

Which Way to *Shalom*? A Theological Exploration of the Yoruba and Western Foundations for Ethics and Development

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Abstract

The biblical concept of *shalom* is a state worthy of pursuit. This article is a theological exploration of the Yoruba and the Western (humanist) ethical foundations for development. The research uses a comparative technique to examine the parallels and differences between the biblical idea of *shalom* and the Yoruba and Western views on ethics and well-being. Yoruba proverbs and popular sayings are used as crucial components to elicit traditional ideas on morality and well-being. To identify the Western view on ethics and well-being, the study investigates the initiatives and objectives of transnational organizations. The study finds that the Yoruba idea of *àlàáfíà* (peace), which is also a pursuit of morality

and well-being, is more closely aligned with the biblical concept of *shalom* than the Western view.

Conspectus

Keywords

Ethics, development, *Shalom*, humanism, Yoruba

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1. Introduction

The development of a society is always tied to people's commitment to what is right and good. Schweiker (2004, 199) puts it succinctly when he writes: "Despite the radical differences among moral systems and communities, human well-being was always in some way intrinsic to a concept of the higher good and the ideas about moral obligation." Therefore, ethics and well-being always go together.

This study explores the connection between the African traditional pursuit of ethics and development and the biblical pursuit of the same. The aim is to propose a biblically-rooted view of ethics and well-being for Africa that can serve as a contextual theology for African Christians to live authentic Christian lives culturally true to the Scriptures in matters related to morality and development. The question that guides the study is, what are the Western and African bases for ensuring ethics as they each seek to attain development?

This research employs a comparative methodology to explore the African and Western views of ethics and well-being from a theological perspective. As a representation of Africa, it focuses on the Yoruba people of Nigeria. It explores relevant, popular Yoruba proverbs and sayings to extract traditional beliefs about ethics and well-being. It examines the activities and goals of transnational organizations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to infer the Western perspective of ethics and well-being. These organizations are taken as a representation of the Western world.

The article concluded that, whereas humanism is at the root of the Western view of ethics in the pursuit of development, Yoruba ethics in the pursuit of development is founded on a biblically related concept of peace (*shalom*). In this study, development is construed as synonymous with well-being, so the two terms are used interchangeably.

2. The Biblical Pursuit of Ethics and Well-Being

God promised to bless the nation of Israel. This blessing implied remarkable productivity for the nation and a good life for its people (Deut 28:1–14). The blessing God promised to the Israelites is tied to *shalom*, the principal end of God's blessings for the nation of Israel (Cafferky 2014). For instance, the priestly blessing among the Israelites is a pronouncement of *shalom* (Num 6:24–26), which implies that, to the people of Israel, *shalom* is the highest form of blessing, the total sum of human desire and need. Therefore, *shalom* is the biblical definition of development, a life full of well-being.

Although *shalom* is usually translated as "peace" in English, the Hebrew concept indicates that it is "multidimensional, complete well-being, physical, psychological, social, and spiritual; it flows from all of one's relationships being put right—with God, with(in) oneself, and with others" (Kitur and Murumba 2022, 22). Taking the definition of *shalom* as well-being, the concept entails a holistic well-being cutting across both material and immaterial aspects of human life.

Biblical *shalom* is tied to an ethical life. God's covenant with the Israelites regulates "a social order that is to be maintained through a right relation to God.... The vertical axis of God/people covenant facilitates a horizontal axis in which the people bind themselves legally and morally to one another" (Hoelzl and Ward 2006, 7). One remarkable way by which God intends the Israelites to attain *shalom*, peace-blessing, is obedience to his Law.

The blessing of God, when received by humans as they obey his commandment, usually results in *shalom*, the peace of God that passes human understanding, which is the biblical term for well-being. The connection between God's covenant, blessing, and *shalom* is well expressed in Cafferky (2014, 1):

The principles contained in the Decalogue have a direct relationship to the realization of promised blessings of *Shalom* as experienced in the community as a whole. The Commandments are not merely a random, arbitrary list of ethical “dos and don'ts” for individuals. They form the prescription for how the community as a whole can experience *Shalom* through individual and collective behaviors.

Writing on the nature of the Hebrew *shalom*, Cafferky (2014) notes that it is precipitated by obedience to God's commandment. When Israelites failed in any way to obey God's Law, they lived a life that was void of *shalom*. Apart from *shalom* being regarded as a biblical definition for development, it also entails “personal integrity and involves doing what is right, living honestly and ethically (Ps 34:11–14, 37: 37)” (Oluikpe and Callender-Carter 2016, 99). The idea of ensuring *shalom* was so important in the Israelite's context that its retention was the king's responsibility since he was appointed by God, the ultimate King. The Israelites's king was a co-regent, while God was primarily their king. The human king as God's co-regent was to rule according to God's Law and be a model of righteousness (Deut 17:18–20). He had to seek justice and righteousness (Isa 32:2, Jer 23:5) and thereby ensured *shalom* in the society.

Still in the New Testament, the idea of *shalom* continues with its Greek version *eirene*. Like *shalom* in the Old Testament, *eirene* is about “wholeness”—a ‘wholeness’ in all dimensions of life.... Such a kind of peace is in direct relationship with the work of God in a man's life and in his world” (Siqueira 2001, 15). In the New Testament Jesus is God's Prince of Peace who brokers peace between God and humans (Rom 5:1). In his teaching to his disciples, he made a promise of peace (John 14:27), part of which entails life in abundance (John 10:10). As such, the New Testament concept of *shalom* relates to well-being.

Just like in the Old Testament, in the New Testament *shalom*, as well-being, is premised on a good moral life. When Jesus came on the scene, he made an important declaration that indicated his stance on the Law: He did not come to abolish the Law but to fulfill it (Matt 5:17). His message of repentance and a call for a new lifestyle dominated his teaching (Mark 1:14–15). His sermon on the mountain demands radical lifestyles from people contrary to what they initially held, like going the extra mile, turning the other cheek, controlling anger, and saying the truth without having to swear (Matt 5–7). All of these imply a demand for ethical living, with Jesus showing how people should submit themselves to the rule of God in matters pertaining “to work, status, friendship, marriage, time, food, clothing, healing, money, anxiety, and rest” (Storkey 2005, 112). Meanwhile, Matthew 6:33 forms his notable teaching that connects material blessings to ethical life: “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (NIV).

Therefore, it is on this premise that this article argues that the pursuit of *shalom* is the foundation for biblical ethics in the pursuit of well-being. On the one hand, it entails well-being, and on the other hand, it entails a good moral life; well-being in the material life, and well-being in the immaterial, moral life.

The radical addition to the pursuit of *shalom* that is found in the New Testament is the idea that because of Christ's death, we are enabled to live an ethical life. This is contrary to what was widely held—that human beings can make good ethical decisions and actions through their willpower. Paul stressed the weakness of human willpower in Romans 7:14–24 when he noted his personal failure to overcome sin through willpower. He also noted God's provision for moral deliverance through Christ (Crisler 2021, 139). This implies that as the *shalom* of well-being is from God, so is the *shalom* of a good moral life. It is therefore impossible

to talk about *shalom* without talking about God the source of *shalom* (Siqueira 2001, 16).

3. The Western View of Development and Pursuit of Ethics

In the Western view, a country is considered developed when it does well with its gross domestic product (GDP), which means that it can produce a reasonable number of final goods and services within a given period. Likewise, a country is doing well when it has high per capita income, which implies that when the GDP is divided by the nation's population, the resulting figure is high enough to make a decent living for individuals in the nations (Grudem and Asmus 2013, 47). In short, the global standard view of development is largely based on the material things that the country produces and the material things that its citizens can afford.

Secondly, as we consider the Western view of development, it is important to examine the sustainable development goals (SDGs), which are being pursued by the global community (United Nations Development Programme 2023).

1. No poverty.
2. Zero hunger.
3. Good health and well-being.
4. Quality education.
5. Gender equality.
6. Clean water and sanitation.
7. Affordable and clean energy.
8. Decent work and economic growth.
9. Industry, innovation, and infrastructure.

10. Reduced inequalities.
11. Sustainable cities and communities.
12. Responsible consumption and production.
13. Climate action.
14. Life below water.
15. Life on land.
16. Peace, justice, and strong institutions.
17. Partnership for the goals.

Judging the Western view of development by these goals, one can infer that development entails human well-being (as seen in goals 1–3, 6–7), which needs to be enhanced by essential factors such as physical, social, political, and economic factors (as seen in the rest of the goals). Development at an individual level entails that each person has at least their basic needs met. To summarise the Western view of development, we can say that development is considered as a higher GDP and per capita income for a nation, and having the essential natural needs met for the individual occupants of the nation.

One important phenomenon that helps us understand the Western view of development is globalization since globalization itself is fundamentally a quest for development. For instance, Thomas L. Friedman's 2005 *The World is Flat* is a narrative of how the integration of the world's regions brought about improved life made possible by cyberspace. As we talk about globalization in the modern sense, it is hard to talk about it without the mention of "multinational enterprises, commercial partnerships, foreign joint venture and embryonic forms of mass production" (Moore and Lewis 2009, 1). All these are geared towards the search for an increase in national GDP, per capita income, and improved lives for individuals.

More importantly, as we talk about the Western view of development from a globalization standpoint, we cannot do so without talking about the United Nations and its specialized agencies, including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Health Organisation (WHO), and United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). The United Nations has five aims: 1) to maintain international peace and security, 2) to protect human rights, 3) to deliver humanitarian aid, 4) to support sustainable development and climate action, and 5) to uphold international law (United Nations n.d.).

From all the indicated UN aims, the UN itself exists for the pursuit of development, since all the five aims stated have direct relationships with the national well-being of the member countries and the individual well-being of the citizens of the countries. Meanwhile, for the global community, as represented in the study by the UN and its agencies, development entails certain achievements such as industrialization, high life expectancy, and income (Sartorius 2022, 101).

Development and ethics are inseparable. Development practitioners of all orientations agree that “what is morally good and right is bound to [produce] the flourishing of human persons and human communities” (Schweiker 2003, 539). Thus, in the pursuit of development, how does the UN in its operation ensure what is morally good and right for its member countries? This study argues that the Western pursuit of ethics in relation to development is founded on humanism. The root of humanism as the global pursuit of ethics and development is exemplified in the two instances below.

The UN’s embrace of humanism as the foundation of its ethical pursuit is reflected in the display of Norman Rockwell’s painting in the UN’s headquarters in New York. Rockwell’s painting is a mosaic work that bears

the images of people from all cultures and religions. Upon these images is the inscription: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” The painting was presented in 1985 by Nancy Reagan, the former U.S. first lady. Upon the repair of its crack, it was rededicated in 2014. This painting is known to have been “a favourite attraction on tours of the United Nations in New York” for a long time (United Nations 2014)

Meanwhile, according to Jan Eliasson’s speech on the day of rededication, the painting is so valued because the “ethic” of its content “is common to numerous traditions.” It appeals to various people because “it reflects humanity” (United Nations 2014). Rockwell’s painting and Eliasson’s comment clearly indicate that the idea of humanism is at the core of the UN’s pursuit of ethics.

In his discussion on humanism, Hans d’Orville (2015, 96) notes that humanism is a call to “sharpen [human] conscience with regard to the potential of a world based on peace, democracy, justice, mutual respect, and human rights.” As he spells out the peculiarities of humanism, d’Orville (2015, 96) notes that “although the exact definition of humanism has historically fluctuated in accordance with successive and diverse strands of intellectual thought, the underlying concept rests on the universal ideas of human emancipation, independence, and social justice.” It can be inferred from d’Orville that humanism has to do with people’s pursuit of what is good and right: respect, peace, independence, and social justice. Also, learning from Muhammad Arif Khan (2019, 31), it is realized that at the heart of humanism is the idea of valuing the inherent worth and dignity of every individual. On this note, this study infers that humanism is a quest for morality.

Throughout human history, humanism has been a search for morality. In Bokova’s (2011, 5) words, “Humanism is an age-old promise, as well as an idea that is always new, endlessly reinventing itself. The humanist project

has been part of our history since antiquity, yet it shines like new in every epoch.” However, it has ties to both the Renaissance and Enlightenment, two historical events that opened the world to secularism and placed humans (rather than God) at the center of everything. Therefore, Christians today should be skeptical of it (Seth 2011, 6). This article makes the case that humanistic principles form the foundation of the Western pursuit of development, a development that is measured in terms of physical indices.

4. Yoruba Pursuit of Ethics and Development

The African community has its unique definition of development, or what is commonly referred to as well-being, in the same way that the rest of the world does. The popular representation of the African definition and pursuit of development is rooted in the concept of *Ubuntu* (Sartorius 2022, 4). Specifically for Yoruba, the actual notion of development is *àlàáfíà* (translated as peace in English). All things are based on a person’s ability to breathe and be at *àlàáfíà*. The Yoruba idea of well-being is reflected in the popular saying *Àlàáfíà l’ójù* (Peace is supreme).

For the Yoruba people, *àlàáfíà* “is the sum total of all that is good that man may desire—an undisturbed harmonious life” (Awolalu 1970, 21). In the ancient Yoruba worldview, the concept of *àlàáfíà* as well-being does not mean that there is no desire for financial wealth at all. The Yoruba view of wealth and poverty, however, is so fundamental that it is said *Bí ebi bá kúrò nínú ìṣé, ìṣé bùsè*, which can idiomatically be translated as “if hunger is (taken) out of your poverty experience, you are no longer poor.”¹

With the saying, *Àlàáfíà l’ójù* (Peace is supreme), the Yoruba see *àlàáfíà* as the ultimate proof of holistic well-being. To achieve this, they believe

in living in ways that ensure cordial relationships with others, gods, and the environment. Moral norms and codes are established to protect these relationships, and failure to follow these guidelines is considered a sin. The Yoruba community believes that living in accordance with these codes is crucial for achieving material well-being and ensuring good relationships with others, gods, and the environment. Violation of any form of relationship in the Yorubaland is considered a sin (*ẹ̀ṣẹ̀*). The essence of good relationships is good moral life. It therefore implies that material well-being and immaterial, moral life go hand in hand.

In contrast to *ẹ̀ṣẹ̀*, Yoruba people celebrate and praise *ìwà rere* (good character) which qualifies an individual to be called a virtuous human being, or *ọmọ́lúàbí*. To them, rather than giving oneself to sin, one should always maintain *ìwà rere*. The idea of *ìwà rere* always goes hand in hand with the concept of *ọmọ́lúàbí* because an *ọmọ́lúàbí* is considered to be the epitome of *ìwà rere* (Olanipekun 2017, 219).

It is said that *ìwà rere lẹ̀ṣọ ọmọ ẹ̀nìyàn* (a good character is the ornament of human beings). Therefore, everybody in society is encouraged to guard their behavior so that they do not sin. Because if there is a sin, *àlàáfíà* is disrupted. The wicked or immoral acts perpetuated against fellow human beings or the community by breaking taboos, and the practice of witchcraft and sorceries are some critical reasons for the disruption of *àlàáfíà*. Any of this can provoke the wrath of the gods.

In their pursuit of material well-being, a good moral life is so important among Yoruba, that a social accountability system is built within the community. This system provides a public eye for community members, encouraging moral behavior and providing information for community leaders, such as chiefs or kings, on how members are conducting themselves. This system serves as a chain of information, promoting a moral life and fostering a sense of community.

¹ The Yoruba are not enamored with wealth, though they are not against it. *Àlàáfíà* is most important, so if one has that and your basic needs are met you are no longer considered poor.

In this social accountability system, everybody holds the right to confront any member of the community who is observed to be violating these laws. This is why Yoruba people would say *Bí ará ilé eni bá n jẹ aáyán, kí a kílò fún un* (“If you find your neighbor eating cockroaches, do not hesitate to warn him/her” [because when the repercussion comes, you will suffer sleepless night with him/her]). Also, it is required that people should corporately condemn an evildoer. This is why it is said that *É jẹ ká pa ẹnu pò ká bá olè wí* (Let us put mouths together to rebuke a thief). This does not apply only to theft but to any form of unacceptable behavior.

Through communal accountability, every member of the community serves as police to one another, sending hints to the king in case of gross misconduct. It, therefore, becomes his responsibility to call a reported sinner to order or bring him/her to book, when necessary, so that the peace and well-being of the community can be preserved.

Through the communal accountability system, the head of the community (king or chief) can know how everybody behaves in society. This is portrayed in the saying, *Ojú ọba n’ílẹ, ojú ọba l’óko, èyàn ní n jẹbẹ* (The king’s eyes are able to see what happens both in the city and in the village because people are feeding him with information). In fact, it is the paramount responsibility of a community head to ensure that people are well-behaved in society so that there is peace. This is because his success is measured by the amount of peace that the community enjoys during his reign. The prominence of kingship in the well-being of a society is revealed in the proverb, *Ọba tó jẹ tí ìlú r’ójú, a kò ní gbàgbé rẹ* (The king whose reign is characterized by order will not be forgotten).

As noted earlier, *iwà rere* among Yoruba is guided by moral codes. Oladosu (2012, 144) claims that *Ifa* divination, proverbs, taboos (*èèwò*), rituals, myths, folktales, and the cultural traditions of the people are the sources of Yorubaland’s moral code. In addition to all of this, individuals

are required to act morally by listening to their conscience, or *ẹrí ọkàn* (Fayemi and Azeez 2021, 83). Similarly, a moral code is likewise formed by someone in a position of power. Since they sprang from the spiritual cosmos, all Yoruba sources of morality are spiritual. For example, *Ifa* is a divine entity which is why people have to engage in divination to consult him. Proverbs are said to originate from the ancestors and are therefore known to be *òwe àwọn baba wa* (the sayings of our fathers; i.e., ancestors). Therefore, the Yoruba quest for well-being and morality is rooted in spirituality, a reference to the world of the Supreme Being.

As noted above, taboos (*èèwò*) are an important aspect of Yoruba moral codes (Adeleye 2020, 43). Most of the taboos in Yorubaland are instituted to safeguard relationships. For example, it is considered *èèwò* to fell a tree in a sacred forest. This is to safeguard the relationships with the environment and the gods. When a man visits your friend, it is *èèwò* to stay in his house when he finds his friend’s wife alone at home. This is to safeguard him from sexual temptation with his wife’s friend. The aim of all these is so that there is *àlàáfíà* (peace) in the community.

When the Yoruba pursue development, the goal is all-round well-being, which is made possible by good moral life. As Owoseni (2016, 59) asserted, the Yoruba pursuit of morality ultimately aims at well-being. It is on this premise that this article argues that the Yoruba basis for the pursuit of development is similar to *shalom*—a holistic concept that encapsulates ethics and well-being with no sense of dichotomy.

5. Humanistic versus *Shalom* Ethic

The biblical, Western, and Yoruba ethical pursuit of development can be summarized as follows:

Biblical	Western	Yoruba
The immaterial is the ultimate necessity for the material (i.e., life is not contained in the abundance of possessions).	Material is the ultimate end.	The immaterial is the ultimate necessity for the material (<i>àlàáfíà l'ójù</i> ; peace is supreme).
God works in you to desire and to do good things (Phil 2:13).	Human beings should exert their willpower to ensure a good ethical life.	<i>Ọwọ ẹni lààfí tún iwà ẹni ẹ</i> (We nurture our behavior with our own hands).
Let us prioritize our relationship with God to enable cordial relationships in other areas of life.	Let us be good so that we can please one another.	Let us give respect to social, spiritual, and moral codes (of the gods/ancestors) so that <i>àlàáfíà</i> (peace) is not disrupted.

Cares for the human soul by a relationship with God.	Neglects care for the human soul.	Attempts to care for the human soul; seeks relationship with God but through intermediaries.
<i>Shalom</i> ethics.	Humanistic ethics.	Quasi- <i>shalom</i> ethics.

Table 1. A comparison between biblical, Western, and Yoruba views on development.

5.1 *Shalom* ethics as the ethical basis for the biblical pursuit of development

The biblical pursuit of development holds that there is more to life than material things. People should devote themselves to seeking immaterial ends as much as they seek material possessions. This value was well communicated to the Israelites through Moses when he said, “man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord” (Deut 8:3 NIV). This taught the Israelites the need for human beings to crave more than the material to sustain their lives. More importantly, their life is sustained by the immaterial.

Jesus also implied this in his response to the rich young ruler (Luke 18:18–30) and the parable of the rich fool (Luke 12:13–21), when he taught: “life does not consist in the abundance of possession” (12:15 NIV). *Shalom*, which is the ethical basis for the biblical pursuit of development, calls people to prioritize immaterial possessions that are associated with a relationship with God (marked by obedience to him). By doing this material possessions will follow (Deut 28:1–14, Matt 6:33).

Shalom ethics also entails cordiality in all relationships, whether with fellow humans, with the environment, with oneself, or with God. The Law of Moses places a moral demand on people, for example, not to mistreat one's neighbors, (e.g., Exod 20:16), how to handle the environment (e.g., Deut 20:19), and what to do for personal well-being (e.g., Deut 5:13–14). Meanwhile, what makes it possible for people to sustain cordial relationships in all other areas of life is when they have a relationship with God—commandments pertaining to humanity's relationship with God are at the top of the Ten Commandments.

In *shalom* ethics, the effort to do good is not ultimately in the human ability but in God who works in humans to desire and to do good things (Phil 2:13). Therefore, *shalom* ethics is not about willpower that often fails but the grace of God that appears to all humans and teaches them to say no to all unrighteousness (Titus 2:11–12). Paul stressed the weakness of human willpower in Romans 7:14–24 when he noted his personal failure to overcome sin through willpower. Therefore, a God-required lifestyle is impossible without a relationship with him. The inability to live out the lifestyle that God requires us to live is the reason for sin in society. The strength of *shalom* ethics lies in the fact that there is a provision that empowers humans with the ability to do what is right.

5.2 Humanistic ethics as the ethical basis for the Western pursuit of development

Judging by the Western definition of development, which is measured in terms of GDP and per capita income, the ultimate end of development is material, which is opposed to the biblical pursuit of development which holds that life does not consist in the abundance of possessions. Just like biblical ethics, the Western view also holds that a good ethical life is a critical prerequisite for development. Nevertheless, humanism,

which is the basis for the Western pursuit of ethics and development, is anthropocentric rather than theocentric.

Quoting Edward Saïd, Sanjay Seth (2011, 6) correctly notes that

the 'core' of humanism is the secular notion that the historical world is made by men and women, and not by God, and it can be understood rationally. At the core of humanism, then, is a philosophical anthropology, which in according centrality to man diminishes (though it does not necessarily eliminate) the role accorded to god(s).

Because of the attempt to leave God out of the scene in the ethical pursuit of development, humanism holds that willpower is the answer when it comes to the human ability to do what is right and wrong. Also, the essence of doing the right thing is not to please any divine being but so that we do not hurt one another (i.e., fellow humans). Because humanistic ethics, as the basis of the global pursuit of ethics, leaves God out of the equation, there is a lack of care for the human soul, the essential human component that seeks fellowship with the divine being. This is the most significant undoing of humanism as the basis of the global pursuit of development.

Global development falls short of being holistic due to its materialistic end. There is an essential aspect of human life that it has left out, an aspect of life which is regarded, according to Daniel Groody (2007, 11), as the "inner space"—the human heart. In the words of Groody (2007, 11): "The current disorders of the society begin with the disorders of the human heart, from which flow destructive choices that unravel relationships." Meanwhile, to leave God out of the equation in our pursuit of ethics and development is to neglect the need to cater to the human heart. This is the source of the world disorder leading to inequality and breakdown in all levels of relationships.

5.3 Quasi-*shalom* ethics as the ethical basis for the Yoruba pursuit of development

As we consider the mode of Yoruba's ethical pursuit of development, one will wonder which category it belongs to—humanistic or *shalom* ethics. This article contends that it is more like *shalom* ethics. Yoruba's concept of *àlàáfíà* (peace), as it takes into consideration the material and immaterial well-being, keeps it in consonance with the biblical view of ethics and development: "life does not consist in the abundance of possesses" (Luke 12:15 NIV). Therefore, Awolalu (1970, 21) is right when he argues that "*Àlàáfíà* as it is being conceived, is very similar to the Hebrew concept of *shalom*."

The Yoruba pursuit of ethics, *ìwà rere* (good character), and *ọmọ́lúàbí* (virtuous person), is directly connected to divinity. Concerning moral life, a Yoruba person believes: "If I misbehave, the ancestors, deities, and *Olódùmarè* [the Almighty] will punish me." More so, as already mentioned, all Yoruba moral codes have divine implications. With this, we draw a line of correlation between the Yoruba and biblical pursuits of ethics and development, which are both divine and spiritual in nature. The fact that the Yoruba make room for human relationships with divinity is an indication of its attempt to care for the human soul, like the biblical pursuit of ethics and development. However, as much as the Yoruba concept of *àlàáfíà* (peace) is similar to the concept of *shalom*, some beliefs and practices conflict with *shalom* ethics.

The Yoruba means of attaining a good ethical life—*ìwà rere* (good character) and *ọmọ́lúàbí* (virtuous person)—is found in the human personal effort: *Ọwọ́ ẹni lààfí tún ìwà ẹni ẹ* (We nurture our behavior with our own hands). Human beings can indeed attempt on their own to become an *ọmọ́lúàbí*, a morally ideal human, as some biblical texts such as Romans 6:12 and Philippians 2:12 suggest. However, the aspect of it that is left out

by Yoruba traditional belief is the aspect of God's willingness to help our willpower through the power of the Holy Spirit that comes upon people the day they receive salvation (Rom 8:1–5). The true height of *ọmọ́lúàbí* (virtuous person) can be fully attained only in Christ. Beyond what Yoruba people believe as the way to possess and maintain good character, Scripture further teaches, "for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Phil 2:13 NIV).

Therefore, it is not enough for an individual to guard their behavior through personal effort, it is also important that they tap into God's provision to help them do his will. The Bible holds that no one can attain the height of *ọmọ́lúàbí* (virtuous person) by personal effort alone. The only way to attain it before God is through the righteousness of Christ that is imputed in us (2 Cor 5:21). Other than that, the demonstration of *ìwà rere* (good behavior) that comes through personal effort is at its best still like a filthy rag before God (Isa 64:6, Rom 3:10).

Although not totally in agreement with the biblical teaching, the basis for the Yoruba's appeal for good character is not as far away from the Scripture as the Western view. While the Western view also acknowledges the place of *ọmọ́lúàbí* (virtuous person) in ensuring the well-being of humanity, their appeal for morality is based on humanistic ethics that are void of spirituality. The Yoruba's appeal for good character is not just based on *humanism* but also divinity. In biblical terms, divinity only entails the Trinitarian God—*Olódùmarè* (the Almighty) minus ancestors and deities. This is another area where Yoruba religious thought misses the point. It places traditional deities and ancestors in the same realm as God. In its perception of ethics and development, the Western view misses the point by leaving God out completely. As such, while humanistic ethics serves as the basis for the Western pursuit of development, quasi-*shalom* ethics is the basis for the Yoruba pursuit of development.

6. Conclusion

This study has discussed the interrelationship between ethics and development. Through a comparative study, it explored the Yoruba and Western foundations for ethics and well-being from a theological perspective. It argued that the Yoruba and biblical pursuit of development and ethics, founded on the respective concepts of *àlàáfìà* (peace) and *shalom*, emphasize the importance of ethical living, communal harmony, and overall well-being in a holistic, undichotomized framework. Therefore, the Yoruba concept of *àlàáfìà* (peace) and biblical *shalom* are said to share a striking similarity, except that the Yoruba view allows for other deities and self-attained righteousness. On the other hand, the Western view of ethics and well-being, founded on humanism, exhibits a narrower focus on human-centered values, thereby deviating from the deeper spiritual and theological dimensions found in the Yoruba and biblical perspectives.

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