

Fostering Peaceful Co-Existence in Nigeria through Communalism as Practice in the Bible and Africa

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Abstract: Nigeria is plagued today with insecurity, religious killing and corruption due to the fact that there is no genuine love among the citizens of the country. Even the political leaders that usually present themselves as the hope of the masses and messiah are only fighting for their own selfish ambition. The survival of the people in the country is not the priority of many politicians today. This is against the communal spirit of the Africans where the survival of one is the survival of all, and no one will think of harming the other person. This paper focuses at examining how peaceful co-existence can be promoted in Nigeria today in order to combat the problem of insecurity, religious riot and corruption orchestrated by selfishness. This paper adopts historical and phenomenological methods to obtain the information needed for this work. The author of this work concludes that communalism is a way out of the Nigeria's problems of insecurity, corruption and selfishness. The practice of communal living is well rooted in the Bible (the secular book of the Christians) and in the African culture. If the Africans (i.e. Christians, Muslims and the traditionalists) can adhere strictly to the communal practice as it was in the past and practiced in the Bible, Nigeria will be a haven place for all to live.

Keywords: Communalism, Peaceful, Co-existence, Africa, Bible.

INTRODUCTION

One of the Africans' ways of life is communalism; this is a lifestyle that promotes cooperation among the people in the community, sees every one as one big family, help one another and live together peacefully with mutual trust. It is also rooted on the fact that one needs the other members of the community for existence and meaningful life.¹

Communalism can also be portrayed as a system of government in a traditional African setting where a family is under a Kingship head and bounded on the basis of communal principles². So, the extended family system is common in Africa where mother, father, grandfather, grandmother, uncles, aunties and other relatives live together in a big house known as "agbole" in Yoruba land under a family head called "baale" where any family issue is settled by the head of the family. From the extended family, an ethnic community that shares common language is formed usually under a traditional head. This political structure is what Jemiriye and Eniola called *Akodi*³, i.e a community where the acceptance of everyone is paramount and the survival of all is the survival of the one in the community. If on the other hands *Akodi* or community does not survive, no individual in the community will survive. So, acceptance is the evidence for solving problems in any community

in Africa⁴. This is illustrated in this Yoruba saying, "Agba ti ko b'inu ni omo re npo" this means "meaning, it is an elder that does not get angry that has many children. This popular maxim makes the people of Africa to tolerate one another and help those in need because when one survives everybody survives. Africans however scowl at the lazy people and encourage them to be diligent while still regarding them as members of the community. Thus, in the word of Kenneth Kaunda as Shorter quoted, "African community is mutual, accepting and inclusive."⁵

The benefit of communal lifestyle of African is also seen in the way they train their children. If an individual gives birth to a child, the responsibility of rearing that child does not lie solely on the immediate parent or nuclear family, but on the whole community. It is believed that the child is one of them and would grow up to represent the values and virtues of the community. In this regard, an adage in Yoruba is an apposite: "enikan ni nbimo sugbon igba eniyan ni nwo." This literally means that it is a person that gives birth to a child but hundreds of people train the child. The communal living in Africa could also be seen when a person is bereaved, sick or in pain. If there is any one in the community experiencing any of the above, the whole community mourns and rally round to assist the concerned person.

¹Applying The African Communalism Theology Religion Essay? <https://www.ukessays.com> (2021).

²Etta, E.E., Esowe, D.D. and Asukwo, O.O. "African Communalism and Globalisation." *African Research Review*, An International Multidisciplinary Journal, Ethiopia, 10.3 (2016): 303.

³Jemiriye, T.F and Sikiru, E. "Religion an Introductory Study." *Ado-Ekiti: PETOA Educational Publishers* (2005): 76

⁴Jemiriye, T.F and Sikiru, E, *Religion an Introductory Study*, 81

⁵Shorter, A. "African Culture An Culture Social cultural Anthropology." *Nairobi: Paulines Publications* (1998): 96

Africans religion is also communal; one hardly sees a member of a family practising religion other than the family one. The individual is involved in religious activities which usually start before birth and continue after death. In other words, an African lives and dies in a religious social/communal universe.⁶The family that worship *Egungun* Masquerade all bear the name linking them with *Egungun* deity such as "Egundeyi." Likewise, family that worship Ogun (god of iron), Sango (god of thunder), Osun, fertility goddess, and the like. So, this paper will briefly discuss the communal practice in Africa and relate it with the practices in Old and New testaments Bible with the aim of promoting mutual co-existence in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarification of African Communalism

Communalism came out from the word communal which has to do with a group of people living together in love and harmony as well as sharing everything they own. Nobody therefore has right of ownership to anything in such a group. A person can only be a person because he or she lives and acts in a community. Communalism in the word of Nze "is the social life of the African which is founded on the African belief that all human beings are members of one family of mankind".⁷So there is no one that should not be part of this family, the aged, the middle aged, the just born babe and all in the different grades and levels of life live together and do things in common as a family. It is usually a strong attachment to one's own community which helps to unify the community/group, suppresses distinctions within the community and emphasizes the essential unity of the community against other communities.⁸In the same way, Africa Economic Development Institute (AEDI) defines communalism as a strong allegiance limited to one's own ethnic group, commonly based on sharing history and cultures, characterized by collective cooperation and ownership by members of a community.⁹

Simeon Eboh argues that, 'the traditional African communalism considers the individual and the

community as a whole. One lives from birth to the grave, in an unbroken interdependence. Life is essentially cooperation and mutual co-existence. Every member of the community feels secure and fulfilled¹⁰. Hence, every one lives happily without hatred and acrimony. This concept is viewed as a political system by Murray Bookchin who defines communalism as a theory of government or system of government in independent communities participating in a federation as well as the principles and practice of communal ownership.¹¹This is related to African practice where a people with common belief form a community and select a head to lead them. Shorter in his argument stresses that African communalism is a mutual society. It is organized to satisfy the basic human needs of all its members. Most resources such as land are communally owned for the benefit of everyone.¹² People in the community can cultivate vast hectares of land and plant for the community use. Similarly, a group in a community may team together to work in the members farm to assist in ploughing and farming. What this group would do in a day may be more than what a person can do in a month. By so doing all the members would benefit from it. To this end, there is benefit in team work which can only happen when people have sense of belonging and mutual trust.

In addition, when a person in a community has an important occasion ahead, such as naming ceremony, marriage or funeral for adult. It becomes the responsibility of the whole community to support in their own way. The hunters may go to hunt bush animals for the occasion while the women fetch water and supply other necessary things that will make the occasion memorable. This is done so that the concerned person will not be disgraced. This Yoruba adage explains it better: *Oju ti ore mi gbogbo wa ni oju ti*. This means if my friend is disgraced, we are all disgraced. No wonder Kimmerle submits that the ethics of mutual help and of caring for each other is founded on communalism.¹³Therefore, Communalism in African setting promotes unity,

⁶ Ogbonna, O.B. "Individual Freedom in African Communalism: An Inquiry." *A M. A. Thesis Submitted to the Department of Philosophy, University of Nigeria, Nsuka*, (2008): 31

⁷ Nze, C. B. "Aspects of African Communalism." Onisha: Vertas Publishers (1989): 14

⁸ Communalism' in www.drishtiiias.com (2021).

⁹ Africa Economic Development Institute (AEDI) Africa, Communalism, Barriers, and Economics, <http://www.linkedin.com> (2021).

¹⁰ Eboh, S. "African Communalism: The Way of Social Harmony and Peaceful coexistence." *Journal of Modern Studies* 52.2, 202 -225

¹¹ Etta, E.E., Esowe, D.D. and Asukwo, O.O. "African Communalism and Globalisation." *African Research Review* :303

¹² Shorter, W. F. ed., "African Christian Spirituality." *New York: Macmillan Publishing Co. Inc.* (1978): 139

¹³ Heinz, K. "Ubuntu and Communalism." *African Philosophy and Art*. <https://rozenbergquarterly.com> (2021).

togetherness, brotherliness, team spirit and cooperation.¹⁴

The Bible Communalism in Relation with the Africans' Communalism

The Bible records in both Old and New Testament that communalism was common practice among the People. Ettal *et al.*, maintains that the Bible account of creation and the practices of the apostles of Christ reveal that people in the Bible lived in communes.¹⁵ The account in Genesis reveals that there were communal practices among the early people God created. God made provision for them and desired they assisted one another in their daily activities. In Genesis 4: 17 - 23, the Bible affirms that after Cain gave birth to his first son, Enosh he built a city which he named after Enosh. The city of Enosh made up of the children, grand children and family of Cain who probably must have lived in commune to sustain the city.

Moreover, after the flood, the Lord blessed Noah and his sons' families that were the remnants to fill the earth. The Bible says 'then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, "be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth."¹⁶ The Bible verse above shows that Noah and his family populated the earth after the flood. This could only be achieved when there is communal living among the people. Similarly, in Genesis 11, there was communal agreement among the people of the world then to build the tower of Babel. In verse one the Bible says 'the whole world had one language and a common speech. The unification in the language of the world then showed they lived together communally.

Another good example of communal living in the Bible is the account of Terah and his children, Abram, Nahor and Haran. The Bible says "Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot, son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan...."¹⁷ Definitely they settled in Haran and lived communally as a big family. The children of Israel also lived together with their father, Jacob before they went to Egypt and while at Egypt, they lived together in one mind as a community.

In the New Testament, communalism was the way of life of the people. Jesus and his disciples lived together as a family. Their communal living continued after the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ. After the inauguration of the church in Acts 2, the believers were united in faith and lived together as one big family without discrimination. The Bible says in Acts 2:44 "All believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need." Acts 4:32 also affirmed the believers' communal spirit thus "All believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had."

As submitted above that communalism in Africa promotes unity, brotherliness, togetherness and team spirit, it could also be seen that a Communal practice in the Bible promotes unity, brotherliness, cooperation and togetherness. This is because, the practices of communalism that have been discussed above show that, the people enjoyed cooperation, unity and togetherness among themselves. These explain why it was possible for the remnants after the flood to replenish the earth, Cain and his children to build a city called Enosh, Terah and his extended family to live together peacefully, for the children of Israel to become a unified city called Israelites and for the early believers to share their belongings without anyone lacking. There was also similarity between the communal practices among the Africans and God's instruction to the Israelites that anyone that was hungry could enter his neighbour's vineyard to eat grapes. Deuteronomy 23:24-25 declares lucidly that:

If you enter your neighbour's vineyard, you may eat all the grapes you want, but do not put any in your basket. If you enter your neighbour's grain field, you may pick kernels with your hands, but you must not put a sickle to his standing grain

This is similar to the African practice as argued by Shorter that in Africa 'the hungry stranger could without penalty, enter the gardens of the village and take, say a bunch of banana to satisfy his hunger. His action only became theft if he took more than was necessary to satisfy his needs'.¹⁸ It is also possible for a person who is hungry to uproot yam, roast it and eat it in the same farm, if the owner of the farm meet him, he will not be

¹⁴ Ogbonna, O.B. "Individual Freedom in African Communalism: An Inquiry." *A M. A. Thesis Submitted to the Department of Philosophy, University of Nigeria, Nsuka*, (2008): 31

¹⁵ Etta, E. *et al.* "African Communalism and Globalisation." 303

¹⁶ Genesis 9:1 (NIV)

¹⁷ Genesis 11: 31 (NIV)

¹⁸ Shorter, ed. "African Christian Spirituality." *New York: Macmillan Publishing Co. Inc.* (1978), 139

angry with the man for he did not take the yam away from the farm.

Personal freedom is another way to relate African communalism with the one practiced in the Bible. God created man with the ability to make choices and be responsible for it. The Israelites had the opportunity of deciding what to do. Similarly, the Africans have the freedom to decide what to do; either to do good or bad, to be lazy or hardworking, and be responsible for the choice.

Communalism is rare in the present-day Nigeria, the common practice today (especially among the politicians) where a person accumulates wealth for himself and family and forgets about other people who are struggling to eat is against the spirit of communalism. In Nigeria there are uneven distributions of the nation's commonwealth as the wealth is concentrated in the hands of privileged few. The rich are getting richer while the poor are becoming poorer without any plan to help or alleviate the suffering of the poor. This is totally against the communal spirit of the Africans and plan of God for his people to commune together in the Bible. It is difficult for some people from the southern Nigerian to live in some parts of the north today. Similarly, it is not easy to allow strangers to

pass a night because of fear of uncertainty. If Africans can go back to the communal living as it was in the past and Christians adhere to the teaching in the Bible on communalism, the country will be peaceful and no one will lack essential things for good living. Thus, communalism is necessary to promote peaceful coexistence in the nation.

CONCLUSION

This paper has dealt with relating Africans' communalism with its practice in the Bible as a mean to foster harmonious living in Nigeria. The author submitted that communalism is a common practice among the Africans (because they live together as a community), and there are many evidences that it is a common practice among the people in the Bible. The author argued that Nigeria being an African country must adhere strictly to this African way of life by living together as one family, accepting the fact that others live because I live. So, others must benefit from my existence. The church also must live communally as an assembly of believers to promote the love of Christ in the country. This will reduce hatred, bigotry, and animosity, thereby promotes harmonious living in the country.

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