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Editorial

In this issue, the lead article examines the roles of the Ulama in Arabic and Islamic scholarship in Yorubaland. Folorunsho and Raifu argue expose both the prospects and challenges Arabic scholarship still faces in contemporary society. Busari also argues that in contemporary world literature, the Qur'an occupies a unique position. Aganoke examines the religious intersection that exists between Catholic and African (Igbo) traditional burial rites. She observes that the influences both have on each other continue to be noticed among the Igbo people. On his part, Iyanda examines the sanctity of human life from the Yoruba perspective. He notes that the increasing desecration of life in contemporary society is against reverence for life that has been an age-long teaching of the Yoruba. Finally, Olajide gives a SWOT analysis of prophecies in contemporary churches, exploring their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that they must guard against in their deployment.

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The Sanctity of Human Life in Yoruba Religion

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Abstract

From the beginning, the sanctity of life is the reason for human existence. This process of life is sustained through procreation and preservation of the essence of human life. But in recent times, respect for sanctity of life and preservation of life have become topical and perennial issue in human society. Nigerian society today is beclouded by act of irreverence and disrespect for human life, and life is no longer sacred but disposable at the slightest provocation. Lack of respect for human life has resulted into destruction of many precious lives. The irreverence for human life could be imagined from how life was being wasted through diverse forms of killing; how kidnapping has become the order of the day; how bombing and ritual killing pervaded the land. The methodological approach for the paper was historical and descriptive in nature because it addressed the age-long problem. The study discovered that human life is sacred from conception to death where dead are accorded with good burial rites. In the light of above, human life is expected to be treated with respect and reverence which would make the society safer for all.

Key words: Yoruba Religion, Sanctity of human life, Proverb and Ifa.

Introduction

The concept of sanctity of human life in Yoruba religious norm is incontestable and revered. There is no religious community without human beings. This shows that individuality could not be maintained without the evidence of religious group, but individual exists when he or she is a part of a group.¹ Religion binds and does not divide a community.² This is to say that sanctity of a community would be maintained by regulations pertaining to religious behavior. Improper or unjust behavior toward fellow members of the community disrupts the harmony and damages the sanctity of the community. The above could be confirmed on how a woman identified as Beatrice was beaten up and her two-year-old baby was smashed against the floor by some thugs and killed the toddler in Idanre Local Government Area of Ondo State as a result of a disagreement.³ This is to affirm how human life is

being degraded in our society. Yoruba is known to hold in high esteem all of God's creation, both animate and inanimate. Everything matters, no matter how seemingly insignificant, and has its importance in the order of the created world.⁴ This is established from Akinowo's assertion that Yoruba believe that at the moment of conception, life begins and it is at this moment that human being is biologically under construction till birth.⁵ If Yoruba, with their beliefs could have the understanding that life begins at the time of conception, it means that foetus is a potential human being. Therefore, human life has to be respected.

It is glaring that we live in a society that is pervaded by irreverence and disrespect for human lives, and also with a culture that does not hold human lives as sacred at the slightest provocation. This has resulted into cheapening and destruction of human lives through murder and wanton- killings by Boko haram, Fulani herdsman, ritual killers and other social maladies. The prevalence of these in Nigeria informed the basis of this paper. The paper, therefore, looks into the relevance of Yoruba Religion in the sanctity of human life in Nigeria. With the above scenario serving as background, the paper examines an account of Yoruba Religion, The Concept of Sanctity of Human Life in Yoruba Religion, Ifa Teachings on Sanctity of Human Life, and relevance of Sanctity of Human Life to the Nigerian Society.

An Account of Yoruba Religion

The study of any religion is the study of the people who practice the religion. Aside man, there can be no religion. Religion can only come as a result of the activities of two agents – God who reveals Himself to man, and man who embraces and responds to God's revelation.⁶ It is therefore proper to know human kind, so as to know much about his religion. Yoruba are one of the three largest ethnic groups in Nigeria and are predominantly found in the South western part of Nigeria, and in some parts of Dahomey (Republic of Benin) and Togo land.⁷ The Yoruba belong to Ogun, Oyo, Ekiti, Osun, and Lagos State of Nigeria. A substantial portion of the population of Kogi and Kwara States are also Yoruba.⁸ The Yoruba are many and are regarded as one of the most advanced communities in West Africa, especially in religion, agriculture, commerce, education, art, intelligence, government, and warfare. These people have a long history, and they trace their ancestral home to Ile-Ife where they believe that the act of creation began.

They however believe in the existence of an Almighty God, who they term Olorun that is Lord of Heaven⁹. They acknowledge Him as the maker of Heaven and Earth, but too exalted to concern Himself directly with men and their affairs. Hence they admit the existence of many gods as intermediaries, and these they term as Orisa¹⁰. That is to say that Yoruba Religion is the indigenous religion of the Yoruba people. There was a time in Nigerian history when the only practiced religion was the indigenous religion¹¹. This was also the case with the rest of Africa, otherwise called

African Religion by scholars. The religion has been handed down from generation to generation by the forebears to the present generation of Yoruba by oral tradition¹². It is a religion that the Yoruba have made theirs by living and preaching it. It has no written literature but it is written everywhere for those that care to see and read. It is written in the peoples' myths and folktales, in their songs and dances, in their liturgies and shrines and in their proverbs and pithy sayings¹³. It is a religion that has no founder and zeal for membership drive, yet it offers persistent fascination for Yoruba whether young or old. The religion is a heritage from the past but it is treated not as a thing of the forgotten past but as that which connects the past with the present and the present with eternity. It is a religion that is practiced by living men and women¹⁴. The above shows that Yoruba do not know how to exist without religion playing a leading and major role, because they never embark on anything without bringing in religion. Yoruba see religion as life and life is all about religion. For Yoruba Religion is more exceeding way of life or an approach to life as directed by a holy writ Ifa. It is a way of life and life itself, where there is no dichotomy between religion and human nature vis-à-vis existence¹⁵. And that, the condition for well-being and wholeness depicts peace as a religious credential and totality of Yoruba Religion.

It must be noted that the study of the belief and practices of the people gave the theological understanding that the religion is a religion of salvation and wholeness¹⁶. With this, the religion is also being careful in analyzing the worldly and spiritual salvation despite the fact that it is the key note of the people's culture. But the basic understanding of the religions provides knowledge of customs, attitudes towards the family, society, environment, death, and life beyond¹⁷. The fact that there are varieties and diversity in Yoruba/African Religion the writer should not have seen the religion as being many. The above assertion and many other changes that occurred in the religion cannot be shoved away, such as the arrival of Christianity and Islam in Nigeria that has severally tampered with the religion. Despite the effects of Christianity and Islam on Yoruba /African Religion, it cannot go into extinction as long as it speaks the language of the people.

The Concept of Sanctity of Human Life in Yoruba Religion

Yoruba Religion is an arm of African Religion. The central theme of the Religion on which every other thing hangs is the humanist perspective which is the foundational religious view of Yoruba and Africans in general. The religion is anthropocentric, that is, humanity is at the centre of everything. The metaphysical and the physical, the super-sensible and the sensible, the invisible and the visible are all conceptualized in relation to humanity on the planet earth¹⁸. Looking at the central theme of Yoruba Religion, we are of the opinion that in all its ramifications, the humanist perspective of the religion is the promotion of life and humanity

Sanctity of human life can be regarded as quality of being sacred, holy, and of immeasurable value. It could also be described as saintliness and inviolability¹⁹. In Yoruba religion, human being is recognized as the creature of Divine Being. That is why the religion believes that from the moment of conception, life starts and it is that moment that a human being is biologically under construction from early to middle and then to birth²⁰. For the fact that the religion believes that life starts at the conception, foetus has become a potential human being. In Nigerian society, the understanding of the concept of sanctity of human life has been put at stake. This could be understood from the killings by the ritual killers, kidnappers and other social maladies. The sacrificial killings could not be over emphasized. Particularly, when a King dies an attendant has to be killed at each stage to carry his birth mat, sponge, soap, and birth robe to the next world. In Yoruba land we have the abobakus. Abobakus are people or wives who must die with the king. They are regarded as the souls of the king while the king was alive. Other killings are carried out by Boko haram that destroys lives and properties at will. On 24th March, 2020, Boko haram fighters killed at least fifty Nigerian soldiers in an ambush in Goneri village in northern Yobe State in an unfortunate and deadliest attack²¹. The attack by Boko haram on Nigerian soldiers was just one out of uncountable numbers of attack on civilians and the military. The activities of Fulani herdsmen cannot be overemphasized. The havoc caused to lives and properties within a year so far outnumbered those killed by the Boko haram. On 29th June, 2019, Fulani herdsmen struck at Orin, Ido-osi Local Government of Ekiti State after a week when the South-West Governors met for security summit. That was when a hunter, Mr Emmanuel Ilori was attacked and macheted to death, just about twenty-four hours later a lady was murdered in Ise-Ekiti²². The activities of other criminals that go about rapping and kidnapping people and demanding ransom for their release are also putting sanctity of human life at stake.

All these and many more show that the quest for sanctity of human life has been rendered more arduous by the sector of the elites and other vested interest who manipulate the religious and ethnic differences for the attainment of their narrow selfish end²³. The above scenario led to a fundamental question of how human lives are regarded and treated in Nigerian nation. The sanctity of human life has been mocked and messed up by many Nigerians which arose as a result of seeking power, fame, wealth/ riches, and above all authority. The value of human life is significantly cheapened by such callous disregard for human life. Human life is a continuous and communal web because what affects one member of the race affects all. The concept of the sanctity of human life in Yoruba Religion could be acknowledged in the acceptance of eradicating irreverence and disrespect for human life. In modern time, human sacrifice and irreverence for life are condemned by major religions in Nigeria, and secular law treat this as murder²⁴. African Charter on Human and People's Right and other Human Instrument (ACHPRHI) also condemns it²⁵. It is

disheartening that in this 21st Century, human beings are still being hunted down, mutilated, murdered, and sacrificed for ritual purposes. Although, the act of ritual sacrifices may pervade the society, but the fact remains that shedding of blood in Yoruba Religion is abhorred.

In Yoruba culture and religion, life is valuable in itself, and belief in the principle of right to life. The goal of the right to life is expressed in the following Yoruba adages: “Emi loju” (Life is the most important); “Ba oku ise o tan” (If we are not dead, we still have role to play); “Emi gigan lo nsanya” (It is a long life that compensates for suffering); “Eni to ku ni tie tan” (Only the dead has forfeited all that he or she has, including rights, humanity, and essential worthy)²⁶. The religion encourages holistic care and equality for one another. This is in the area of justice. Justice is the quality of being just, fairness in dealing with others, uprightness, honesty just requital of deserts, the administration or maintenance of law and right²⁷. Justice therefore means giving to every person what is due to him/her. It also means liberty, freedom, equality, and fair play. In Yoruba and her religion, justice is respected and this could be understood from this proverb that says: “Aparo kan ko ga ju kan lo” (Every bird of a particular species is of the same height, none is taller than the other); or “Bawo ni Obo sori ti Inanki o se”? (How did Baboon do his head and Chimpanzee does not?). This means that the head of the two are the same and they should be treated the same way; or what is due to each of them should be given to each in the world of animals. It will also interest us to know that among the Yoruba, injustice to one is injustice to others.

The above proverbs show how valuable life is in itself and how life must not be deliberately taken and also lay the background for understanding, appreciating, and actualizing human rights in society. It also connotes equality of all persons irrespective of race, colour, sex, language, and national or social origin. If these are actualized, it means that justice would not be watered down and would also result into less oppression of the poor and trampling upon the right of the poor and the less privileged.

Moral Teachings of Sanctity of Human Life

What Yoruba Religion teaches on sanctity of life that makes life to be respected and revered will be considered on the platform of moral values. Morals deal with issues of what is right and good, and what is wrong and evil in human conduct. The Yoruba people have a deep sense of right and wrong which had produced customs, rules, laws, traditions, and taboos which can be observed in each society²⁹. Morals deal with human conduct, this conduct has two dimensions such as: personal conduct which has to do specifically with the life of an individual and social conduct which has to do with the life of society at large. These morals lay a great emphasis on social conduct since a basic Yoruba view is that, the individual exists because others exist³⁰. Moral is then seen to be keeping the society not only alive but in harmony.

Without moral, there will be chaos and confusion, morals guide people in doing what is right and good for both their own sake and that of their community. Morality helps people to do their duties and enjoy certain rights from society. Morals produce the virtues that society appreciates and endures to preserve, such as friendship, compassion, love, honesty, justice, courage, self-control, helpfulness, and bravery³¹. On the other hand, morals sharpen peoples' dislike and avoidance of vices like cheating, treachery, theft, selfishness, dishonesty, and greed. It is morals that keep society from disintegration; even if the ideals in morals are not always reached, they challenge people to aspire to them. They give a sense of inner peace to the one who observed them within the community because he/she knows that he/she is not doing wrong or going against the accepted norms.

Fundamentally, God is regarded as the source of Yoruba religious morality because, for Yoruba, God forbids what society forbids, what God approves society does³². In Yoruba Religion, the totality of what constitutes traditional religious values is summed up as chastity before marriage and faithfulness during marriage, hospitality, generosity, unselfishness, kindness, justice, truth and rectitude as essential values, avoiding stealing, keeping covenant, observing taboos, avoiding falsehood, protecting the poor and the weak especially women, avoiding incest, giving honour and respect to older people, and avoiding hypocrisy³³. These are the teachings of Yoruba Religion on sanctity of human life. This is so much believed that anyone that does all these is regarded as not only doing the will of the society, but also of God. At the same time, a person who does the contrary is regarded as violating Deity's ordained command and he will surely be punished³⁴.

In the light of the afore-mentioned issues of morality, it is clear that the adherents of Yoruba Religion hold firmly in their belief structures, practices, and moral values, because in so doing life will be respected, revered and honoured. People will be discouraged from all appearances of evil and there will be harmony and relative peace in the society, and it will be worthy of living. Every person will have sense of belonging.

Ifa Teachings on Sanctity of Human Life

Ifa is an ancient sacred science that has been passed down from generation to generation³⁵. Ifa is the geomantic form of divination, it is a means of communication and interaction with the unseen spiritual world connected with the cult of Orunmila, one of the major divinities of Yoruba Religion³⁶. Olademo also described Ifa as the Yoruba god of wisdom, knowledge, and divination. And also as Orunmila who is believed to be the Yoruba premier deity as it is found in all Yoruba communities³⁷. Ifa being a system of divination, occupies a unique position in Yoruba communities and it is widely consulted because of its reputation and reliability. It is the means of explaining the past, declaring the guilt and innocence,

dividing land and deciding the issues of war and peace.

Ifa and sanctity of human life cannot be separated because it is realized that the most important religious and moral ideas of the Yoruba are contained in Ifa corpus. Ifa subscribes to sacredness of life and opposes the violation of taboos. There are taboos that are prescribed through divination which have to be observed and kept; failure to keep them is a direct invitation of negative forces into one's life. Such may result into sickness and possibly death.³⁸ Ifa subscribes to the compliance of sacrificial offerings. Offering or sacrifice as prescribed by Ifa assures adherents that any misfortunes laid in the part of man can be removed and obstacles can be overcome³⁹

The teachings of Ifa could also be understood from the angle of honesty. Honesty as defined by Cassel Pocket Dictionary; is upright, fair, truthful and trustworthy in dealings, just, equitable, open, frank and candid, sincere, unimpeached, and unstained⁴⁰. Honesty could therefore mean, an act of sincerity i.e. sincerity to oneself and others in the course of interaction at any given time. In daily social interaction, society regards as honest anything that is substantially or categorically true, that is, a fact that is true to the letter and through to life. Honesty therefore, goes with truthfulness, sincerity, and straightforwardness in deeds⁴¹. Honesty is a social relationship that is based on trust because relationship has to do with the past, present, and the future. This fact of honesty is emphasized in Ifa corpus of Eji Ogbe that says;

Sotito sotito

Sotito osi tun sododo

Eni sotito ni mole ngbe

Sotito sododo⁴²

Meaning:

Be truthful, be just

Oh! Be truthful, be just

It is the truthful that divinity supports

Be truthful, be just.

We can deduce from the above that truth telling is rewarding because a truth teller or an honest person is always rewarded by Orisa (divinity) while liars are punished. The reward which could either be now or later will definitely come to pass. It is not surprising that Yoruba will say "Olotito koni ku si ipo osika" (A truthful man will not die in the place of the wicked).

The position of Ifa on sanctity of human life can also be supported with how good character is so paramount and not negotiable. According to Ifa corpus Oyeku meji;

Bi amu ragba ta ragba

Iwa, Iwa ni a nwa

Bi amu ragba ta ragba
 Iwa, Iwa na ni a nwa
 Awon yii naa lo si da orin ti anko sile pe
 Bo lowo ki ofi to sekere, iwa ni nnkan
 O un nifa fi so pe "Iwa l'oba Awure
 Ati pe lojo ti inu bi Eledaa ti opinu ati pa ile aye re
 Nitori iwa janduku, iwa ai bikita, iwa adie da mi logun nu ma fo leyin
 Orisa ti o ran lowo lojo ti onda ile aye lo sipe fun Eledaa ti osi ran leti
 pe
 Bi oba titori eniyan buburu fo loju
 Eni rere yo ko ja ti ako sini rii⁴³.

Meaning;

Bi amu ragba ta ragba (praise words)
 Character, it is character we look for
 Bi amu ragba ta ragba (praise words)
 Character, it is character we look for
 It was these people that formulated our songs
 If you have much money, character matters
 That was why Ifa says character is the most profitable
 The day the creator was annoyed and decided to destroy the earth
 Because of acts of hooliganism, nonchalant attitude, and act of
 vengeance
 The deity that assisted Him in creation pleaded with creator and
 reminded Him that
 If you because of wicked person lose your sight
 A better person will pass without knowing.

The above Odu Corpus shows that character matters most, irrespective of how rich an individual is. With good character which will be accompanied with good virtues, life will be respected. If the society can imbibe the habit of Orisanla who turned an intermediary between Eledaa and the society so as not to destroy the earth, this world will be a better place.

In the light of the above teachings of Ifa on sanctity of human life, obedience, honesty, and good character are part of virtues that are scarce in the society. The scarcity of these and many more have led Nigerian society into the situation where life is no longer regarded as sacred. If the teachings of Ifa are imbibed, Nigerian society will be worth living and sanity will reign.

Relevance of Sanctity of Human Life to the Nigerian Society

Issues that are of great concern to Nigerian society is the irreverence or disrespect to sanctity of human life due to the rising waves of killing, kidnapping, violence, raping, murder, Boko haram, Fulani herdsmen, corruptions, politicizing the sanctity

of life in the face of epidemics and other social maladies. The quest for sanctity of human life and nationhood has been rendered more arduous by the sectors of the elites and other vested interests that manipulate the religious and ethnic differences for the attainment of their narrow selfish end⁴⁴. What else could be valuable if human life is not of importance? The danger of armed robbers, hire-killers, kidnappers, suicide bombers and rapist give the feeling that we are people under the gun and lives in the midst of crisis, danger, fear, violence, destruction and death⁴⁵. All these have reduced the sanctity of human lives. Going by the trend of events in Nigeria, the issues discussed above have put the sanctity of human life at stake.

In view of these, the relevance of Yoruba Religion to sanctity of human life in Nigeria cannot be over emphasized because Yoruba tradition and culture have their own authentic institution and patterns of behavior and values such as honesty, hospitality, respect for elders, respect for sacredness of human life, communal life, liberty, social justice, and consciousness of the divine with high esteem. Fighting of evil and making life more bearable in the society has been the duty of Yoruba Religion⁴⁶. The religion has the strong consciousness of the existence of evil which is known to be inimical to human life, strength, health, fertility, and prosperity. It destroys, and brings sudden and inexplicable death⁴⁷. The adherents of the religion address the problem of drought, famine, epidemics, injustice, and other disasters, wherever they are there is their religion⁴⁸. The fact that the practices of the religion are anthropocentric makes it point to only one objective of human life and its preservation. The prayers and the sacrifices offered to gods and ancestors have an end in view which is welfare of man⁴⁹. The virtue of inherent individual worth which they are endowed with, and their unique conception of human being that Yoruba in their traditional and indigenous culture understood the universality of human rights, recognized and defended human rights. They put in the institutional measures to ensure that these rights are enforced and protected. This is so because they have the duty to protect the humanity of all persons irrespective of their social pedigrees. Their principle of universal humanity still requires that the essential dignity, the inherent, worth of such persons be acknowledged, protected, and respected in meting out any social sanction on them⁵⁰. The existence of social arrangement to assess and deal with those who fall short or alleged to fall short of social expectations or who violated social rules cannot be over emphasized. Therefore, in Yoruba and her religion, when punished, it does not mean that such a person's humanity is compromised. Premium is equally placed on the role of morality particularly on *iwa* – character. *Iwa*- character makes for good social relationship and promote general well-being of the society.

Since religion is agreed to be an agency for the promotion of moral and social cohesion in the society, God is then seen as the final guardian of moral laws. Violation of which is greatly punished and the adherence is greatly rewarded. In the

light of the above discourse, premium should be placed on relevance of sanctity of human life in Nigerian society so as to have a dignifying and viable nation where human life will be meaningful and respected.

Conclusion

Having considered the relevance of the concept of sanctity of human life in Yoruba Religion as it affects the Nigerian nation, it must be understood that everybody must have an essentially duty-based ideology that holds that human beings have right to life which cannot be automatically waived. If the Yoruba religious beliefs, values, and practices are put in motion in the nation, the societal moral life would be strengthened because morals are the food and drinks that keep the society alive, healthy, and happy. Any moral breakdown that can lead to loss of national integrity and results in chaos, Nigerian society must run away from all forms of selective sanctity of human life because it is always politically driven with political ideologies than Yoruba religious norms. Above all, for human life to be thoroughly respected, honoured, revered, and sacred, everybody has a role to play.

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