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AFRICAN COMMUNAL LIVING AND RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

This work entitled: "African communal-living and religious experience" is an effort by the researchers to examine the relationship between communalism in Africa and religious experience. The idea of communalism is not alien to the traditional Africans as they continue to explore ways to live in harmony with one another. For several centuries, Africans have lived together as one entity under the traditional institutions and leadership taking their destinies into their own hands. That it has not been too well in all spheres of the lives of Africans in our contemporary time is not to assert that the continent is not familiar with how well to live as a people. The interaction with cultures of other continents especially Europe has somehow constituted a hindrance to their understanding of themselves as a race and a people as there seems to be a clash of cultures and values. No culture is better than the other, as there is no evidence that a superior culture exists anywhere in the world. This work aims to assess African communalism and religious experience, an experience that digs deep into religious expressions and beliefs. The research methodology employed is socio-historic approaches. The findings of this research indicate the need for collaboration among various diverse cultural traditions and peoples. There is no need to throw one tradition and culture into the dustbin of irrelevance as that would amount to suffocating the cultural and traditional relevance of such people, and this, the Church in Africa is beginning to be conscious of with her stand on inculturation/acculturation.

INTRODUCTION

The encounter of the Africans with the divine or His agents cannot be swept under the carpet if one is to properly understand communal living from the standpoint of Africans. This is because traditional Africans have always had close ties with the divine and as such at not ignorant of the role played by God in the affairs of human beings. The notion that the Africans were taught about the divine by the foreign missionaries amounts to falsehood and underrating of the religious inclinations and yearnings of Africans which have been in existence for a very long time, most especially in the area of communalism. This works through African communal living and religious experience, the scope is specifically about Christianity in Africa.

This work aims to examine the African perspective of communalism about religious experience particularly within Christianity in traditional Africa, to put us in the right frame of mind for a better understanding of our subject matter as far as this research work is concerned. The research methodology used in this work is the socio-historical approach.

African Communal-Living

Communal living in traditional Africa has been a hallmark of the way Africans have lived together for centuries. But one wonders if we can still assert that authentic communalism exists in traditional Africa today. The issue of communalism cannot be properly assessed without examining the whole notion of hospitality. In hospitality, one moves away from individualism to attempting to live in communion with others.

Communalism in African cultures may be understood from the perspective of the moral ideas of personhood, community, and their connection. This notion of communalism also provides the basis for comprehending the nature of moral principles or values, moral reasoning, and moral thought or philosophy in African

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traditions. This entails that the idea of communalism is essential in understanding moral philosophy in African traditions (Ikuenobe 93).

One of the concerns that motivate the meta-ethical or analytic approach to moral philosophy is relevant to the criticism of ethnophilosophy and the idea of getting African moral philosophy from cultural values, beliefs, and principles. The concern is that the normative approach may lead people to internalize or accept normative principles as dogmas and they may act on such principles that they have not critically examined, rationally understood, or justified for themselves. Despite those concerns, the limitation or restriction of philosophy (moral or otherwise) to analysis or the effort to define philosophy solely in terms of the analytic tradition or method is, from a metaphilosophical stance, inadequate. It seeks to deny that other kinds of moral inquiry that are descriptive, normative, practical, and applied in nature, may be characterized as a legitimate philosophical moral enterprise. For example, Africans do not deem it fit to engage in abstract linguistic analysis of moral notions partly because most African languages are precise, simple, and easy to understand when used in moral discourse (102).

Religious Experience

Religious experience can be generated by perceptions of individual objects, for instance, the memorable account of Jesus setting his face to go to Jerusalem, to His passion. Even a passage of philosophical reasoning may do this, as when someone contemplates the incompleteness of all explanation, the intellectual capacity of space and time, and feels compelled with a sense of mystery to posit divine completeness and unity (Hepburn 165)

Religious experience can also come into reality due to mankind wanting to be closer to the providence of morality. This experience too becomes a reaction emanating as a result of divine discontent, interpreted as intimations of God's existence and call to moral endeavour, the sense of divine and in the rectifying of one's moral life, and in Christian evangelical terms, a sense that one has been redeemed or saved by God's action on behalf of humanity. The overall impression is of the immense diversity of religious experience. They are indeed connected by complex webs of family resemblance (165).

Consequently, religious experience emanates from man's awareness of himself and the knowledge of man's inability to solve his problems and so, man tends to seek protection and assistance from a being greater than him. By nature, man is aware of the fact that he needs protection, power, and all kinds of aid from the ultimate being, a being that is far greater than man. This accounts for why God allows man to experience Him in a very dramatic way to further show man that he is merely a mortal being. In the African Traditional Religion, for instance, songs can also lead to religious experience. In the sense that songs during worship, enhance emotional and physical participation in any act of worship and those songs oftentimes lead to ecstatic experiences and possession by the divinity. In the course of ecstasy during singing, a possessed devotee may give a message from the divinity to the people in the community. This constitutes partly the essence of communalism (Enegho 33)

The tasks of religious experience are worth mentioning. They include the following: First and foremost, when one encounters God, such an experience is usually to change that person's spiritual or religious outlook to life and to further make the individual have a better understanding of the ultimate reality, (God). From the Christian perspective, we saw how Saul who was formerly a persecutor of the Christians encountered God in a very dramatic manner and the experience of God converted him from a murderer and a persecutor of Christians to an "instrument" utilized by God to spread His word to the gentile world, kings and to the entire Israel (Acts 9) (33).

In Islam, due to the several experiences of Prophet Muhammad, with (*Allah*) God, he was able to establish Islam. He got the conviction that (*Allah*) God who revealed Himself to him was never going to let him down by allowing his enemies to terminate his life prematurely (34).

The history of the advent of Islam in Africa and Nigeria in particular and its far-reaching impact on the people and their language is a subject that has received elaborate courage in scholarly literature. As a religious culture, Islam crept into Nigeria and brought the simultaneous process of Islamization and Arabization into the lives of the Nigerian people. With Islamic bias in ideology, the ways of life of the people changed totally as reflected in their beliefs, customs, language, thinking, worldview, dressing *et cetera*. There is no gain in saying the fact that the Islamic culture is equally that complex whole, which includes knowledge, belief, arts, morals, laws, customs, traditions, and any other abilities and habits acquired by adherents of the Islamic faith in contrast to generally endowed behaviour (44).

From the perspective of tradition, it is quite clear that one of the significant influences of the Arab-Islamic traditions on the faith and culture in Nigeria found among some Hausa and Yoruba Muslim clerics is the art of divination. The geomancy of the Greek and the numerology, which is the Egyptian influence on Arab culture, was much cultivated by Arabs, and this later found expression in African Islamic cultural tradition. For instance, the geomantic system of an eastward orientation based on the number 16 and astrology, which is an offshoot of the numerology with its heavenward orientation based on the zodiacal number 12 are all incorporated into the traditional belief of the Nigerian culture, as found among Hausa/Fulani and Yoruba Muslim clerics, and this system has become part of their local cosmological conceptions (Enegho 2013:46-47).

In the African Traditional Religion, Africans believe in higher and lower spirits. They therefore believe through the assistance of a native doctor, the oracles can reveal many hidden facts to the people. This is responsible for the African traditionalists' encounters with the native doctors when they have challenges, to consult the oracle for them to know the cause of their problems/challenges and the solutions. If the cause of the problem is known, through the assistance of the oracle adequate solutions are given and man cooperates with the oracle about the demands

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made, it is expected that the person in question would have peace of mind with the hope that his/her problems are solved. So, the oracle's revelations tend to fulfill the objectives of man's protection or man's yearning for protection. The communication between the native doctor or the priest with the spirits or divinities is a religious experience not just for the individual, but for the overall wellbeing of the entire community. It is believed that during the interaction/communication between the native doctor or the priest with the spirits, there is the belief that such a mediator is no longer in the physical realm, but in the realm of metaphysics (35).

Communalism in Africa and Religious Experience

Communal living in many African societies cannot be separated from deep interaction with God. Nigeria for instance may be adjudged as the most religious country in the world, though this claim can be contested, but beyond the veneer of this so-called religiosity is the challenge of a brand of Christianity that could be described as being only "skin-deep" or too shallow a level. The same groups of people who seem to be so enraptured in Christian Churches by their public profession of the Christian faith are also the ones who are allegedly involved in trado-cultural beliefs and practices, which stand in direct contradiction to the avowed Christian faith (Enegho 2020:54)

From the Christian perspective, the Church expects Christians to do some theologizing by taking a cue from St. Anselm's famous dictum, *Fides quaerens intellectum* (Faith seeking understanding). This science of faith would necessarily be imperative in our sifting and sieving task. That explains why in Ecclesia in Africa, (the Church in Africa), Blessed Pope John Paul II calls for dialogue between cultures, particularly, to:

Sift the negative aspects of African Traditional Religious culture from the positive values which will eventually serve "as a preparation for the gospel, because they contain precious "*semina verbi*" which can lead us to avoid any use of derogatory, inaccurate, disrespectful language against them (55).

That is why when theologians teach theology and live theology in the name of the Church, they do so with the approval and with the authorization of the *magisterium* (The authority of the Church). They distributed the wine in the wineskins that were both approved by the steward. When they do theology as individual believers searching deeper understanding of their faith, they do so as individuals (55).

Theology in Africa, within the biblical construct, has continued to tread the path of Eurocentric theologies, as left behind and fueled by Western missionaries. Scholars like Adamo (2005) and Yamuchi (2006) and others in their exponential works have initiated bold Afrocentric readings of the Bible, yet their efforts have not yielded the desired results among professionals and nonprofessionals, the clergy and the lay faithful. African theologians continue to rely heavily on Western thoughts. Theologians too often forget that such imported Eurocentric and Americanised postulations do not seek clarification for the thoughts of Africans on the Bible. Eurocentric concepts are not capable of clarifying, ventilating, and satisfying the inner aspirations of Africans (Tubi 59).

The problem is exacerbated by the fact that Christian theologies are devoid of anthropological leanings. The result is a theology that is devoid of a clear understanding of the lifestyles and cultural patterns of Africans, which are different from Western lifestyles. Future Catholic priests are still sent for training in Rome, European universities, and American institutions, where priests who intend to go for studies or further studies prefer Western countries/ Albeit, when "Colonial" trained or "Western" trained African theologians sought to put Christian dogmas and theology into perspectives, their objectives easily failed because they lacked the anthropological grounding that is required to construe the cultural ethos, norms and lores of their people. There are noticeable "White" and "Colonial" orientations, discussions, and literature in many writings across the African continent that are Eurocentric. Eurocentrism is noticeable in the curriculum and syllabuses of seminaries and theological schools in Africa. In such ecclesiastical institutions, there is evidence that various departments are fashioned after European seminaries and universities. From minor seminaries and novitiates upwards, ample time and resources are devoted directly to learning about Latin rituals, movements, composure, dressing, and vestments that showcase Western orientation (59-60).

Songs as Religious Experience in African Traditional Community

The Place of songs in the African traditional community cannot be overemphasized. This is against the backdrop of traditional songs interpreted as religious modes of expression concerning the origin of things which achieve their objective through the "expression of the deeper meaning of existence which exerts profound influence on human consciousness" (Obi 200). Songs used for interpretation are taken from the novels of Achebe. In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe's Relic of a Song to the Rain presents Nnadi as a loner who eventually becomes unmarried. His state of bachelorhood explains why he was cooking and eating all by himself. Nnadi's case presents an anomaly that negates communal life in an integrated African traditional society. Nnadi transmuted into folklore as the lyrical figure of loneliness captured in children's songs to the rain to register its consequences early on in their youthful minds. The metaphoric world of Nnadi "where the ant holds his court in splendour and the sands danced forever" (200) is anchored in another song. The hero of the song typifies the human condition torn both ways by the opposing forces of reason and appetite. The admonition extended to the hero is metaphorically interpreted as the dynamics of the human person as he struggles toward self-integration. In this context, Eze interpreted as mastery or excellence is utilized in an ironic sense because the erstwhile "king" is not even master of himself (200).

The above interpretation has a parallel in Plato's *Phaedrus* where the human person is depicted as a chariot drawn in opposite directions by two headstrong horses. Lucretius captures the human predicament as "each person from himself flees" (200), while

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Seneca explains that faults "not the places, but ourselves; when there is no need for endurance, we are weak, and we cannot bear toil or pleasure or ourselves or anything very long" (200-2001). In *No Longer at Ease,* Achebe introduces a song among passengers in a commuter (201). Both positions that an in-law killing his in-law and a servant rebelling against his master recorded in the song are instances of treachery appear valid. But the interpretation of such cases of treachery to mean that "the world has turned upside down" (201) has to be understood metaphorically because these instances which make it possible for the "world to turn upside down" (201) reveal that it is the nature of the world to turn upside down. From this standpoint, the acts of treachery under consideration do not appear to validate the interpretation that the "world has turned upside down" but rather that the "world is itself". If the "world is itself", then the "world turning upside down" becomes a normal state of affairs. After all, acts of treachery are part and parcel of the human condition in the world. But if the statement is interpreted metaphorically, it turns out as a dead metaphor because the fundamental feature imputed to the world is that it "turns over on itself" which by implication means that the world is dynamic and becoming (201).

African Cultures and the Notion of Authority

Appiah echoes the notion of authoritarianism in the African thought system in terms of what he considers to be the irrational basis for beliefs. For him, people in traditional African cultures justify their beliefs solely by reference to the fact that they are supported by the authority of tradition. In his view, "justifying beliefs by saying they have the authority of tradition is one of the practices that demarcates traditional cultures from formal philosophy" (Ikuenobe 176). He contrasts thought systems in African traditions with the Western intellectual culture of formal philosophy by arguing that even when authorities are cited in the Western intellectual tradition, they are not cited blindly, and they are not accepted simply because they have been regarded as authorities *per se*. He indicates that the adversarial style or method of inquiry in the Western intellectual culture is embedded in their conception and methods of education, and the processes of acquiring and justifying beliefs. This adversarial method implies that the view of authority must be questioned to determine its appropriateness and that it is the soundness of the evidence for the position which then confirms and sustains it as authoritative. The epistemic, political, and moral authoritarianism in African communal cultures, Wiredu and Appiah argue, discourages the attitudes and processes of critical inquiry, questioning, and curiosity, which are necessary to have a rational set of justified beliefs, values, and moral principles. As such, both Wiredu and Appiah are in doubt whether the use of reason is truly allowed to flourish in African traditions given its authoritarian tendencies (176-177).

Hence, Wiredu argues that "the disinclination to entertain questions about the reasons behind an established practice or institution is a sure mark of the authoritarian mentality." Many African cultures had "the principle of unquestioning obedience to superiors, which often meant elders. Hardly any premium was placed on curiosity in those of tender age, or independence thought in those of more considerable years." Wiredu makes this point more poignant when he compares the customs in African cultures with the attitudes of young people toward elders in America. He says that American youth in a converse shift of environment would be likely to feel that traditional African society demands nothing short of grovelling docility from the young to their relations with the old. For Wiredu, anyone who attempts to question the authority or adequacy of established beliefs, principles, and the procedures for doing things in many African cultures is met with a rebuff and told, "That is how it has always been done. I do not want any argument." (177)

Furthermore, Wiredu opines one ought to always make of reason to decide between alternative beliefs and ways of doing things. These points seem to suggest, at least in part, that many of the beliefs that were substantial to the traditional African people were beliefs or principles regarding how things should be done and achieved. In other words, many of these beliefs knowledge, or principles had practical relevance to the day-to-day lives of people. Several of these beliefs or principles were not held solely as abstract or theoretical, or conceptual ideas that could be questioned for the sake of theoretical inquiry (177).

Assessing the Basic "Ingredients" to Communal Christian Living

In his encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio*, Pope John Paul II perceived inculturation as an intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration into Christianity and the insertion of Christianity in various cultures. He asserts:

Through inculturation the Church makes the Gospel incarnate in different cultures and at the same time introduces people, together with their cultures, into her community. She transmits to them her values, at the same time taking the good aspects that already exist in them and renewing them from within. Through inculturation the Church, for her part, becomes a more intelligible sign of what she is, and a more effective instrument of mission. (Enegho 2016: 75)

From the definition above, it can be established that inculturation has always followed the Church's history and journey in our world. Inculturation is a historical reality which hurries the mission of the Church, even challenging it in some of its truth which only in the past seemed acquired for centuries, like those of a monolithic and implanted European Christianity. In our world today, the church is confronted with human subjects who live within their culture and are so proud of the absoluteness of their world that they do not feel the need for meetings and dialogue. The challenge of inculturation sends us feedback on conversion and humility (75).

If the Christian Church today is to bring individuals and communities into intimate relationships with Christ, there is the need for such a person to be sufficiently acquainted with the inner selves of a community, its soul awakens as it were, and an internal transformation takes place, by which the original genius is stimulated and made to flower. Christ is not interested in doing violence to nature or the deeper identity of any social group. He is not an external agent imposing strange norms from without. He is an inner force stirring into life the dormant potentialities of a given

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society from within. For this reason, the missionary and all Christians in the task of evangelising must follow the same style of working: stimulate the inner genius of a community from within. Such an individual is expected to offer opportunities for the growth of the hidden potentialities of a people. While it is expected that the missionary and all Christians of good will need to take a keen interest in the traditions and customs of the group or community to whom he is dedicated, he is expected, even with greater eagerness, to search for its deeper identity, its main character traits, its strong points, and weakness, as well as its unrevealed potentialities. Just as human beings have their likes and dislikes, so too, communities have their basic orientations and "what goes against their grain." This attitude is important for all Christians if they can notice such differences. If thoughtlessly one goes against the grain of the people, such a person is for trouble and is going to waste his/her time and energy in fruitless labour, or as it always happens, such an individual is undermining the effectiveness of his/her even heroic deeds and superhuman performance with his/her injudicious actions (75-76).

For a people's friendly Christianity to exist in Africa, such Christianity must be sensitive towards the African worldview. Authentic African Christianity should put into consideration all those factors that make Africans truly at home with the message of Christ transmitted to them in a manner easily understood by Africans. Also, an evangelizer must clearly understand the basic challenges of African Christians. There are numerous challenges such as the fear of widowhood and being an orphan, witchcraft, poverty, corruption in public and private establishments, ritual killings, kidnapping, malnutrition et cetera (77).

Man is born into a community, and not into a vacuum. As responsible members of the community into which we are born, we must be socially responsible to the community we are born into. This implies that we must impact positively on the community by making definite contributions to its well-being. We are not expected to constitute a nuisance or problems for the community but to be agents of reconciliation and positive change. What contributions have you made to the progress of your community? Have you been cheated on other people? Have you been a thorn in the flesh? Always think of what positive impact or influence you can make or exert on your community. Your community needs your service. Give them in obedience to the categorical imperatives of Christ's invitation to serve (Imaekhai 251-252).

The prophets of Israel were all prophets of their culture, but they had the penetrating perception and the spiritual strength needed to challenge the evils they found in it. They loved their people and their culture, but they also dared to criticize the negative aspects of it. So, making 'inculturation' a slogan is only an exaggeration. It hints at an earlier alienation from one's culture. Christ did not suffer from it. He did not have to make an artificial effort to insert himself into his cultural world. His life and work sprang from his culture. He remained a loyal child of his culture even while denouncing evils in it. The case of a trans-cultural evangelizer is different. For him/her to evangelize a community different from his/her own, such a person is eager to; learn, what is new to him/her, to understand things he/she does not easily understand, and to respect even what he/she finds puzzling during his/her search. He/she seeks to fully insert himself/herself into the cultural world of the community he/she is called to serve (Enegho 2013: 32).

It is only when an evangelizer has made sufficient progress in understanding the culture of the people he/she is evangelizing and his/her self-insertion can he/she hopes to be equipped to share the gospel message in an intelligible manner. He does so with humility, and with the attitude of a permanent learner, using the categories and images of the new culture. Rather than denounce the evil he/she finds in that culture, he/she prefers to hold it up for reflection in the community and prepare minds and hearts for an honest assessment and final rejection. Ultimately, it is the community itself that makes the decision. He/she can only seek to be part of that community (33).

The Church in Africa and Traditional Healing Methods

Therapeutic medicines are obtained from herbs, leaves, bark, and roots of trees, animal parts, juice, palm oil and kernel, water, et cetera. The mixture of these materials produces recipes or medicaments for the treatment of one form of illness or another. Those who practice this form of indigenous medicine are known as herbalists. For this reason, we have herbalism, 90 percent of which is made up of herbs and vegetables. These medicaments are used for the treatment of biological diseases such as arthritis, diarrhoea, asthma, pneumonia, cholera, malaria fever, and many other diseases. Even Hippocrates who is regarded as the father of medicine made use of herbal remedies in the treatment of ailments (Adamo and Enegho 40).

Healing among traditional Africans is a corporate activity. It is about the individual, the family, and the community. The idea of good health among traditional Africans differs considerably from the Western concept. The World Health Organisation (WHO) for instance conceives of good health as the absence of diseases or infirmity. But the African concept of good health examines the condition of total physical, mental, and social being due to the maintenance of good relationships and harmony with nature, divinities, spirits, and fellow human beings. Another therapeutic system among traditional Africans is massaging which is effective for the treatment of nervous, and muscular systems and especially the treatment of gynecological problems. Hydrotherapy involves the use of cold water and hot water. Compress and steam vapour baths are used for various ailments such as headache, fever, rheumatism, and general pain. Hot water relaxes the skin capillaries and the activity of the sweat glands. It has been established that water increases the consumption of oxygen up to about 75 percent and it eliminates about 85 percent of carbon dioxide from the body (40-41).

There is some occultic strength displayed by some herbal medicines. Some others are antidotes that counteract diseases caused by supernatural forces. Some can be used telepathically to summon a missing person. There are some herbal medicines which can assist in the extraction of bullets or thorns from the body without subjecting the patient to any form of surgical operation.

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Also, there are some herbal medicines when administered divert the bullets from the targeted person or spot. Merely chewing some herbal medicine can help to fortify a person against a cutlass or machete, knives, bullets or any sharp objects. Some other herbal medicine renders the individual invulnerable to enemies' attack, meaning enemies cannot raise their hands to fight the users of such herbs. Some herbal medicines are natural antiseptics which fight against microbes in the body. Herbal antiseptics not only heal the body but also assist in building up new cells (41).

In traditional African societies, another important aspect of indigenous therapeutic methods is fasting. Some ailments require a patient to abstain from the intake of food for a certain period of days or a week. This method is usually used in the treatment of obesity, indigestion, overweight, mental disorders, and some chronic diseases. Also, marriage and childbearing are very important in the African culture and the inability to procreate is regarded as a catastrophe which may lead to the breakdown of marriages and invariably polygamy, ridicule, and general unhappiness. However several African communities have found ways of solving this challenge through the use of medicinal plants administered to such married couples who desire to have children (41).

Orthodox medicine is practised in Western scientific cosmology with an emphasis on the pathological condition of the sick person. Consequently, the African medical system which is based on the African paradigm is essentially religious with its cosmological values. Worldviews underlie people's perception of diseases and their methods of treatment. The variance and the ineffectiveness of the orthodox medical system created what looked like a sense of deception in the minds of many Africans in the early era of Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa. The African Christians in the era of foreign missionaries had a sense of disappointment and frustration with the missionaries in the area of health care. Some of the missionaries preached to the Africans against the use of medicine while secretly they were taking quinine and other malaria medicines. This motivated the Africans to reread the Bible with the African worldview and values adapting the African medicinal treatment methods and causal factor of health diminution. Thus, the armamentaria of the African Independent Churches were holy water, holy olive oil, fasting, confession of sins, sacrifice, herbs, potent words, candles of all colours, and invocation of the appellations of God, and the missionaries' Bible, which they made use of hermeneutically. This hermeneutical approach towards the Bible by the adherents of the African Independent Churches helped them to identify some Psalms as therapeutics and others for the prevention and protection against the activities of witches, sorcerers, and evil eyes of enemies, while others could be utilized in enhancing one's life as well as meeting one's aspirations (41-42).

The following Psalms are identified as protective Psalms: Psalms 5, 6, 28, 35, 37, 54, 83, and 109. Such Psalms are made use of in conjunction with certain ritual actions with repetition of words. Ogunfuye prescribes Psalms 109 for use against one's enemies. According to Adeboyejo, Psalms 1, 2, and 3 are unique Psalms for the treatment of stomach pain. For these Psalms to be effective, they must be read into the water with the holy name WALOLA ASABATA JAH 84 times, and the patient is to drink a small quantity of fried oil, potash, small salt, and one egg. The intake of the above is expected to heal the sufferer. For swollen stomachs, he recommends Psalms 20 and 40. One is required to get water from a flowing river into a new pot. A complete palm front and three new grown-up palm leaves should be put together in a pot while reading Psalms 20 and 40 with the holy name ELI SAFATAN 62 times. The patient is expected to light nine candles and bathe with water for nine days. According to Oshun, members of the Pentecostal Churches refute the assumption that their use of water, olive oil, and other elements is based on African traditions. To them, the use of water for healing has biblical legitimization. The Pentecostals even point to the healing of Naaman the leper (2 Kings 5) as an example of the use of water for healing in the Bible. Nevertheless, there are reasons to hold the view that the use of water and oil along with Psalms for healing depicts the African context of traditional medicine. This is because it has a resemblance with the preparation and use of concoctions among the various African tribes (42-43).

Before the coming of Western/orthodox medicine in Nigeria there was never any doubt in the minds of the people about the potency of traditional medicine. This is due largely to the fact that traditional medicine was the only one available to the people and it was effectively utilized in the treatment and healing of those who had diseases within the community. Even today, with the presence of orthodox medicine, traditional medicine still exists and has gradually become widely spread within the health care delivery system in Nigerian society (Yusufu 154).

Several studies done all over the world have proven that natural medicine is effective, and can be more effective than any other type of medicine. The Roman Catholic Church in the true spirit of inculturation in Nigeria has continued to encourage her priests and lay faithful to participate in bringing about good healthcare services not only through the orthodox method but the traditional means. Worthy in mention are the contributions of the National Association of Pax Herbal Health Care Providers (PAXHERBALS) Ewu, Edo State, Nigeria under the direction of Rev. Fr. Anselm Adodo, Association of Scientific Identification, Conservation, and Utilization of Medicinal Plants of Nigeria (ASICUMPON) in Enugu, Nigeria directed b Rev. Fr. Dr. Raymond Arazu as well as other priests and lay Catholic faithful scattered all across Nigeria. More of this type of initiative should be encouraged and supported by the Church and the government (Enegho and Iyere 77).

The positive features that attract people to traditional medicine include diversity, flexibility, greater accessibility in many parts of the world, extensive acceptance in developing countries, comparatively low cost, and a lesser need for modern technological capability and perceived safety. Many persons also utilize traditional medicine because of its perceived efficacy, both in general and in particular for the treatment of chronic debilitating diseases that defy conventional pharmaceuticals (Omale 20).

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Conclusion

This work examined communal living in Africa and religious experience. Though it is related to religion generally, the researchers focused mainly on Christianity and its very healthy romance with tradition in African communities. This is to debunk the insinuations by many who are yet to come to terms with the relationship between African tradition and the Christian religion. To assert that it is an aberration for Africans to live in communities and utilize the African paradigm in their communal life as a people is to insult the intelligence and worldview of the people. Religions on the African continent are beginning to come to terms with the reality that Africans have the right to take their destinies into their own hands, even while experimenting with the perspectives of opinions and ways of doing things among non-Africans. There is indeed a need for collaboration among various diverse cultural traditions and peoples. However, to throw one's tradition and culture into the dustbin of irrelevance is to suffocate the cultural and traditional relevance of such people, and this, the Church in Africa is beginning to be conscious of with her stand on inculturation/acculturation.

From the perspective of African communalism and religious experience, the researchers suggest that there is a need for the Church in Africa to be truly African, while at the same time retaining the Christian identity. The life of one in an African community is for the common good of the individual within the community. Egocentricism or individualism is not the hallmark of traditional Africans. Therefore, in every aspect of the life of every African, he/she is first and foremost obliged to act rightly to please the community no matter his position in the society, and so, acting otherwise is far out of the expectation of that community. The idea that what constitutes modernization ought to be always Western is not only a fallacy, but a depreciation of the values of the African people and culture, and invariable a stampede to the intellectual and religious identity of traditional Africans.

This work is a wake-up call to all African scholars, Christians, and people who truly respect African values to do all within their power to defend, promote, and protect the essence of communal living on the African continent if there is to be sustainable development of the continent. It does not matter if communalism also has some pitfalls that need to be amended, what one must not fail to realize is that people who are losing the trend of their identity are enslaving themselves culturally and religiously. In that case, they are losing their self-worth as a people which may ultimately lead to a confused identity and the suffocation of their progress and development in every sphere of life.

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