
THE IMPLICATIONS OF HUMILITY IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

At this moment in time when our nation needs to do about-face to attain a desired progressive sustainable development, it becomes necessary for every faculty of human endeavor to contribute its own quota for the desired development. It is against this backdrop that religion as a faculty attempts to suggest the virtue of humility as the source of all enduring development. Accordingly, this paper discusses humility as a virtue that brings about the demeanor that creates a down to earth understanding of oneself that seeks to understand others and God Almighty. It proposes humility as a religious virtue that enables patience, endurance, peace, harmony, negotiated-compromise and peaceful coexistence to sprout, grow and mature enough to empower humans to change their demeanor of pride, arrogance, vainglory, and corruption. It argues that the ultimate change of the mentioned vices gives rise to a sustainable development of any nation. The essay concludes by insisting that by suppressing or completely abrogating the mentioned vices our country will exponentially experience sustainable development.

INTRODUCTION

The word 'humility' is a direct translation of the Latin word *humilitas* which means modesty or respectfulness. Aquinas argues that humility was derived from *humus* or earth beneath us to express lowliness (Contra Gent., bk. IV, ch. Iv). But Devine (2010) maintains that the word humility is not definable rather it is known by recognizing its resultant effect in human behavior. Hence, he submits that "humility signifies lowliness or submissiveness." This idea is corroborated by Browne (1967) who went through the memory lane to remember the medieval omission of humility when they were enumerating the seven virtues that made the chart for good Christian life. According to him, the omission presupposed either that the practice of the seven virtues made for humility or that only the humble person could practice them, meaning that humility was subsumed into the seven virtues. Even in the second half of the twentieth century, people still subsumed humility in people's quality life by explaining it in the context of good life with regard to human relationships. Hence, while not mentioning humility by its name, Browne (1967) identifies it in human behavior. The person who exhibits this trait is therefore termed the humble, and then through the critical observation of the humble, what is called humility emerges.

Thus, the humble is defined as neither boastful nor domineering, not given to self display, always prepared to do well what he/she can do well and as occasion demands, to attempt what he cannot do well (Browne, 1967: 160). But Devine (2010) would like the concept to be applied to both persons and things to grasp the holistic view of its content. It is against this backdrop that he defined humility as "that which is abject, ignoble, or of poor condition." According to him, people ordinarily, conceive humility as something that does not worth

much. Hence, people talk about people of no consequence as man/woman of humble birth or abject house as a house of humble dwelling. When humility is strictly restricted to persons, it is understood also as afflictions which may be inflicted by external agents, as when one person humiliates another person to bring opprobrium on him/her. The virtue of humility may be further defined in Aquinas' words as "a quality by which a person considering his own defects has a lowly opinion of himself [herself] and willingly submits himself [herself] to God and to others for God's sake." He borrows from St. Bernard to further identify humility as "A virtue by which a man knowing himself as he truly is; abases himself." Furthermore, Aquinas, adds that the virtue of humility "consists in keeping oneself within one's own bounds, not reaching out to things above one, but submitting to one's superior" (*Contra Gent.*, bk. IV, ch. Lv). Besides, humility could be understood in a virtuous ethical sense, in which a person modestly estimates his/her own worth, and humbly submits him/herself to others. "According to this meaning no man can humiliate another, but only himself, and this he can do properly only when aided by Divine grace" (Devine, 2010: 1). This is the higher and ethical sense of humility which is also referred to as virtuous. This is the understanding which this essay is treating humility. It will also treat it and most important from the angle of its contribution to the transformation of a nation to sustainable development.

Humility as a Potential part of Temperance

Among the four cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance, humility is annexed to temperance as a potential part. Temperance is the virtue that includes all those virtues that refrain or express the inordinate movements of our desires or appetites. All other moral virtues annex to others either as integral, potential or subjective parts. Since humility is a potential part of temperance, it assists it to repress or moderate opposing virtues like pride and vainglory or that spirit in us that urges us to do things beyond or above our strength and ability. In this regard humility performs the same duty as the virtue of meekness which represses anger. Thus, we can say that meekness and humility can be applied as agents of repression of anger and pride respectively, promoting peace and calmness in the process. (*Summa Theol.*, I-II, Q. lxi, aa. 2 and 4)

Humility as the Foundation of all Virtues

From what we have stated above, it becomes clear that while the theological virtues [faith, hope and charity (1 Chr. 13:13)] occupy the first seat among the ranks of the virtues, the intellectual virtues [understanding, knowledge, wisdom, art and prudence] come second, since they immediately direct the human reason to good. Since obedience is a part of justice, both of them are placed before humility in the rank of virtues. However, humility is said to be the foundation of the spiritual edifice, in a sense that without humility, other virtues will find it difficult to materialize; since it is the virtue that brings about the condition for other virtues to sprout and grow. Yet it is true that faith should be the first because it is the first step through which we access the supernatural life, but humility is scored first in the order of removing obstacles to spiritual life. Thus, inasmuch as humility removes the obstacles to faith it is the first among the virtues. For according to St Thomas, humility is the mood of virtue that is capable of removing obstacles. Hence it removes pride and makes

human person subject to and indeed fit to receive the divine grace. For, according to the words of St. James: "God resists the proud, and gives his grace to the humble" (James 4:6). Nevertheless, since faith is the first step by which we access the supernatural life, it is the first and the positive fundamental virtue of all the infused virtues. That is why the apostle Paul maintains that "without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him" (Heb 11:6). Humility, inasmuch as it seems to keep the mind and heart submissive to reason and to God, has its own function in connection with faith and all the other virtues, and it may therefore be said to be a universal virtue. As a universal virtue it cuts across cultures and faith- traditions. It is the fundamental virtue of all tribes, nations, sexes, colors and religions. It is therefore the cogent virtue that can successfully transform nations. Since every human person in this world can radically relate to humility, it is unarguably the virtue that our nation needs to harness at this moment of transformation to achieve a sustainable development. This is why we must immediately consider how our ancestors in faith accessed humility to become the icon that we look up to today.

The Dynamics of Humility and their Influences on Our Ancestors in Faith

According to Stacey (2008), Ibadah is an Arabic word from where another Arabic word 'ubudiyah' which translates to mean humility, originated. She explains that while ibadah like other Arabic words might have other shades of meaning, it expresses more of humility or humbleness. Ibadah in her words, involves more than an awareness of humility, it expresses the complete sense of humbleness that overcomes one who is totally submitted to the will of God. Since real worship is total submission to God, she averred that humility is the essential part of submission to God. Thus, any Muslim worth his/her mettle should be awash with humility since he/she must submissively worship God at least five times daily. "So glorify the praises of your Lord and be of those who prostrate themselves to Him" (Quran 15:98).

Conceiving humility as piety, Stacey (2008), beautifully describes the pious situation in an Islamic congregational prayer as follows:

The main pillar of worship, Ibadah, is the prayer. The congregational prayer is performed in rows where all men stand before God as equals. There is no special place for the rich or powerful, the meek and poor are not relegated to the back lines. Each man bows his head in humility knowing that his brothers, on either side of him are equally important in the sight of God. Only one thing raises one man or woman above another – piety. True piety or righteousness is not achievable without cultivating a sense of humility.

Moreover, Stacey (2008) maintains that humility under discussion is the one that comes from knowing about God and recognizing His greatness, venerating Him, loving Him and being in awe of Him. She also says that this type of humility is the one that comes from knowing about oneself and one's own faults, and weaknesses. She insists that God gives this characteristic to those who struggle to become close to Him through deeds of piety and

righteousness. Browne (1967: 160) echoes the same thought when he explained that humility is made through "the consistent attempt to love God, neighbor and self in thought, word and deed" Citing Saheeh Muslim, Stacey (2008) further reminds us that "Wealth does not decrease because of charity, and God increases His slave in honor when he forgives others." For as Browne (1967: 160) further explains, the humble person bears in mind that each individual is at the same time, first, a creature limited in knowledge and power; secondly, a being made in the image of God, capable of a relationship with God; thirdly, a sinner in constant need of repentance. Thus, there is no one who humbles him/herself before God who God does not raise in status. This agrees with the words of Mary in the Magnificat where she insists that God raises the humble but brings down the proud (Lk 1:51-2). Hence, Stacey (2008) emphatically asserts that humility is one of the greatest blessings God can bestow on human being, since it enables a believer to achieve genuine submission to God. Sampling Prophet Mohammad as an example of humility she stated as follows:

Prophet Muhammad was truly submitted to God; his character was one of complete humility and based on sincere trust in God. He was a model of kindness and humbleness. In fact, the characteristics displayed by Prophet Muhammad were the exact opposite of pride and arrogance. Every aspect of his life reflected humbleness, even his walking, talking, sitting or eating.

That is why we think that humility is really a universal virtue which is necessary for transformation and indeed basic for salvation. No wonder then, Our Lord Jesus Christ enjoined his disciples to "Learn of me, because I am meek, and humble of heart: and you shall find rest to your souls" (Mt. 11:29). Moreover, the Apostle Paul enjoining his Philippians' audience while drawing their attention to the humility of Christ Jesus as follows:

Have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross (Phil. 2: 5-8).

From the example of Christ and His Saints we may learn the practice of humility, which Aquinas explains as "the spontaneous embracing of humiliations is a practice of humility not in any and every case but when it is done for a needful purpose: for humility being a virtue, does nothing indiscreetly..."(Contra Gent., bk, III, 135). Thus, the Lord Jesus further teaches his disciples saying, "Blessed are you when they shall revile you, and persecute you and speak all that is evil against you, for my sake; be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven" (Mt. 5: 11-12).

The implications of Humility as an Act of Transforming the Nation

Moreover, this work chooses to study 'humility' because of its potentiality to repress or moderate vices like pride and vainglory or the spirit in us that urges us to do things beyond

our ability. As a transforming country, our country needs the virtue of humility now to aid it in the process of transformation. There is no gainsaying that our country is completely immersed in corruption; a casual look at this 'catalogue of waste', recorded in one of our dailies will put us yet in touch with the magnitude of corruption in Nigeria. In his lamentation on the railway rot in Nigeria, Martins (2012) bemoans the situation as follows:

It has been a catalogue of failed ideas; dreams turned nightmares and more of passing the buck; blame games, accusations and counter accusations than any success story at the NRC. For instance, it is public knowledge that the regime of the late General Sani Abacha, on December 9, 1995, signed a mouthwatering \$528 million contract with CCECC to rehabilitate, resuscitate and refurbish Nigeria's 3, 500km rail network. The firm was further required, according to the contract, to supply a total of 620 locomotives, rolling stocks as well as provide technical training for Nigerian Railway Corporation (NRC) staff. The deal between CCECC and Nigeria was a four-year term that was meant to be either reviewed, continued or terminated at the end of the first phase. Sadly, it never saw the light of the day...Reason is the insincerity of Nigerian government to tackle corruption...(Martins, 2012: 31)

Martins (2012), summarizes the whopping sum corruptly salted way by NRC authorities as follows:

Regime	Period	Amnt	Firm
IBB	1989/92	\$6b	CCECC
Abacha	1995	\$528b	CCECC
Obasanjor	2006	\$10b	CCECC
Yar'Addua	2009	\$441	CCECC; Costain West Africa, General Electric
Jonathan	2011	N67m	CGGC

At this juncture, it becomes obvious that we need the virtue of humility to diminish if not completely abrogate the corrupt appetite of Nigerians. It has been unarguably established that practicing humility protects one against pride which is said to be the source of corruption and vainglory. The same source also attests to the fact that the practice of humility deeply represses the spirit in every human being that leads people to aspire for things beyond their power (Skinner 2012). Now, this is not to say that it is evil to have inner drive to want to be successful, or desire for the possibilities that may seem larger than life, that in itself is even humility also but it is more of humility to desire things achievable within our competence. What is necessary here, suggests, Skinner (2012), is to develop humility which speaks to the demeanor and attitude in our moments of pursuit and rivalry, so that our inner drive and desires are in balance with our composure, and our conduct with those who interact with us or what we interact with are in consonance. This will enable a genuine transformation as it will enable us to understand ourselves properly so as to understand others as well. When we fully understand ourselves as creatures of God, it will enable us to understand all human beings as beings fundamentally created by God as humans. By this understanding, all humans will understand one another as humans who have common desire and common

needs and therefore should be treated as humans at all times without bias of faith, sex, tribe, ethnicity, or state. This will then assist us to accommodate people around us who would inevitably share in our achievements and or failures in life. It is in this connection that the rich but humble person remembers his/her environment, both the rich and the poor around him/her. Instead of his richness popping his head off in pride and vainglory, humility attenuates him and then enables the person to share his richness with the people around him/her. Here, humility helps the person to show kindness to people but particularly people who are less privileged.

When a humble person kindly shares his possessions, he/she courts the pleasure of many people who would always be praying for his progress, as it is obvious with the prayers of the beggars along the Nigerian roads, which goes like this: "*Allah ya baka ka ba mu*>may God (give) increase your wealth so that you can give us." This is an appreciation that reveals the inner joy of the beggars, saying you have treated us as human beings who matter in the scheme of things, may your humanness bring more wealth to you so that you will continue to treat us in this manner. Or put it this way, "By this sharing you have appreciated our worth as ordinary human beings who are created by God but happen to be beggars due to circumstances beyond our control. For not treating us like trash, we continue to pray for the increase of your wealth so that you can be remembering us." In this act of giving, you not only satisfied the needy but drastically mellowed down the wild eyes of the envious persons who would be targeting to square up with you or planning how to destroy you and your vainglory. It is this area that humble politicians attract a lot of encomiums and prayers; while the proud and thrifty ones incur anger and disdain of the masses. Thus, it pays to learn the act of humility as it enables us to change and turn a new leaf of life which engenders being at peace with oneself and with humanity and above all with God Almighty.

Humble Demeanor leads to the Recognition of Common Humanity intent upon One God

Moreover, it is the act of humility that enables us to appreciate other humans as creatures of God who have such needs as supernaturalism and prayer. It is with humble heart that people should understand that all human beings who need supernaturalism must have diverse ways of saying the prayers. From the stand of humility then, one will understand that as one says his/her prayers to God and enjoys them, so also another person can say his/her prayers to God and be happy with them. It is humility then that will enable me to recognize and respect other humans and their prayers and the object of their prayers which is God. It is humility that will enable us to understand that all of us pray to one God and one God alone. In the same vain a humble person should discover, recognize and appreciate the diversity of cultures, tongues, ethnicities and religions that make up one conglomerate nation called Nigeria. Humbly understanding this will enable us to appreciate one another as brothers and sisters created by the same one God whom all of us worship daily for our wellbeing. Acquiring humility as our mood of life is definitely going to transform us as new persons who dispose themselves to transforming their nation for better.

The Implications of Courtesy as an Act of Humility

As an act of courtesy, humility has the power to promote an orderly society where respect and obedience become the cultural order of behavior. In an African society for instance respect takes sway in everything one does. Because the social relationship is gerontocratic, the junior members of the society owe the seniors an enormous debt of humble respect. Whereas Yoruba prostrate while greeting their elders, the Igbo stand but must not in any way show any sign of arrogance or pride. The junior Igbo cannot in any event dispute or dishonor the opinion of an elder as that will be interpreted as arrogance which will be instantly sanctioned and severely punished. Frankly, it is the respectful obedience that is often translated as love within the bond of marriage among the Igbo of Nigeria. It is when the wife is humbly respecting the husband that he acknowledges that he has a good wife (Chidili, 2005:294-295). Girls of African descent are often reminded of humble behavior by their parents and guardians since it is the demeanor that fetches husband as and when due. Arrogant and proud girls rarely attract husbands in time. And what is more? A humble husband is a chaste husband who takes care of his wife and children honorably and keeps faith with his vow of fidelity. Since chastity checks the wile of lust the husband keeps to his wife and wife keeps to the husband as recommended by Paul the apostle (1 Corinth 7:3-5). Humility brings about the demeanor which sprouts the virtue of chastity. And when all families are in humble state of life; our nation transforms exponentially.

A Humble Patient Family: A Happy Nation

Furthermore, it has been argued that patience is the hallmark of peaceful marriage. Where the spouses are not patient with one another, the family most often goes chaotic. But where spouses patiently bear each other's burdens, peace becomes the ruler in the family. Humility is the virtue that provides the demeanor for patience. It is only a humble person that can bear the reproaches of family life. Among the Igbo, humble demeanor is assumed for the female; meaning that females are expected to be humble in every situation whereas males are expected to be arrogant, because according to them, men should be the proud owner of the family and therefore must arrogantly protect it. But recent research in family life shows that humility has no rival in securing a happy, peaceful family. Hence, men are advised to attenuate their arrogance and learn to be humble in the interest of peaceful family. When a spouse develops humble demeanor he/she waves bye-bye to anger and angry moments. There, we resemble our heavenly father who is slow to anger abounding in love and forgiveness (Num 14:18; Ps 103: 8; Neh 9: 17). This implies that like our heavenly father we will develop the demeanor not to be easily provoked. Even when we are provoked, we shall be tender and compassionate towards our offenders. This demeanor reveals the readiness in us to pardon sins of all sorts and willingness not to drag cases to extremity even when the offender is punished. Because as the saying goes; the person of humble demeanor has the potential to positively reconsider deeds and misdeeds before taking decisions capable of absorbing idiosyncrasies of family life. Such a person is not only ensuring a peaceful family but also ensuring the wellbeing of the family and the nation. Since by that single act order and joy will take sway of the family and by extension, the nation. For where God gives grace to be humble, he will give more grace, more wisdom, faith holiness and humility (Henry

1991). Hence, the apostle Peter adds: humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time (1Pt 5:6). Hence, a humble family ultimately saves itself from wiles of fever, dysentery, hypertension and many other diseases that are fomented by chaotic dysfunctional family. In like manner, the nation is saved from all forms of problems incurred by chaotic situations; for happy family makes a happy nation. It is an orderly happy family therefore, that produces an orderly happy nation, which in fact gives rise to sustainable development. This is why this essay sees the virtue of humility as a must for every member of the Nigerian family at this moment of transformation, so that we can transform our nation for sustainable development.

Humility as the Root of Peaceful Coexistence

Since the virtue of humility provides the demeanor for courtesy, respect and patience, it becomes apparent that it is the virtue needed for peaceful coexistence which Nigeria badly needs now. Peaceful coexistence is after all an accommodation of one another's different views and opinions, different religions, states, races, personalities and idiosyncrasies for the sake of peace. It means to compromise, negotiate or concede positions for the sake of peaceful coexistence (Idris, 2007). What the virtue of humility does in this regard is that it assumes the pivotal enabling source of dissipating the anger of estranged brothers and sisters and facilitates their healing process. It does this by inspiring and activating the agenda of peace overtures to advance healing process within the estranged communities to engender reaching out to one another in their sincere attempt to live together in peace. It enables a negotiated compromise and allows communities to cede positions in the interest of peace and harmony. Humility allows estranged brothers to see the dignity and worth of all human beings and therefore appreciate all humans as children of God who qualify to live together in love and harmony. It is humility then to endeavor to imbibe the humble demeanor so as to facilitate moments of peaceful coexistence in our lives. If we can imbibe the spirit of humility it means that we have discovered the panacea to our common nationhood which will unite us as a nation under one God. It is at this juncture that we must remind ourselves that acting with humility does not in any way diminish or deny our own self worth. Rather, it affirms the inherent worth of all persons. Say (2012) puts it this way:

We can be confident, and we can be self-assured; humility does not call for us to be meek, or consider ourselves lower in stature. We do not require less of ourselves, and we take our role and our responsibilities seriously. However what humility does is create a sort of receptacle of acceptance in us, so we are open to being filled with the knowledge and opinions of others. Humility is a kind of hunger for more abundance. The greater our humility, the greater our fascination with the world around us, and the more we learn (Say, 2012, p.1).

Moreover, some would consider humility to be a psychological malady that interferes with "success" (Say, 2012). But what is rather true is that, wealth, power or status gained at the expense of others brings only anxiety, sleepless nights and hypertension; whereas wealth, power or status earned through the spirit of humility produces peace, love, wellbeing

and progress. It is therefore the considered opinion of this paper that Nigerian people with their government should do whatever it takes to imbibe the spirit of humility so as to turn our nation round for the better.

CONCLUSION

The preceding has discussed humility as an agent of transformation that will genuinely transform the nation for sustainable development. The paper discovers that as the power to repress or moderate pride and vainglory, it is a force that is needed to abrogate corruption controlling the spirit of our people now. As a virtue, humility which is developed through constant effort to love God and humanity bears in mind the situation of human persons as creatures of God who are prone to fallibility. Humility is also the virtue that enables people to recognize individuals and collectives as children of God who needs love without border. Humility also brings about the demeanor that produces peaceful and progressive family. It also seeks for the wellbeing of all peoples and nations. Finally, it seeks for living together in peace and harmony of all humans. This is what this paper understands as transformation; we can therefore make bold to conclude that humility is the virtue we need now to transform our nation to sustainable development.

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