

Chapter 20

African Multi-Wives Culture: Human Fatality and the Media in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Human life is the most prized and valued of all creation. No wonder all human activities, government policies, and the entire engagements of humanity are anchored on the betterment and sanctity of human life. Religions all over the world recognize the sacredness of human life as the highest form of creation. Sadly, the sacredness of human life has been facing a downward movement never experienced in the history of mankind in the main as a result of incidences of couples killing each other on a mere or flimsy reason of suspected marital infidelity. Nigeria media quite recently have been agog with daily reportage of such dastardly acts without a corresponding reportage of possible solution located in the multi-wives marriage or culture of the African traditional society. This work focuses on the gains of multi-wives marriage in Africa, which has been in existence since the origin of humanity in Africa. This work is a wake-up call on the media in Nigeria to rise up to the occasion and do the needful and challenge the Western culture of individualistic existentialism.

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, Africans value human life. They have always placed the greatest premium on it. This value dates back to creation and did not just emerge in their belief system with the conquest, partitioning and subsequent inversion of their land by the colonialists assisted by the missionary religions nor with the advent of any foreign law. It was not also a product of Africa's contact with the outside world consequent upon the era of slave trade. If not for anything, the slave merchants from Europe and other parts of the world manifested the greatest dehumanization and devaluation of the human life while engaging in their nefarious trade. Onyeocha (2007) aligns himself along same reasoning as he states that "the human beings are the very center of African religious impulse and expression. The willful taking of human life was considered the worse crime and offence in African world-view and the punishment for such was

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the killing of the culprit (Afuekwe 1992). Metuh (1987) agrees that such offence was forbidden in Igbo world-view, and its prohibition is total and absolute because its infringement threatens the natural order and the very existence of society. Metuh argues further that in the traditional African society, it was an abomination against the Earth Deity to take a human life. Both voluntary and involuntary murder were abomination and require purification rites to safeguard the society from dangers the abominations may bring on it.

In some sub-cultural areas, for voluntary murder, the murderer was allowed to hang himself honourably or he would be slain by any member of the family of his victim. Where it was known to be involuntary, the culprit was allowed to flee, and later pay an arranged compensation before his return. Such was the provisions of the traditional African Religion and culture in the value, protection and preservation of human life before the agents of social and religious change invaded Africa.

It must be noted that this work is not a comparative study of two or more forms or types of marriages and does not intend to do a bifocal study or analyses of the merits and demerits of forms of marriages nay European and African. It is a research work that seeks to proffer solutions and provide alternatives in humanity's search for the panacea for the preservation of human life in Nigeria, Africa and by extension the global community against the backdrop of the incessant and contemporary abrupt termination of human lives by couples on the very flimsy reason of suspicion of infidelity which in most cases are not confirmed nor proven. If one sees the work as unifocal, he may not be far from the truth. Along this line therefore, the work argues based on the findings, that African multi-wife culture reduces and tries to eliminate petty jealousy observed in monogamous partners, creating and providing avenues for tolerance in marriages even when infidelity is suspected; further raising the human life to the value where nature/divine has so placed it from inception. By so doing, it is the well considered view of this work that development (howbeit human) in Africa will be enhanced and which will in turn stimulate other forms of developments. Accordingly, the work does not by any stroke of imagination expect a pat on the back from scholars across the divide because it seeks to adjust the contemporary order and statue quo. Just as the 19th century theologians, church fathers and other scholars attacked the evolution theory of Charles Darwin frontally; science attacking the Jewish/Christian teachings of an earth/world with four corners and having an end, the work expects provoked scholarly reactions across board which indeed is the beauty of a venture such as this. The media (especially of Africa), wherever they may be, must continue to promote.

THE SANCTITY OF HUMAN LIFE

Both the old and new testaments as a holy book teaches that each individual is known by God from the foundations of the world, (www.cmalliance.org). Since all life exists for God's purposes and all human lives are equally sacred, it is the belief that every human is blessed of God and must be preserved and nurtured. Going by the biblical account of the creation narratives, human life is created by God and is good. Since human beings are uniquely created in the image of God (Gen 1:27) and formed by God (Gen 2:7, Job 33:4; one can safely argue and further hold to the sanctity of all human life (Gen 9:6). Further down, one understands that human life begins at conception (Psalm 139: 13-16; Jeremiah 1:4-5). It also lasts beyond death into eternity (John 5: 28-29, I Corinthians 15:51-52). God gives life and breath to every human (Acts 17:25), calling all human beings to value equally the dignity of every individual life in its entirety. This compels us to love and have compassion for all the peoples of the world

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