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RESOLUTION OF THE TENSIONS BETWEEN THE DEMANDS OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH EVIDENT AMONG THE IGBO-AFRICAN YOUTHS AND SOME OCCURRENCES IN LIFE IN RELATION TO CULTURE: A PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Short Communication

ABSTRACT

Many of our young people in our present society are wallowing in a total ignorance or having half knowledge that is very dangerous. Consequently, instead of knowledge that is based on concrete evidence and in tandem with reality, many people are ignorantly basing their knowledge on mere externalism and mere superstitious. It is on this backdrop that the researcher primarily intends to delve into a way of resolving the tensions between the demands of the Christian faith evident among the Igbo-African youths and some occurrences in life in relation with culture. The objective is to unravel the confusion, uncertainty and crisis that accompany such occurrences in relation to a Christian and an Igbo-African youth. To achieve the purpose, the researcher, therefore, employs the methodological approach of philosophical appraisal and expository analysis to accomplish the objectives of the study.

Keywords: Youths; modernity; occurrences of life; culture; Christian faith.

1. INTRODUCTION

We are in an age in which materialism and massification of merely ephemeral wealth have taken the greater part of the modern man. Hence man is satisfied with the merely legalism and merely externalism to such an extent that life is lived on the periphery. Hence, the knowledge of the really real and the interior manifestation of reality is gradually eluding the modern man. Consequently, as the modern man lacks the interior knowledge of things, he is solely dependent on the mere speculations and superstitions. Modern man, therefore, needs that grace that will enable him to open up to the divine spack

that will in turn ignite man's rational mind into creativity and productivity. This can be achieved by bringing the young people face to face with the truth of life and reality.

2. BRIEF LITERATURE REVIEW

Many of our Christian youth are speedily returning to paganism. One may ask, what could be the primary motive behind such mental turn about?

The word paganism is an age long concept that depicts a traditional understanding of religion. From the Ontology, it represents and presents another

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religion outside of Christianity, which could be genuine owing to the fact of its existence. But in our contemporary world, with the advent of Christianity, pagan worshipping has been side-lined. Thus:

... for as I was walking along, I saw your many shrines. And one of your altars has this inscription on it: 'To an unknown God'. This God, whom you worship without knowing, is the one I'm telling you about (Acts. 17:23).

Therefore, without the possibilities the world has opened up for us, we seek that which is beyond our Christian faith. The urge for matter has permeated and pre-occupied our Christian beliefs: the materialistic tendency of the modern man. Thus, relegating the spiritual to the background, and with this strong aversion for pains, man, therefore, resorted to seeking happiness and pleasure instead. Bearing in mind this thirst for happiness and pleasure, therefore, materialism was crowned as the be all and the end all. Again, many self acclaimed priests and prophets of the present day churches in great measure have assisted in promoting the situation by feeding the modern man with what they yearns and yawns to hear: breakthrough, divine favour and what have you without repentance and conversion. This is not rooted in reality where one has to first work before one can think of harvesting the fruits of one's labour. The impression such a situation is creating and presenting, therefore, is that we worship God only because of what God can offer. Consequently, there is an emergency of what may be called positive atheistic humanism, which is becoming a new religion for the modern man. F. C. Ugo opines that this situation:

... has induced human beings to fall down before themselves in narcissistic adoration and love. Obviously, atheism has its sole creed, dedication and enterprise, the fulfillment of human will and not the will of God. And as such, many inhuman and ungodly acts that tend to reconstruct the entire human universe, its thoughts and values have come to play [1].

In that regard, Christianity becomes a mere utilitarian and materialistic institution that has nothing spiritual and metaphysical about it. Consequently, many of these modern churches are filled with bundles of pagans and self centred members that are seeking themselves and not God. The situation facilitated the upsurge of the neo-paganistic system of religions and syncretic beliefs of modernity together with its accompanying confused culture.

From the foregoing, it is obviously necessary to highlight at this point that the main concern of an

average young man today is on the material. Hence, in order to be satisfied with what nature has presented, there is the need to return to nature, for pagans worship nature as divine. There is this cry "let us go back to Egypt ". In order to satisfy this quest, therefore, the Youths abandon their faith to where they thought their help shall come from, though at last with utter disappointment and regrettable consequences.

Hence, the modern man is only interested in maximizing his liberty and anything that hinders this liberty is seen as enemical to human existence. In the pursuant of this liberty and pleasure, the new man is systematically losing hold of himself and is gradually and dangerously dangling out into the darkness and domain of mere brutes. Thence, the modern man has lost the sense of the sacredness of life and respect for the fellow human beings. In this present destructive blindness of the modern man and quagmire of the merely practical atheistic humanism the modern man has selfishly gellatin himself, he, therefore, lacks the inner power that will enable him to distinguish between the good and the evil. Man in the Pythagorean coinage, becomes the measure of everything, the things that are good that they are good and the things that are bad that they are bad. Morality for the new age is, therefore, a personal and subjective issue of no consequence. In that case, there is no objective morality. Whatever one considers good is good for one.

Nevertheless, in this artificial amoral and self deceptive world of modernity, despite and in spite of the massification of everything and the technological leap very evident in the areas of mass communication, the harmoniousness that characterizes the human nature is still no where to be found. Hence, with all the material accumulation and the infrastructural sophistication, the modern man knows no peace and happiness. In his undesired and never expected encounter with utter meaninglessness, the new man is gearing towards self annihilation and zeroization. The more the modern man struggles to deliver himself by his own efforts alone, the more he falls headlong into utter confusion and hopelessness.

Consequently, the new man lacks the grace that will enable him to give everything around him their right place. This is in turn as a result of his alienation from God, the source of his strength and the basis of his existence. Sin or Aru is no longer considered as evil and this human situation has severed both his vertical relationship with the source of his existence and his horizontal relationship with the fellow human beings in whose community man discovers his humanity.

3. IKPU ARU (RESOLVING ABOMINATION) IN OUR CULTURE AND THE DEMANDS OF CHRISTIAN FAITH

The concept of "ikpu aru" in the Igbo understanding, traces its origin from the scriptures. The unblemished lamb of the Old Testament and the Sacrificial Lamb of the New Testament. It is a concept that is very familiar with everybody. Before the exegetical interpretation of "ikpu aru ", let us understand what we mean by "Aru" (abomination). "Aru" or "Nso Ala" (behaviour contrary to the laws of the land or the earth deity) are two words that are used when speaking of contravention against approved social and religious codes or norms. Note that there are two kinds of customs: customs that pertain to morality and those that are purely social and cultural. Morality is believed to be there before the creation of man while the social and cultural prescriptions are human invention. Hence, Ebeh maintains that:

Morality is thought to have been there before...ancestors and have been handed over to man. Man is expected to enforce it while their ancestors are thought to guard and supervise the administration of morality. The gods are thought to be the custodians of morality. They punish and reward where need be both in the present and in the future life [2].

Therefore, any abominable act done, tradition prescribes the various things that must be done to take away the evil effects of such breaches or else the spirit of the ancestors and "Ala" (the earth deity regarded as the mother- responsible for fertility) will plague the society- the Implication of the theory of "otu aka ruta mmanu ozue oha onu" (When a finger is soiled with oil, it will eventually smear the other fingers). This necessarily may be the reason Omoregbe summarises that taboos or customary prescriptions are justified from the point of view of the unwanted or adverse effects that would result should they be violated [3].

Therefore, there is not much difference in the Christian understanding which was evidently shown in the scriptures that find its culmination in Christ Jesus. Sin or abomination (grievous or mortal sin) is nonetheless, both vertical and horizontal in relationship. Vertical in one's relationship with God, and horizontal as regards one's relation to the society. This is because man is a being whose being-ness is a boundary between the spiritual and the physical world. I. N. Onwuatuegwu in line with this idea states that:

Man is an animal of two worlds. In the being of man is a meeting point of the spiritual world and the sensible material world. He has both the qualities of a spirit and that of a body. Invariably, in the order of the spirit, man is the least of the spiritual beings. In the corporeal order, man is hierarchically the first and the greatest [4].

An abomination causes rupture amidst the social order. Hence, for Aru to be resolved, this social and vertical ruptures must be repaired by the one who causes the disorder or the like. This is acceptable in the Christian understanding and doctrine. However, where the problem lies is in the method used and the application of the method.

In the traditional setting, it is a traditional chief priest that prescribes and a dwarf from Nri kingdom is, therefore involved in the process. In like manner, in the Christian understanding, the Church takes control. In the Old Testament, it is an unblemished lamb as the book of Leviticus prescribes, but in the New Testament, it finds its culmination in Christ - the victim and the sacrifice. Obviously, the unblemished lamb of the Old Testament was replicated in the Sacrificial Lamb of God (Christ) of the New Testament (in the sacrifice of the mass). Now, it will no longer be ad rem to make the use of the Old Testament methodological approach, but rather the New Testament formula that has its fruition in the sacrifice of the Holy Eucharist (the Holy Mass) where Christ becomes the lamb that takes away the sins of the whole world (cf. Jn. 1:29).

Nevertheless, the church of modernity is oblivious of the above points. Just like the neo-paganistic system of religion, the church of modernity has crowned man as the king and the lord of the world. Whatever man pronounces good is good and whatever he pronounces evil becomes evil. The entire effort of the new man is to maximize his liberty, hence the emergence of Godless churches and normless religions in which through the musical instruments and senseless and meaningless verbalization or rattling, man falsely and tantalisingly glorify his own ego and, therefore, recklessly thrown himself more into the shameful abyss of beinglessness and meaninglessness. Nothing, therefore, is abominable in the fake world the modern man deceptively assumed he has created for himself. Since he is the king and the lord of the entire universe, he, therefore, has no necessary reason to either confess to God himself or to humanity. Modern man stupidly turned himself into the offender and the offended, the sinner and absolver of his own sins. Hence, instead of struggling to keep the laws of God, man is instead interested in man-made statutes, laws and prescriptions. Little wonder Paul warns thus:

See to it that no one captivate you with an empty, seductive philosophy according to human tradition, according to the elemental powers of the world and not according to Christ (Col. 2:8).

Among such prescriptions and taboos that man in Igbo-African milieu has created for himself include: dada child rituals, reincarnation rituals, Issues of dreams and host of other such rituals and beliefs.

3.1 Dada Rituals (Baby With Curly Hair)

Among the Igbo people, dada (a baby with curly hair) should not be touched with comb or the hair shaved until a certain period of time and accompanied with some prescribed rites. Traditionally speaking, it is believed that children who are born *dada* are of spiritual origin, the dark side and are possessed as their mother visited shrines and made pacts with deities to conceive them. Hence, they observe many traditional rules and beliefs when dealing with a *dada* child.

The most important of them is the ritual performed before clearing a *dada* hair. The hair must be first shaved by a dada priest or by a fellow dada. The ceremony also entails gathering of children, friends and family members over and treating them to a nice feast after the shaving. This feast is called *saraka*. The name dada and the ritual *salaka* are implicitly portraying the fact that this tradition or culture might not be originally an Igbo culture or tradition. It may be one of those borrowed cultures and traditions. Both dada and salaka sound more like a Yoruba originated. From the Igbo cosmologic ontological perspective, oriko (a ritual to restore harmony) is more ad rem for the Igbo than salaka. Well, that is not exactly the main focus of this work.

Consequently, a dada child whose hair is cut without the proper ceremony is believed to die within few days after the shaving or will suffer serious sickness. However, the researcher discovered in the course of the study that majority of the children with curly hair do have light skin and soft bone cover at the centre of their skull. As a result, for some days to a week after the hair shave, there is serious need to cover the child, especially the child's skull with cap. This is to prevent cold from permeating through the child's light skull skin, and, therefore, resulting into sickness or eventual loss of the child. Intrinsically, there is nothing evil about such child.

In Igbo land, therefore, prior to the shaving, it is believed that you do not touch a dada's hair if you are

not the mother or a fellow dada, for such could warrant sickness. Thus, if one could not resist touching the hair or mistakenly does so, it is demanded that the one should offer the child a gift of money or tie a cowry to the child's hair to avert sickness. You can understand why most dadas carry a good number of cowries on their hair.

However, with the advent of Christianity, the concept of dada is only a superstitious belief and a concept in the mind (psychological). When Samson was born, a rule of life was given as to how he is to be treated and taken care of; which one of them is not to let comb come on his head - a Nazirite (Judges 13:5). This is because he has been consecrated, called and set apart. Therefore, Christians believe that there is no connection between dada and evil, rather it is a mere superstition. This could be evidently seen in shaving data's hair: instead of a dada priest or fellow dada, a priest (Christian) does that regardless of the celebration inherent in it (salaka) and the child survives. Understandably, the cases of some children getting sick when touched on the head by a none dada are, nonetheless, the influence of their parents' psychology. The psychological mood of the parents can greatly affect or influence a child's behaviour or state of health. However, before now dada is taken to be a taboo and evil because of the spiritual background attached to it by tradition. Currently, it is just normal. Obviously, biologically speaking, it could be as a result of hormonal changes or situation and/or condition of the individual person.

Nevertheless, some of the celestial churches and syncretic/ neo-paganistic system of religions are gradually and seriously evolving some of these baseless beliefs and cultures in the present era. Consequently, man in his confused and meaningless world in which God is bracketed, is hopelessly trying to give meaning to certain occurrences in his world to no avail. To find meaning and true interpretation of some of these occurrences, man must unfailingly and necessarily anchor back to the divine source and summit of his existence. This points to the fact that:

... humans have the natural propensity to the absolute and as such is drawn to Celtic practices, camouflaged myths and rituals. He consciously or unconsciously moves towards the transcendent seeking the true meaning of life and existence. It suffices then to say that every individual is intrinsically laden with an incurable hunger for transcendence. If being abhors vacuum, the vacuum it most violently shrinks from is the total absence of infinite Being [1].

3.2 The Possibility of the Appearance and Disappearance of a Dead Person

Many people have testified to the appearance and disappearance of a dead person, especially those whose death were regarded as untimely or premature. Numerous and varied opinions abound in this regard. From the traditional perspective, both the Jews, Christians, as well as Muslims have believed that at the time of death, the soul detaches from the body that it inhabits and continues to exist in an intermediate incorporeal state. On the other way round, the traditionalists believed that God has created every single person with a personal data which is inscribed on the palms of every individual person. In the Igbo-African conceptualization, it is called "akaraka" (personal destiny). In this akaraka is expressed in details and in a clear specification, the destiny of an individual person together with the height, life span, number of issues, social status, economic status, type of death and so on, of the individual person in question. Thus, the Igbo and perhaps other African ethnic groups strongly believe that the "mother earth" is very abhorrent to those who failed to live in full the number of years allotted to them; either as a result of being poisoned, accidental death or things of the like. Meanwhile, with the above mentality and the readily accepted rejection by the "Ala" (the mother earth), the soul of such dead person is believed to have no other option than to be re-embodied in order to complete the allotted duties and years. By this re-embodiment, therefore, the soul returns in another human material body and continues with its existence in a different geographical environment and alienated from those he or she met in the former temporal existence.

Nevertheless, the existence of the dead after natural death could be an illusion and could be a reality. It could equally be within what John Powell called phobia, which he defined "as an irrational fear of a known but unrealistic object" [5]. Life is full of mysteries and numerous mysteries are yet to be unravelled. Hence, a reality remains a reality, whether discovered or undiscovered, accepted as a reality or not accepted. Apart from the creator God, an existent being does not depend on anything else to assert its being-ness.

Moreover, the Catechism of the Catholic Church and the Christian Scriptures taught that human soul at death goes back to God from whom it came, for judgement. If this is the case, and it happens that the dead comes back to another earthly dwelling, then many questions will ensue: Whose soul is at work in the purported second earthly dwelling? Will that soul be subjected to another judgement at the conclusion of the second empirical dwelling? Who will be

responsible for offenses committed in the return existence? These and many more fundamental questions leave us in a dilemma about the certainty of this so called co-existence of the dead or reembodiment. Consequently, considering the chains of uncertainties surrounding the phenomenon and coupled with the fact that the idea eludes human comprehension, it, therefore, will not be out of place to say or assert that the phenomenon is still within the ambiance of the mysterious.

However, the modern churches and neo-paganistic religions are claiming to be well versed in matters of spiritism. In their magical ablakataic nychromancic mesmerism claim to have access to the domain of the spirit, to communicate with them and to placate them. An Igbo-African man having an external locus of control, will readily accept such religions. This is because, he will always love his problem to be blamed on external forces or factors. He is never responsible for any of his failures in life. It is either the spirit of the ancestors, the curses from the parents, machinations of the evil men or women and not his inaction, ineptitude, carelessness or lack of seriousness.

For one to better his situation, one must first accept the situation and then work towards bettering the situation. An Igbo-African man should learn to be responsible and claim the responsibility of his or her existence as to better his or her situation and then stop seeing spirits everywhere.

What could be given as the reason for a child who is born with Physical wounds or mark previously spotted on the body of the deceased relative? It is true that one can be born with the exact mark of a departed member of the family. Nevertheless, this does not in any way serve as a justification or as a enough point to conclude that it is a dead relative that has come back to life. Scientifically speaking, it is believed that those occurrences are the consequences of genetic transference of characters traits and physiological resemblance. It could be a psychological convergence, by which a mark or some resemblance in another, through the psychological configuration of the mother influences the child in the womb. Reincarnation, therefore, is the composition of the mind or an assumption of our state of thinking. Dominance and recessive genes may even come to play, though not negating or neglecting the biological make up. All these should be factored in when considering such a phenomenon or occurrences.

Man in his stupidity will readily uphold such beliefs as a way of confusing himself that he will enjoy his materialistic institutions for ever. In such self-inflicted blindness, therefore, man ceaselessly deceives himself that his happiness lies in the massification of wealth and materialistic accumulation of the ephemeral things of the passing existence.

3.3 Belief in Dreams

Dream (especially bad one) is one of the experiences that beclouds an Igbo-African man's mind. With the added omen that some do later happen as dreamt makes it a complicated issue. Consequently, there are differentiated and varied ways of reacting by many thinkers to the issues concerning the interpretation, reality and belief in dreams.

Idealistic conception seems to support dreams as reality. For idealists, nothing exists in the human mind that has no corresponding existent in the physical world. Hence, according to Onwuatuegwu, I. N., the idealists believe that reality is not independent of the mind. Consequently, the ideas of the mind constitute the essence of all reality [6]. Invariably, therefore, as radical idealism conceived that there is no world or existence outside of one's mind, it is very easy then to accept the contents of one's dreams as reality. The conservative form of Idealism even holds that one's understanding of reality is dependent on characterised attributes of one's mind [7].

Dream, however, is a succession of images, ideas, emotions and sensations that usually involuntarily in the mind during certain stages of sleep. The content and the purpose of the dreams are not fully understood, though they have been topic of scientific speculations, as well as subject of philosophical and religious interest, as recorded in history. Dreams mainly occur in the rapid-eye movement stage of sleep when the brain activity is high and resembles that of being awake. Research proves that an average person has three to five dreams per night. Nevertheless, dreams have been seen as connected to the unconscious mind. They range from the normal and ordinary to the overly surreal and bizarre. John Powell in one of his works alluded to the above points as he observes that:

...the most common technique is called *free* association. Clients are helped by the analyst to associate their present thoughts with memories of their past. Gradually they learn to link what they feel in the here and now to the historical and radical causes of these feelings. The analyst may also attempt to interpret clients dreams, the matter for which is supplied largely by the subconscious mind since the conscious mind (being asleep) is not active during sleep [5].

This implies that our past lives can influence our present lives just as our present lives can somehow condition our future lives. Many of our life experiences that are sedimented in our subconscious mind have a way of resurfacing in the conscious mind, though most often in a disguise manner.

From the biblical perspective, most of the messages or articles of faith that have been handed on to the present generation were gotten through dreams. Just as the case of Joseph, "Do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the holy Spirit that this child in her womb is conceived" (Mtt. 1:20). Likewise in the case of Jonah and many other prominent religious giants. On the other hand, as highlighted briefly above, some dreams are just replication or representations of what is in the physical; more or less thought formation, which could be surreal or bizarre. For instance, a flying horse which could be a combination of two concepts- that which is in existence in the physical empirical world. This idea concurs with the Empiricist belief that senses are the primary source of knowledge [8]. Empiricists such as John Locke and David Hume observe that experience brings an understanding of reality and matters in the world [9]. Here, therefore, we dream(t) about that which we cannot accomplish in the physical corporeal world. This is so because repressed feelings and sentiments usually look for ventilation [10]. Be that as it may, dreams in general could come in form of a message with divine origin or could also be a representation of an unfulfilled data that was registered in the sub-conscious. It is this that psychologists called latent content. That not withstanding, there are many sources of knowledge and God has various ways of conveying his divine knowledge to people of different eras. Onwuatuegwu thus emphasizes:

...in different time and in various ways, God spoke to our fore bearers. Hence, in every age God has a way of speaking to his people. As God was speaking to the Jews through the prophets, he was speaking through the ancient Greek philosophers to the Greeks and then was communicating to the Africans through the sagesphilosophers in its cradle (wise men and women). Hence, through the cosmological and ontological structure of the Igbo world, reality unveils itself to them in their own circumstances and situations [8].

Nonetheless, some dreams are not merely dreams, but revelation in form of dreams. Consequently, distinction should be necessarily made between the merely ordinary dreams and dreams that are packed with divine meaning and messages.

The problem, however, lies in the unreasonable and unscientific acceptance of every dream as a divine manifestation of ominous things that are most likely to happen with senseless prescriptions or directives on how such should be averted. This is part of the aspect of determinism and blind faith beclouding traditional African metaphysics, which necessarily and seriously needs to be demythologized [11]. For instance, Parrinder is of the notion that a witche is capable of bewitching another and sending him or her evil dreams, or even injecting poison to kill him or her [12]. This is 21st century. It will be advanced shamelessness to swallow every information with sinks and pebbles, and without questioning or reasoning.

4. CONCLUSION

The readers especially the youths should be made to understand and appreciate the urgent need for practical spirituality. This will facilitate the efforts to integrate Christian teachings with one's life experiences and culture. When we talk about practical spirituality, we imply real Christian life that is manifested in allowing the spirituality and the morality that is in Christ Jesus to radiate in one's own life. Christianity is not a theoretical issue. It is a practical Issue. It is life, a new attitude to life. Hence:

...the average mentality of a Christian (particularly Nigerian Christian) is using God to achieve financial and career successes: people are simply and hypocritically using God to solve their endemic human problems....it is mentally abnormal for someone to be criminally minded, corrupt, materialistic and worldly-minded, yet such a person claims to be a Christian, and more annoying is the claim to being a born-again Christian. Therefore Christian Psychonomy insists that people's brains are deceiving them that they are children of God [13].

Your Christianity starts only when you begin to live out in your own life what the waters of baptism signified. Hence, it is of important concern to advise and urge the public especially the youths to allow the word of God to be decisive in their lives. Obviously, therefore:

...criminality and religiosity are strange bed fellows which must be completely rejected if hypocrisy must remain hypocrisy, rather than glorified holiness [13].

One should be able to live out in one's life what one professed. In so doing, one will, therefore, begins to drop one's selfish and obnoxious will to take up the will of God - the will that thinks of the common good and has room for others. St. Alphonsus de Ligouri, in his moral theology called this "the unification of one's will with the will of God". This in a way implies authenticity of life. Therefore, as Fulton J. Sheen would put it, Christianity emphasizes not necessarily;

...on self-development, but on regeneration; not on improving our present state, but on completely changing our status [14].

Invariably, in this regard, the one's faith becomes one's culture. Culture is a general way of people's lives. The faith of a Christian, hence, becomes the basis of interpreting reality and experiences of life, thereby giving better meaning to culture as a way of life. This will automatically bring a final solution to the problem of personality crisis as is evident in this present day syncretic attitude to life, which is one of the serious predicaments of most Igbo-African Christians.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

To effect change and discipline in the youth, there is serious need for persistence and consistency. To convince the young people, therefore, one needs to be convinced first in order to be convincing. They seem to be more of practical than theoretical in their manner of life. Hence, teachings that are majorly embided on practical life experiences are more welcome and more influencing to them than an empty verbalization or mere rationalization that is not based on concrete reality. Invariably, the young people are necessarily in need of mentorship and image makers. as they have future to make and image to protect. The Youths are at a very high intuitive level, and, hence being intuitive as well as reasoning, they can easily and readily identify or indicate when one is serious with them or not. They equally need to be engaged or they will engage themselves their own ways. Because the young people are so mimicking and very imitating, anyone that is dealing with them must always be conscious of their words and actions. Nevertheless, once they are convinced that you have their interests and aspirations at heart, they are ready to follow you to any extent and to observe whatever you taught them. In fact, they are an interesting group to work with

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COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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