

RELIGION AND HUMAN VALUES: AN INQUISITION OF THE AFRO-CENTRIC IMPERATIVE.

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Abstract

Contemporary debates by scholars on the relevance or otherwise of African values system and thought process had further opened the floodgate of the ambivalence between those scholars seeking to define African values and morality within the parameters of a conventionalized Western religious epistemological hegemony, thereby accentuating the superiority of Western values. On the other side of the debate are scholars pursuing an “Africanist” explanation which embraces an authentic mode of African knowledge construction of human values and morality. The objective of this paper is to examine the Afro-centric imperative of the African thought process in the current moral discourse, in order to extrapolate an endorsement which will grant space for a hybrid of moral reconstructions between Christianity and African indigenous religion and thought process. This study is cached within the theoretical framework of the Afro-centric Cultural Distinctive Paradigm (ACDP) which encapsulates African indigenous religion and human values. However, within the grindstone of spotlighting African human values, is the inevitable project of decolonization. This paper therefore explores the task of decolonizing African thought against the backdrop of the ontological normative dialectics of superiority and inferiority. This paper argues against the superiority of Western thought and values over African values. In order to argue for this conclusion, this discourse finds

it expedient to denude in more precise terms, some positive human values of African thought process; an investigation that leads to the interplay between the decolonization of African thought and the decolonization of the African intellectual landscape. This paper disturbs and unpacks the colonial project and calls to contestation Western hegemony and the continuous dominance of Western thought even amongst African scholars (theologians and philosophers). This paper concludes by asserting that the differences that exist between African religious human values and western values must not necessarily have normative consequences; as things can be different without having to be placed within a normative hierarchy. The contention that African values should be of less worth than Western values is therefore repudiated. The Paper advances the understanding of religion and human values from the perspective of African indigenous worldview. The recommendation is that there should be an integrated approach to resolving the current crises of human values.

Keywords: Religion, Human Values and Afrocentricism.

Introduction

The deadweight of accentuating African indigenous religious and human values in contemporary scholarship is fraught with many difficulties punctuated by fluctuations, oscillation, and occasional regressions. Although some progress is being made, this progression has not always been rectilinear but nonetheless exhibiting some level of advances. Vivaciously this process has been set in motion by the aspirations of many African intellectuals like Kwame Anthony Appiah, Kwasi Wiredu, Henry Odera Oruka, John Mbiti, Bolaji Idowu, Frantz Fanon, and Aimé Césaire; and many other African activists like Steve Biko and Nelson Mandela. Interestingly the project of decolonization of the African thought process has also been the preoccupation of non-African contemporary scholars like Björn Freter¹ and very few others. These antecedents should suggest that the crusade before African contemporary scholarship is the acceleration of the contention to decolonize African thought process, including the valuation and transvaluation of indigenous religious and human values.

The crisis of values pervading contemporary Nigeria moral space is inexorable, which requires a high level of critical reflection in the search for ways through which the moral challenge posed by the agents of Western acculturation can be adequately addressed. The tremendous impact of Western acculturation on the nation and the speeding erosion of well enacted Afro-centric religious and human values are readily seen in the ways many African indigenous normative systems are being seriously undermined even by some African intellectuals and African

converts to non-indigenous religions. This situation has led to the waning away of African values system in the face of alien values.

Therefore the enterprise to underscore African religious and human values is one that must not be taken lightly, because every society has set of values covering the whole ramifications of the society, and these values apparently play regulating roles in human relationships and act as stabilizing factors of the society. As asserted by Kanu “value system is the cultural outlook of a people and the understanding of the value system of the people is the understanding of the belief system and cultural system of the people in question.”²

In proffering solutions to the misadventure of the Nigerian project, the dominant tenor within the public space is the narrative that posits that the solution to the Nigerian question is at the narthex of formulating the right economic policies and fashioning a suitable political ideology. This line of thinking has reached a crescendo that any contrary opinion is often repudiated. While some level of truth resides in the above assertion: that economics and politics play undeniable importance in the development of any nation, public discourse tends however to discount the most fundamental aspect of the society: namely its ethical dimension. Therefore, an accurate design of economic policies and the adoption of the proper political ideology, without a corresponding attestation of an ethical value system are most unlikely to yield any meaning human development. Ethical behavior in every area of the public space should provide the fundamental philosophical foundation for authentic human development, because: “economic and political choices as a society are ultimately determined by moral values.”³ Plato said, “States are as men are; they grow out of human character.” So the Nigerian state is a product of the Nigerian character as a nation cannot rise above the values of her citizens.

What is profoundly and eminently obvious is that there is a crisis of values in Nigeria, which has led to the agitation and clamour for invigorating and maintaining durable and lasting positive values in Nigeria. The draught of positive values is made manifest in all sphere of public life. There is the abuse and perversion of teachers-students relationship which is supposed to be a vital mentoring relationship. Religious institutions have fallen into moral disrepute owing to a number of high profile scandals with the attended disdained for the emissaries of organized religion. Religious leaders are increasingly vulnerable to the criticism that they are far more comfortable courting the rich and the powerful than speaking truth to power. The post-modern Nigeria society is increasingly being typified by instant gratification that feeds on short-termism, profiteering, fraud, sexual irresponsibility and perversion. Without making hasty and unsustainable

generalizations, the consensus is that the Nigeria public space is suffused by inordinately disproportionate returns on non- investments (which in popular parlance is called corruption), cheating, predatory exploitation and feverish individualism at the expense of the common good.

Arriving at a broadly agreed upon set of values that will launch Nigeria into the path of moral rectitude is one of the most urgent tasks for Nigerian public intellectuals and social thinkers. The objective of this paper therefore is to examine the Afro-centric imperative in the enthronement of positive religious and human values in order to extrapolate an endorsement which will grant space for a hybrid of moral reconstructions.

Conceptual Clarity

Religion

Religion is a victim of definitional pluralism as there is no scholarly consensus over what precisely constitutes a religion. For the purpose clarity, the paper adopts Émile Durkheim definition of religion as a "unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things".⁴ By sacred things Durkheim meant things set apart and forbidden, beliefs and practices and all those who adhere to them. Sacred things are not, however, limited to gods or spirits. On the contrary, a sacred thing can be a rock, a tree, a spring, a pebble, a piece of wood, a house. Religious beliefs, myths, dogmas and legends are the representations that express the nature of these sacred things, and the virtues and powers which are attributed to them. Antoine Vergote on his part defined religion as "... the entirety of the linguistic expressions, emotions and, actions and signs that refer to a supernatural being or supernatural beings."⁵ Vergote took the term supernatural simply to mean whatever transcends the powers of nature or human agency.

Therefore religious values are ethical principles founded on religious traditions, texts and beliefs. These values are usually considered to be the high moral and ethical values that people of faith aspire to achieve. In contrast to human or personal values, religious-based values are based on the scriptures and or a religion's established norms. For example, Judaism has the Ten Commandments. Christianity has both the ten commandment and the teachings of Jesus Christ. Islam provides spiritual guidance through the Quran and Hadith, while African traditional religious values are expressed through the customs, culture, beliefs and practices of the Africans.

Christians and Muslims comprise the predominant religious groups in Nigeria. Christianity is more common in the southern region of the country, while Islam is the dominant religion in the north. Indigenous traditional religion accounts for about 10 percent of the population.

These traditional religions are specific to certain rural or indigenous areas and are usually intertwined with either Christianity or Islam. Each of these religious groups has various religious values which serve as a guide and control of human behavior, dictating right from wrong.

Human Values

Many social scientists have tried to give meaning to the word “value” by articulating many definitions. Among these are: Allport, Jones and Gerald, and Rokeach. Allport in his publication titled *Pattern and Growth in Personality* sees value as: “a belief upon which a man act by preference.”⁶ Jones and Gerald in their join text defined value as: “any singular state or object for which the individual strives or approaches, extols, embraces, voluntarily consumes, incur expenses to acquire as positive value.”⁷ According to these social scientists, values sensitize the person; they move him around his environment because they define his attractive and repelling nature and particular cognitive categories. Therefore a value offers a motivational force, defines, sustains and modifies attitude and behaviour.

Another attempt to create a more lucid meaning of the word “value” is found in the work of Rokeach titled *The Nature of Human Values*. Rokeach says “a value is an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end state of existence.”⁸

Experts in the humanities have described human values as “our very core, the especial essence of who we are as human beings.”⁹ Human values are the virtues that guide us to take into account of the human element when we interact with other human beings. Human values are, for example, respect, acceptance, consideration, appreciation, listening, openness, affection, empathy and love towards other human beings. These are the demonstrable and authentic values on which any human society should be built upon. Some human values in traditional African society include honesty, morality, respect for elders, respect for fellow citizens, communality and family loyalty. One of the most significant values that traditional Africans hold to be of great importance is the wisdom of its elders. Age is a symbol of experience and intelligence, and the mistreatment of said elders is viewed as taboo.

Afrocentricism and Afro-centric Cultural Distinctive Theoretical Framework

Louis Gates and Anthony Appiah view Afrocentrism as a cultural ideology or worldview that focuses on the history of the people of African descent. It is a response to global Eurocentric attitudes about African people and their historical contributions; it revisits their history

with an African cultural and ideological focus.¹⁰ In most studies, Afrocentrism is usually interchanged with Afrocentricity which deals primarily with Pan-African ideology in culture, philosophy, and history. Afrocentrism can be seen as an African inspired ideology that manifests an affirmation by conceptualizing a glorified heritage that is distinctly African. This is what defines the Afro-centric cultural distinctive theoretical framework. It often argues against or minimizes European cultural hegemony and influences, while accenting historical African civilizations that independently accomplished a significant level of cultural development. In general, the Afro-centric cultural distinctive paradigm is usually manifested in a focus on African culture and the history of Africa. It involves an African version of an African-centered view of history and culture to portray the achievements and development of African traditions which have been inferiorized by the West.¹¹ In his book, *The Afrocentric Idea*, Asante defines Afrocentricity as "the placing of African ideals at the center of any analysis that involves African culture and behavior."¹² It should be emphasized that this perspective is not an explicit argument for African superiority in culture and history, although some scholars have used it to that end. Rather, the Afro-centric cultural distinctive paradigm is a conceptual tool for seeing the history of African-descended peoples through their own lens, and not through the lens of Europe or the West. As a mode of analysis, Afrocentrism has remained remarkably durable over the past two hundred years; however, scholars have often reached radically different conclusions in their utilization of this analytical tool.

According to Asante, what is today broadly called Afrocentrism evolved out of the work of African intellectuals that flowered into its modern form due to the activism of African intellectuals in the civil rights movement and in the development of African studies programs in universities as a distinct academic ideology.¹³ Proponents of Afrocentrism support the claim that the contributions of various Africans have been downplayed or discredited as part of the legacy of colonialism and slavery's pathology of "writing Africans out of history."¹⁴ Afrocentrism argues that for centuries, Africans and other nonwhites have been dominated, through slavery and colonization, by Europeans, and that European culture is diametrically opposed to efforts by non-Europeans to achieve self-determination. For this reason, according to Afrocentrism, people of African descent need to develop an appreciation of the achievements of traditional African civilizations; indeed, they need to articulate their own history and their own system of values.¹⁵

Afrocentrists assert that traditional African culture contrasts with European culture in being more informed by its history "circular" rather than "linear"; more cooperative; more intuitive; more humano-centric;

and more closely integrated with the spiritual world.¹⁶ Renewed attention to this culture, they argue, can benefit Africans by reminding them that their own culture, which was long been devalued by Europeans, has a rich and ancient heritage. In addition to emphasizing the past, Afrocentrism encourages the preservation and elevation of contemporary African culture.¹⁷

Western Textualisation of African Values and Thought Process

Edem Kodjo, the author of *'Africa Tomorrow'* aptly describes the western textualization and colonization of African values and thought process as the condition of the African "torn away from his past, propelled into a universe fashioned from outside that suppresses his values, and dumbfounded by a cultural invasion that marginalizes him. The African ... is today the deformed image of others."¹⁸ The westernization of African values is the perception of ethnic and cultural inferiority, a form of internalized oppression engrained in the contemporary African psyche. This disposition was supported by an educational system which drew the African away from his community and misled him by showing him the green pastures of the European society where he is not allowed to graze.¹⁹ Western education introduced a western culture-transmitting process with an attitude that neither respects the core values of African culture, nor leads the present generation to acquire accumulated knowledge of African values with pride. The educational process directed the African thought process away from African values; equipping him with a type of education that is antagonistic to the African cultural values and thought patterns.²⁰ Onwubiko said:

Western system of education was very well calculated to teach the new Africans that in order to rise in the ladder of the new culture and acquire the status it promised; they must be alienated, ideologically and physically, from their root and their cultural past. The colonial agents presented themselves as symbols of human beings, in the image and likeness of whom all future generation Africans were to be created.²¹

This is the thinking that foreign values are always better and superior, while the indigenous are primitive, uncultured and barbaric. Therefore a colonized African thought is the acceptance, by the colonized, of the culture or doctrines of the colonizer, as intrinsically more worthy or superior. This is the mentality that still plagues Africa many years after independence, and despite all the knowledge and education. This is why Nyerere said: "of all the crimes of colonialism there is none worse than the attempt to make us believe that we had no indigenous culture of our own or that what we did have was worthless or something of which we should be ashamed, instead of being a source of pride."²² Therefore the Western textualisation of African values is

responsible for the wholesale importation and adoption of Western values and the repudiation of African heritage, as if there was never anything good in Africa history and values.

African nationalists who worked so hard for the liberation of Africans from physical enslavement and actual colonization may not have realized that intellectual slavery and mental enslavement that works insidiously at the level of the mind was more pervasive, more vicious and even more cruel and exacting, than political colonization. Once people's mind is conquered and enslaved, the dominion and domination naturally extend to other domains such as politics, economics and even religion. This mental enslavement comprehensively dehumanized and stripped Africans of their humanity; a situation which makes the work of the conqueror easier. Thus, the colonization of African mind makes Africans tend to treat Europeans and their allies as demigods.

The effects of the colonized African mind also included the near extinction of African culture, which has greatly diluted or destroyed African heritage, including the destruction of African traditional institutions and religion. The Europeans forced the people to learn their language, taught them how to eat European food and dress like Europeans, abandoning their own traditional eating habits and dressing. From then on the Africans occupied only the inferior positions of the colonial administration and never had a say in the government of their own countries. Those employed by the colonial administration felt proud and more superior to the others. Even today Africans who are schooled in western ways of life feel more superior to other Africans. This deculturalization of Africa paved the way for the acceptance of the dominance of Europe and European values over African heritage, and the rejection African culture in exchange for the colonial culture.

A colonized African thought process is today a burden and barrier to the progress of Africa, as Africans now prefer foreign lifestyle, culture, music, literature and others. Today Africans conduct two (at times three) separate full-blown marriage ceremonies, because in our minds, until the "White Wedding" is done the marriage ceremony is not complete. Thus there is the traditional marriage (which is actually the proper marriage ceremony according to African heritage), then the marriage at the registry, and the third which is the "white wedding". In politics, the colonized African thought process seeks to implement democracy as defined by the western nations without regard to the fact the democracy as a system of government grew and evolved from the way of life of these nations with their own variant of democracy.

It is believed in most part of Africa that one will automatically become rich if he/she can travel to Europe or America, as many Africans believe there is no poor man in Europe because it is a whiteman's

country. This is why many young Africans: men and women are ready to cross the Sahara desert on foot upward to Europe through dangerous and unfathomable means through the sea. The colonized African mind believes that what makes a beautiful African man or woman is the whiteness or fairness of the skin. So that an individual is ready to bleach the skin to white as it is the belief that white skin is better than black skin.

Franz Fanon's book *Black skin, white masks*" provides some edification here. Fanon writes that "the juxtaposition of the black and white 'races' has resulted in a massive psycho-existential complex".²³ Fanon through his work sought to liberate the black man from the arsenal of complexes that germinated in the colonial situation. Fanon believes that it is necessary for the black person to overcome the psychological effects of colonialism.²⁴

Freter avows that what is largely responsible for this state of affairs is the superiorization of Western thought over African thought. According to Freter:

Western thought is infused with a permanent tacit assumption of superiority of a metaphysical proportion, a diffuse conviction of being the one and only thought that truly counts. It is from this assumption of superiority, entirely in accordance with Western textbook dialectics, that the idea of inferiorisation directly and necessarily emanates. When one entity is considered superior, others must be considered inferior. Anyone who thinks in this manner has good conceptual reason to make the leap from one to the other. This movement of thought shows only that the plain and arbitrary positing of one's own greatness simultaneously means the positing of the other, i.e. the one which is not great. This positing, because it follows necessarily from an arbitrary act, is itself also arbitrary.²⁵

The onslaught Christianity and Islam on African traditional religion is yet another sad narrative. While early missionaries condemned and forbid our forebears from venerating African ancestors; on the other hand, the missionaries introduced and propagated the veneration of the saints which most often were Eurocentric ancestors. On one hand the missionaries condemned our most revered masquerades, while in the same breath brought in Santa Claus. These missionaries saw nothing good in African indigenous religion including African theocentric names that conveyed more theocentric connotation to the African mind. Indeed the whole of African traditional religion was cached in derogatory terminologies. However due the consented pioneering efforts of Geoffrey Parrinder in 1954, later Bolaji Idowu and John Mbiti where to protest against a long history of derogatory elucidation of Africans, their culture and religion by outsiders. Interestingly African Traditional

Religion (ATR) is now widely taught in African universities and Seminaries, but its identity remains essentially negative. To the West, what was not Christian was non-religious and non-theocentric. What was African was inferior and what was Western was superior. The success of Christianity and Islam on the African continent in the last 100 years has been extraordinary, but it has been, unfortunately, at the detriment of African indigenous religion and culture.

Religion and Human Values: The Afrocentric Imperative

The African tradition consists of basic human values which are indispensable for authentic human development.²⁶ It is expedient to denude in more precise terms, some positive human values of African traditional thought process:

African Value for Human Life

The greatest arguments against African traditional religion and customs by Westerners and their apologists are the practices of human sacrifice and twin murder, which are usually evidenced as lack of regard for human dignity. The misleading slant arising from these practices eventuate in the colonial writers to describe Africans as primitive, dark, pagan, brutes, cannibalistic, crude and savages. While these writers can easily be forgiven for their epistemological deficiency, the point must be hurriedly made that African society has a very high regard for the human person and the preservation of human dignity.

The dignity of the human person is seen in African cosmology and human origins. Ikenga - Metuh asserted that: viewed from the standpoint of his origin and final destiny of man is best understood in relation to God, his creator. Man comes from God. He has a definite mission to fulfill in God's plan and will eventually go back to God.²⁷ The dignity of human person is seen in relationship of being created by God, the human complex nature which God imprinted in man is the crown of God's creation and provision for a continual interaction through rituals, despite human limitations.

The dignity of the human person is also identifiable in the African insatiable desire to worship. Mbiti has rightly observed that Africans do not know how to exist without religion.²⁸ Wherever the African is, there is religion and its morals. In pre-colonial Africa, the human person is a religious being, wherefrom follows his human dignity. The African concept of human dignity is not found in earthly riches and abundance, but in the nobility of his religious being. Therefore the relationship between individuals is based on the recognition of their intrinsic worth as human beings; not necessary only in what they possess or what they can do for each other.

African Sense of a good Life

In all African traditions, the idea that there is far more to life than vested self interest and the inordinate pursuit of riches is deeply ingrained in the African thought process. There is the African proverb that says: “a good name is better than riches”. This is a timeless truth in African values system which seems to have been jettison in post-colonial Africa. It is indubitable that one of the greatest problems of today’s Nigeria is within the ambience of self-centeredness and unbridled vested self interest. The Nigeria society today needs to re-evaluate and re-emphasize what it means to be rich. Certain questions beg for answers: is the frantic acquisition and primitive accumulation of wealth all that Nigerians have to live for, or should Nigerians be seeking intangible human values that cannot be subjected to monetary evaluation, but which nonetheless are the real basis for living a fulfilled life? What matters most is a good character. In African traditional society wealth will come to naught if one lacks good character. A life without moral rectitude is nothing but vanity. Interestingly contemporary social science researches are fast coming to the conclusion that inordinate pursuit of capitalism and the zero-sum competition for money and status in the developed world is a major source of unhappiness.²⁹

There is abundant anecdotal evidence to suggest that people find new meaning and fulfillment in their lives when they free themselves from the acquisitive treadmill and begin to give of themselves. In other words, social science is now proving what African indigenous epistemology and axiology have always known through the wisdom of African ancestors that: generosity rather than consumption is the key to happiness. Current social researches are therefore reclining to the traditional African thought that what is truly require for happiness is nurturing healthy relationships, cultivating friendships, serving others, raising well-adjusted children, and being involved in a community.³⁰ Only a life that transcends the narrow goals of self-aggrandizement and self-gratification can be truly happy. A society of transcendent human values such as those found in African traditional society can be truly safe. A society in which all individuals are committed to nothing more than the single-minded pursuit of their self-gratification at the expense of everything else is a dangerously predatory society in which no one can ever be truly safe – sadly these are the operating parameters of most post-colonial African societies. This situation of self-centeredness is what is expressed in the Afemai proverb: *mokpaira rele ikhekhe le gbo* “I will eat all alone suffers constipation.”

African Sense of Parenting

In African traditional values system, parenting takes a lot of forms which enables a child to develop into a responsible adult. Some of these forms of parenting are: through story telling (folktales), the extended family, traditional rites, and the mother's care, attention and love.³¹ The uniqueness of this system with regards to parenting in traditional African communities is that the responsibility in taking care of the child is not only to the biological parents. This is shared by all in the extended family. This is buttressed by the African proverb on parenting which says that, “a single hand cannot nurse a child”. This in Afemai would mean: *aro obokpa ro omo*. Yet again, another African proverb says “it takes a village to raise a child”. This implies that although the mother has the responsibility of taking care of the child, the responsibility is being shared by all.

Arguably therefore, the most significant indicator of national instability is not found in politics or economics but in the ways in which children are raised and socialized. Parents, teachers, older relatives and friends must be good exemplars to young ones and should have lasting positive influences on our lives. These early influences define their identities and what they later understand to be acceptable standards of societal behaviour. The family, very broadly defined, is the premier learning environment. Research has shown that what happens to a child in the earliest years has a formative impact on the personality and character development which in turn affects the rest of his life.³² It is within families that the critical standards of right and wrong are acquired. In African traditional society parents are the primary audience before whom children model a lifestyle of integrity, purpose and service to the common good.

The Lack of Monetization of Values

There is no gainsaying the fact that contrary to the African human values system that the monetization of values has broken down our traditional definitions of authority within the family system. Before now, the most respected were those who were reputed for their ethical constancy and moral authority. Just now, the most influential members of the family are those who have illicitly or otherwise earned wealth from stints in government or corporate enterprise.³³ Despite the knowledge of their crimes, we celebrate these men and women because of what we stand to gain from them financially. Those who are the real voices of reason within the family are marginalized, derided for their lack of financial heft and mocked for their insistence on values that are now consider irrelevant.

African Sense of Community-based Living

African value for community-based living and relationships are found in works of Davidson,³⁴ Mbiti,³⁵ Okere³⁶ and Ogbujah³⁷ and a lot more. The sense of community or communality refers to the awareness which identifies an individual not as a solitary being, but as an entity whose being and survival is consequent upon its union with other human beings within an identified locality. In traditional Africa for instance, a person is known and identified in, by and through his community. Individual lives, moves and revolves around the community. To a large extent, a man's achievements depend primarily on how much of his community's standards he accommodates: he sees as his community see, and acts as his community acts.³⁸ Communal life is among the cardinal values in Africa. Africans do not practice individualism like most Western nations. They live a life of community and solidarity. The African man's idea of security and its value depended on personal identification with and within the community.

However with the arrival of the colonial overlords, different ideologies and philosophies about human relations such as individualism came into play. Mbiti noted that for the Africans, to be human is to be in a community, participating in the beliefs, ceremonies, rituals and festivals of that community that gives them sense of belonging. Membership of the community is emphasized more than member's individuality; for a society is based more on obligations, than on individual rights and individuals assume their rights in exercise of the obligations, which makes a society a chain of inter-relationships.³⁹ The autonomy and rights of the individual person are enjoyed in relationship.⁴⁰

Individuals are not regarded as complete until they have been identified with a community. "Each one must belong to kith and kin, to parents, brothers and sisters, who are immediate, and to a wider relationship within the extended family. There is nothing like individualism. A person belongs to an immediate family, hamlet, village, clan and town. This belonging enhances chances of survival and ensures security and growth."⁴¹

Sense of Brotherhood and Hospitality

Before the advent of Western civilization and culture to Africa, the sense of brotherhood and hospitality were some of the cardinal human values of African indigenous society. The Sense of hospitality is inherently indispensable in African tradition society. There was always spontaneous accommodation of strangers and visitors. Unlike the West, no appointment and special invitation are needed for one to visit a distant relation or neighbour. On arrival, one is treated kindly, just as one

would wish to be treated when visiting another home. This spontaneous acceptance is expressed in many symbolic ways like presentation of kola nuts, traditional gin, coconuts etc. These are given to show acceptance and safety.

Onimhawo and Adamu in their study: *An Afrocentric Perspective on Human Migration:*

The Nigerian Experience succinctly argued that the common membership of one universal human family constitutes a legitimate basis for the idea of universal human brotherhood in African conceptual thought. This idea is depicted for instance in Afemai maxim: *Oya lo khi iyokpa oya* "A human being's brother is another human being".⁴² This maxim asserts unmistakably that a human being is related only to another human being, not to a beast. Implicit in the African perception of humanity is the recognition of all persons, irrespective of their racial or ethnic backgrounds, as brothers. This is the reason why in African cultures the word 'brother' is used to cover various and complex family relationships linked by blood ties.⁴³ But the word is also used, significantly, by persons between whom there are no blood ties; thus, the word is used comprehensively. The comprehensive meaning given to the word 'brother' in African culture is intended, indeed, to lift people up from the purely biologically determined blood relation level onto the human level, the level where the essence of humanity is held as transcending the contingencies of human biology, race, ethnicity, or culture.⁴⁴

African Sense of Solidarity

The traditional African community attitude to work is one factor that explains the African sense of solidarity. In African cultural context duties such: building of a hut or a house for a kinsman especially of someone that is old or a person that is not well to do in the material sense, is often seen as a collective responsibility that calls for the contributions of many.⁴⁵ This African concept of solidarity is aptly captured in Afemai proverb: *Obokpa ovue akh' uno* "one hand cannot cover the mouth of a pot." Yet another Afemai proverb says *Orokpe okio gwa*, "one tree cannot make a forest". Furthermore, kinsmen can mobilize a workforce to the farm of a dead relative or someone who is bereaved to help out in maintaining the farm and keep the bereaved family going.⁴⁶

Everywhere in Africa society there is the spirit of *Ubuntu* (I am because we are) which Barbara Nussbaum says "is the capacity in African culture to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, harmony and humanity in the interests of building and maintaining community with justice and mutual caring."⁴⁷

Sense of Respect for Elders

Africans generally have deep and ingrained respect for old age. Grey hairs earn an individual the right to courtesy and politeness. The elders are respected first because they are believed to be the teachers and directors of the young. They are the repository of truth as their words and instructions are heeded to for the promotion of good behaviour among the young. The elders are also taken to be the custodian of communal wisdom and therefore they are conceded leadership in the affairs of the people. One of the reasons for this, is the nearness of the elders to the ancestors. The respect given to the elders has its practical effect in the maintenance of custom and tradition. The young are always looking forward to being elders and they are often told that if a child respects an elder, he would be respected by the young when he becomes an elder. This is the fundamental principle behind human relations in African cultural milieu

The idea of Old People's Homes is an aberration in traditional African society and a promotion of a careless assumption that a man is deserving of respect only, and only if the man is virile and productive. To entrust the welfare of the elderly to institutional caregivers is an abomination to the African mind. The care of the aged is situated within the family. It is so cherished and so organized that there is no need, in the African setting, for the cheerless nursing homes for the aged as it exist today in Europe and America⁴⁸ and speedily taking roots in Africa.

African Sense of Extended Family

According to Pantaleon Iroegbu "African languages generally have no words for uncles, aunts cousins and nieces. All these are part of the one family. The family is one, but extended".⁴⁹ Marriage is a means of family extension especially between two families. The extended family system is very much alive in contemporary African societies as a community of brothers and sisters, which is the basis of, and the expression of, the extended family system in Africa.

African Sense of Religiosity

Africans are everywhere and always profoundly religious. African spirituality simply acknowledges that beliefs and practices touch on and inform every facet of human life, and therefore African religion cannot be separated from everyday living. For many Africans, religion can never be separated from life. Unlike the West, religion is a way of life, and it can never be separated from the public sphere. Religion informs everything in the traditional African society, including marriage, health, diet, dress, economics, birth and death. The Africans eat religiously, drink religiously and bath religiously. African spirituality is truly holistic.

For example, sickness in the indigenous African worldview is not only an imbalance of the body, but also an imbalance in one's social life, which can be linked to a breakdown in one's kinship and family relations or even to one's relationship with one's ancestors.⁵⁰

Africans are deeply religious, for the African, life is religion and religion is life. The attachment to and worship of God, form a dominating part of their world view. All they do or say and permit is impregnated with a vision of the divine, and all natural reality is explainable in function of the supernatural. African social values rest on the moral values which in turn rest on religious values.⁵¹

To many people it is perverse and perhaps sacrilegious to separate the moral and the religious values. It is the presence of religion that lends meaning and authority to values. Religious or spiritual element in the African man characterizes his relationship with the divine, with God and/or the gods. And it is an indubitable fact that this sense of religion is the promotion of moral excellence.⁵²

A conscientious inquisition of the preceding prefatory would indeed reveal the imperativeness of adopting the Afro-centric cultural distinctive paradigm. Namely, that the African values system contains positive human values that can provide the ontological foundation for a moral reconstruction, even between Christianity and African thought process inclusive of indigenous religion. The note of caution is that care must be taken to excogitate certain aspects of African traditional values that might not be wholly in *tandem* with contemporary realities. This should not come as a surprise because every culture consists of both the counterintuitive and the perdurable.

Conclusion

This discourse established the importance of accentuating African indigenous religious and human values in contemporary scholarship. The role of human values was exhaustively discussed and denoted because of the understanding that the value system of a people is consequent upon the understanding of the beliefs and cultural system of the people. The paper examined the Afro-centric imperative of the African thought process in the current moral discourse, and concluded that the Afro-centric cultural distinctive paradigm encapsulates African indigenous human values. It was expedient to denude in more precise terms, some positive human values of the African thought process which included an investigation into the African value on human life, African sense of a good life, African sense of responsible parenthood, the lack of monetization of values, African sense of community-based Living, African sense of brotherhood and hospitality, African sense of

solidarity, sense of respect for authority and the elders, African sense of extended family and African sense of religiosity.

Given that no one values system is error proof, African religious and human values must be carefully examined in order to extrapolate the very best of African traditional values systems which continuously reverberate their usefulness in our contemporary era. The paper asserted that the differences that exist between African religious human values and western values must not necessarily have a normative consequence; as things can be different without having to be placed within a normative hierarchy. The contention that African values should be of less worth than Western values is therefore repudiated.

Recommendations

This paper makes the following recommendations:

- a. that African institutes of human character formation like seminaries should faithfully study and seriously promote African traditional values system, including African indigenous religion;
- b. that African converts to non-African religions should have a rethink and reevaluation of their disposition to African traditional religion, namely to change their attitude from condemnation to commendation and understanding;
- c. that policy makers should be aware of the importance of the Afrocentric imperative in the enthronement of positive human values in Nigeria;
- d. that African scholarship should be at the vanguard in the promotion of African human values both within and outside Africa;
- e. that the negative clout presently beclouding African Indigenous religion should be removed through proper enlightenment.

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