

THE DECALOGUE AS A GUIDE FOR YORÙBÁ CHRISTIAN ETHICS

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Abstract

The level of moral decadence in many African nations is a serious concern to several people, especially biblical scholars. One suspect is a gross violation of ethical principles and values as contained in the Bible. The result of the violation of ethical norms is lack of peace and harmony in many societies and communities in Africa, as there are several cases of wickedness such as stealing, killing and kidnapping among others. This paper examines the Decalogue as an ethical guide for Yorùbá Christians, with the purpose of linking Yorùbá Christian ethics with the Decalogue, the Ten Words which Yahweh gave to Moses on Mount Sinai and to remind Yorùbá Christians of the need to follow the ethical principles contained in the Bible. Historico-exegetical method is adopted. Historically, literature on Decalogue and Yorùbá Christian ethics is reviewed. Exegetically, some key Hebrew words in the Biblical texts are studied with the help of *Hebrew Lexicon and Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. It is discovered that Decalogue is a divine revelation of God to Moses for the Israelites and their obedience to it brought blessings while disobedience brought curses as seen later in their history. Also, there is a strong connection between the Decalogue and different laws found in different societies in Africa. The paper concludes that just as the Decalogue was to the Israelites, so the Bible must be to the Yorùbá Christians. Therefore, Yorùbá Christians must adhere and obey the instructions contained in the Bible including the Declogue, so as to aide reduction in the ethical problems confronting the (Yoruba) society.

Keywords: Decalogue, Ten Commandments, Christians, Ethics, Yorùbá, Nigeria

Introduction

Apart from written laws in different nations of Africa, every tribe and community has her unwritten ethical norms that guide people in their relationship. For example, the Yorùbá people rely so much on Ifá corpus as it contains guidelines on how to relate with Olódùmarè (the supreme Being) and one with another.¹ But, it appears that human beings generally find it difficult to obey these written and unwritten laws that are meant to govern the harmonious relationship of people in community. Consequently, African nations, like elsewhere in the world, are plagued by diverse moral and social challenges ranging from immorality, stealing, killing, kidnapping, insecurity and all forms of wickedness. News on the social and electronic media is disturbing. The print media as represented by national newspapers have crime pages on regular basis that contain wicked atrocities being perpetrated. It thus appears that several individuals have lost their consciences. The purpose of this paper is to examine

the unique role of the Decalogue in guiding the Israelite society, to demonstrate that it should also serve as a guide for Yorùbá Christians, ethically. The paper has the following sub-topics: the Decalogue and its purpose; some scholarly views on Decalogue; the Decalogue and Yorùbá ethical values; and concluding remarks.

The Decalogue

The deliverance from the Egyptian bondage under the leadership of Moses was a significant event in the life and history of the Israelites. At Mount Sinai, the redeemed and liberated people received laws that would guide their relationship with God on the one hand, and their relationship with one another, on the other hand. The Mosaic laws in Exodus had three components namely, the Decalogue (Exod 20:1-17); the book of the covenant with civil and religious ordinances (Exod 20:22-24:11); and the ceremonial regulations (Exod 24:12-31:18).

Decalogue is a Greek compound word- *deca* (ten) and *logue* (words). Thus, Decalogue is the Ten Commandments, that is, Ten Words of Yahweh that were originally promulgated for Israel. The Israelites accepted the Decalogue as their obligation when they entered into covenant relationship with Yahweh. Their acceptance and obedience to these commandments distinguished them as a people chosen by Yahweh for a special relationship.

The Decalogue is not really a law code as each of the commandments is not comprehensive enough. Each deals with general principles rather than detailed cases. The Decalogue is expressed in second person singular. Each of the commandments is addressed to individuals within the Israelite community. All of them are apodictic in form as they are categorized and absolute. They are unconditional laws which must be obeyed by everyone in the community. The Decalogue is not like the casuistic laws, that is, the conditional laws which appear in the covenant code (Exod 21:2-14,18-36;22:1-17).

The biblical records emphasize that God Himself spoke the Decalogue to the hearing of all the people at the time of theophany at Sinai (Exod 20:1,22) and He wrote them on two tablets of stone and gave them to Moses.² Speaking of the two tablets, Craigie notes that one tablet belonged to Israel and the other to God, so that both parties to the covenant had a copy of the legislation.³ Unfortunately, the one with Moses was broken when he discovered that the people were worshipping the Golden Calf (Exod32). Nevertheless, Yahweh graciously re-inscribed them and directed that they should be deposited in the Ark of the covenant (Deut 10:1-5) and they were still there at the dedication of the temple during the reign of Solomon (1 Kgs 8:9,21).

Exod 20:1-17 is sometimes called “ethical Decalogue” while Exod 34:17-26 is called “ritual Decalogue.”⁴ Some biblical scholars have queried the location of the Decalogue in Exod 20:1-17. Marshall notes that Exod 20:1-17 is an interpolation in the text as it interrupts the flow of material between Exod 19 and 20:18. He opines that if Exod 20:1-17 is removed, the remaining material

describes a theophany in which God instructs Moses to set limits around the holy mountain, with only Moses and Aaron allowed to descend the mountain.⁵

Closely connected with the issue of location of the Decalogue within the Exodus text is the date and origin of the document. On the one hand, many critical scholars since the time of Wellhausen, are of the view that the Decalogue could not have originated with Moses. They argue that the Decalogue shows the influence of the Hebrew prophets and therefore it should be placed at the beginning of the classical prophetic movement in the eighth century.⁶ Harrelson is of the opinion that the moral and spiritual teachings contained in the Decalogue must be a product at much later time, under the influence of the great prophets of the eighth century BC. He opines that the present form of the Ten Commandments may be assigned to the exilic period, specifically 587-530 BC or to the century following.⁷

On the other hand, many conservative and some critical scholars are of the view that the Decalogue should be ascribed to Moses. The main argument is centered on the fact that the Decalogue does not really exhibit the concern for social problems found in the prophets. In other words, the prophets are seen not as innovators, but rather as reformers who wished to revive some of the ideals of an older age which went back in part to Moses.⁸ I align myself with the view that connects the origin of the Decalogue with Moses. Exod 20:1 makes it clear that God spoke the words to Moses.

Purpose of the Decalogue

The purpose of the Decalogue is summarized as follows:

Firstly, the Decalogue which was originally meant for the Israelites (Exod 20:12; Deut 5:15) serve the purpose of governing the moral life of the community. In fact, the first four of the Decalogue guide the relationship between the people and Yahweh while the last six guide the relationship of the people one with another.

Secondly, the Decalogue gives the summary of God's deliverance of His people from the land of slavery in Egypt and the need for them to live holy in all their days. Lehman says "fundamental to the Decalogue is the basic oneness of ideas of redemption and the resultant life of holiness and conformity to the nature and will of God."⁹

Thirdly, the Decalogue is a summary of all the various instructions that had been given earlier by God to the people at one point or the other. Examples include instruction on Sabbath (Gen 2:2-3); murder (Gen 9:5); adultery (Gen 26:9-10) etc.¹⁰

Fourthly, the Decalogue is the foundation to the New Testament ethics. This is clearly illustrated in teachings of Jesus Christ who at the beginning of each teaching would say "You have heard that it was said to those of old..." (Mat 5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43, etc.). He categorically told the disciples "Do not think that I come to destroy the law or the prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill." (Mat 5:17).

Finally, the Decalogue is the core of biblical ethics upon which every society either secular or religious derive their laws.

Some Scholarly Views on the Decalogue

The Decalogue is such an important topic in the Old Testament of which several scholars have written one thing or the other on it. One of such scholars who is passionate of the Decalogue is Kuntz who argued that “the Decalogue offered the most reasonable paradigm for a well-ordered society.”¹¹ His book titled *The Ten Commandments in History: Mosaic Paradigms for a well-ordered society* is an excellent survey of different views and interpretations of the Decalogue, ranging from the classical, medieval, reformation, and modern periods. He observed that the modern men have ten difficulties with Moses’ Decalogue. One of the difficulties is how could anyone think that any code or abstract formula could prescribe the good life? Can any creed succeed in stating the ultimate truth? Are there not so many variations in both thought and conduct that a code must fail?¹²

Kuntz reviewed the work of Philo of Alexandria who is also known as Philo Judaeus (30 B.C.E-50 C.E). Philo was a contemporary of Paul the Apostle, and a leading member of the Jewish community in Alexandria. He was a prolific writer who worked on a synthesis of Greek philosophy and Jewish scripture. Philo presents the Ten Commandments of Moses as the best moral guide for all mankind.¹³ He formulated his Mosaic philosophy in the Greek language, using Greek philosophical concepts to show that the Jew lived by the most intelligible and loftiest morality possible. He interpreted each of the Ten Commandments in the light of his Greek philosophical concept.¹⁴

The contribution of Saint Thomas Aquinas to the discussion of Decalogue is worth mentioning as he wrote books on the Decalogue both as a theologian and as a philosopher. As theologian, Thomas presents the Decalogue in the context of the creed and the Lord’s prayer.¹⁵ Aquinas’s method involves first quoting the text of each commandment and relating it to other scriptural texts- with the aim of establishing what the scripture means.¹⁶ As a philosopher, Thomas Aquinas “draws upon the natural philosophy of Aristotle, with its concept of casualty, to prove that there must be a first efficient cause and a final cause of the world, and what God’s essence is.”¹⁷ According to Thomas Aquinas “man is demonstrated to be a free and responsible agent who knows that his end is happiness, an agent who knows which habits conduce to happiness and which produce misery.”¹⁸

Grant gave a summary of the use of the Decalogue in the early church. According to him, the early church was able to systematize the use of the Decalogue and provide a theological basis for its retention by Gentiles. This was done by extensive use of the idea that the law of nature and the law of God were essentially the same.¹⁹ He states further that by means of a careful and literal exegesis of the context of the Decalogue, early Christian interpreters were able to show that it was only the Decalogue which God had spoken, and that the rest of

the law had been added for various reasons. Thus, the Decalogue provided an extremely valuable means of catechetical instruction, as it does today.²⁰ Citing the example of Apostle Paul's understanding of the Decalogue, he says:

The Mosaic Law is the most complete revelation of the will of God there is, in terms of precepts and prohibitions; but the `law of nature` is not a different law, but only a less precise and complete revelation of the same eternal and complete law of right and wrong.²¹

Hyatt's article titled "Moses and the Ethical Decalogue" has much connection with our current topic. He started by taking note of the four unique roles which Moses occupied namely: he was a courageous leader who successfully brought the Israelites out of Egypt, through the wilderness, and to the border of the land of promise. Two, he was the mediator of the covenant formed between Yahweh and the people of Israel. Three, he was a prophet, and the prototype of later prophets. Finally, he was a law-giver par excellence, to whom a great many of laws of the Old Testament are attributed. As a law-giver he was not considered to be a codifier, but rather as the one who mediated to the Israelites the laws which their God wanted them to obey.²² Hyatt identified seven distinct codes of law in the Pentateuch as follows:

1. The Covenant Code, Exod. 20:22-23:19
2. The Ritual Decalogue, Exod. 34:10-26 and 22:29b-30; 23:12,15-19
3. The twelve (originally ten) curses, Deut. 27:14-26
4. The Ten Commandment, Deut. 5:6-21 and Exod. 20:1-17
5. The Deuteronomic Code, Deut. 12-26
6. The Holiness Code, (H) Lev. 17-26
7. The Priestly Code, (P) The Book of Leviticus and parts of Exodus and Numbers.²³

He then gave a clear description of the Decalogue which he referred to as "ethical Decalogue" as follows:

It [Decalogue] is brief and succinct, fitting the description of it as "ten words"- that is ten sentences. It is not really a code of law, designed to meet all the contingencies of life. It does not stipulate any penalties, except the implied penalties of the wrath of Yahweh and of the community. It is a set of general prohibitions and commands that could have applied to the community; certainly it was not promulgated as a universally applicable set of ethical principles. The ethical Decalogue has the apodictic categorical form which, according to Alt, is characteristic of nature Hebrew law, as distinct from the casuistic form which the laws generally have that were borrowed from the Canaanites and general ancient Oriental Law.²⁴

Obviously, a brief survey of literature on the Decalogue shows its uniqueness and importance in the Old Testament. Similarly, the significant place of the Decalogue as a guide for Yorùbá Christian ethics is the focus of this paper.

The Decalogue and Yoruba Ethical Values

The Decalogue (Ten Words) has two components. The first four commandments deal with the relationship of the Israelites with God, while the remaining six deal with social relationships within the Israelite community. Exod 20:2 introduces the Decalogue with God saying “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.” The sentence begins with *anoki* Yahweh meaning I, Yahweh. Yahweh is the personal name of God with which He revealed Himself to Moses (Exod 3:15; 6:2, 7-8). In this context, he introduced Himself as the Deliverer who brought the people out of Egypt, the land of slavery (Exod 13:3,14; Deut 5:6; 6:12; 7:8; 8:14; 13:5, 10). Therefore, He declared in the first four commandments as follows:

1. “You shall have no other gods before Me.”
2. “You shall not make for yourself a carved image...”
3. “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain...”
4. “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.”

The Hebrew word *Elohim* means God, gods, rulers.²⁵ In this context, Exod 20:3, it means gods or idols. Incidentally, it is presumed that other gods were in existence but the Israelites were enjoined not to prefer any other gods apart from Yahweh. The Hebrew word *pesel* is a masculine noun which means idol or image (Exod 20:4; Deut 5:8; 27:15; 2 Kgs 21:7, etc.²⁶ The worship of God is spiritual and Yahweh does not require any form of carved or graven image. Hyatt notes:

The second commandment intends to say that Yahweh is the kind of deity who cannot properly manifest himself in any kind of image; Yahweh was to the Israelite a God manifesting himself in his word and in history. Those who made images sought to control the gods for their own purpose, but Yahweh could not be used or manipulated by man. This commandment was originally directed against images of Yahweh, but later included foreign idols, which of course were forbidden by the first commandment.²⁷

The third commandment forbids the use of the name of God in any idle or frivolous purpose. The Hebrew word *sawl* is a masculine noun which means emptiness or vanity (Exod 20:7; Deut 5:11; Ps 24:4; 139:20.²⁸ The name of God should be honoured and protected. It must not be wrongly used in oath taking, blessings and curses, and sorcery. The people were encouraged to take oath only in the name of Yahweh, and to do so with sincerity, not falsely (Jer 4:2; 5:2; 7:9; Lev 19:12; Zech 5:3; Mal 3:5).²⁹

The fourth commandment deals with honouring the Sabbath day. The Hebrew word *zaker* is the imperative form of *zakar* which means remember.³⁰ The people were to set apart the seventh day as a day of solemn worship. Hannah notes that “this was not to be a day of slothful inactivity but of spiritual service through religious observances. For the violation of this

command God imposed on Israel the death penalty (Exod 31:15; Num 15:32-36).³¹

Relating the first four commandments to the Yorùbá situation, it is obvious that the people believe in the Supreme Being who is the creator of heaven and earth. He is Olódùmarè, that is “the king or chief unique who holds the scepter, wields authority and has the gravity which is superlative in worth, and he is at the same time permanent, unchanging and reliable.”³² He is Olórùn that is, “the owner of heaven” or “the Lord of heaven.”³³ Writing from the Yorùbá traditional perspective, Awolalu and Dopamu argue that:

From the beginning, God has put His law in man’s heart, and has endowed man with the sense of right and wrong. Man’s conscience has always instructed him that there are certain things which he must not do in order to have peace.³⁴

They note further that this “God, from the beginning, maintained communion and fellowship with man until the latter sinned and God placed a barrier which cut man off from the unrestricted bliss of heaven and in effect he was isolated from God.”³⁵ Therefore, it is expected of the Yorùbá Christians to obey the first four commandments absolutely as failure to do so will bring punishment. Explaining the concept of Triune God in connection with ethics Kunhiyop says “God the Father, the norm for Christian ethics; Jesus Christ, the model for Christian ethics; and the Holy Spirit, the power for Christian ethics.”³⁶

The fifth commandment says “Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving to you” (Exod 20:12 or Deut 5:16). The position of this commandment is very unique as it comes immediately after which inculcate proper worship and respect for Yahweh, and before the commandment concerning neighbours. The commandment enjoins respect of parents. It implies obedience and submission to them. The same instruction was given by Jesus Christ and the Apostles in Mat 15:4,6, 19:19; Mark 7:18; 10:19; Luke 18:20; John 5:23; Eph 6:1-2; 1Pet 2:17). Obedience to this commandment leads to longevity of life. Unfortunately, some children do maltreat their parents as implied in Prov. 19:26; 28:24. Cursing one’s parents is an indication that one is disregarding their authority and so it attracts capital punishment (Exod. 21:15,17). In Deut 21:18-21, a stubborn and rebellious son was subjected to stoning by the community.³⁷

Incidentally, every Yorùbá person accords honour and due respect to elderly individuals in the community. This, of course, is not limited to one’s biological parents, it is extended to all the elders in the community. In fact, as a sign of respect, the male children prostrate and the female children kneel down while greeting the elders. The Yorùbá believe that anyone who failed to honour the elders will not live long. As longevity of life is the reward of honouring one’s parents in the Bible so also plenty of benefits await young people who respect their elders. Idowu says “the young must respect the elder because of the

seniority as well as because of their riper and richer experience from which the young should profit.”³⁸ He states further:

Omodé, e wólèf ágbà
Àgbàníú `gbani
Níjó a rí je
Àgbàníú `gbani
Níjóàìrì je
Àgbàníú `gbani

Meaning:

Young ones, do obeisance to the elders;
It is the elders who come to the rescue;
The day one has plenty to eat,
It is the elders who come to the rescue
The day one has nought to eat
It is the elders who come to rescue.³⁹

Also, it is the collective responsibility of the elderly ones to take care of the younger ones among the Yorùbá. Fadipe notes:

The education of young Yorùbá in codes of manners, convention, customs, morals, superstitions and laws of his society is therefore achieved through various members of his family and household, his extended-family (usually located in the same compound), his kindred and his neighbourhood.⁴⁰

The sixth commandment has it that “You shall not murder” (Exod 20:13). There are three Hebrew verbs for murder. The first one is *shahat* which means to kill or slaughter for example an animal for food (1 Sam 14:32,34; Isa 22:13); killing for sacrifice (1 Sam 1:25; Exod 29:11 Lev 1:5,11; 4:24 etc.) or slaughtering a human being for sacrifice (Judg 12:16; 1 Kgs 18:40; 2 Kgs 10:7,14 etc.).⁴¹ The second word is *harag* which means to kill or slay. This killing is within the context of conflict, war, and disorder (Gen 4:8,14,15; 12:12, 20:11; 26:7; 27:41-2; 34:25-26 etc.).⁴² The third word is *rasah* which means to murder or slay with premeditation (Exod 20:13; Deut 5:17; Ho. 4:2; Jer. 7:9; 1 Kgs 21:19).⁴³ This is a premeditated murder which is condemned in Exod 20:13. Hyatt notes that *rasah* is “nearly always used of the killing of a personal enemy.”⁴⁴ He states further that the purpose of this instruction “was to prohibit any kind of illegal killing that was contrary to the will and the best interests of the community.”⁴⁵ Generally, great value is attached to human life in the Bible (Gen 9:6).

The Yorùbá Christians strongly condemn every form of wickedness and retaliation. They have different sayings that illustrate the fact that evil is bad. Two of them are *Enití ó bá da eérú ni eérú tò*, which literally it means that ashes blow after the person who throws them (the effect of wickedness ultimately falls back upon the wicked). The second one is: *Eni tí ó bá gbín èbù ikà, orí omọ rẹ ni*

yìd hùlé (He who sows the seed of wickedness, it is on his children`s head that it will grow).⁴⁶

The seventh commandment says “You shall not commit adultery.” The Hebrew verb *na’aq* means to commit adultery. It speaks of a man committing adultery with the wife of another man (Lev 20:10; Prov 6:32; Exod 20:14; Deut 5:17; Jer 5:17; 7:9; 23:14; Hos. 4:2).⁴⁷ Adultery is any form of extra-marital sexual union; the voluntary cohabitation of a married or betrothed woman with a man who is not her own husband. Adultery in the Old Testament was considered a violation of the sanctity of the marriage bond; it was an offence against the husband, who was entitled to exclusive sexual possession of his wife. It was also considered a sin against God (Gen 20:6; 39:9; Psa 51:4).⁴⁸ The purpose of this commandment is to protect the sanctity of the home (Gen 2:24; Mat 19:1-12; Heb 13:4). Hannah notes that “the marital vow is a holy commitment that should not be violated by sexual unfaithfulness under any circumstances.”⁴⁹

Ethically, the Yorùbá people frown at both fornication and adultery. Idowu, while looking at the main components of good character notes:

Chastity before marriage on the part of the woman is essential. A woman who is not virtuous at marriage is a disgrace both to herself and to her family. Chastity in married life is a woman`s bounden duty. Although, the rule is rather loose as far as the man is concerned, nevertheless, it is forbidden that a man should seduce another man`s wife on pain of paying a heavy penalty and in addition, of having to face grievous consequences. It is realized that basis of conjugal happiness is in the faithfulness of both parties; that is so, even in a polygamous community.⁵⁰

The eighth commandment says “You shall not steal” (Exod 20:15 and Deut 5:19). This commandment was given with the aim of respecting each other`s property. Yorùbá ethics forbid stealing. Yorùbá people believe in dignity of labour and that a hardworking individual will live a comfortable life. They have a saying: “*Eni tó bá ja`lèbọ`mọ́jé*” meaning “whosoever steals is not a good child.” In fact, when a person was caught stealing in the traditional Yorùbá Society, the individual was paraded in a disgraceful manner and then killed. And if an individual is not caught, the Yorùbá has a saying that the person will not go free: “*Amòòkùn-jalè, bí ojú oba ayé ò ríi, tóba Orun n wòó.*” That is “He who steals under concealment (secretly), even though the eyes of the earthly ruler do not see him, those of the king in Heaven are looking at him.”⁵¹

The ninth commandment says “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.” Hyatt takes “false witness” as “lying witness” as found also in Ps 27:12; Prov 6:19; 12:17; 14:15; 19:5,9; and 25:18).⁵² The purpose of this commandment is to help maintaining stability in a society by protecting individuals` reputations.⁵³ Ethically, the Yorùbá frown at every kind of falsehood. Idowu notes that “the truthful and the upright have the unfailing support and blessing of the divinities” even as noted from an *Odù* called *Òtúrùpòn-méjì*:

*S'òtító; serere;
S'òtítóò; se rere
Ení sòtító
Lòrìṣà á gbè o.*

Meaning:

Be truthful, do good;
Be truthful, do good
It is the truthful
That the divinities support.⁵⁴

The tenth commandment says “You shall not covet your neighbour’s house...” The Hebrew verb that is translated ‘covet’ is *hamad* which means to desire or take pleasure in something. It is used of ungoverned and selfish desire for something as in Exod 20:17; Deut 5:18 or Exod 34:24; Deut 7:25; Jos 7:21; Mic 2:2; Prov 12:12.⁵⁵ The tenth commandment is a warning against coveting one’s neighbour’s house, his wife, manservant, maidservant, ass, and field. A similar idea is expressed among the Yorùbá with their common saying:

*Má ṣe ojú kòkòrò;
Ojú kòkòrò kò dára.*

Meaning:

Do not covet;
Covetousness is bad.

Obviously, the above analysis of the Decalogue in the light of Yorùbá culture indicates that Yorùbá Christian ethics must be understood within the context of African Christians’ understanding of God and the Bible. In other words, Yorùbá Christian ethics has its root from the Bible. Generally, the Yorùbá ethical value is centred on *ìwà rere* (good character) which is the greatest compliment that a man may receive. *Ìwà rere* (good character) is the richest asset which a Yorùbá person may seek to acquire. A Yorùbá folk song well expresses same thought: “*Oò bàà lówó-lówó k’óju ti sèkèrè lẹ, ìwà rere ni ònkan*” meaning that even if a person is richer than the gourd adorned with net of cowry-shells, good character is what is really crucial.⁵⁶ Another saying among the Yorùbá is “*Ìwà rere láyé yìí ni yóò dáọ léjọ*,” meaning that a person’s character here on earth will pass judgement on the person. Writing on the importance of good character, Awolalu and Dopamu say:

Thus the Yorùbá put great emphasis on character. And good character among other things means for them: chastity before marriage, hospitality, unselfishness, kindness, condemning wickedness, truthfulness, protection of women as the responsibility of men, keeping covenant, observing taboos, respect and honour for the aged, condemning stealing, falsehood and hypocrisy, avoidance of incest, and condemning the taking away of another man’s wife. Anyone that does

all these is regarded as not only doing the will of the society, but also of God. In the same way, a person who does to the contrary is regarded as violating Deity's ordained behest, and he will surely be punished.⁵⁷

It is clear from the above that Yorùbá Christians have much to learn from the Decalogue as it has much in common with their traditional norms, and so can serve as guide for their daily ethical practices.

Conclusion

This paper has brought to light some salient facts: one, the Decalogue occupies a prominent place among the law codes in the Bible. Also, it serves as a guide for Yorùbá Christian ethics. Two, the Decalogue that is, the Ten Commandments are the fundamental statements of Yahweh that were originally meant to guide the orderliness of the Israelite society. Even though Yorùbá Christians are not directly under the Decalogue but then, they are under obligation to abide by the standards presented in both the Decalogue and the Bible. Three, the first four of the Ten Commandments were meant to guide the relationship of the Israelites with Yahweh while the last six of the Commandments were meant to guide relationship of the people one with another. In addition to what the Israelites had, the Yorùbá ethical value is centered on *ìwà rere* (good character) and anyone with *ìwà rere* (good character) will not be involved in any form of evil or wickedness such as falsehood, stealing, kidnapping, and killing among others. Finally, the Decalogue is an important document to both the Israelites and Yorùbá Christians. Therefore, as the Israelites placed great value on it, so also Yorùbá Christians must do the same. Yorùbá Christians must make effort to learn, understand and obey the tenets of the Decalogue in particular and the whole Bible in general. This implies that Christian parents must teach the Decalogue to their children as it will help in their moral and spiritual developments and thereby reducing the social problems in the Yorùbá society in particular and African nations in general.

Notes and References

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