

African Religion: It's Relevance in the Development of a Democratic Culture (A Philosophic Insight)

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Abstract: *Africa as a continent is made up of many nations. Nations are made up of peoples and cultures belong to the societies. The topic suggests a kind of generality of values among Africans if not in a lot of sphere then in the sphere of religion. Africa is in a state of crisis. Africa has become a dumping ground for foreign political, economic ideologies and religions. Most of these tend to knock life out of the African because they are contradictory to African culture as none of the political ideology has made Africans whole not even the new governance perspective which is against strong state, and which tends to promote liberation and privatization.*

Keywords: *Democracy, culture, African, religion, philosophy, values.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Religion is a slippery concept very difficult to define. Different scholars have expressed it in a multi-farious way. This is due to the fact that it has to do with three great realities in life: God, man and the world. It has to do with a dialectical relationship of the mind with reality. Joyce Hawkins (ed) (1995:345) sees religion as "belief in and worship of a superhuman controlling power; a system of this influence compared to religious faith". Procter Paul (ed) (1978:933) says it is "belief in one or more gods, esp, the belief that he/they made the world and control it and give men life after death (2) a particular system of belief and worship, behavior, etc, connected with it..." For Kirpatrick, E.E(ed) (1983 :) religion is "belief in recognition or awakened sense of a higher unseen controlling power, with the emotion and morality connected therewith" (as well as) rites or worship"

In the viewpoint of Margaret Peil (1971:213) religion is "the belief systems, moral norms and values held by members of the society". By implication, one can hold that it is an attitude of a people in life towards an unseen being or something believed to have Ultimate value and control over the worldly affairs. Glock and Stark (I 965) held it is "an institution allied (and integrated) system of symbols, beliefs, values and practices focused on the ultimate meaning." These scholars mentioned above talked of a power or being above man. For Anih (1992: (2) this Being is believed to be existent and to have supernatural qualities. And we add, He is believed equally to be real, for something can exist at the level of conceptualization alone.

Man is by nature not only a rational being, he is equally a "homo religious", always in the quest to be united with God because of his constitution. He is body and soul. Agbodike (1999:22) writes " ... man's impulse towards the Divine and the ultimate is a pervasive feature of human life and an essential part of man's endowment". Religion is as old as man, according to Glenn Vernon (i962: 55) it is "that part of culture composed of shared beliefs and practices which not only identify or define the supernatural and-sacred and man's relationship there to but which relate them to the known world in such that the group is provided with moral definitions as to what is good (in harmony with or approved by the supernatural and what is bad (contrary to or out of harmony with the supernatural)". Culture itself is seen as the way of life of a people, but it is more than simply peoples' way of life which is shared among them and which is equally transferable and transmitted from generation to generation. According to Ralph Linton (1947:1) it is "social heredity". Taylor's (1871:1) definition has remained quoted by millions of scholars, he says it is "that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, law, customs and any other capability acquired by man as a member of the society", Culture is not a simple phenomenon but a complex whole, this whole is inseparable from

religion; for religion permeates every sphere of life of the African. Little wonder, Mbiti noted Africans are "religiously religious". Does it beat the imagination why every sort of religious sect is comfortable in Africa irrespective of the illogicalities of its creed.

African traditional religion being an inseparable part of the African culture anchors on Africans world view hence encapsulates and envelops the peoples' norms and values. To be in Africa is to be religious. On account of the inter-relatedness, inter-mingle-ness and inter-penetrated-ness of religion and culture, Africa traditional religion stands a chance of playing a vital role in national reconciliation, integration and unification of the people most especially from the area of the core values, and serving as the foundation for Africa democracy. It means in a sense grounding the values of democracy on the traditional value of Africans which, the people are at home with. The case of Nyerere's 'Ujamaa' which means family hood or brother hood in a case in point

How do we go about this? We have first of all to examine the African situation, look at the ideals of democracy; African values, and see if there are areas of inter-relatedness and offer these as the grounds for effective democracy in Africa. Then we will conclude the work.

2. THE AFRICAN SITUATION

Africa is the continent peopled by the black man. Africa has been qualified as the cradle of civilization and the home of mankind. Okolo (1996: I) writes Africa is not the only home of the black people but their home-base as well. In the sense that in actual fact, the continent contains the heaviest concentration of black people in the world" Any genuine talk on the Africa situation must touch on the life-situation of Africans today which cannot be separated from the life of Africans in the past and the factors which conditioned them in history. A person who has no history is not human and as such has little if he has any relevance. God sent Jesus through the tribe of David, and made him a historical being and he remained ever relevant and will be relevant forever. Contrast Jesus with Melchizedek who just appeared as king of Salaam in the Bible without Father, without Mother and Children; has he much relevance?

A gloomy and indeed bleak image of Africa emerges. A continent made up of many nations with multiplicity ethnic nationalities, which are heterogeneous and pluralistic in various forms. A continent whose cream population was enslaved by the West for over four centuries; a continent that developed other continents with her labour and has remained undeveloped. A continent that knew colonialism, neo-colonialism which is imperialism with a style and is presently being cowed with globalization which is Euro designed. Abiola Ireere (I 992:2) holds a number of factors inform our present condition and experience and they include:

- The shallow developmental legacies of European imperialism
- Blistering poverty, hunger and disease (now including a calamitous AIDS epidemic)
- The repressive, corrupt, and inefficient governance of Africa states by their elites since independence.
- Steep economic decline across the continent.
- Crises of political legitimacy due to (1) to (4) above.

A critical analysis of the situation shows you that no list can ever exhaust the litany of woes of the African predicament. Lists can only reveal the complexity of the problem or situation.

The African condition during colonialism was unhealthy but it looked less unhealthy than the African condition presently; where our own elites 'colonize' us. African condition has remained far from being healthy. Okolo (1996: I) continued "Historical existence since the ends of colonialism has been clearly marked by poverty (material and mental) disease, famine squalor, wars, ethnic conflict of different sizes and duration, border clashes, refugees problems overt and covert foreign manipulation and exploitation, coups and counter-coups with resultant tragedies, again, of different kinds magnitude, and so on". No doubt the Europeans through the process of balkanization did inflict much harm on Africa, causing divisions where none existed. Think of the Northern and Southern Cameroon. The question is do we have to inflict more harm on Africa? What of self-inflicted burdens and uses of fratricide wars, ethnic revesilles, internecine wars, border disputes, coups and counter-coups execution of Western orchestrated plots to unseat our governments and cause pandemonium, unstable economic and unworkable political system. Africans have practiced every type of political system practiced by

the Europeans and have not succeeded. They have manufactured ones not strictly socialist, capitalist, or communist and have not succeeded. They have developed home groomed system and have failed. The problem is not with the system but with the operators of the system. If Africans do not change their attitudes, and values, no political system can take them to the promise land.

The power that be in any polity, determines the state of the economy and the economy which is the substratum determines the states of the superstructures in any polity. Lack of adept leadership brought rolls of woes in all spheres of life. Isaac Ukpokolo (1998:41) writes". The steep economic decline has brought many national economies to the verge of collapse. It has led to material deprivation in the land, with situation degenerating to outright destitution in many countries."

Our history is chequered; punctuated with woes of different magnitude. Although we are populous, we have no power, we are powerless. We have lots of human beings but not human resources; materials resources which have not been given quality, in short in every sphere achievement has slipped off our hands. What power do we actually have? What power do we have to exercise by ourselves and for ourselves? We cannot operate the machines without the help of the European experts; we cannot even prepare our budgets without these experts. Do you think they will advise us to pursue a policy of self-reliance where they will cease to make millions of dollars from us? Perhaps the only real power Africans have is the power to "remote control" death, poison each other and eliminate others.

After much trial and error, when all is said and done it does seem that we have shown ourselves incompetent and incapable of having an effective system, reliable communication system and enduring economy. We have equally found it difficult to adapt the technology already developed by Europe to solve our basic problems; in fighting mass illiteracy, food scarcity, disease, tribalism, ethnicism, nepotism and endemic corruption. To fight any of these, we still have to borrow their weapons. Does it mean our forebears never solved problems during their own days before contact with the Europeans? Or does it mean the intelligence quotient of the present Africans is lower than theirs?

In Africa, the value of trade has replaced that of farmers, value of contractors has replaced those of teachers and craftsmen, 419 has replaced the value of investors, value of financial managers that of production managers, financial matter have gained prevalence over production matters. A lot of people now go into service industries. Today only very few people go to make either medium or long time productive investments, lots of people think more of survival than growth. This shows a battered and anemic economy. If the substructure is this way, what happened to the superstructures? Many Africans, especially Nigerians want to make money and not to 'earn' money. This has brought about a cult of 'money-mss-road' from government, people through different ways to destroy the values of the people.

With lassiez faire attitude of the populace toward productive investments, jobs become scare, very scare. Little wonder, there are graduates who have stayed up to six years after graduation without jobs. When this is merged with bureaucratic obstacles, tax evasion etc 'underground economies' emerge in the language of Antonio Alonso- Concheiro (1991:74). This breed's high level of tension in the society, which culminates in existential angst of the African thus: "We (Africans) do not control our land, our lives or our direction. We do not command the means of distribution and production. We do not even earn a reasonable living wage but we were born here and our forefathers claim ownership of the land "We have not really awoken to the challenge of life and the situation. We have not affirmed our existence, unless we affirm ourselves and believe in ourselves then the will to achieve or make any mark on the society or in life will continue to be lacking. We need the will power to make the continent to stand on its own to become great and an enviable one. We need the will to fashion a vision and work this vision into concreteness. For Okolo(1996:3)"self frustration and disgust appear increasingly to characterize his daily (African) mood"

This gloomy condition is compounded all the more by pictures of ethnic conflicts in which Africans slaughter their kith's and kin and devastate cities with weapons they got from Europe. At times you see foreign mercenaries helping one African group in eliminating the other groups. As these wars go on, our foreign reserves diminish and those of Europe accumulate. Ukpokolo (1998:42) stressed "Indeed, a popular image of Africa now is that of ongoing politically induced disruption of life with the attendant insecurity and constant misery. Now, just as the political orientation of any society is correlated to the prevailing economic condition, so are they inevitable tied together in the experience".

Any attempt to proffer solution to the identified problem must keep this fact in view" it is infra dig that Africans find it difficult to settle problems among them unless they invite the Europeans. How many times have the Europeans invited Africans to help them settle their own cases? Is wisdom the traits of any nation or continent?

Is it not insulting ourselves that we dupe our nations as leaders, elites and put these monies in European banks, the Europeans use our wealth to run and develop Europe while our land languish in lack of money? Nigeria for instance, has all it takes to be a respected nation in the globe. Japan had little or no natural resources, but she is today a world power. But Nigerians fly to overseas to treat their ailments. What a shame. Japan and other Asian nations were colonized as we were. It is true that colonialism enmeshed us in a predicament, without equipping us to complete favorably in the capitalist system. The question is having recognized our predicament what have we done? Asian nations had the same problem but today they have outgrown the frugal state structure and crisis of legitimacy. Are we waiting for Europe to develop us? Of course, she cannot be.

When Europe plunged Africa into the capitalist system, it is argued that she introduced Africa to her value, - westernization and modernization. Africa was seen in the vortex of both social and cultural change with a reconstitution and restructuring of her traditional modes of production, social organization, and governance, all these affected her fundamental norms and values and even cultural expression. The fact is that the contact had a mark but this contact did not transform Africa the same way industrial revolution transformed Europe.

Many nations in Africa are despondent; exuded signs of lack where the will to free themselves from domestic, national and international problems are. Africans have remained powerless to be self-reliant, and self-sufficient in virtually every sphere of life. We still import food, fuel, gas, paper, in short everything. We are incapable to fight against the odds of our situation. We have to end this section of African situation with the paradoxes professor Ali Mazarui (1980:23) used to qualify Africa.

- "Africa is the first habitat of man but is the last to be truly habitable"
- "Africans are not the most brutalized of people but are probably the most humiliated in modern history"
- "African societies are not the closest to the West culturally but have been experiencing the most rapid pace of westernization this century"
- "Africa is not poorest of the regions of the world in resources but it is the least developed of the inhabited continent"
- "Africa is not the smallest of the continents but it is probably the most fragmented"
- "Africa is the most central but politically, and to some extent militarily, it may be the most marginal"

Africans have remained nonchalant, despondent, indigent and dependent even politically.

3. AFRICAN VALUES: PRINCIPLES AND CONTENT

The heading is not the same as values in Africa. Values in Africa are more nebulous and confusing for one would not be sure whether one is expected to talk of the present values in Africa or the traditional values. The heading African values tend to suggest a purely speculative and normative treatment against which the present values in Africa can be measured. This makes this work philosophical for anthropology and sociology treat values with descriptive and empirical approaches.

On account of the that fact that knowledge is perspectival, I have skipped from one approach to the other in order to give adequate and more realistic treatment of African values; values can be of immense help if we make it suitably relevant. Our learned friend Kant said that concept without precepts and precepts with concept are empty and blind respectively. The grist for this philosophical analysis must be the hard-data of African traditional culture which is inseparable from African traditional religion.

In the bid to rediscover our traditional values, we may be tempted to romanticize our traditional values; we may be tempted to romanticize our past. This will be twisting history and would not pay (yield) any dividend. Life in a continuum, so there is a nexus between the present and the past.

The present is built on the shoulders of the past. To really understand where we are presently, we need to look back and discover where we were. Akinpelu (1983:32) observed "life can be viewed as an unbroken chain in which the past cannot be divorced from the present nor the present be isolated from the future." President Nyerere as quoted in Cliff. L. et al (1972) must have had this in mind when he wrote "of all the crime 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" Be it as it may, we can still trace and identify some metaphysical beliefs about man, his world and God which are behind the comprehensive system of values Africans parade, the African is first and foremost a society, community being before he becomes an individual. According to Busia, K. A. in Sanders et al (1972: 80) man is only a link in the cycle of being Lambo in Sanders equally held" The Africans find it difficult to conceive a man as purely contemplative being for them human qualities presuppose a world of human relations. Thus the influence of group consciousness is recognized as the motivating influence of ideas and thought".

African values are not based on the rationality of man, or divine revelation rather they are man-centred for man occupies the central position in Africa and invariable community-based. By implication they are practical and pragmatic they work and are functional. Dzobo in Brown and Hiskett (eds) (1975): 76) writes thus; they come from the flux of African life both past and present with emphasis on past experience.

Now let us take a look at the principles which are behind the African traditional values and examine them one after another. One thing remains valid, that as traditional values are man- centered, great value is placed on human life, so our value system is humanistic.

4. THE DIGNITY OF MAN

Man sees himself as the centre of the universe. God made him the focus in the universe peopled by a lot forces. Parrinder (1970:85) expressed it thus. "At apex was God the Supreme Being, on the two sides were great spiritual powers manifested in gods and ancestors, and at the base were the lower powers of magic. In the middle was man under the influence of many different kinds of power? Human life is of great importance, hence is regarded as sacred and cannot be taken away with impunity. A cursory look and in depth analysis of everything that happens in the traditional life of Africans suggest that every religious practice is geared towards preservation of the human life Ezeanya (1976:6) scribbles, offerings to evil spirits sacrifices and prayers to divinities and God, consultations of oracles, divination, magic and even the use of charms have one aim- the preservation of life.

The sacredness of life is not universal for it cannot be applied to every person in the same way. At times human beings were sacrificed in order to preserve life of the community or in obedience to the command of a deity or divinity. Think of the killing of Ikemefuna in Umuofia by Okonkwo in Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart.

Basden (1996: 127) held" it was forbidden to eat a member of ones own community" By implication, one can eat another from another community. Placide Tempels (1969: 142) made it clear "Towards a foreigner of equivalent status, injustice has no longer the same. Character of "injustice" as against the elder or brother of a clan, hence the act of injustice committed against a "non-native" belongs to a different species of moral.

5. BELIEF IN LIFE AFTER DEATH

For the Africans, life does not end here. Death is only a passage, a transition into life in the beyond. There is an element in man that is immortal. Awolalu (1972:1 16) states" One central theme runs through the African concept of man's destiny: namely, that the death, while the carcass is buried in the earth, the essential person passes on into another life, it is held responsible for deeds or misdeeds, and it is rewarded or punished accordingly by the author of life...." Since the life one lives here determines ones life in the beyond this belief has great effect on the life ones lives here; (in the language of Hinduism to avoid Karma) Ezeanya (1979: 15) writes" The belief is therefore another great incentive for the Africans to live a very high standard of morality at all levels,

6. GOD OCCUPIES A UNIQUE PLACE

Though God serves man because of the anthropocentric nature of African understanding of reality does not lose his place. He is uniquely placed as the be all and end all. He is called a lot of names in the Igbo religion, Chineke - the creator, onye Okike the one who can do all things. Mbiti describes him as creator of all things" Moulder, Begetter, Bearer, Maker, Potter, Fashioner, Architect, Carpenter, Originator, Constructor, and so on" though there is no shrine or cult for him he remains the governor of all things.

Belief in him remains unquestionable, it is self-evident. Mbiti (1975:40) holds All African peoples believe in God. They take this belief for granted. It is at the centre of Africa Religion and dominates all its other beliefs".

Pope VI holds that the presence of God permeates African life. Sacrifices and prayers are made to him in reverence and worship and in order to get petitions answered. In his very words" In this spiritual concept, the most important element generally found is the idea of God as the first ultimate cause of all things. The idea of God is prominent and respected in Africa.

These principles lead us to some of the values we will discuss in this paper such as liberation, African family hood, communalism and patriotism.

7. LIBERATION

Man is at the centre of the African word. He is the measure of things, actions and inaction's. What brings him is morally good vice versa. What brings dignity, respect, prosperity, happiness joy and contentment to him and his community is good. An enduring principle of African traditional value-system is Africa humanism. The foundation of morality in Africa is not divine, not supernaturalism rather is either man or custom-oriented (based). Our outlook is humanistic. Wiredu (1980:6) writes something is not good because God approves it rather God approves it because it is good.

A look at the African condition reveals a heart breaking discoveries. Pope John Paul II (1995:40) writes on Africa "One common situation, without any doubt, is that Africa is full of problem. In almost all our nations, there is abject poverty, tragic mismanagement of available scarce resources, political instability and social disorientation. The results stare us in the face: misery, wars. Despair. In a world controlled by rich and powerful nations Africa has practically become an irrelevant appendix, often forgotten and neglected". Africa has acquired the status of the subjugated, exploited, oppressed, underdeveloped continent. In the expression of Franz Fanon, Africa is the wretched of the earth. We (Africans) have been turned into hewers of wood and drawers of water by forces in history such as slavery, colonialism, imperialism, capitalism and the much vaunted globalization which is a heightened form of imperialism. We cannot understand Africa without reference to this existential situation: on this account our operative value should be freedom (liberation). 'Freedom from' and 'freedom to' forms a unity; the former deals with avoidance of restraints, constraints, obstacles inhibiting while the latter deals with efforts made towards realization of development. Freedom connotes responsibility; it leads to maturity.

8. AFRICAN FAMILYHOOD (BROTHERHOOD)

The family system is seen as extended. It includes the parents, the children, aunts, nephews, nieces, grandparents, ancestors, dead, not yet born and even God. Like concentric circle it includes the nuclear family, the village, the community, the tribe in short all of mankind. The African man is a member of his family, village and community before being an individual; He is one of the lines in the 'We'. He is because others are. For Busia in Irvine and Sanders (eds) (1972) the African family embraces the dead, the living and the yet -unborn, and hence the man is just a line in the cycle of being. It is not surprising why every elderly man and woman is addressed as father and mother respectively. The expression 'otu onye adighi amu nwa'- One person does not own a child, confirms the solidarity enunciated in the concept family espoused above.

Africans are their brothers keepers. Onto logically speaking what affects one person affects the other people. Tempels (1969; 03) holds'.... Bantu psychology cannot conceive of man as an individual, as a force existing by itself and apart from its ontological relationships with other living beings" Human beings affect others based on the hierarchy of forces. Parents have greater life forces than their children hence can either reinforce or diminish the forces of their children. This is a value which can

aid and enrich our political life and governance. It is an ideal frame work to practice the virtue of love; where there is love, there will be justice which is the ligament that holds the society together and there will be peace, progress and development

9. COMMUNALISM

This value is highly related to the last. It is an expression of the concept of brotherhood or family hood. It is different from the European's idea of collectivity of individuals in the society. Our society is communal, it is a community. Africans place a lot of emphasis on the solidarity of the group and communion of the members of the group than the needs or even contribution of an individual. An expression says group 'Ofu anye adiro aka ora' - one person is not greater than the group. According to Anyanwu and Ruch (1981 ;230) African society 'does not primarily conceive of the person as an individual but as a member of a kind of 'mystical body' in which he can achieve his full development, his originality and his total potential". This is not so with collectivist societies. It is this African brand of solidarity that is refereed to as communalism.

Communalism can be said to be the traditional and existential life of the African founded on the belief that all human beings are members of the same family - mankind; and deep concern for the welfare of man and the continuous existence of the society. This belief is strengthened by the traditional religion which is a community thing. At the base of communalism is the kingship system. Nkrumah (1964:69) expresses this thus the theoretical basis of African communalism which expresses itself on the social level in terms of institution such as the clans, underlying the initial equality of all the responsibility of many for one". In Africa because of the 'I' being only a part of or a line of the 'We, no individual can rightly affirm himself as a being. In the words of Senghor (19964:599) "he feels and thinks that he can develop his potential, his originality only in and the community in union with all other men even with all other things in the universe: God, animal, tree or pebble". Communalism is a people's self-consciousness that they exist naturally in relation to (themselves) others for their welfare and good of the society. It is the fountainhead of collective life and existence an important element of African religion practices or consciousness. This concept or philosophy can aid in integrating the people and giving them a peculiar kind of identity. Okorocho, Cyril (1992: 16) emphasized "communalism evidenced in group solidarity and popularized through commensality is an essential ingredient of true piety for African people." This practice according Akama (1999:44) is based" on the people cosmology and religion which is all embracing, covering all aspect of their lives. For Diedrich Westermann (1926:425) it is directed by an inclusive and unified attitude toward the world about him and within him.

10. PATRIOTISM

Patriotism flows from patriotic which means according to Joyce Hawkins (ed) (1995:296) loyally supporting one's country. Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary sees it as "Love and loyal or zealous support of one's own country especially in all matters involving other countries". In the distant past because of homo genic entity present in communities and kingdoms the elements that give rise to patriotism were present, our people were patriotic, unlike today communication, social life and oneness has been limited by a litany of factors such as ethnic differences, Language barriers;, Border disputes etc. In the past, our people made great sacrifices for the welfare of their lands, some have to pay the supreme price in the defense of their borders and are acclaimed as heroes. Ezeanya (1979: 17) writes "People so loved their father-land and were so attached to it that even when death occurred outside the fatherland, every effort was made to bring the individual home and bury him with his father's".

Patriotism according to Okoye, G.M.P (1977: 14) has its moral foundation in piety and social basis in the community "because of the inseparability of religion from peoples' way of life, the welfare of the people becomes guaranteed as each kingdom has a god or goddess which is in charge of it and members of the kingdom are afraid of incurring the wrath of these merciless god (s) or goddess (es).

Ezeanya (1979: 17) equally pointed out: "This devotion to the fatherland was essentially linked up with religion. The inhabitants of any given area are together under the special custody of the local divinities to whom each and every member must show love and loyalty and under whose guardianship they are all united".

11. DEMOCRATIC IDEALS

Democracy in a nut shell means "all things to all men". It has been used in modern times to describe different systems. This all purpose application breeds heated confusion, making the concept virtually meaningless. Some even see it as a social way of life. Hampsch (1982: 16) reshaped the definition of Lincoln thus: it means the "government and society which is of the people, by the people and for the people". For Schumpeter (1950: 269) it is "that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the peoples vote." How really is it by the people? Are the people only to produce the government and not operate it? What then happens to the idea of participatory society? For Arnorld Thurma (1937: 40) democracy is a name for a type of organization controlled by voters."

What are the principles of democracy? These include liberty, equality, sovereignty and majority rule. Liberty can be limited. There is nothing like absolute freedom. For Laski (1980: 142) it is the "eager maintenance of that atmosphere in which men have the opportunity to be their best selves." According to Gettel it is the "rights and privileges which the state creates and protects for the subjects". According to Appadorai (1975: 68) it is the "the faculty of willing and the power of doing what has been willed without influence from any other source."

This liberty can be limited by man or nature. We can talk of civil or political liberties. The quality of liberty realizable in any place at any given point in time depends on culture, place and time. Mabott (1970: 57-58) holds "there is no single natural right, which is infact regarded even by its own supporters as sacrosanct. Every one of them is constantly invaded in the public interest with universal approval".

Equality originated in the theories of natural right philosophers of the 17th century and since then people all over the world drum it loud into the ears of other peoples. Ebestein (1980: 10) writes "All men are created equal but not equal in background, upbringing, physical and intellectual endowment ...equality meant not sameness through social conformity but rather the right not to be punished ... for being different; women for not being men, Atheists for not being believers, Black for not being Whites. Constitutions of United States, Germany, Nigeria etc emphasized this equality of mankind. For Jean Jacques Rousseau men are equal by convention and legal right. This principle helps in breaking down class distinctions in the society and making democracy workable. Aristotle in Politics writes "The most pure democracy is that which is so called principally from that equality which prevails in it; for this is what the law in the state directs; ... "

Sovereignty means supremacy. For Appadorai (1975: 48) it is "the power of the state to make laws and enforce the law with all the coercive power it cares to employ". It is the character of the state which makes it impossible for it to be legally bound by another will outside its own.

Scholars differ on where the power lies. Some say it lies in the people, other say in the legislature. Gewirth (1965: 65) holds like Hobbes that it resides in the legislature. He says "there can be but one supreme power which is the legislative..." Again he did recognize the misleading position of the above and holds like Locke and Rousseau that it resides in the people. He says recognizing the fiduciary nature of the organs of government thus" ... yet the legislative being only a fiduciary power to act for certain ends, there still remain in the people a supreme power to remove or alter legislative ..

The people rationally should retain sovereignty as a tool of protection. Jefferson (1965: 97) holds that "independence can be trusted nowhere but with the people "since" they are inherently independent of all but the moral law"

Majority Rule is an essential ingredient of democracy. The majority elect the government of the day. Majority too in the assembly take decisions on policies and not all. Opinions of individuals differ likewise interests."

Everybody is free, each one would want his ideas adopted so as to serve his interests but cannot be. If everybody's consent must be gotten, democracy cannot work. It is assumed that the majority decision can serve the common good and that it can stand for the decision of the whole. Locke (1963: 376) holds "the act of the majority passes for the act of the whole and of course determines, as having the law of nature and the reason, power of the whole". As ideal democracy sets out to achieve unanimously, it will be suicidal to reject majority rule and opt for minority rule for it will be impossible. Attempting to do it will breed chaos.

12. AFRICAN RELIGION AS THE CORNER STONE OF AFRICAN DEMOCRACY

The Holy Writ writes in the Psalms "Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labour in vain". This means that only polities built on God stand. The Vatican Council II pointed this out clearly thus "Only God is great God alone is the beginning and the end. God alone is the course of your authority and the foundation of your laws". The African religion gave a unique place to God in the past and still gives such position to him.

They believe in God. The Africans believe that "it is God, who, both directly and often indirectly through his agents, maintains man and the entire universe in existence" said Ezeanya (1979: 16). This religion believes that if individuals live aright paying homage to God, making sacrifices on their behalf and that of the society, that there will be peace and prosperity.

This African religion is a pervasive force permeating every sphere of life. Mbiti (1970: 1) writes "Religion permeates all departments of life so fully that it is not easy or possible always to isolate it. A study of the religious systems is therefore, ultimately a study of the peoples themselves in all complexities of both traditional and modern life ... "Religion is the be all and end all of Africans, for to be is to be religious. It is the philosophical understanding behind proper understanding of the Africans socio-politico-moral relationship. Absolute dependence on God is at the root of our traditional life. This idea generates the moral steam which holds the polity in order.

Morality flows from the religious creed hence in order not to court the wrath of the gods of the land and ensure a living hope of making a blissful life in the hereafter, the African tries to live a moral life. Every evil committed has social consequences. Morals according to Mbiti (1975: 181) "are the food and drink which keep society alive, healthy and happy. Once there is a moral breakdown, the whole integrity of society also breaks down and the end is tragic ... " Ezeanya (1979: 17) observed this as a native of Africa and penned, "It is this awareness of the unfailing sanction from the divinities that was responsible for the prevalence of law and order in the traditional society where before there were no policemen or soldiers to enforce the laws of the state."

For Akinpelu moral values are separable from spiritual and religious values, but we think the understanding of life as force and force as life in Africa, makes his assertion lose weight. Rather these values though not the same remains inseparable from each other. In Igbo land, one with good character is regarded as a moral person, and one who exhibits this polished character cannot be religious and spiritual unless he has seemingly good character and not good character. Moral values include: chastity, honesty, integrity, modesty, truthfulness, self-discipline, humility, patience, self-control, industry, honour, vivacity, tolerance etc.

Religious value will be value of and respect for human life and dignity. Though it can be deeply grounded if it is based on moral consideration, the fact that our concept of family is very extensive involving us, God, dead and the not-yet born, the moral spiritual values seem to be tied together. There is no doubt that the former deals with man's relations with fellow men and the latter - with man's relations with God. For instance, immortality and reincarnation are spiritual values for Africans; these values cannot be realized unless the individual lives a moral life. Are they not tied then?

These values tend to ground our social relationship within which we have the political life. In every society trust remains at the foundation of every relationship. The values of truth, respect for elders, communalism among others can aid in national integration of the people.

Democracy harmonizes different interests in the society so as to have integration, peace and order which will in turn breed progress and development.

In Igboland for instance, there is respect for the elders and old age. While breaking the morning Kola, the Okpara or the eldest male pray for long life among other things. There is respect for parents, seniors, priests, leaders etc. The demonstration of this filial respect and loyalty is very necessary for the existence of order and peace in the society. Akinpelu holds "There was deep respect (bordering almost on servile obedience) to legitimate and constituted authority, be it that of head of the family or of the Oba, Obi or Emir. This authority is hierarchical but yet democratic, in the sense that it remains legitimate and sacred only for as long as it continued to be exercised in the interest of the governed, and in accordance with the time-honored and sanctified customs and traditions of the people".

There cannot be peace unless there is justice. Justice means recognition of the dignity and worth of the other. For Aquinas it means giving each man his due, neither less or more. Sullivan (1957: 165)

sees it as "a virtue of the will of man's power to choose the good as rationally apprehended-the goods with which the sense of desires are concerned". For Okere (1984) it involves "basic rights and duties and determining and apportioning appropriate shares". It is the yardstick of human interaction and vessel of human rights. It is the oil that lubricates the political gyroscope in a polity.

Peace cannot be without justice. It is then the consequence of the per oxilation of justice in the structural gamut of the society. Justice guarantees welfare of man in the society. Gaudium et Spes emphasized that "Peace cannot be obtained on earth unless the welfare of man is safeguarded and people freely and trustingly share with one another the riches of their minds and their talents."

There is an intricate relationship between justice and peace. Metuh (1992: iii) posited "There can be no peace without justice. Relationship between individuals or groups cannot be said to be beneficently adjusted or in harmony when one of the parties is held in perpetual bondage or subjugated to extreme exploitation and deprivation". Justice is the chief virtue of any polity. Where there is justice, the polity is not dead but alive. The question is, does African religion guarantee justice?

There is no doubt it does, for the understanding that every evil has social consequences and that what happens to one person affects every other person and the harmony of the polity acts as a check on the behaviour of Africans. Again the understanding that every polity is under the guardianship of a divinity who does not spare offenders keeps people on their toes, in their relation towards the others and the divinities or God. Morality is custom and taboo-tied. Agbodike (1999: 27) supports our viewpoint thus: "the violation of a taboo in an African traditional religious and culture setting upsets the relationship between the sacred (God) and the profane (man) as well as between man and his fellow human beings, for which purification and reconciliation become imperative."

Now we go to the value of communalism. We for instance hail from the kindred Umuerechi in Umuria Anaku. The prefix 'Umu' is followed by Erechi showing blood-relationship-children of Erechi. For Nwala (1985: 167) the African political community is "a spiritual commonwealth, involving union of the living blood relatives, the dead and the gods of the community." Though everybody is free, has power and authority, the elders are accorded a higher recognition because of wisdom and experience. Moreover it is believed that their life forces will be greater in intensity as they are now nearer to the living dead of the community. The Bantu say 'if the young were left to themselves, the village would get nowhere.' They may no longer be capable to tell the head from the bottom of a tree hence building of houses will be impossible. They may loose customs, norms, values and may end up without laws then chaos will reign.

Political societies are said to be humanistic and leaders can either get the members pursue the common good through persuasion or force. This is not true of the African society, for the 'I' is only a line in the 'We', the good of one person is tied to the good of every other person. Awogu Olisa (1975: 81) stated that distribution is based on the principle of need and through equitable distribution of common wealth; equality and humanism are attained in the traditional community.

The foundation of all the political manifestations of communalism is ontological. The leader is seen as the channel for the flow of the vital force which holds the polity in being and in shape. The African feels fulfilled when he lives as the society expects him or else why is it not objectionable when the oracle decrees that a human being be sacrificed to it?

The bedrock of a stable and enduring social and political relationship and leadership is educated citizenry. There is great need to enlighten the populace on the values in African religion and culture and how these values will help in making them fulfilled persons. Little wonder, Julius Nyerere echoed "Our first step, therefore must be to re-educate ourselves to regain our former attitude of mind. In our traditional African society we were individuals within a community. We took care of the community and the community took care of us." In traditional Africa the leaders are not changed easily, the office is regarded as sacred and legitimate as long as it is not abused. Authority in traditional African setting is hierarchical and democratic. It remained legitimate when exercised in accordance with 'time-honored and sanctified customs and traditions of the people.' African leaders can be said to be autocratic only in the process of decision-making.

In the process of decision-making because of diversity of interest, the value of tolerance comes in. Akinpelu (1983: 40) writes "in the process there was all the virtue of tolerance, freedom of opinion, and readiness to consider all possible alternatives". This value is desired highly now if democracy will

ever take a hold in African nations due to the extreme religious and cultural pluralism in these nations. Tolerance will help African nations to avoid sterile quarrels and debates which will distract the people in their onward move to development.

The African situation is not wholesome due to tribalism, excessive ethnicity, religious disunity, selfishness, coupled with the barricade thread of evil paraded by globalization capped with the resultant communal clashes. Our strong sense of communal existence, reflected in the cherished values of hospitality and brotherhood can serve in putting in place a democracy with an African spirit, mind and flesh. The efforts of Senghor in his philosophy of Negritude and those of the Nyerere in his Ujamaa postulation remain ideologies to fall on and develop a more existential and pragmatic theory of democracy.

13. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Having come this far, it is the conclusion of this paper that African traditional religion which is inseparable from African culture can not only aid in integrating African polity but equally has all it would take to act as a solid cornerstone and foundation for African democracy. The values of democracy as postulated in the work are all enshrined in the traditional values in African religion and culture. It is equally discovered that these principles of democracy are not as rich and enduring as the values of the traditional religion. The values of tolerance and communalism: espoused in traditional religion are among the resources which can be used to develop democracy and give it a more human face and make it more communal in order to get at participatory society which Ogugua Paul have elsewhere qualified as the acme of democracy.

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