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The “Son of Belial” in Ancient Israel and “Akukuubi” in Traditional Yoruba Society as Impelling Mechanisms for Parental Responsibility in Contemporary Nigeria

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Abstract

In every human community, living a moral life is important for mutual co-existence. However, the reverse is the case with most Nigerian youths that are notable for amoral life style as a result of unbridled freedom, selfishness and overambition, which is traceable to lack of adequate parental care. This prevailing moral decline calls for a swift reaction as it has become a notable venom in their blood. To curb the menace of moral laxity in the recent time, there is a need to take a clue from the peoples of antiquity to see and learn from their experiences how they handled such problems in their own time. In the ancient Israel and the traditional Yoruba society, several metaphorical expressions were employed as moral mechanisms while addressing the problems of parental irresponsibility. This paper therefore examines the use of the “Son of Belial” in the ancient Israel society in line with the understanding of *Akukuubi* in the context of parental irresponsibility in the Yoruba society. It focuses on the relevance of this traditional method in both the ancient and the present times. Biblical texts and 20 purposively selected Yoruba proverbs were the primary data. Biblical texts were subjected to textual criticism while the Yoruba proverbs were transliterated. Using historical-critical method in the interpretation of both the Biblical texts and the selected Yoruba proverbs, the paper recommends that parenting should be more of a communal enterprise in contemporary societies; it should involve the entire community and not be limited to the parents of the children. Biological parents should also appreciate communal efforts in training children.

Keywords: Son of Belial, Ancient Israel, *Akukuubi*, Yoruba, Parental Responsibility

Introduction

The dangerous trend of committing atrocities among Nigerian youths in recent times bothers every patriotic citizen of this nation. These abysmal vices are morally traceable to the recent deplorable state of parental duties. As graphically illustrated in the bible and philosophically expressed in the Yoruba culture, parenting is a serious responsibility that carries grave consequences when neglected (Patricia, 2013). Thus, the crucial responsibility of parents instructing their children cannot be downplayed. Dutiful and loving parents who desire to put their best efforts into raising their children to be productive and valued members of the community can extract wisdom and understanding from the books of 1st Samuel. Such parents can also admire the socio-philosophical backbone of the most populous tribal culture of the West Africa known as the “Yorubas” (Akogun, 2011). In the ancient Israel and the traditional Yoruba society, various terms were used to praise or commend obedient children and their successful parents. Conversely, some reproachful metaphors were employed to address the morally deficient ones and their unsuccessful parents. The “Son of Belial” in ancient Israel and *Akukuubi* in the Yoruba culture were derogatory terms employed metaphorically as internal moral compass to ensure parents were more dutiful in raising virtuous children who would not give them bad reputations.

The “Son of Belial” in Ancient Israel: Historical Origin and Moral Implication

The origin of the “Son of Belial” is rooted in antiquity. It was apparently in use soon after the flood; this indicates that the name might have been known or used in the sinful degenerations of the pre-flood world. It appears to have been a very early name for a pagan god, and later became synonymous with Satan (Elliot, 1998). There are three schools of thought on the origin of the name. “Belial” might have stemmed



from Hebrew words 'beli', meaning 'not' and 'ya'al', meaning 'over' or 'value'. The combination of these words would describe a person filled with pride and envy, who will not tolerate having anyone over him in a position of superiority or authority. The second possible derivation is from the Hebrew words 'beli' meaning 'not' and 'ol', meaning 'yoke'. The combination would describe a person who is utterly lawless, who refuses to be governed. The third possible origin is from 'beli', meaning 'not' and 'yah-al', meaning 'profit' or 'benefit'. The combination would describe a person who is 'worthless' or 'good for nothing', or 'constantly evil and wicked'.

The term is used twenty-six times in the Old Testament, usually translated as "worthless" in New American Standard Bible, but also as "base", "destruction"; "rascally", "wicked", elsewhere. The expression "Son of Belial" does not imply that Belial is a real person who fathers children; rather, it is a description of people who are characterized by wickedness, corruption or worthlessness. The Old Testament uses 'Belial' as a personification of evil, lawlessness, or rebellion, not an actual entity. Later, the personification began to be used as of actual person (ibid).

Conceptual Applications and Moral Implication of the "Son of Belial" in Ancient Israel

Wicked men, as stated before, are generally referred to as "Sons of Belial" in the Bible. In the light of this, the idolaters (Deuteronomy 13:13), the men of Gibeah (Judges 19:22; 20:13), Sons of Eli (1 Sam. 2:12), and many others are referred to as "Sons of Belial" in the Bible. Before Solomon built a permanent temple in Jerusalem, a portable tabernacle was located in Shiloh, a city north of Jerusalem. Eli, whose name means "my God", was the priest over the tabernacle in Shiloh (1 Sam. 1:9; 2:11). He was ninety-eight years old at that time (1 Sam. 4: 15). Hannah, after her committed prayers, gave birth to Samuel and brought him to Eli to fulfil her vow (1 Sam. 1:24-28). Samuel served faithfully in the tabernacle under the supervision of Eli (1 Sam. 2:11). Unfortunately, Eli's sons did not submit to their father's supervision as Samuel did. The two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were also priests like their father (1 Sam. 1:3). They "knew not the Lord" and were referred to as "Sons of Belial" (1 Sam. 2:12). This is a term of derision used to denote "Eli's parental irresponsibility (Frank, 2001). Hophni and Phinehas treated the Lord's offering with contempt, extorting the people who came to offer sacrifices. In addition to extortion, they were guilty of sexual immorality with women who served at the entrance of the tabernacle (1 Sam. 2:22). Besides, they blasphemed against God. Therefore, the Lord was displeased with their behaviour (1 Sam. 2:17). Later, a man of God was sent to Eli, telling him that he was guilty of honouring his sons more than the Lord (1 Sam. 2:27-30). Eli was considered guilty for neglecting his parental duties towards his sons because "he trained them not" (1 Sam. 3:13). Then, the Lord said that Eli and his house would be cut off from His favour and that, as a sign of the truth of the Lord's words, both sons would die on the same day (1 Sam. 2:30-34). This verdict was fulfilled when the Israelites went to war with the Philistines. In the battle, Israel was defeated and many Israelites lost their lives. The ark of covenant, which the Israelites hoped would provide some divine protection (1 Sam. 4:1-5), was captured and taken away. The two sons of Eli died. Hearing the news, Eli fell off his seat, broke his neck and died (1 Sam. 4:18). Then, Phinehas' wife who was pregnant delivered prematurely and died; but before she died, she named her baby "Ichabod", meaning "the glory had departed from Israel" (Fox, 2019).

Yoruba Moral Values in Child Education: Implication of *Iwa* (character), *Ogbon* (wisdom) and *Akukuubi* (worthless child) for Parental Duties

The Yoruba people occupy a large area in South-West Nigeria. They occupy Osun, Lagos, Oyo, Ogun, Kwara, Ekiti and Ondo States and some parts of Kogi State. Although, a handful of them are found scattered in other parts of Nigeria and some other West African countries. Besides, Yoruba communities can also be found across the Atlantic, as far as the Caribbean and South-America, particularly in Cuba and Brazil. The Yoruba people are known to be a single near-homogenous and semi-independent people loosely linked by history, geography, language, culture and religion. In Togo, the Yoruba people are known as Anago, Tsha and Ife to the North. In Liberia and Sierra Leone, they are referred to as 'Aku' or 'Eku' (Dada, 2009). The Yoruba people are one of the three main ethnic groups that make up Nigeria.



They constitute approximately 21% of Nigeria's total population and around forty million individuals (Ayantayo, 2012).

***Iwa* and *Ogbon* as Embodiments of Yoruba Moral Values in Child Education**

In a traditional Yoruba setting, child training was considered a dominant mandate. Inculcating moral values was unanimously considered imperative in order to produce progeny that would later become an indomitable rock of their cultural traditions. The concept of *iwa* and wisdom in relation to child training are central in Yoruba communal self-understanding and the process of peaceful co-existence. The word *iwa*, translated as 'character', 'nature', 'being', or 'the beginning of being', is socially and philosophically interpreted from two ends: the ontological and ethical evaluative (Labeodan, 2006). The ontological perspective enables one to identify the quantitative existence in the society. In the Yoruba society, *iwa* has its root in a Yoruba word "wa" meaning 'to exist' or 'existence'. A person without *iwa* is seen as not a being. In other words, it is *iwa* that confers existence on a person. The ethical evaluative has to do with a qualitative judgment of how good or bad one's *iwa* is. If one's *iwa* is positive to the moral standard of the community, it is said to be *iwa rere* "good character" and this is very commendable. But if it is opposite, it is said to be *iwa buburu* "bad character" which is also punishable as well. However, when *iwa* is mentioned alone among the Yoruba people, emphasis is laid on *iwa rere* "good character". Take for example, when Yoruba people say: *Obinrin naa ni iwa* "the woman has character", they are actually referring to good character found in the woman.

In the traditional Yoruba society, *iwa* was highly cherished and could never be compared with any other valuable possession. To them, if a man has other valuable things and lacks character, he is considered as lacking in all. Such a person would not be honoured in the society. The Yoruba people believed that, once you have *iwa*, you have everything. They always say: *Bi o lowo bi o ko ni iwa, o ko ni nnkan* (if you have money and lack character, you have nothing). Though 'money answers all things' as people believe, to the Yoruba people, *iwa* is more supreme to money (Iyanda, 2019). They believe that *iwa* is capable of deciding one's fate, and that is why one hears them say: *Obinrin so iwa nu o ni oun ko mu ori oko waye* (A woman without good character presumes it is destiny that is responsible for her being unmarried). Similarly, following their moral philosophy, the Yoruba people affirmed that one's life could be preserved, secured or ruined by one's *iwa*. This is confirmed through their saying: *Iwa rere lesu eniyan* (good character is one's ornament). The immense value attached to *iwa* is quite summed up in the popular maxim: *iwa lewa* (character is beauty).

In the moral thought of the Yoruba people, *iwa* is believed to be contagious (Iyanda, 2019). That is, one's *iwa* could be influenced by the type of friendship one keeps or association that one belongs to in the society. One Yoruba adage says: *Fi ore re han mi, n o so iru eniyan ti o je* (show me your friend, then I will tell you the type of person you are). Another proverb says: *Iwa jorwa nii je ore jore* (similar character makes a friendship). To the Yoruba people, *Egbe buburu ma n ba iwa rere je* (evil association corrupts good manner); and *Ore ayanju nii mu ni yan eke* (having too many friends gives room for befriending liars) because *Ore kii y'ore akobani kii yara won* (birds of the same feather flock together). Hence, in the traditional Yoruba world, both parents and elders in the community are always concerned about the type of friends their children keep, and they take it as their sole responsibility to live exemplary lives. They believed that: *Esin iwaju ni ti eyin n wo sare* (the horses at the back often follow the footsteps of the at the front while running). Unlike today that adults are seen turning deaf ears to moral pleas, elders in the traditional Yoruba society would try as much as possible to live enviable moral lives so as to influence positively the younger ones. The products of *iwa*, as revealed in the traditional Yoruba world-view, are obedience, humility, respect for elders, having greeting habits, modest dressing, love toward members in the community, faithfulness, honesty, sympathy, justice, discipline, hard work, loyalty, hospitality, kindness or generosity, gentleness, and submissiveness, courage, accountability, openness and so on (Babatunde & Setiloane, 2014). Having all these qualities, one is said to be *Omoluabi* (well-behaved child), which is known as "ezigbo mmadu" among the Igbo people (Agulana, 2010).



The Yoruba word *Ogbon* (wisdom), has several usages within their cultural world-view. The word could be used to denote success or positive outcome of any decision, attitude or deed in various dimensions (Iyanda, 2019). Within this understanding, the Yoruba people believe the end justifies the means. That is why it is said that: *Eni koko e ye lo moo lo* (someone whose transplanted cocoa survives is the one that knows how to transplant it). One Yoruba proverb even says: *Atare r'eni tun idi e se o n fi Oburo sesin, Oburo ki ba r'eni tun idi re se ki ba san ju atare lo* (alligator pepper has someone to take care of it and is mocking Oburo plant, if Oburo plant has someone to tend it like the alligator pepper, it would be more valuable than alligator pepper). This simply warns people to shun pride after being successful in life. The ethical assessment, that is the qualitative judgment of how positive one's attitude is to the norms of the family and the ethical standard of the entire community, is another consideration for wisdom among the Yoruba. One Yoruba proverb says: *Omo to ba m'owo we yoo ba agba jeun* (a child that knows how to wash his hands (well-behaved) will eat with (enjoy as) the elders). Moral uprightness is a major aesthetic quality enviable among the Yoruba people. Thus, every parent, in the community, always seeks to have children whose appropriate life style will bring glory and honour to them.

The concept of wisdom is crucial and very fundamental among the Yoruba people. To them, the lack of wisdom, or ability to apply it as and when due, is dangerous, and even deadly. One Yoruba proverb says: *Omo go eni o ma kuu, kilo pani bi o se ago* (the child is foolish (not smart) and you pray that he should not die, what kill quickly than foolishness?). The subject of wisdom is significant in the Yoruba understanding of life. Those who lack wisdom are described as *Obun, Omugo, Asiwere, Ope, Suegbe, na an s'eni o go, afofungbe-mu, gbewudani, k'eran-ma-jele* (foolish) among the people (Iyanda 2019).

Akukuubi in Relation to Parental Duties among the Yoruba

One Yoruba poem reads thus:

*Kaka ki n bi egbaa Obun
Ma kuku bi okan soso Oga
Ma rohun yan araye loju
Ma rohun gberaga*

*Se okan soso Araba
Kii segbe egbaa Osunsun
Omo to jafafa kan soso
Kii segbe igba Irubi Omo*

*Akukuubi sesin radarada
Kaku lomode ko yeni
O san ju ka dagba ka toro je*

English translation:

Instead of giving birth to two thousand foolish (not smart) children
I prefer giving birth to one virtuous and enviable one
With whom I may boast before men,
With whom I may display my pride;

For only one *Araba* tree
Is far better than two thousand *Osunsun* sticks.
Only one smart child
Is far better than two hundred undesirable children.

A worthless child is shamefully ridiculed
To die young honourably
Is far better than begging for food at old age



The above Yoruba poem has afforded us the opportunity to establish the background and the moral implication of *Akukuubi* in the Yoruba thought pattern. The first line of the poem *Kaka ki n bi egbaa Obun*, shows that the Yoruba people cherish a life that is dignified as a result of one's ability to preserve one's integrity. The expression *kaka ki n bi* (instead of giving birth to, or for me to give birth to), is a term that indicates resolution among the Yoruba. *Kaka* is often used to register readiness or determination to sacrifice one thing for another, as in saying *Kaka ki n jale, ma kuku d'eru* (instead of stealing, or for me to steal, I prefer to be a slave). So, instead of giving birth to *egbaa Obun* (two thousand foolish children), the Yoruba people prefer having only one that is enviable, as evident in line 2. The Yoruba word *Obun* generally means 'someone who is dirty', but used metaphorically to denote foolish (not smart), or morally deficient child (Adejube, 2016). Having a virtuous child with acceptable behaviour is a pride, as revealed in lines 3 and 4. In lines 5 to 8, a wise child is referred to as *Araba*. In the Yoruba moral philosophy, *Araba* is used metaphorically to denote greatness, or for someone or something that is big, more valuable and preferable than others. *Irubi Omo* in line 8 is used to denote the product of unchecked and undesirable child-bearing.

Then, *Akukuubi* is found in line nine of the poem: *Akukuubi sesin radarada*. It is an abridged form of a Yoruba sentence: *A ba ma kuku bii* (it could have been better if we did not give birth to him). The English translation here is deliberately given so as to express some exegetical analyses. The pronoun 'A' (we) in *A-kuku-u-bii* reflects cooperate regret among the family and community-oriented people, as in saying *Arwa ki ba ma kuku bii* (we should not have given birth to him). However, *Akukuubi* can also be used by people outside the group to castigate the child or parents, pointing attention to parental laxity.

Lessons to Learn from the Biblical and Traditional Beliefs

Numerous stories in the Bible illustrate how parents have tried, either successfully or unsuccessfully, to teach their children to be morally upright. We can learn important lessons from both types of the examples. One of these instructive stories is that of Eli as considered in this paper. Eli, as a priest of the tabernacle, successfully supervised Samuel but was not as diligent as he should have been to his own sons. In a similar fashion, though many endeavours may be worthy of our time and attention, we ought not to neglect our responsibility towards our family because of our devotion to other activities. From the Yoruba perspective too, parents are encouraged to train up their children, instructing them in the proper way of life (Egbetakin, 2013). As in the ancient Israel and the traditional Yoruba setting, parents of children who behaved in acceptable ways were approved as successful while parents whose children misbehaved were shamed and advised to put their houses in order; if such reproachful child is unyielding, the society label the child *Akukuubi* (a reprobate) or caricature of a child. Parents' role in child-training is reflected in the verses of the *Ifa* divinatory corpus (*Odu*):

If one trains one's children
They will be perfectly wise
As Ire, the daughter of Olokun
If one does not train one's children
They will be stupid and foolish
Like Ibawini, the son of Otu Ife.

In the Yoruba moral philosophy, parenting is not limited to the parent of the child, it involves the entire community. Parenting in the traditional Yoruba society was more of a communal responsibility (Dada, 2009). This is summed up in the Yoruba maxim: *Oju merin lo n bi omo, igba Oju nii woo* (four eyes brings into existence a child, two hundred eyes raise him). Unfortunately, many parents frown at communal correction and parenting, and limit the training of their children to themselves. This explains the increase in anti-social behaviours among 21st century children.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper examined the use of the term "Son of Belial" as preserved in 1 Sam. 2:12 in the ancient Israel society and *Akukuubi* in the traditional Yoruba society with a view to identifying their relevance in parental responsibility among the contemporary people. The work explored the historical origin of the "Son of



Belial”, revealing that the name seemed to have been known or used in the pre-flood world; it was traceable to the pagan god, which later became used synonymously for Satan. In line with different schools of thought, the name could be interpreted to mean the proud, the lawless, worthless or wicked person. In Old Testament, it is used twenty-six times. In 1 Sam. 2:12, the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were referred to as “Sons of Belial”, who “knew not the Lord”. Consequently, Eli was punished for neglecting his responsibility as parent, and this became a notable lesson for many Bible users. The use of *Akukuubi* among the traditional Yoruba people was also examined, focusing on the relevance of *iwa* and *wisdom* in the Yoruba method of child-training. The immense value attached to these concepts is confirmed in the Yoruba proverbs: *Obinrin so iwa nu o ni oun ko mu ori oko waye* (A woman without good character presumes it is destiny that is responsible for her being unmarried) and *Omo go eni o ma kuu ki lo pani bi o se ago?* (The child is foolish and you pray that he should not die, what kills quickly than foolishness?). *Akukuubi* reflects cooperate regret, and a term used to castigate or point attention to parental laxity among the family and community-oriented people. Now, from the foregoing, it can rightly be deduced that parenting is a serious responsibility that carries grave consequences if one fails at it; parents must be diligent and dutiful in their God-ordained responsibility of instructing their children. The paper therefore recommends that parenting should be more of a communal enterprise in contemporary societies; it should involve the entire community and not to be limited to the parents of the children. Biological parents should also appreciate communal efforts in child-training.

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