

Ethical Leadership and Moral Regeneration: African Religion's Response

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INTRODUCTION

The shift from a communal way of life to individualism has resulted in the moral decay in our country. The focus on individual rights more than communal rights has made people to ignore the moral principles and only think about what one would achieve for his or her own interests irrespective of the effects of his actions to other people. Individual rights, though they are fundamental for the social, economic, physical, and spiritual life of each individual, they do not hang in air, they are shaped up, developed and strengthened by various factors around other people, circumstances during growth, and the environment where one grows. Individual rights, if not monitored could jeopardize the rights of other people. Individual rights, if not based on the laws and taboos that are prescribed by the spiritual world whose foundation is communal rights, could result the violation of the rights of the whole community.

When a criminal is arrested, the law dictates that the police must make it a point to dramatize this statement ' You have got a **right** to remain silent, you have a **right** for a lawyer'. They even advise the criminal that 'anything that s/he says may be used against him/her', that is another right. This means that during arrest the first thing to consider is not the crime committed and the rights of the community affected, but only the rights of the criminal. If the rights of the criminal are not dramatized before the arrest the lawyers whose job is mainly to defend the lawbreakers make a mountain out of the mole and the

criminal may go free. Again here the shift is on an individual rights and not on the community rights.

In African Religion individualism is discouraged. It is regarded as inhuman. The communal way of life is central and allows people to share joys, blessings, sorrows, and burdens together. That is why it is said 'Umntu ngumntu ngabantu'. Harmony within oneself, clan, society, nature and the spiritual world forms the basis of a healthy society. To achieve harmony, respect is fundamental- respect of oneself, other people, the elderly and the spiritual world. What is right and wrong is assessed by its impact on other people.

The elderly

The elderly is expected to lead by example. African Religion is a clan-based religion. In each clan there are special people, male or female, who have special duties to play depending on the birthright. Though the first-born male or woman has special roles in the well being of their clans, they is not way that they could be autocratic as they themselves are under the leadership of the clan. If the first-born male is a drunkard or does not obey the rules of purity before any clan ritual, he is replaced by another person chosen by the clan. This means that though he is in the high ruling class, if he is acting against the clan norms he is replaced.

Today we find elderly people who, because of their rights, they open shops called 'adult shops' and outside it is written '**safe sex**'. What is the message sent to the community who reads that, and second ' where does adult begins and according to which standards? No one could challenge the existence of such shops because it is the right of those individuals to open them, irrespective of the moral consequences of those who come in and out of such shops. In some communities, one is an adult once s/he is over eighteen years or twenty one years. To African Religion one becomes an adult once s/he has grand children. Even though s/he is an adult, s/he does not make unilateral decisions, s/he may suggest anything to the clan members to advise.

Before the advent of the Roman-Dutch law any immoral case in African Religion was dealt with by the group of people who are affected so that justice is done to all. A rape case, for instance, was not necessarily dominated by males as no one knows which male is not capable of rape. Rape was mainly dealt with by women who are always victims of such an act. Isihewula minimized rape cases.

In cases of adultery, it was not only the woman who was humiliated, both of them were humiliated so that they learn the lesson of never to repeat the crimes.

In other words, an individual could have a wife and children but does not have absolute authority over his family, he is under the guidance of his clan, and society. Breaking the law is punishable.

The youth

The youth is expected to be ambassadors of their parents, clans, communities and their religion. A young person when is being introduced is never addressed as an individual; s/he is a reflection of his/her parents. That is why s/he is always referred to in his/her parent/s name/s, like Nokuzola's son or Sakhiwo's daughter.

The young people are in a religious journey; therefore they need guidance from the elderly. They are expected to perform some special duties in the community. Adulthood is a process, it does not come when one reaches twenty one like in other communities. Infact age does not make one an adult, it is responsibilities acted out that make one an adult. A man whose initiation ritual was performed and has a stable family and has his own homestead could be regarded as mature though he is thirty. A boy even if he is thirty can never be regarded as an adult, is still immature and unreliable until he undergoes initiation and be taught how to become an adult.

Nowadays in the townships boys own homes, as a result they are disrespectful. They are immature 'community leaders' and call their neighbours 'meli' from mmelwane (neighbour) irrespective of the age differences and that is anti-African. That term can never be used by people of different age groups, not a child to a father or vice versa.

Justice System

As long as South Africa still imposes one justice system, there are still going to be problems of moral degeneration in the country. One may argue that the justice system is changing for the better because it is including other so called 'customary' laws. Even that is not enough as these are included as appendages of the Roman-Dutch law or even their inclusion is measured using the same Roman-Dutch law.

Government policies

It is unfortunate that Religions are not involved during policy formulations, as they would play quite a significant role. The government may think that it is helping people but the policies are not controlled. Let us take the issue of abortion which was passed by governments irrespective of some religions' abjections. Now there are adverts on 'Safe abortions', people making money under the false pretense that they are serving the communities.

For argument's sake I would like to make this general statement and compare the meanings behind. If a supermarket own is worried that the business is not going well, it means that people are not coming to buy food, which is a genuine complaint. If the abortion clinic complains of not having a business, it implies that people are not coming to kill the innocent unborn babies, and that is immorality of the worst degree.

To conclude, communal life is therefore very important in African Religion. Disturbing harmony and showing disrespect to living beings are punishable acts. The punishment comes from the Creator and is given out by the ancestors.

We can all talk about ubuntu, but ubuntu involves many aspects of life, is very broad. I suggest that we must all think about relooking at the way individual rights are implemented and how they affect the communities. A farmer may throw the workers on the streets because it is his father's land and is the rightful owner. Even if the workers claim that they have their ancestor's graves in the land, which they would like to be respected, they are chased out because he thinks about his rights. The rights of the community are ignored and no feelings of the children sleeping in the streets with empty stomachs and some may die because of cold out there. One would also find women and child abuse because of some newly acquired or selfish interpretation of culture.

Unless religions would take part in policy formulations, immorality will still grow.