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Impact of the Globalization of the Sensate Symbolic Universe On Africa

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Abstract

Africa today, continues to grapple with serious moral challenges such as corruption, oppression and exploitation of the vulnerable, and drug and human trafficking. This paper argues that the aforementioned social injustices are rooted in the growth of the sensate symbolic attitude – an attitude where human persons glorify their essential material nature and attempts to pursue values that satisfy this aspect at whatever cost. This sensate symbolic attitude has steadily supplanted the traditionally held normative ethic of the common good. Using a case of Uganda, and specifically the prevalent challenges of patronage politics and corruption, the paper demonstrates how such evils are grounded in the sensate symbolic universe where state management is purposely dedicated to extracting financial resources to meet the insatiable ends of state managers. To circumvent these moral challenges, this paper advances a normative ethical recommendation aimed at liberating human persons from the bondage of relentless amassing of material goods at the expense of others. The recommendation thus is adopting a life of voluntary simplicity – an attitude that can potentially free us from the glamour of consumerism, allowing us to open our eyes to the social injustices suffered by others which are largely a result of our unrestrained greed.

Keywords: Common good; Social justice; Sensate symbolic universe; Voluntary simplicity; Ethics

1. Introduction

In Africa today, any concerned observer is aware of the existence therein of phenomena of environmental degradation, drugs and human trafficking, corruption, and oppression and exploitation of the weak and poor. The rich in power, getting richer at the expense of the poor who they leave to sink into abject poverty. The powerful in the management of public affairs educating their family

members at the expense of others, building mansions with stolen money, and remaining in power at all costs.

What could be the underlying cause behind the above phenomena? It is contended in this paper that the underlying factor behind the above phenomena is the ascendancy to a prime position and globalization of the sensate symbolic universe that is subtly but steadily supplanting the traditionally dominant normative ethic of the common good that had long been acknowledged across the globe as an ethic that ought to guide and regulate human moral conduct both at the private level and in the management of public affairs.

The paper starts with a clarification of the common good which is considered an ideal ethical position that society ought to strive to realise. Upon this clarification, we plunge into making sense of the symbolic universe and later the sensate symbolic universe which is the core of the paper. In elaborating this, an explanation is given on how the sensate culture has been behind the major social injustices experienced in sub-Saharan Africa and other parts of the world. Reference is made to Uganda as a case where patronage politics and corruption largely ensues from this attitude. Following the above, a normative position aimed at reviving the ethics of the common good on the African continent is advanced.

2. The Normative Ethic of the Common Good

The common good refers to “the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfilment more fully and more easily” (Mechmann, 2000: 16). Thinkers such as John Rawls defined it as the “certain general conditions that are in an appropriate sense equally to everyone’s advantage” (Rawls, 1999: 217). Some of the major dimensions of the common good include: an effective system of public safety and security, just legal and political structures, an unpolluted physical environment and peace within and between nations in the world (Velasquez et al., 1992).

3. Essential Elements of the Common Good

The common good is of three essential elements that if they are not attended to then we cannot have the common good at all. These elements include: respect for human persons, promotion of social welfare and ensuring social order.

Respect for human persons morally obliges each member in society and most especially public authorities to respect, promote and protect fundamental human rights. It considers these rights as fundamental and by virtue of the fact that human beings share in a common humanity these rights are possessed by all, regardless of gender, national origin, religion, economic status, ethnicity or political orientation. This proclamation of the universality of human rights is, thus, a powerful moral rebuke to social, economic and political structures that deny people their just due.

Second, the common good requires attention to the social welfare and development of the community. This entails the pursuing of material prosperity in society; hence, justifying the individual drive to economic and social development. The common good, however, does temper this drive with the dictates of human solidarity which demands each human person to have a concern for the wellbeing and fulfilment of all and never to violate the integrity and stability of our ecosystems since they are the primary source of raw materials necessary to our realization of material welfare.

Third, at its core, the common good is about securing a just order. It obliges public authorities to guarantee the security of all members of society without discrimination. However, the common good admonishes on this matter that security must be maintained by morally accepted means – means that are consonant with respect for the fundamental rights of the human person. Hence, “pursuing the security of society does not exonerate unjustly ... denying the fundamental rights of individuals” (Mechmann, 2000: 19).

4. A Symbolic Universe: Its Meaning and Nature

A symbolic universe is a body of largely unexamined fundamental assumptions about the nature of human beings and the universe. These assumptions provide common sense answers to a people's questions about what is really real, the purpose of the universe, and what is good and bad, right and wrong. These assumptions provide meaning to a people who hold them shaping their beliefs and behaviour both towards each other and towards the other beings in the universe (Berger, 1991: 113-119). What needs to be emphasized here, however, is that, a symbolic universe is largely unexamined. It is not a coherently articulated set of propositions. It is largely unconscious. Most of those who live by it are generally unable to state the most fundamental assumptions of the beliefs they hold and live.

5. Potency of the Symbolic Universe

The fundamental assumptions of a symbolic universe play an integrating role of the way of life of the people who live by it. It provides them foundations for feelings, aspirations and making judgments. A comprehensive symbolic universe may contain assumptions about what is ultimately real and what is not; what constitutes a good life; and what ought to be sought. In other words, as Lawrence Osborn does put it, a symbolic universe:

Contains affective assumptions; assumptions that govern our ideas of beauty, style, taste and pleasure. Thus, the clothes we wear, the food we eat, the houses we live in, the art forms that give us pleasure, and even the people we find attractive are influenced by our symbolic universe (Osborn, 1995:7).

It follows then that, a symbolic universe does provide criteria for a people's priorities that shape their desires and determine their allegiances. Having seen what a 'symbolic universe' generally means, let us now delve into making the specific explanation of what the sensate symbolic universe is – that symbolic universe that has pervaded the globe and is steadily supplanting the traditionally recognized normative ethic of the common good.

6. The Sensate Symbolic Universe

A sensate symbolic universe is one that is founded on the fundamental assumption that ultimate reality, including the human being, is essentially matter (Sorokin, 1951:136). By implication thus, there is nothing like a non-material God or a non-material human soul that can survive physical death. Physical death marks the end of a human being. This symbolic universe eclectically borrows several elements from the views of various materialist thinkers especially the Cyrenaic hedonist views of Aristippus (c.435-336) and the amoral political views of Nicollo Machiavelli (1469-1527).

From the Cyrenaic hedonism of Aristippus, the sensate symbolic universe holds that the good life for the human being is the life of enjoying sensual pleasures and that such pleasures must be not anyone else's but my own pleasures. It admonishes that anything is valuable only as a means to satisfying my own sensual pleasures – the pleasures of eating, drinking, enjoying the arts and sexual gratification (Lampe, 2015). This Cyrenaic hedonistic belief, further holds that an achieved hedonist is the one who in pursuing a good life crowds as much enjoyment of the senses as possible into every moment.

This Cyrenaic position acts as an essential part of the sensate symbolic universe. It further rejects the universality of moral values such as those propagated by the common good ethic. It enjoins that when you are enjoying and pursuing your sensual pleasures, do keep in mind that there is nothing that is immoral by nature. That what may be considered immoral is just a norm established entirely by the customs of particular societies. Hence, there is nothing inherently wrong with, for example incest, greed, robbery, adultery, murder or even embezzling if these can lead you to enjoying sensual

pleasures. If you are to refrain from such things do so not because they are wrong in themselves but because of the punishment you may suffer if you are caught.

In this sensate symbolic universe one also finds the Cyrenaic admonition that while pursuing and enjoying your sensual pleasures, you should not be concerned about the past or future. Why? Because life is so short since we can neither live in the past nor in the future, but only in the present. We must therefore only focus on those immediate pleasures (O'Keefe, 2002:395).

Now, side by side with the above admonition, seemingly inconsistent as it may be with the Cyrenaic position highlighted above, is the Machiavellian-like position that is found in the sensate symbolic universe. In this symbolic universe one finds the belief that in pursuing a good life, relationships such as friendship and marriage and positions of all modes of leadership, either, social, political, and economic or religious must be entered into for self-interested motives. We should make friends, marry and take positions of leadership but after we having calculated that these shall put us in better position to obtain material benefits and pleasures for ourselves, not that we think these are valuable for their own sake, or because we love our friend, spouse or to serve society. With this, one can inevitably detect how the sensate symbolic universe has some contradictory beliefs; one belief calling you to simply focus on the now and the other advising you to take on roles but after calculating the possible future benefits. Anyway this incoherency is maintained and such is possible in any symbolic universe since a symbolic universe is a body of unexamined fundamental assumptions.

Building on the above, this sensate symbolic universe also holds that in pursuing the good life for oneself, as you exercise your power of influence on others, either socially, politically, economically, administratively, or religiously, you must not be bothered about whether your actions are fair or unfair so long as you achieve some material benefits for yourself in the end. Hence, you with influence on others do whatever is in your power to achieve material benefits but for your own self. You are under no obligation to follow any ethical values if you could do away with them and eventually attain material benefits for yourself.

In this symbolic universe, thus, you with power to influence things can employ any form of manipulation, lie, bribe, intimidate, kill or even sell others into slavery if your goal is to achieve material benefits. However, your lies, bribery, intimidation, murders and kidnappings must be exercised with sufficient cunning and tact leaving no evidence that you are involved. You must be tactical in such a way that you successfully, camouflage as a morally upright person concerned about the requirements of the common good (Bhandari, 1997:170-171).

As we have already noted above, this sensate symbolic universe has spread to the global level and is one of the major threats to the traditionally held normative ethics of the common good. With its belief that the good life is the life of enjoying unrestrained sensual pleasures and pursuing material benefits to promote sensual pleasures, the sensate symbolic universe is suffocating the traditionally underlying principles of the common good. Principles like, respect of human life, justice, human dignity, environmental stewardship and preferential option for the poor and vulnerable are rejected or at best given lip-service. Those living by this sensate symbolic universe are hardly concerned about the moral duty of promoting and sustaining those social conditions which can allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfilment more fully and more easily. They only focus on promoting their own self-interest at the total cost of ignoring the legitimate interests of others.

Beyond buttressing self-interest, blind to the legitimate interests of others, the sensate symbolic universe is historically and structurally expressed in capitalism. Influenced by the sensate way of life, capitalism is historically oriented towards continuous accumulation of wealth through competition for profits and meritocratic legitimation of material success. This capitalist paradigm is often detached from and supplants the traditionally dominant ethics of the common good as it overlooks the good of all, prioritising individual interests. It offers a significant structural explanation for some

of the aforementioned social injustices. This paper deliberately analyses an individual's moral and ethical dimension of the problem rather than the structural. It addresses individual moral evils, some of which are beyond the limits of market forces but are influenced by the sensate symbolic universe. This individual moral and ethical perspective is presented in this paper as a central dimension which provides a strong basis to even further appreciate and address the broader structural issues of the problem.

7. The Impact of the Sensate Symbolic Universe on Human Behaviour and Practice

A critical examination of the sensate symbolic universe reveals that it relegates the human person to just a level of instrumentality. With it, how materially rich you are, not how honest you are, is the stake. With it, what you have materially acquired, not what you can contribute to the general welfare makes you somebody. With it, the idea of might makes right, reigns. With it, guile is method. Treachery is strategy. Disrespect of human lives is road to success. Betrayal is cleverness and greed is the vital principle that keeps all these alive. In fact, in contradistinction with common good ethics, the sensate symbolic universe lauds greed as the central or the prince of the virtues. This exultation of greed to a level of centrality within the body of sensate values can evidently be seen in the famous words that were uttered by Michael Douglas in the 1987 movie entitled 'Wall Street' that "greed is good. Greed is right. Greed works ... Greed, in all its forms; greed for life, for money, for love, knowledge marks the upward surge of mankind."

We need to understand what greed is if we are to appreciate this core of the virtues in the sensate symbolic universe. What then is greed?

Greed is wanton desire. It is an inconsiderate and over-ambitions quest for things. It is a manifestation of unrestrained egoism. It is a possession-mania. As Pantaleon Iroegbu aptly presents it

One who is greedy wants more and more and more, still more and all. And when he gets all or almost all... he still wants more. He is never satisfied. Never says it is enough ... The greedy never considers others ... Fair play, justice, peace and communal love do not exist in the life-vocabulary of the greedy human beings. Instead of solidarity, it is self-centeredness, outright egoism (Iroegbu, 2000: 151).

Now, with the basic assumption that one must pursue material possessions and pleasures in disregard of moral restraints and that greed is the prince of the virtues, "in the bid to satisfy his never – to – be – satisfied greed or passion to have, the greedy tramples upon everything that stands in his way. Laws and norms that guide to the common good ... are trampled upon without remorse" (Iroegbu, 2000: 152). This inevitably leads the greedy into accumulating obscene wealth, polluting the environment, drug dealing, human trafficking and causing social injustice – the very realities Africa, (and indeed even many other parts of the world are also) witnessing today. How has the sensate symbolic universe acted as the prime cause of all this?

8. On the Accumulation of Obscene Wealth

Gianfranco Girotti defined obscene wealth as "the excessive accumulation of wealth by a few" (Foldvary, 2008, para 4). But what does the term "obscene" really mean? This term can mean offensive or repulsive and in some instances lewd. Now, if this is what the word "obscene" means, then it is quite disturbing to assert that simply having more wealth than others have is obscene as Girotti wants us to believe. There is, thus, something a lot more about obscene wealth than just a few owning it. What is it then?

In the area of ethics, there are two ways of making moral judgments. One of these ways is to judge an outcome, and the other is to judge a process. In relation to our concern with wealth, the

first mode of moral judgment condemns wealth because it exists, regardless of how it came about. The second mode judges how this wealth came about. Now, if you look at Girotti's definition, you soon realise that he applies the first mode, judging an outcome, ignoring the process of getting there. By doing this, thus, Girotti does not help us to appreciate the idea of obscene wealth. Sound moral reasoning requires us not to ignore taking into account the process through which this wealth has been acquired if we are to come to a valid conclusion that some wealth is obscene.

According to the moral law, human beings are equal self-owners and therefore own their labour and the products of their labour. In light of this, thus, if your labour achieves high wealth, such wealth is not immoral. It does not harm others to accumulate wealth through labour and voluntary exchange, no matter how much wealth is produced (Foldvary, 2008). Hence, wealth acquired this way ought not to be described as offensive or repulsive, or obscene as Girotti may want us to believe.

Now, still following the moral law, theft and robbery and enslaving are immoral. So, if wealth is obtained by stealing, robbing and subjecting others to slavery, then those acts or processes are evil. Wealth acquired through such processes is evil not because the wealth is large but because those acts or processes are evil, they are offensive or repulsive, in short they are obscene. Following this clarification, thus, *'obscene wealth is that type of wealth acquired through morally offensive or repulsive means.'* Such morally offensive or repulsive means of acquiring wealth include stealing, drugs and human trafficking, profiting in war activities and through all forms of corruption in the public domain among others.

Under the intoxication of greed pampered by the maxims of the sensate symbolic universe such as guile is method, treachery is strategy, betrayal is cleverness, and disrespect of human life is the road to success, many unsuspecting Africans are trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation, forced marriages, domestic servitude and forced labour on construction sites, and plantations or farms. This is done through formal labour recruitment channels but with fraudulent contracts. Thousands of Africans are today currently enslaved due to the phenomenon of human trafficking yet, unfortunately, many of them are perceived as prostitutes, rather than sex slaves; illegal migrants rather than victims of the remorseless greedy human traffickers. Most of these African victims are lured from their homes with false promises of well-paying jobs and better life in countries like United States of America, Europe, South East Asia and the Arab world. Once they get there, they get entrapped; they are coerced into both heterosexual and homosexual prostitution and the other forms of slave work (Polaris Project, 2019). Wealth acquired through this practice is part of what is referred to as obscene wealth. Many of the Africans who are involved in these processes of acquiring wealth consider themselves successful since they now have big bank balances, big cars, large mansions, large square miles of land and they are unbothered about the means by which they acquired this wealth. What matters to them is the fact that they have them. What needs to be mentioned here however is that, such wealth is indeed a result born out of untold suffering experienced by so many innocent and unsuspecting people in Africa. Such wealth is obscene wealth and is realizable only when one has no regard for the underlying principles of the common good.

9. On Causing Social Injustice

Instead of celebrating achievements of character as the ethic of the common good does, the sensate symbolic universe defines personal success in terms of material prosperity regardless of how it is acquired. It considers high income and conspicuous possessions rather than moral integrity as its symbols of secured success. To sensate individuals, this success has to be sustained. And for any sensate individuals who are fortunate enough to be in any position of managing societal affairs, their only way is to cling onto power at all cost. Clinging onto power is not done as an end in itself but as a means to affirming their continuous draining of society's financial resources to sustain their illicit material benefits. This act is manifested through corruption in the public domain – a practice that is generating social injustices in many parts of modern Africa.

10. Social Justice

In the context of this paper, social justice is about the claims all persons in a community have to sharing in goods that are essentially public or social- goods such as adequate education, adequate basic health care, social insurance, public utilities and an atmosphere governed by the rule of law. With social justice, even those who have contributed minimally to achieving the public good or not at all, such as the elderly, children, chronically ill, and mentally derailed have a right, created by their membership in the community, to share in the public good to a degree compatible with human dignity (Tusabe, 2013: 47). Hence, in any society founded on the ideal of social justice, those entrusted with care for the community are concerned about promoting and sustaining the flourishing of all those under their jurisdiction and with a preferential attention given to the poor and vulnerable. Therefore, social justice not only obliges state managers to promote and protect individual rights but even more to give special attention to concerns of social and economic rights through social and political institutions founded on the basic values of good governance. Thus, if you found a community, like most African countries are, where all the major centres of power i.e. political, economic and military are perennially dominated by a chosen few, and the attendant wealth that goes with such powers is being disproportionately enjoyed in favour of those chosen few while a considerable number of other people are living under the weight of abject poverty manifested through

- i. the suffering of persistent hunger and malnutrition
- ii. the use of unsanitary water
- iii. having no access to basic medical care
- iv. living in crowded, unsafe inadequate shelters
- v. illiterate with no productive skills in any economic venture; and
- vi. inability to openly challenge the system sustaining such hardships

then you shall have found a society weighed down by social injustice by those in the social, political and economic positions of power (Tusabe, 2013: 47). And for them to safeguard their acquisitions they, as Thomas More tells us: “devise all means and crafts, first how to keep safely, without fear of losing what they have unjustly gathered together, and . . . they then legitimize these unjust gains by means of laws and appeals to the common good” (O’Hear, 1985: 284). Following the clarification of social justice and injustice, it is worthwhile to demonstrate how those grounded in the sensate symbolic universe have really done it to stay in the political management of the state purposely to extract financial resources to meet their insatiable material goals. The country chosen is Uganda and two case are cited i.e. patronage politics and some examples of spectacular corruption scandals.

11. Patronage Politics in Uganda

All successive post-independence governments in Uganda assumed power either by *coup d’etat* or by political manipulations characterized by government orchestrated violence. The current “National Resistance Movement (NRM) government came to power through a guerrilla war and has continued to hold power through political manipulation” (Mbazira, 2008: 34). In addition, this government adopted the trappings of democracy, yet it has persistently perverted the very requirements of democracy – sometimes through patronage and at other times through violence and repression – all for the sole purpose of remaining in power (Tapscott, 2021).

Patronage politics has led Uganda to have a bloated cabinet with deputy ministers for most of its ministries, which ministerial positions are actually redundant jobs yet they drain large financial resources from the national treasury at the expense of the provision of basic social services. By March 2024, there were over 80 cabinet ministers and ministers of state, in addition to over 139 presidential advisers, special assistants and deputy special assistants (Wanyenya, 2024). Many of these political

sinecures are in the hands of ethnic kinsmen of the political leadership and are loyal movement supporters (Okok, 2023).

The consequence of this political patronage bent on perpetuating some specific group of people in power has only meant that accountability, openness and probity in government activities and projects are not taken seriously. Those operating by the sensate symbolic universe extract financial resources from the state with the aim of accumulating for themselves material wealth. Evidence for this is the many grand corruption scandals that involve many of Uganda's top government executives. Every other day, colossal sums of money are unjustly appropriated by some public officials, obscenely enriching themselves while the public good is left unattended to. In Uganda, thus, the condition of a large number of poor people in the rural areas and those in urban squalors is progressively getting harsher and unbearable. Many people are in abject poverty, lacking adequate food, shelter, medical care and clean water. This poverty mostly affects vulnerable categories with meagre political and economic power.

Like many other African countries that officially claim to be concerned about eliminating poverty among their people, Uganda has several government poverty eradication strategies such as *the Poverty Eradication Action Plan, The National Gender Policy for Uganda, The Agriculture Policy, the Universal Primary Education and the Universal Secondary Education*. Most of their control is managed by sensate strong brokers who have consolidated their excessive power on them that the poor are unable to derive meaning out of these programs. Hence, these poverty eradication strategies are largely there just in name used by the powerful public administrators as means through which they extract heavy monetary resources to accumulate their personal property holdings leaving the poor in severe privation and need. Perhaps it is necessary here to illustrate this phenomenon with some concrete examples if we are to appreciate the kleptocratic character of some of those in the management of Uganda's public affairs who are just there firmly committed to exploiting state resources for themselves and eventually generating explicit social injustices on the Ugandan poor and vulnerable.

In 2009, the government of Uganda had kept on informing citizens that it had built 750 health centres in the country. But in December of that year, *The New Vision* (one of the Uganda's dailies) revealed that there were more than 100 ghost hospitals in the country and that these hospitals were fraudulently 'receiving' drugs and government funds – employing "medical staff" whom government was paying salaries (Mwenda, 2009). There have been many stories in Uganda also to ghost teachers and schools, ghost civil servants and even ghost pensioners. For instance, when in 2008 the *Ministry of Finance* began to pay pensions directly to pensioners' accounts instead of sending them to line ministries, shs.30bn was saved that year (Tusabe, 2013: 50). Besides the ghost scandals, the sensate attitude of Ugandan state managers is further revealed in the manner in which resources meant for the most vulnerable poor within our society are diverted to serve the insatiable egotistic interests of state managers. In 2023, several Ministers and the Speaker of Parliament distributed to themselves iron sheets which were meant for the poverty stricken people of Karamoja region (Kamurungi, 2023). In addition, the manner in which poverty alleviation programmes have suffered from corruption reveals a lot about the sensate attitude of state managers who disguise around as concerned about the plight of the poor yet turn around to divert such resources to their benefit. Almost all these programmes have been engrossed with massive theft and diversion of funds hence failing to effectively serve their intended purpose, leaving many citizens in abject poverty. Among these programmes that have suffered in the hands of corrupt official include the *Bona bagagawale*, Youth livelihood programme, Operation Wealth Creation, *Emyooga* and the Parish Development Model (Ndyabahika, 2018; The Independent, 2021; Kakumba, 2022).

From what has just been described above, it is clear that much decision making and public administration in some African countries is largely entangled in personal interest and patrimonial politics. Several persons in positions of government heavily reap out of these greed practices leaving a host of needy people without access to the basic minimums of social services. Many of the social

injustices suffered on the African continent, especially those injustices related to the violation of social and economic rights, have been and are still sustained by the corruption livened by the sensate symbolic universe. And to make matters worse, such grand unfair appropriation of scarce financial resources in most African countries has fuelled petty corruption at lower levels of administration and service delivery since these lower levels officials (probably also under the force of the sensate symbolic universe) have little incentive to do their jobs well and fairly. In the end of it all, it is the poor and vulnerable that stand out as the worst hit victims. It is not surprising then that in most African countries, especially those south of the Sahara, one can easily observe the ever increasing symptoms of social injustice such as:

- The ever increasing number of slum dwellers who live in tiny and crowded shacks, without sanitary facilities and unemployed since they lack any economic productive skills and are in conditions of extreme deprivation.
- The rising host of rejected and abandoned street children searching for food in garbage heaps and refuse cans. Begging or stealing to fill their empty stomachs and in danger of death from drugs and AIDS and of being kidnapped by those who are eager to sell them away for their internal vital organs.
- The ever-growing number of mothers in the slums and rural settings, who have to put up with the weight of their children's suffering from malnutrition, starvation, diseases and are unable to help them because there is no help available to the poor.

Apart from the sensate symbolic universe leading some of the powerful people in Africa to acquire obscene wealth and propagating social injustice, this symbolic universe has also had a profound impact on the way of life of many individuals, not only those in positions of power but even the ordinary people to a point that one can say that the dominant spreading culture in Africa today is the sensate way of life. What are the characteristics of this way of life as manifest in the lives of a considerably large number of people, both the ordinary and those in positions of power?

12. The Sensate Way of Life

A sensate way of life is one founded or saturated with the foundational assumptions of the sensate symbolic universe. These assumptions, as we have already seen, have with them the Cyrenaic hedonic belief that the good life is the life of enjoying the pleasures of the senses – an enjoyment that must not be restrained by any moral norm. Now, a corollary of this emphasis on pleasure has been the tendency among most people to believe that having materially bigger things is better without regard for the morality of the means you used in acquiring these big things. Hence, quantitative colossalism is now considered by many – those with a sensate mindset – to be the major criterion of any great value and achievement. The best business enterprises are those that are huge who even governments can choose to subsidize other than subsidizing the small ones. Respected leaders in society are those who are rich regardless of their moral character. The best preachers must be stinking rich and attracting large crowds. Anything not big, even when it is the finest in quality, is passed unnoticed.

Mass education is promoted and yet less genius is emerging; for instance, universities teaching philosophy and history but hardly producing philosophers and historians. A crowd of students graduating from a university where English is the lingua-franca, but so few among them being able to construct any two English sentences correctly.

On the economic level, under this sensate outlook, many have been lured into productivism – the economic belief that measureable economic productivity and growth is the purpose of human life and that more production is necessarily desirable (Henkel, 2015). Oriented towards sustaining this productivism, one now sees almost everywhere in the world a class of professionals who manipulate people on what their taste should be. The world is replete with media businesses telling people what

they should wear, eat, drink and what type of car or motorcycle they should drive or ride. We see all over the place media giving hints about what is good taste and what is bad taste. Purveying taste has become big business – a business covertly coercing people to consume that which they should not have consumed. The sensate economic culture is focused not at meeting demand but at creating it. Apart from this type of economic culture not being ecologically sustainable since it over exploits the natural environment leaving it with no capacity of replenishing itself, this economic culture has led to the habit of over consuming luxurious products and services – a habit that is referred to as consumerism. Many have become intoxicated by it that it has more or less assumed a level of being described as a cult in its own right.

This cult already has its own ‘cathedrals’ in the names of super-markets and shopping-malls; its own ‘priesthood’ represented by shrewd advertisers and salesmen; its own ‘doctrine’, the sensate symbolic universe; its ‘faithful laity’, those unsuspecting masses obsessed with enjoying material pleasures; and its own means of ‘grace’, money that must be received at any cost (Osborn, 1995: 62). One may even conclude that in this sensate way of life, the *Cartesian Dictum* “I think, therefore I am” has now been replaced with “I buy, therefore I am.” And for me to receive the means of grace (money), with which I can buy, then anything goes. No wonder that in most parts of Africa, violence has proved to be the major means for acquiring money to buy. This violence spans between the overt and covert. Overt violence is manifested through direct robberies or murders to steal or confiscate the property of the victims; and also kidnappings in order to traffic victims into slavery or sell away their vital organs. While covert violence manifests itself in several ways that are subtle. For example, the subtle violence inflicted by a contractor against the contractee where the contractor provides shoddy services in order to save for himself some money; or a pharmaceutical company providing fake medicines that do not meet the standard chemical requirements; or corrupt administrators in academic institutions selling to crooks forged academic documents; and drugs merchants selling drugs to addicts where they derive supernormal monetary returns. The traditional moral principles of respect for persons, human life and commutative justice have totally been disregarded by the sensate economic commercial mental out-look that has pervaded the African continent.

13. Towards the Revival of the Ethic of the Common Good on the African Continent

As demonstrated above, the sensate symbolic universe has won over a considerable majority of people on the African continent. It is steadily displacing the dictates of the moral law that had traditionally been anchored by the ethic of the common good. The success of this sensate symbolic universe is thriving on the conviction that if it is lived, it liberates its adherents from the irrationalities of traditions, and the fears projected by religions and even releasing them from the eschatological-metaphysical claims of punishment after death if one never lived by the requirements of the moral law as outlined by the ethic of the common good.

We need to beware that if this sensate way of life took deeper root in Africa, it is no doubt that the continent shall inevitably slip into the Hobbesian-like state of nature. How can this be avoided?

There is need to vigilantly strive to revive concern for the common good especially among the emerging generation i.e. the younger adults who take for granted the sensate way of life which is propagated by the mainstream media. This generation has been nurtured in a context shaped less by commitment to the values of the common good but more by celebrating material greed as the virtue for those that want to be successful in life.

Reviving the cultivating of the common good on the Africa continent ought to be done by paying special attention to the traditional African normative axiological system. This traditional African axiological system is rich with values so relevant to cultivating concerns for the common good. By looking to this traditional system, advocates of the common good shall be guarding themselves against possible accusations that they are promoting alien values on the African people. The most outstanding of the values in this normative axiological system include: respect for human

persons; respect for human life; and human solidarity.

Respect for human persons requires that the person is always the center and end of all human endeavours. He/she as a person must never be “thingfied” as an object to be used to promote one’s material selfish goals. Everyone is expected to take care of the human person. It follows then that, in this axiological system obscene wealth is condemned since it results out of having “thingfied” fellow human persons. In fact, having examined this aspect concerning the respect that has to be accorded human persons, J.S. Mbiti came to conclude that traditional African normative axiology is founded on “its own ontology... it is an extremely anthropocentric ontology in the sense that everything is seen in terms of its relation to the human person” (Mbiti, 1975: 15). This principle more than ever needs to be cultivated.

Those working to revive adherence to the ethic of the common good ought also to nurture in the young the value of cherishing human life. The young need to be made to realize that every human life from the moment of conception to natural death i.e., at every stage of its development and decline is precious. The young must thus be educated into realising that:

To touch a person’s life, starkly put, to shed human blood, especially innocent blood is the greatest evil on earth: against earth, and against humanity... [And that] those who threaten or harass human lives deserve to be proportionately sanctioned according to their evils (Iroegbu, 1994: 84).

This value must be cultivated purposely to lead the young into appreciating that all social and political arrangements ought to aim at promoting the flourishing of human life; that all development is development for human life; and all progress is progress towards fulfilled human life.

In reviving concern for the common good in Africa, the young also need to be nurtured to realise that the human person is essentially a social being since for any human individual if he/she is to be born and to survive and even in death, society is an inevitable presence. With this, thus, the principle of solidarity ought to be encouraged among the young generation in Africa. This solidarity must be encouraged to allow the young develop “the positive will to, and the practice of living and working together, crowned by profound mutual assistance: spontaneous or organized, among the members of a group brought together [for the common good]” (Iroegbu, 1994: 86).

It is very probable that if this principle were promoted among the African young people may be they shall live to be concerned about putting first the needs of the weak and the vulnerable in their midst, hence, uplifting the moral principle of the preferential option for the weak and vulnerable.

And lastly, all those in Africa committed to concerns of the common good ought to practically participate in striving to work to realize those social conditions in society that are to every one’s advantage. There are three suggestions made here on what they ought to perform, apart from what has just been recommended above. First they need to grow in knowledge about the social injustices on the continent in general and in their regions in particular; second, they need to continuously make personal reflection on the ideal requirements of the common good and; thirdly, they ought to participate in public policy advocacy.

To grow in knowledge about the condition of social justice on the continent requires them to regularly seek factual information on the social and political plight of the people. Gathering such information is a critical first step in working for a just social order. They should therefore make it a habit to search to know what is going on both in their areas and on the continent at large.

Those committed to promoting the common good should also devote some moments to reflecting on and contemplating the ideals of the common good and the moral law in general. Such is significant because it does influence the way they shall live their lives and organize their lifestyles – empowering them to strengthen their commitment to living lives divorced from greed and consumerism. And even more, they must also involve themselves in activities of public policy advocacy. Their involvement in political affairs is not only appropriate, it is necessary. It is necessary because social structures and policy frameworks that affect especially the poor and vulnerable are a product

of public policy decisions. Hence, the struggle to promote a better Africa for all requires these advocates of the common good to effectively participate in decisions that affect the lives of the weak and the voiceless.

14. Conclusion

It has been shown, in this paper, that those in Africa living by the sensate symbolic universe have generated a lot of suffering on many people through corruption, oppression of the poor and the weak and through drugs and human trafficking – acts that have undermined the requirements of the common good. In light of the moral law which beckons each one of us always to do good and avoid evil, this sensate symbolic universe is dreadful, unworthy of being lived and in every sense destructive of human civility. A way of life patterned along its basic assumptions inevitably leads human beings to exercise violence against their fellow human beings. In the face of the challenges and problems generated by living this sensate symbolic universe, practical reason points us to adopting a life of voluntary simplicity. This is necessary because simplicity of lifestyle has the potential of liberating persons from the bondage of relentlessly amassing material goods at the expense of others. It can free us from the glamour of consumerism allowing us to open our eyes to the social injustices suffered by others, and perhaps which injustices we have partly contributed to due to our past way of life of unrestrained greed. It can liberate us into appreciating the other as a person possessing rights which we are morally obliged to respect. It can pave way for working together to realise the sum total of those social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfilment more fully and more easily. Otherwise, if the above phenomena of abusing human persons in Africa continue to unfold the way they are now, under the sensate symbolic universe, then our humanity as human beings shall inevitably slide into extinction.

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