



AFRICAN COMMUNALISM AND THE ETHICS OF SOCIAL INCLUSION: A CONTEXTUAL READING OF LEVITICUS 19:9–10, 15–16

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Abstract

Social inclusion remains a significant ethical concern in contemporary Africa, where poverty, economic inequality, disability, unemployment, displacement, ethnic divisions, migration and unequal access to social resources continue to restrict the participation of vulnerable persons in communal life. African ethical traditions have frequently been interpreted through the category of communalism, which emphasises relationality, mutual responsibility, solidarity, reciprocity and the common good. Yet communalism must also be critically examined because communities can reproduce exclusion, favouritism and structural inequality. This article offers a contextual and exegetical reading of Leviticus 19:9–10 and 15–16 through the framework of African communalism. The study employs historical-literary, lexical and contextual analysis of the selected Hebrew texts before bringing their ethical claims into dialogue with contemporary African communitarian thought. The exegesis demonstrates that Leviticus 19:9–10 establishes limits upon agricultural accumulation and the gleanings of harvest for the poor and the resident alien. Leviticus 19:15 prohibits judicial partiality toward both the poor and the powerful, while verse 16 prohibits slander and commands members of the community not to stand passively over the blood or life of a neighbour. When placed in dialogue with African communalism, the texts provide resources for an ethic in which individual flourishing is inseparable from communal responsibility. The article concludes that a contextual reading of Leviticus 19 can contribute to an African Christian ethic of social inclusion that moves beyond charity toward participation, justice, dignity and communal responsibility.

Keywords: African communalism, Leviticus 19, social inclusion, communal responsibility, Africa.

Introduction

Social inclusion is an increasingly important ethical question in contemporary African societies. Although African communities possess strong traditions of kinship, solidarity and mutual assistance, significant forms of exclusion remain evident across the continent. Poverty, unemployment, disability, migration, displacement, ethnic marginalisation, gender inequality and unequal access to education, healthcare and political participation continue to prevent many persons from participating fully in communal life. The problem is not simply that some individuals lack material resources. Social exclusion is multidimensional. A person may have physical access to a community while being excluded from its economic opportunities, decision-making structures, social relationships or institutions of justice. Consequently, social inclusion requires more than charitable assistance. It



requires structures and relationships through which persons can participate meaningfully in the life of their communities.

This concern is particularly significant within African ethical thought. African philosophical traditions have often been characterised by relational understandings of personhood and community. Menkiti (1984) emphasised the social constitution of personhood, while Gyekye (1997) developed a moderate communitarian position that sought to hold communal obligations and individual rights together. Contemporary African philosophy has continued to revisit these questions, particularly the relationship between communal responsibility, human dignity, rights and justice (Chimakonam, 2020; Ikuenobe, 2022; Jecker, 2022; Okeja, 2020).

African communalism, however, should not be romanticised. Community can provide belonging, protection and solidarity, but communal structures can also generate exclusion. Historical and contemporary practices involving caste, lineage, ethnicity, disability, gender or social status demonstrate that community does not automatically produce justice. A meaningful account of African communalism must therefore ask what makes a community morally good and what ethical criteria should be used when communal practices marginalise particular persons.

The Old Testament provides important resources for this discussion. Leviticus is often associated with ritual purity, sacrifice and priestly regulations, yet Leviticus 19 presents holiness as inseparable from social conduct. The chapter moves from the command to be holy to instructions concerning parents, Sabbath observance, agricultural practices, economic responsibility, justice, interpersonal relationships and treatment of vulnerable persons. Recent scholarship continues to emphasise the ethical and theological dimensions of Leviticus 19, particularly its integration of holiness and social responsibility (Bosman, 2018; Kruschwitz, 2023). This article focuses on Leviticus 19:9–10 and 15–16. The selected passages are sufficiently narrow to permit close exegetical analysis while also providing a coherent ethical framework. Verses 9–10 address the treatment of the poor through Israel's agricultural practices. Verses 15–16 address impartial judgment, slander and responsibility for the life of one's neighbour.

The central argument is that these verses articulate social inclusion through four interconnected ethical principles: material access, impartial justice, relational integrity and protection of life. When read contextually alongside African communalism, they provide a theological basis for understanding community not merely as belonging but as a moral structure of responsibility. The study therefore proceeds in two movements. First, it offers a close exegetical analysis of Leviticus 19:9–10 and 15–16. Second, it places the results of that exegesis into dialogue with African communalism and contemporary African realities.

Leviticus 19 in Its Literary and Theological Context

Leviticus 19 belongs to what is conventionally described as the Holiness Code, Leviticus 17–26. The chapter begins with the divine command: “You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy” (Lev. 19:2). The opening statement establishes the theological framework for the entire chapter. Holiness is not restricted to ritual separation. It is expressed through everyday conduct. Leviticus 19 combines ritual, moral, economic and social instructions. Among other matters, it addresses respect for parents, Sabbath observance, sacrificial practice, harvesting, theft, deception, wage payment, judicial conduct, slander, neighbour relations and treatment of the resident alien. The juxtaposition of cultic and social commandments is theologically significant. It indicates that Israel's relationship with God cannot be separated from its relationships with other members of the community. The repeated formula “I am the LORD” functions as a theological grounding for many of the individual commands. In verses 9–10 the command to leave portions of the harvest concludes with “I am the



LORD your God.” Verse 16 similarly concludes with “I am the LORD.” The ethical commands therefore derive their authority from Israel’s covenantal relationship with YHWH. Bosman (2018) observes that Leviticus 19 integrates social ethics with the theological identity of Israel, including its treatment of the neighbour and resident alien. Recent scholarship likewise continues to interpret Leviticus as a text concerned with the formation of a holy community rather than simply a collection of disconnected regulations (Kruschwitz, 2023).

Exegetical Analysis

- **Leviticus 19:9–10**

The Masoretic Text reads:

וּבְקַצְרְכֶם אֶת־קִצְרֵי אֲרָצְכֶם לֹא תִכְלֶה פֶּאֶת שְׂדֵךְ לִקְצֹר וּלְקַט קִצְרֵיךְ לֹא תִלְקֹט:
וְכִרְמְךָ לֹא תַעֲזֹלֵל וּפְרֹט כִּרְמְךָ לֹא תִלְקֹט לְעֹנִי וְלְגֵר תַּעֲזֹב אֹתָם אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

A relatively literal rendering is:

“And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not complete the edge of your field by reaping it, and the gleaning of your harvest you shall not gather. And your vineyard you shall not strip bare, and the fallen grapes of your vineyard you shall not gather; for the poor and for the resident alien you shall leave them. I am YHWH your God.”

The text contains a series of prohibitions followed by a positive purpose clause. The landowner is commanded not to complete the harvesting process and not to collect everything that remains. What is deliberately left behind is designated for two categories of persons: the poor (*‘ānî*) and the resident alien (*gēr*).

Leviticus 19:9–10 addresses the treatment of vulnerable persons within Israel’s agricultural economy. The passage commands: “When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not strip your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the alien” (Lev. 19:9–10). The legislation covers both grain production and viticulture, suggesting that the concern is not a particular agricultural practice but the ethical use of economic resources.

The expression *pə’at šāḏāḳā* (“the edge/corner of your field”) and the prohibition *lō’ tākalleh* (“you shall not complete”) indicate that the landowner was not permitted to harvest every available portion of the field. Similarly, the prohibition against gathering the *leqet*, the gleanings left behind after harvesting, and the *peret*, the grapes that had fallen from the vine, establishes deliberate limits upon total economic appropriation. The owner retains possession of the field and its harvest, but ownership is not presented as an unrestricted claim over every product generated by the land.

The beneficiaries are explicitly identified as *‘ānî*, “the poor,” and *gēr*, “the resident alien.” The inclusion of both categories is significant. The poor represent those experiencing economic vulnerability, while the *gēr* represents a person living within Israel without the full social and ancestral status of the native Israelite. The legislation therefore extends economic concern beyond the immediate household and kinship group. The vulnerable stranger is included within the community’s economic responsibility.

The command *ta’āzōb* (“you shall leave”) is particularly important for understanding the ethical logic of the passage. The landowner must intentionally leave resources available for others. The text consequently establishes a principle of restrained possession: those who control resources must accept limits on their own claims so that persons with fewer resources can gain access to the means of sustaining themselves. Gleaning also differs from mere passive charity because the poor and resident



alien are given an opportunity to participate in gathering the available produce. The system therefore combines provision with participation.

The concluding declaration, *ʾānī YHWH ʾēlōhēkem* (“I am YHWH your God”), gives the legislation its theological foundation. The obligation toward the poor and resident alien is not simply a matter of agricultural efficiency or social benevolence; it arises from Israel’s covenant relationship with YHWH. Economic conduct is consequently incorporated into the meaning of holiness announced at the beginning of the chapter (Lev. 19:2). The passage presents a community in which possession entails responsibility and in which the prosperity of one member cannot be entirely detached from the needs of vulnerable members.

• *Leviticus 19:15*

The Hebrew text reads:

לֹא-תַעֲשֶׂוּ עוֹל בְּמִשְׁפָּט לֹא-תִשָּׂא פָנֶי-דָל וְלֹא תִהְדָּר פָּנֵי גָדוֹל בְּצֶדֶק תִּשְׁפֹּט עַמִּיתְךָ:

A literal rendering is:

“You shall not commit injustice in judgment; you shall not lift up the face of the poor, and you shall not honour the face of the great; in righteousness you shall judge your fellow.”

Leviticus 19:15 moves from economic provision to the administration of justice: “You shall not render an unjust judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great: with justice you shall judge your neighbour.” The verse is significant because it places social inclusion within the sphere of institutional justice. A community cannot be considered just merely because its members provide material assistance to the vulnerable; its judicial structures must also treat persons fairly.

The opening prohibition, *lōʾ-taʾāsû ʾāwel ba-mišpāt*, literally, “you shall not do injustice in judgment,” establishes the central concern. The noun *mišpāt* refers to judgment, justice or the proper administration of law, while *ʾāwel* denotes injustice or wrongful conduct. The command therefore addresses the integrity of communal institutions rather than merely individual attitudes.

The two following clauses establish a deliberate balance. *Lōʾ-tiśśā pānē-dāl* prohibits “lifting the face of the poor,” an idiomatic expression associated with showing favour or partiality. Conversely, *wālōʾ tehaddar pānē gādōl* prohibits honouring or showing deference to the “great,” that is, the socially powerful. The verse is therefore not advocating automatic preference for the poor. Rather, it rejects both forms of judicial partiality. Poverty must not become a reason for unjust favour, and wealth or social status must not become a basis for privileged treatment.

The positive command, *bašedeq tišpōt ʾāmīteḵā*, “in righteousness you shall judge your fellow,” provides the governing principle. *Sedeq* denotes righteousness, justice or what is right. The standard of judgment is therefore neither the economic condition of the poor nor the social influence of the powerful, but justice itself. The reference to *ʾāmīteḵā*, “your fellow,” also retains the relational character of the command. The person appearing before the community’s judicial structures is not merely a legal case but a fellow member whose dignity must be recognised.

Within the argument of this article, verse 15 is particularly important because it demonstrates that social inclusion requires institutional impartiality. Vulnerable persons cannot be genuinely included in communal life if access to justice is determined by wealth, influence, status or social connections. The verse therefore moves the ethic of inclusion beyond interpersonal generosity to the structures through which communal decisions are made.



• *Leviticus 19:16*

The Hebrew text reads:

לֹא־תֵלֵךְ רֹכִיל בְּעַמֶּיךָ לֹא־תַעֲמֹד עַל־דַּם רֵעֶךָ אֲנִי יְהוָה:

A relatively literal translation is:

“You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people; you shall not stand over the blood of your fellow; I am YHWH.”

The verse contains two prohibitions that initially appear unrelated: slander and standing over another person’s blood. Yet both concern conduct that threatens the social and physical well-being of another person.

Leviticus 19:16 extends the concern for communal justice into interpersonal relationships: “You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people; and you shall not profit by the blood of your neighbour: I am the LORD.” The verse contains two prohibitions, both of which concern behaviour capable of damaging another person’s life and social standing.

The first, *lō’ tēlēk rākīl bə‘ammēkā*, prohibits going about as a *rākīl*, commonly understood as a talebearer, slanderer or person who spreads damaging information. The verb *hālak*, “to walk” or “go,” creates the picture of harmful speech being circulated throughout the community. The concern is therefore not merely private gossip but speech that can damage relationships and undermine a person’s standing within the community. In a strongly relational society, reputation is closely connected to participation. False accusations, malicious reports and persistent stigma can therefore function as mechanisms of social exclusion.

The second prohibition, *lō’ ta‘āmōd ‘al-dam rē‘ekā*, literally refers to “standing over the blood of your neighbour.” The expression is textually difficult and has received different interpretations. The noun *dām* (“blood”) can signify life, and the command has traditionally been understood as prohibiting conduct that takes advantage of or fails to respond appropriately to another person’s threatened life. While the precise idiomatic force remains debated, the ethical thrust of the verse concerns responsibility toward the vulnerable neighbour rather than passive indifference.

The final declaration, *’ānī YHWH* (“I am YHWH”), again grounds interpersonal ethics in the identity of God. The command against slander and indifference is therefore part of the same holiness ethic that governs economic behaviour and judicial practice. The verse demonstrates that social inclusion has a relational dimension: people must be protected not only from material deprivation and institutional injustice but also from forms of speech and conduct that undermine their dignity, reputation and life.

Exegetical Synthesis

A close reading of Leviticus 19:9–10 and 15–16 reveals a comprehensive ethic of social inclusion grounded in four interconnected principles: material access, institutional justice, relational integrity, and active protection. Verses 9–10 require landowners to leave portions of their harvest for the poor and the resident alien, thereby placing limits on private accumulation and creating access to communal resources for vulnerable persons. Verse 15 extends this concern to the administration of justice by requiring impartial judgment, regardless of whether a person is poor or socially powerful. Verse 16 addresses the relational dimension of communal life by prohibiting slander and destructive speech, while its reference to the blood of one’s neighbour underscores the responsibility to respond to threatened life rather than remain indifferent. Taken together, these provisions demonstrate that social inclusion in Leviticus is not merely about physical presence within the community; it involves ensuring that vulnerable persons have meaningful access to resources, receive equitable treatment



within communal institutions, are protected from relational harm and are regarded as worthy of active communal concern. Thus, the ethical vision of Leviticus 19 presents inclusion as a communal responsibility that encompasses economic participation, justice, dignity and protection.

African Communalism and the Exegetical Findings

The exegetical findings resonate with important dimensions of African communalism. African communal thought begins from the recognition that human beings exist within relationships. Menkiti (1984) famously emphasised the communal formation of personhood, while Gyekye (1997) developed a moderate communitarianism that seeks to maintain both communal responsibility and individual moral agency. The connection with Leviticus 19 is particularly visible in the principle of responsibility. Leviticus 19:9–10 assumes that the economic activities of one person have consequences for others. African communalism similarly resists the idea that personal prosperity is morally detached from communal welfare. This does not mean that all African societies have historically implemented communal ownership or economic equality. Rather, it means that social relationships create obligations.

- ***Wealth as Social Responsibility***

The landowner in Leviticus 19 possesses resources, but possession generates responsibility. This provides a useful theological lens for contemporary African debates concerning wealth. In many African societies, wealthy persons are expected to contribute to communal projects, assist relatives and support persons in distress. Such expectations are sometimes criticised as burdensome, but they also reflect a moral conviction that wealth carries social obligations. Leviticus 19 offers a theological basis for retaining this relational dimension while giving it a more structured ethical form. The question becomes not simply “What do I own?” but “What responsibilities accompany what I possess?”

- ***Community Beyond Kinship***

The inclusion of the *gēr* is particularly important. African communalism is sometimes criticised for being primarily kinship-oriented. If communal responsibility is restricted to one’s family, ethnic group or insiders, it can easily become exclusionary. Leviticus 19:9–10 expands the moral horizon by including the resident stranger. The ethical community therefore cannot be reduced to biological kinship. This has considerable relevance in contemporary Nigeria, where ethnic and regional identities can influence access to social resources and political opportunities. A contextual African Christian ethic must therefore distinguish between communal belonging and ethnic exclusivism.

- ***Justice Beyond Favouritism***

Leviticus 19:15 also introduces an important corrective. African communal networks can provide support, but they can also generate nepotism and favouritism. The biblical command challenges both forms of partiality. Neither poverty nor social power should determine justice. This is an important contribution to contemporary Nigerian public ethics, where personal networks, political connections and social status can influence access to institutions. The biblical principle of *śedeq* requires institutions to transcend such partiality.

- ***Community as Protection***

Leviticus 19:16 further suggests that community should protect rather than expose vulnerable persons to harm. This principle is highly relevant to contemporary African societies where stigma surrounding disability, poverty, mental difference, migration, disease and other forms of vulnerability can produce exclusion. The community should not become an environment in which vulnerable people must constantly defend their dignity. It should become a place of protection.



Social Inclusion and Contemporary Nigeria

Nigeria provides a particularly significant context for applying these insights. The country has strong communal traditions, including extended family structures, age grades, town unions, religious communities, mutual-aid associations and informal social networks. These structures often provide forms of social protection unavailable through formal institutions. However, Nigeria also experiences significant exclusion. Poverty and unemployment restrict economic participation. Persons with disabilities encounter physical and institutional barriers. Internally displaced persons may lack stable access to livelihoods. Rural communities often experience inadequate infrastructure. Ethnic and regional identities can influence political and economic opportunities. Social stigma can further marginalise vulnerable people.

A church that possesses significant resources but excludes persons with disabilities from meaningful participation has failed to embody the economic logic of inclusion. A church that provides welfare but does not create opportunities for participation risks reducing vulnerable people to permanent recipients. A church that protects influential members from accountability violates the principle of impartial justice. A church that tolerates gossip and stigma against vulnerable persons violates the relational ethic of Leviticus 19:16. The biblical text therefore challenges churches to move from charity toward structural inclusion.

Toward an African Christian Ethics of Social Inclusion

The dialogue between Leviticus 19 and African communalism provides a useful foundation for developing an African Christian ethic of social inclusion. Both perspectives reject the idea that human beings exist as isolated individuals and instead locate moral responsibility within relationships and community. Leviticus 19 presents social inclusion not merely as an attitude of kindness but as a concrete ethical obligation expressed through economic practices, judicial fairness, interpersonal responsibility, and protection of vulnerable persons. African communalism similarly understands the well-being of the individual as inseparable from the well-being of the community. Read together within a Christian framework, these perspectives suggest a fourfold model of inclusion based on responsibility, participation, justice, and protection.

- ***Inclusion as Responsibility***

African communalism understands community as a network of mutual obligations. The possession of resources therefore carries social responsibilities. This principle is clearly reflected in Leviticus 19:9–10, where landowners are commanded not to harvest their fields completely but to leave portions for the poor and the resident foreigner. The provision is significant because it places responsibility on those who possess economic resources to consider the needs of those who have less. In this sense, inclusion cannot be reduced to personal generosity or occasional charity. It involves recognising that resources exist within a moral community and therefore have social implications. The biblical command challenges an exclusively individualistic understanding of property by placing limits on unrestricted accumulation. Possession generates obligation.

For African Christian ethics, this has important implications. Churches, families, institutions, political communities, and individuals with greater economic or social resources have responsibilities toward persons who experience poverty, disability, displacement, unemployment, or other forms of marginalisation. Christian inclusion therefore requires more than sympathy for vulnerable persons; it requires structures and practices through which the community accepts responsibility for their well-being. The ethical question is not simply, “What can the privileged give to the vulnerable?” but also, “What responsibilities arise from belonging to the same human community?”



- ***Inclusion as Participation***

The gleaning legislation in Leviticus 19:9–10 also reveals that biblical inclusion is concerned with access and participation rather than mere dependency. The poor and the resident foreigner are given an opportunity to gather what remains in the fields. They are therefore not simply objects of charity. They are granted access to resources through which they can participate in sustaining themselves. This distinction is particularly important for African Christian social ethics. A model of inclusion based exclusively on charity may unintentionally reinforce dependency by positioning vulnerable persons permanently as recipients and privileged persons as permanent providers. Participation offers a more constructive alternative. It asks whether social, economic, ecclesial, and political structures enable marginalised persons to exercise agency and contribute to communal life.

African communalism provides a strong conceptual basis for this approach because the community is sustained through reciprocal participation. Persons are not valued only according to what they can receive from the community but also according to their capacity to contribute to its life. Consequently, Christian inclusion should seek to remove barriers that prevent participation. Persons with disabilities, for example, should not merely be objects of church welfare but should have meaningful opportunities to worship, serve, lead, deliberate, work, and exercise their gifts within the Christian community. Inclusion, therefore, involves creating access to resources, opportunities, decision-making, and communal participation. The goal is not simply to keep vulnerable persons within the community but to enable them to flourish as active members of it.

- ***Inclusion as Justice***

Leviticus 19:15 extends the principle of inclusion into the sphere of justice: judgment must not be distorted in favour of either the poor or the powerful. The verse challenges both partiality and the manipulation of justice according to social status. Inclusion consequently requires institutions and processes in which persons are treated with equal moral seriousness. This has direct relevance to African societies where social position, wealth, political influence, family connections, ethnicity, or institutional status can affect access to opportunities and justice. A society may publicly celebrate inclusion while its institutions continue to privilege particular groups. Genuine inclusion therefore requires more than welcoming language; it requires impartial structures.

For the African Christian community, this means confronting practices such as nepotism, corruption, discrimination, patronage, and status-based privilege. Churches themselves must examine whether their structures reflect the justice they proclaim. Questions of leadership, employment, theological education, access to church programmes, distribution of resources, and participation in decision-making should not be determined merely by wealth, social connections, gender, disability, or family status. Leviticus 19:15 therefore reminds Christian ethics that inclusion has an institutional dimension. Justice must be embedded in the procedures through which communities make decisions and distribute opportunities. A community cannot claim to be inclusive if its formal structures systematically exclude certain persons.

- ***Inclusion as Protection***

Leviticus 19:16 introduces another dimension of inclusion by prohibiting conduct that endangers or harms another person. The command against becoming a talebearer or standing idly by in relation to a neighbour's life indicates that communal responsibility includes protecting others from harm. Inclusion is therefore not achieved simply by permitting vulnerable persons to remain within a community. They must also be safe within it. This principle is particularly significant in contexts where vulnerable persons may experience humiliation, stigma, exploitation, abuse, or violence. Persons with disabilities, older persons, children, migrants, widows, and economically disadvantaged



persons may be physically present within communities while remaining exposed to forms of relational and structural harm. Physical presence, therefore, should not be confused with genuine inclusion.

An African Christian ethic of inclusion must consequently develop practices of protection and accountability. Churches and other communal institutions should establish environments in which vulnerable persons can participate without fear of exploitation, ridicule, abuse, or discrimination. Protection also requires confronting harmful cultural assumptions and practices rather than remaining silent when they threaten human dignity. The ethical force of Leviticus 19:16 is therefore considerable: community carries a duty not only to include vulnerable persons but also to protect their lives and dignity. A community that tolerates the humiliation, exploitation, or harm of vulnerable members contradicts the very relational values upon which its communal identity rests.

Taken together, these four dimensions show that social inclusion is more comprehensive than charitable assistance. Responsibility requires those with resources to recognise their obligations toward others; participation ensures that vulnerable persons possess agency and access to communal resources; justice requires impartial structures that resist privilege and discrimination; and protection ensures that persons are secure from exploitation, violence, and humiliation. An African Christian ethic of social inclusion therefore seeks not merely to bring marginalised persons into existing communities but to transform communal relationships and structures so that every person can participate, contribute, and flourish with dignity.

Conclusion

This article has examined Leviticus 19:9–10 and 15–16 through a detailed exegetical and contextual reading informed by African communalism. The exegesis demonstrates that the selected verses are not isolated commands about agriculture, judicial procedure or interpersonal conduct. They belong to a larger theological vision in which holiness is expressed through the organisation of communal life. Leviticus 19:9–10 limits agricultural accumulation by requiring landowners to leave part of their produce for the poor and the resident alien. The text therefore creates material space for vulnerable persons within the economic life of the community. Leviticus 19:15 places justice above social status. Neither the poor nor the powerful should receive judicial favour because of their social position. The standard is *sedeq*, righteousness and justice. Leviticus 19:16 protects communal relationships from destructive speech and commands responsibility in the face of threatened life. Its difficult expression concerning the blood of the neighbour nevertheless establishes a strong ethical concern against passive indifference to another person's vulnerability. When these findings are placed into dialogue with African communalism, a significant convergence emerges. Both traditions understand human existence relationally and recognise that individual well-being cannot be separated completely from communal responsibility. Yet the biblical text also provides a critical corrective. Community is not morally legitimate just because it is communal. Communal structures must be evaluated according to whether they protect dignity, distribute justice, provide meaningful participation and protect vulnerable persons.

For contemporary Africa, and particularly Nigeria, this has important implications. Social inclusion cannot be reduced to charity. It requires access to resources, impartial institutions, responsible relationships and active protection of vulnerable persons. Leviticus 19 therefore provides an important biblical resource for an African Christian ethic of inclusion. Its vision can be summarised in four principles: resources must be shared responsibly; justice must be administered impartially; relationships must protect dignity; and vulnerable lives must not be ignored. African communalism provides a rich contextual framework for developing these principles, while the biblical text provides theological and ethical resources for critically reconstructing communal life. The result is not a



romantic return to either ancient Israel or an idealised African past. It is a contextual ethical project: to imagine communities in which belonging does not become exclusion, wealth does not become absolute possession, justice does not become the privilege of the powerful, and vulnerability does not become a reason for marginalisation.

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