation to human action. As long as we are not self-aware or morally aware, we risk profound unhappiness and if we do not reason or reflect on the dynamics of human experiences at intellectual and moral levels, we condemn ourselves to an unhappy existence. Tolle (1999) argued that:

> Action, although necessary, is only a secondary factor in manifesting our external reality. The primary factor in creation is consciousness. No matter how active we are, how much effort we make, our state of consciousness creates our world, and if there is no change on that inner level, no amount of action will make any difference. We would only recreate modified version of the same world again and again, a world that is an external reflection of the ego. (p. 39)

Tolle is not discouraging or undermining the action of giving birth but argues for moral awareness or responsibility as a necessary foundation or base for causing birth. Moral awareness (personhood) should primarily come first and necessarily guide and govern human action of causing birth. The intellectual and moral consciousness is prior to human action of causing birth. Chumachawazungu (2010) also argues:

> You may believe that you are responsible for what you do, but not for what you think. The truth is that you are responsible for what you think, because it is only at this level that you can exercise choice. What you do come from what you think. You cannot separate yourself from truth by 'giving autonomy to behaviour.' (p. 93)

No choice is made at the level of the intellect but at the level of will. It is the heart that decides and hence we need to raise moral awareness as well because it is at this level that we make decisions. Without moral awareness, there should be no human action because there will be consequently no responsibility (Tolle 1999:39).

Justification of fatherlessness

By and large, fatherlessness exists in reality! And that it is affecting humanity worldwide is socially and scientifically evident. Fatherlessness is a fast-growing problem in the world and it needs a permanent solution or remedy. Whether caused by single parenting, divorce or broken families, more and more children are growing up fatherless. Writing about the situation in the United States of America (USA) in 1996, sociologist Popenoe (2005) said:

The decline of fatherhood is one of the most basic, unexpected, and extraordinary social trends of our time. Its dimensions can be captured in a single statistic: In just three decades, between 1960 and 1990, the percentage of U.S. children living apart from their biological fathers more than doubled, from 17 percent to 36 percent. By the turn of the century, nearly 50 percent of American children may be going to sleep each evening without being able to say good night to their dads. (p. 117)

Judging from these given facts, it is easy to conclude that USA is rapidly becoming a fatherless society, or perhaps more accurately, an absentee father society. However, the issue of fatherlessness does not only affect USA but all countries. Facts reflect that the importance and influence of fathers in families has seen a significant decline and is now reaching critical proportions. Baskerville (2004:485) confirmed and argued that 'there has been a progressive loss of the father's authority and diminution of his power in the family and over the family'. Thus, fatherlessness is an undeniable fact and a sad reality of today's world. Popenoe (2005) further argues that:

This massive erosion of fatherhood contributes mightily to many of the major social problems of our time…Fatherless children have a risk factor of two to three times that of fathered children for a wide range of negative outcomes, including dropping out of high school, giving birth as a teenager and becoming a juvenile delinquent. (p. 117)

Fatherlessness therefore is a serious issue and carries with it difficult and painful effects or consequences. The following evidence and effects of fatherlessness are given by Ray (2023): (1) increases poverty, (2) lowers educational performance, (3) increases crime, (4) increases drug abuse, (5) increases sexual problems, (6) increases physical and mental health problems, and (7) increases physical and sexual child abuse. The problem of fatherlessness is thus real and powerful. Baskerville (2004), concurring to this issue, argues that:

Virtually every major social pathology has been linked to fatherless children: violent crime, drug and alcohol abuse, truancy, unwed pregnancy, suicide, and psychological disorders – all correlating more strongly with fatherlessness than with any other single factor. Tragically, however, government policies intended to deal with the 'fatherhood crisis' have been ineffective at best because the root cause is not child abandonment by fathers but policies that give mothers an incentive to initiate marital separation and divorce. (p. 485)

Fatherlessness is a real issue and its negative effects are common not only in Europe but also in Africa. The question is: What is the fatherless rate in Africa? According to data from 04 May 2023 (SSA), only 31.7% of black children stay with their biological fathers, compared with 51.3% of coloured children, 86.1% of Indian or Asian children, and 80.2% of white children. Fatherlessness is thus a problem that is currently affecting Africa as well. Fatherlessness is the most critical social, moral and religious problem of our time – the most destructive trend of our generation. The problem needs to be assessed and addressed. Baskerville (2004) assessed and advised:

Given these seemingly irrefutable findings, a case might be made that both liberals and conservatives should rethink their priorities. Rather than spending more on antipoverty programs, as the left advocates, or on ever harsher law enforcement, beloved of the right, both sides should get together and help restore fatherhood as a solution to social ills. On its surface, the government's fatherhood campaign seems to make good sense. (p. 485)

Baskerville suggested for legal and government intervention, and this is a good and tolerated move. This research considers hunhu/ubuntu and St. Joseph as better moral and religious tools to assess and correct the crisis of fatherlessness.

The fatherhood of St. Joseph in the context of hunhu/ubuntu

This section intends to root St. Joseph's fatherhood/parenthood in hunhu/ubuntu ethic. The argument is that St. Joseph had hunhu/ubuntu and thus was an original, normal and ordinary good man/person. St. Joseph practically exhibited and lived the moral qualities of love and good (hunhu/ubuntu) – the indispensable moral foundation to fatherhood. It is perspicuous in the apostolic letter entitled *Patris Corde* [With a Father's Heart] by Pope Francis that St. Joseph was an ordinary man/person with original and normal loving heart and this is hunhu/ubuntu. It is a fact that St. Joseph needed God to perfect his ordinary human personhood and fatherhood, but the moral realisation of hunhu/ubuntu or personhood was his own project and responsibility. Being good and pleasing to God was St. Joseph's moral responsibility and no one else. It is the researcher's argument that hunhu/ubuntu and St. Joseph are sufficient enough to make or mould humans into good and loving persons.

In the apostolic letter (2020), Francis describes Saint Joseph as a loving father, a tender and caring father, obedient and humble father, an accepting father, a creatively courageous father, a hard-working father, and a father in the shadows. It is evident that all the seven qualities are contained in and spontaneously flow from the moral principle of hunhu/ubuntu. As the researcher has already argued, St Joseph had hunhu/ubuntu and thus valued hard work, harmony, solidarity and relationships in community with others. He was naturally and originally loving, good and human; a responsible and caring man and father. In hunhu/ubuntu, there are more than seven qualities as given by Tutu (1999:39) and Prozesky (2003:16). However, the research needs to focus on how Joseph grew in personhood and hence reached fatherhood status.

In Matthew 1:19–22, St. Joseph experienced a dream or an imagination; the normal and ordinary necessary process common to all men. For the researcher, this entails that the initial stage in manhood is marked by dreams and wishful thinking and for this reason men are undecided and fearful; a moment of serious fatherhood crisis! It is a moment of serious fatherhood crisis because men are socio-culturally influenced by negativity and denial. Why is denial common at this stage?

It is common sense that no man can prove, with scientific certainty, that he is the real father to/of his own children. For this reason, doubt and denial are socio-culturally inevitable! It is a self-evident truth that having sex with a girl or woman is no proof or evidence that a man is the actual father. Doubt and denial are thus cultural and scientific diseases that commonly affect all men and are actual causes to the fatherhood crisis. Every man has this immediate experience of doubt and denial. From St. Joseph, the researcher fathomed that confronted and affected by doubt and denial, men naturally become dramatic, rhetorical and poetic. The dream experienced by Joseph explains better the fatherhood crisis! However, the researcher argues that the culture of doubt and denial are the material residues or raw data from where hunhu/ubuntu starts.

Judging from the above analysis, the researcher finds out that it was normal and procedural for Joseph to apparently doubt and deny the fatherhood responsibility because he had not yet developed the necessary requirements and qualifications characteristic of manhood/personhood. In the scriptures, St. Joseph mentally fought and battled with the denial until he finally won through consulting the higher faculty of the heart/conscience (hunhu/ubuntu). The researcher concludes that in case of doubt and denial one must consult and rely on their heart/conscience (hunhu/ubuntu). From the scripture passage, the researcher learnt that culture does not give fatherhood status to anyone but just exhibits or points to it. Fatherhood is thus a moral decision men should make at the higher level of their hearts/consciences (hunhu/ubuntu).

However, from the biblical story of St. Joseph, the researcher summarily learns and argues that fatherhood is a gradual process that begins with inevitable doubt and denial, and finally ends in the actual attainment and achievement of man/personhood. The argument is that it was because of St. Joseph's original and natural humanness, personhood and goodness (hunhu/ubuntu) that God chose him to be the religious father of his Son. It is clear in the Scripture passage that St. Joseph was not a mere legal father, as argued in the apostolic letter (2020:1), but the moral and religious father of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. The important question is: What is the connection of hunhu/ubuntu and God in St. Joseph's fatherhood?

In his apostolic letter, Francis (2020) shares that St. Joseph was a:

> [C]arpenter who earned an honest living to provide for his family, also teaches us the value, the dignity and the joy of what it means to eat bread that is the fruit of one's own labour. (p. 1)

Pope Francis continues: 'We all need to appreciate the importance of dignified work, of which St. Joseph is an exemplary patron'. Thus, according to Pope Francis, St. Joseph lived an ordinary normal life of being honest, sincere and hardworking. However, such values like being honest, sincere and hardworking are hunhu/ubuntu's nature and character. These values are properties that immediately and spontaneously flow from hunhu/ubuntu (heart/conscience). Without hunhu/ubuntu (heart), these moral qualities are practically impossible to attain and achieve.

Matombo (2019), in his article, *St. Joseph: A Good Model of Parenting and Stewardship* says:

> Our world and our country are thirsty for good models … Joseph was a man of prayer and today where God is little by little being put aside, Joseph is a good example to follow especially on prayer and humility. (p. 4)

Matombo makes a correct observation and recommendation that St. Joseph is a good role model which humanity must follow. The researcher recommends that the 21st century generation must embrace hunhu/ubuntu in order to be good fathers like St. Joseph. Humility and prayer are moral qualities through which the 21st century generation should intuitively participate in the hunhu/ubuntu, Life of God. God is the source and origin of hunhu//ubuntu (Temples 1969:46), and thus hunhu/ubuntu links the 21st century generation with St. Joseph and God.

Thus, in the midst of greedy members of the society, where people were involved in many corrupt acts, Matombo (2019) says that St. Joseph stands for integrity, he advocates for the honour of good. Let us pray through him that we may win God's favour. The implication is that St. Joseph stood and advocated for hunhu/ubuntu; integrity and honour of good. And in order for us to win God's love, like what St. Joseph did, hunhu/ubuntu must be our immediate moral disposition in/of prayer. Matombo further says that the country and the world are thirsty for good role models, of responsible parents and stewards. Let us take St. Joseph to be our model. Our society is tremendously in need of models like St. Joseph. Our people, our country needs inspiring role models who inspire the new generations. Our youths yearn for icons who become the source of virtues and integrity like St. Joseph.

Thus, the hard issues of fatherhood and stewardship must be espoused in accordance with the philosophy of hunhu/ubuntu. Solid efforts should be made to ensure that hunhu/ubuntu is employed successfully to morally enforce and guarantee fatherhood in and among the 21st century generation.

The application of hunhu/ubuntu to fatherhood crisis

It is my argument that hunhu/ubuntu is the proper philosophical moral lens that can set right or put an end to the fatherhood crisis. Hunhu/ubuntu is our natural and original humanness or human soul and without it humans cease to be or exist. Hunhu/ubuntu is man/personhood; the indispensable foundation to fatherhood and thus the indispensable moral link between human fatherhood and God. However, although hunhu/ubuntu is a principle largely from Africa, this research demonstrates that it is not meant to be only for Africans but for the universal world. The

researcher concurs with Mertz (2011) who contributes that it is important for African realities to contribute meaningfully to the world philosophy. These African realities have been marginalised for a long time. Mertz's contribution is a reflection of the importance of the African ethic in moral debates other than reliance on Western moral theories. The world needs to rely more on a moral principle which is real and practical than on mere speculative moral theories. Hunhu/ubuntu, in this research, is thus argued as the better African moral principle that can effectively and efficiently deal with the 21st century generation fatherhood crisis.

It is my argument that hunhu/ubuntu is the African people's ontological hierarchy or order of reality, the worldview that can be used to heal the 21st century fatherhood crisis. Temples (1996) asserted that:

> The most fundamental and basic concept in Bantu thought is vital force. God possesses Force in Himself and is the source of Force of every creature. As a consequence of God's creative Force, everything on earth, that is, human, vegetable, and material, have been endowed, essentially, with vital force. (p. 46)

Thus, 'vital force' is the most essential notion in hunhu/ubuntu philosophy. And the 21st century generation should know that in hunhu/ubuntu, God is the source and origin. He is the force, the fullness of hunhu/ubuntu, love and fatherhood. As force, God is full of hunhu/ubuntu, life or love. The definition of being by Parmenides (cited in Grayling 1998) fits the African God: 'The unshakeable heart of all rounded truth'. God is full of himself; there is no empty space or spirit but fullness of being, love or life. Each being freely participates in the being (hunhu/ubuntu) of God to the level or degree its vital force permits. God is present in all beings, continuously and persistently communicating and infusing his hunhu/ubuntu, life or love. Hunhu/ubuntu is God's love responsibility and fatherhood available and given to the 21st century generation.

However, from the quote above, the present day generation is taught that in hunhu/ubuntu, humanity is created in the ontological reality of God's Fatherhood and not image or picture. There is no artificial or fake human love (fatherhood) and responsibility in hunhu/ubuntu but traditional, natural and original. It is the researcher's conviction that, in hunhu/ubuntu, the 21st century generation men are made not into imitators or photocopies of God but into the reality of God here on earth. They are made not into mere believers but lovers of God and hence responsible lovers and fathers of their children. Being loving and responsible are the moral foundational entry points through which the 21st century generation participates in the true and good Fatherhood of God.

The researcher argues that through hunhu/ubuntu, the present generation is made free to be what they ought to be – responsible gods or human persons. Through hunhu/ubuntu or human conscience, God morally commands the 21st century generation to behave according to their rational nature, virtue and character (human personhood). In other words, through hunhu/ubuntu, God is immanently present in the today's generation, taking stewardship/fatherhood care and responsibility of his people and other creatures. God is not a dictator because the 21st century generation is free to realise and discover hunhu/ubuntu; God's life is inherently in them. In God, men are free to achieve human personhood and fatherhood!

The researcher challenges the generation of today to know and accept that hunhu/ubuntu is the human person, heart, soul or humanness (Menkiti 2018:170), and without the heart fatherhood is impossible. They should however know that hunhu/ubuntu is no replacement of God but it tells them that their being as human persons, in this universe, is essentially of their own making. The 21st century generation must know their moral mandate that they have a victory to win (fatherhood), and that victory lies in their lived morality having to do with reciprocal relations which society has insisted all along that the human face of the other be recognised and be deemed supreme; that we are all equal as persons despite any variations in social status (Menkiti 2018:166). This points to the fact that the question about the person-making of communities is not an affront to the God who made us. God created us, but the 21st century generation must mould themselves into the persons that God wants them to be. In other words, the task of personhood is not completed for the generation of today; they themselves have the job to do, to move the uplift along. They are not given good or bad life but are given life. It is up to them to make life good or bad. Without hunhu/ubuntu, human personhood, there is no fatherhood for the men of this present generation.

In his article *Ubuntu as a moral theory and human rights in South Africa,* Mertz gives a moral interpretation of hunhu/ubuntu which is 'A person is a person through other persons'. Mertz (2011) writes:

> Personhood, selfhood and humanness … are value laden concepts. That is, one can be more or less of a person, self or human being, where the more one is, the better. One's ultimate goal in life should be to become a (complete) person, a (true) self or a (genuine) human being. (pp. 536–537)

Thus, the present generation should know that the dictum 'a person is a person through other persons' (Eze 2008:387; Mertz 2011:536; Suresh 2018:2) places a moral demand on them to develop personhood, a moral prescription for them to achieve and attain hunhu/ubuntu, to exhibit humanness. The dictum is what hunhu/ubuntu entails and it defines humanity or person. The dictum implies that humanity is a moral quality we owe to each other (Eze 2008:387). Each individual person is connected and protected within the group, and thus interdependence is the backbone of African societies; the individual needs the society to survive and the society needs the individual to function (Suresh 2018:2). The application is that the 21st century generation must develop and become complete, true and genuine human beings. They become moral persons insofar as they honour communal relationships. They must value communal love relationships,

and hence uphold unity, identity and solidarity with their children and families. The present generation should know that fatherhood necessarily demands personhood or humanness, being a good and loving person. On personhood, Menkiti (1984) taught and he wrote:

> This brings us to the second point of contrast between the two views of man, namely, the processual nature of being in the African thought … the fact that persons become persons only after a process of incorporation. Without incorporation into this or that community, individuals are considered to be mere danglers to whom the description 'person' does not fully apply. For personhood is something which has to be achieved, and is not given simply because one is born of human seed. (p. 172)

Given are two moral views of man: African and Western. The African moral view of man is practically gradual and processual. The present day generation must pass through a moral process of incorporation or integration into hunhu/ubuntu. The process essentially includes the idea of moral excellence, of plenitude of vital force at maturation. They must know that personhood is something that they must achieve and acquire. For this reason Menkiti (2018) writes:

> First let me begin by restating an aspect of my main claim to the effect that within the African world moral function is an essential core of the definition of the human person. (p. 162)

The 21st century generation ought to be morally functional. They ought to be practically caring and loving and thus be responsible fathers to their children. Menkiti (1984) encouraged:

> Thus, it is not enough to have before us the biological organism … We must also conceive of this organism as going through a long process of social ritual transformation until it attains the full complement of excellences seen as truly definitive of man. And during this long process of attainment, the community plays a vital role as catalyst and as prescriber of norms. (p. 172)

The present day generation must know that physicality or physical appearance is not adequate to constitute their human personhood and fatherhood. Physicality is naturally given and not acquired or achieved. Menkiti (1984) wants the present generation to know that human person is an achievement which is acquired by going through a gradually long process of cultural and moral reformation until they attain moral virtues, truly definitive of a father. The community is this long process of attainment and it morally prescribes rules and norms. The community refers to that metaphysical moral good and love that guide and direct humans to attain personhood, humanness. Menkiti (1984) further argues:

> The various societies found in traditional Africa routinely accept this fact that personhood is the sort of thing which has to be attained in the direct proportion as one participates in communal life through the discharge of the various obligations defined by ones stations. It is the carrying out of these obligations that transforms one from the it-status of early childhood, marked by an absence of moral function, into the person-status of later years, marked by a widened maturity of ethical sense … an ethical maturity without which personhood is conceived as eluding one. (p. 176)

For Menkiti (1984), 'personhood is not simply given or assumed' at the very beginning of one's life. It is attained after one is well along in community of love, ethical maturity. One must be good and loving! The community prescribes the ethical norms by which individuals ought to live. The 21st century generation must get assimilated and integrated into the life of virtue and love.

Despite the fact that 'personhood is something at which individuals could fail, at which they could be competent or ineffective, better or worse' (Menkiti 1984:173), personhood is a victory which the present generation must win. They must grow in love and goodness, and they should know that failure in personhood necessarily implies failure in fatherhood/parenthood – the root cause of the fatherhood crisis. There are other many causes for fatherlessness, but in the philosophy of hunhu/ubuntu, failure in personhood is the primary cause. The 21st century generation should practically know that they are all equal in the personhood struggle despite variations in social status and human error. And despite failure and error, community/personhood, as an ethical goal, is a reality which they must always seek.

It is clearly stated in hunhu/ubuntu that: 'A person is a being of this kind who has shown a basic willingness and ability to fulfil his/her obligations in the community' (Gade 2012:498). The 21st century generation should take a leaf from Menkiti (1984) and Gade (2012) and thus learn that they must not only exhibit the basic willingness but practically realise and fulfil their obligations of being loving and responsible fathers. They must realise that they are connected and protected as families, and interdependence should be the backbone of their societies; the children need their fathers to live and the fathers need their children to morally function. Through hunhu/ubuntu, the fathers of today are morally commanded to take up their duties and responsibilities to protect and assist their children to grow into personhood. In hunhu/ubuntu, fathers learn that their manhood and fatherhood morally depends on their actual fulfilment of the obligation towards children.

Menkiti (1984) and Gade (2012) morally mandate the 21st century generation fathers to assist their children to grow, to be morally good and loving persons. They also taught the present generation that fathers and children need each other to grow, and hunhu/ubuntu is a moral system which makes fathers and children grow into a loving community. Hunhu/ubuntu is influential and durable. The moral qualities of love, personhood, harmony and friendliness make hunhu/ubuntu more attractive and applicable and hence fit for the job. Hunhu/ubuntu is love and togetherness. Eze (2008) supports and wrote that the core of hunhu/ubuntu can best be summarised as follows: 'A person is a person through other people' (p. 386). What defines a person is love relationship; alone the individual is without definition and meaning. Eze (2008) further explains that hunhu/ubuntu suggests to us that 'humanity is not embedded in my person solely as an individual; my humanity co-substantively

bestowed upon the other and me. Humanity is a quality we owe to each other' (p. 386). Hunhu/ubuntu is love we relationally share and is a gift to all.

The 21st century generation must learn personhood from Wiredu (1996:71) and Gyekye (1997) who said that:

> [T]he acquired status of personhood is understood not as simply a matter of gradual socialization, but as attaining and practicing a particular moral life that contributes to the well-being of one's community. (p. 50)

'If one can be thought to be "not a person"' according to Gyekye, 'it is because he/she is morally weak'. The fatherhood crisis is a clear reality that the 21st century generation are morally weak. Gyekye (1997) characterises this as follows:

> The judgment that a human being is 'not a person', made on the basis of that individual's consistently morally reprehensible conduct, implies that the pursuit or practice of moral virtue is intrinsic to the conception of a person held in African thought. The position here is, thus, that: for any p, if p is a person, then p ought to display in his conduct the norms and ideals of personhood. (p. 50)

Because the 21st century generation has failed to reflect in their behaviour the acceptable moral principles or to manifest the expected moral virtues in their conduct as parents, they are not persons. Therefore, they must evaluate themselves opposite to this status of not persons and thus be persons, have good character, be peaceful and not troublesome, be kind and have respect for their children and others, be humble.

The 21st century generation must know that they are persons insofar as they pursue and practise moral virtue in community (hunhu/ubuntu) and with hunhu/ubuntu they ought to exhibit or show in their behaviour the morals and reality of being good. If they fail to live by the principles of hunhu/ubuntu, they are not persons. Speculative knowledge of the good is not sufficient for the 21st century generation but they ought to live or do the good. To be good persons they must be practically peaceful, respectful, loving and good, humble and kind. The 21st century generation must listen to Shutte (2001) who sums up the basics of the hunhu/ubuntu ethic as follows:

> Our deepest moral obligation is to become more fully human. And this means entering more and more deeply into community with others. So although the goal is personal fulfilment, selfishness is excluded. (p. 30)

The 21st century generation becomes moral persons insofar as they honour communal relationships. They should uphold love, identity, and solidarity with their children and others.

However, Wiredu's view of the relationship between the community and individual person is stronger than Gyekye's (1996):

> The integration of individuality into community in African traditional society is so thoroughgoing that, as is too rarely noted, the very concept of a person has a normative layer of meaning.

> A person is not just an individual of human parentage, but also one evincing in his or her projects and achievements an adequate sense of social responsibility…. One of the greatest problems facing us in Africa is how to reap the benefits of industrialization without incurring the more unlovable of its apparent fallouts, such as the ethic of austere individualism. (p. 71)

Wiredu (1996) encourages the 21st century generation to develop hunhu/ubuntu values such as love and care and integrate these values into their life and thus live them today. The integration process into these hunhu/ubuntu values must be as it was in the past, normative and thoroughgoing. As persons, the 21st century generation must be properly and thoroughly assimilated and integrated into hunhu/ubuntu because the notion of personhood (hunhu/ubuntu) intrinsically demands it. In the process of integration into hunhu/ubuntu, they must display or exhibit, in their behaviour, the adequate sense of moral responsibility.

Conclusion

Hunhu/ubuntu is an eternal African philosophy of oneness and interconnectedness of all life. Hunhu/ubuntu is the golden thread of goodness that connects all life from the lowest creature to the highest and is love. From the moral principle of hunhu/ubuntu spontaneously flows: love, truth, peace, happiness, responsibility, eternal optimism and inner goodness. Hunhu/ubuntu is the essence of being human, the divine spark of goodness inherent within each being. Hunhu/ubuntu is the guiding principle for how one interacts with other human beings, nature, or God. Hunhu/ubuntu is the common guiding principle of human values and without hunhu/ubuntu humanity is enveloped by greed, selfishness, immorality, and pride and fatherhood crisis. It was hunhu/ubuntu that morally connected St. Joseph to his family. The 21st century generation is morally and religiously encouraged to take a leaf from St. Joseph: be assimilated and integrated in hunhu/ubuntu values and be responsible, loving and caring fathers; substantially knitted together into being one with their children.

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Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

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