

SPIRITUALISM IN AFRICA AND THE METAPHYSICAL OPERATION OF THE UNIVERSE

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Abstract

The content of this research is of the view that, the Spiritualism and the metaphysical operation of the universe in connection to African environment is not only a topic matter that needs more attention, but it's a reality faced by Africans in totality. Therefore, it posits that the idea of spiritualism and metaphysical operation of the universe in Africa is that which is phenomenal and is made up of both the dual aspect of coexistence among Africans i.e the spiritual and physical environment. The central idea of man and his environment is manifested through the African metaphysics and cultural understanding of personhood in an environment co-habited by other forces which is made up of natural phenomenon which shares the environment with man, such as spirits, animals and plants that all walk around the face of the earth. Due to the important components of a dialect language used in the quest of this studies, the work will arrive at this conclusion after critically analyzing the issues and hermeneutic methods used to clarify the views of some key African conception of land with respect to existence. In addition, this work will try to synthesize the notions of Spirituality and the metaphysical operation of the universe in an African worldview in order to reach at a better understanding of the relationship that thus existed between man and force. An analytic approach will be applied in our quest of this research.

Keywords: Spiritualism, Metaphysical, Operation, Universe and Force.

Introduction

In an attempt to understand the meaning of spiritualism in African and the metaphysical operation of the universe, it would be worthwhile to first explore the concept 'Spiritualism'. Etymologically, it is coiled from a religious word, a movement based on the belief that departed souls can interact with the living. Spiritualists sought to make contact with the dead, usually through the assistance of a medium, a person believed to have the ability to contact spirits directly. Thus, in this

paper, Spiritualism and metaphysical operation of the universe will be used interchangeably, and by universe it is meant worldview. For a further and profound enquiry as to the meaning of worldview, there is a copious cache of literature available in this regard. One needs to glance at the works of eminent scholars like Obi, Mbiti, Kagame, Wambutda, Ejizu, Achebe, Onuoha, Metuh, Ubesie, Ezenweke and Kanu. Very significant to their analysis, is an underlining principle that speaks of spiritualism in African and the metaphysical operation of the universe, which gives a sense of purpose and direction to the lives of people and enables them to act purposefully and exercise a measure of control over their relationship with the universe and their environment. It is in this regard that Obi maintains that Duality of Being answers most of the fundamental questions about the relationship that thus, exists between personhood and universe. This cannot be done outside the ambience of supernatural forces or powers. Africans perceive, conceive and contemplate their universe from a dual perspective not the way the universe is conceived by the West but conceived their world as a bond of linking everything into everything; the lens through which they see reality, which affects their ancestors, their value systems; it is the African's search for the meaning of life, and an unconscious but natural tendency to arrive at a central stage of the universe as existing within one.

Metaphysical Operation of the Universe

Thus, for (Nyang 2) in his article *Reflections on 'Traditional African Cosmology'*, he stated that: Africa was, and still is, rich in cosmological ideas. Though the diversity of Africa's religious and cosmological heritage has been little known outside of the continent, the intensive researchers of Africanists around the world and the growing global interest in the African world have combined to draw attention to what could be Africa's spiritual gift to humanity. This gift is less understood by many Africans, even much less by the greater majority of non-Africans. Africa's traditional cosmology is diverse, but behind this diversity lays the core of shared beliefs which spread across the continent. This research does not plan to bring out the differences operation of the universe; rather, it seeks to construct a framework of analysis out of the body of ideas that researchers in the field have agreed upon as the common elements in the various cosmological and ontological systems among Africans in their quest for understanding the ways and manners the world operates.

Thus, for Metu, Thempels the main principles of the African-centred worldview on the operation of the universe are:

the interconnectedness of all things “*vital force*”; the spiritual nature of human beings; collective individual identity; the collective/inclusive nature of family structure; the oneness of mind, body and spirit; and the value of interpersonal relationships (12).

As with the Indians, the Brazilians and as the Israelites distinguished the *Pure* from the *Umpire*, so beings are differentiated from each other in the African ontology into various species according to their vital powers (Tempels 29). *Levenskrach* or their inherent vital ranks. *Levenskrach*. Above all, force the Supreme Being, spirits and create, the *Mwine Bukomo Bwandi*. It is He who has force, power, in Himself. He gives existence, power to survive and power of increase, to other forces. In relation to other forces, He is *He who increases*. After Him comes the first fathers of men, founders of the different clans. These arch patriarchs were the first to whom the Supreme Being communicates His vital force, with the power of exercising their influence on all posterity.

They constitute the most important chains binding man to the Supreme Being. They occupy so exalted a rank in African thought that they are not regarded merely as ordinary dead. They are longer named among the means and by Africans, they are called the *Spiritual Beings*, beings belonging to a higher hierarchy, participating to a certain degree in the divine force. After those first parents comes the dead of the tribe, following their order of primogeniture. They form a chain through which the links of which the forces of the elders exercise their vitalizing influence on the living generation. Those, after the dead. The living on earth rank, in fact the living belong in accordance with primogeniture and their vital rank, that is to say according to their vital power.

Thus, according to Tempel:

Man is not suspended in thin air. He lives on the land, were he finds himself placed by nature to be the sovereign vital force, ruler of the land and everything that thus, existed on it; call it man, animal or plants. The eldest of the group or of the clans is, for the Africans, by the divine law the sustainer or sustaining link of life, building ancestors and their descendants (30).

It is he who reinforces the life of his people and of all inferior forces, animals' vegetations and inorganic objects that exist, grow or live on the foundation which the universe provides for the welfare of humanity.

Thus, it has been said by (Mbiti 9) that African ontology is a religious one and that "the key to our understanding of the basic religious and philosophical concepts, is the African concept of time." He went on to argue that: "according to traditional African concepts, time is a two-dimensional or a dual phenomenon, with a long past, a present and virtually no future." (17) These formulations of Mbiti have given currency to the view that, to the old African, history consists of two parts, namely the *Sasa* and the *Zamani*. The former is composed of all the events which in Western or linear concept of time would be considered as the future. This concept, in the writings

of Mbiti, is taken as that dimension which embraces all events that are about to occur or are in the process of occurring or have recently occurred. It is also understood as the most meaningful period of the individual. The latter, on the other hand, is described by Mbiti as the macro-time which embraces all the past events that link the beginning of things to the present unfoldment of events in the universe. In his view, *Zamani* is more than the past, it is, as he suggests "the graveyard of rime." *Zamani*, therefore, is not only the period of termination, but also the period of myth. The conceptual scheme of Mbiti does help one understand the particularisms of African thought, but it certainly, will not be the last point in the debate over the African concept of history. I also think (J.N.K. Mugambi 32) was correct when he wrote that: Mbiti's linguistic basis for his conclusions on the absence of indefinite future in African thought is too simplistic. Indeed, much research needs to be done on the matter, but we can agree here that Mugambi is quite correct in saying that: "To assert that Africans do not conceive of a future beyond two years - is to imply in the same assertion that Africans do not have any traditional means or principles by which they ensure a perpetuation of their communities" (18).

After presenting Mbiti's interpretation of the African conception of history, let me briefly offer an alternative conceptual scheme while drawing on the same findings of Mbiti and others in the field. As suggested in our discussion on the nature of African traditional man, the African's view of the destiny of man is that of a gradual and peaceful transition from the human world to the spiritual world. In my view, the key concept in traditional African thought is the cosmic schizophrenic tendencies of man. By this I mean that traditional African man sees himself as a citizen of three different worlds at the same time. This is to say that he lives in (a) the world of concrete reality, (b) the world of social values, and (c) the world of ineffable self-conscious.

The first world is that of man, trees, stars, inanimate objects and phenomena. The second is that of "vital force" the value governing the mental and spiritual processes of man and his world. The third is that of unreachable and inexpressible spiritual powers forces acting upon each other. When analyzed carefully, the beliefs and thought patterns of the traditional African man could be fitted into the three major ontological categories. The tendency of the students of African religions to assert that Africans do not worship one god is due to this cosmic schizophrenic behavior *inman*. In the African concept, traditional man places the high god in the world of ineffable self-conscious. Though he shuttles between this particular world and the other two, his ontological makeup seems to incline him more to the realms of concrete reality and social values respectively.

The Relationship that Exists between Spirit Beings and Vital Forces

There is a very close relationship between the **spirit beings** and the **mystical or impersonal powers and forces** in Africa. This realm of the supernatural operates mystical power, magic, witchcraft, sorcery and many others. The spirit world or the realm of the supernatural is, in a sense, a battleground of spirits and powers that use their mystical powers to influence the course of human life and his environment. These mystical powers of forces responsible for various actions can be designated as positive or negative, good or evil, which may bring blessings or curses according to their point of action.

Thus, according to Yusufu Turaki in his *Africa Traditional Religious System as Basis of Understanding Christian Spiritual Warfare*, is of the view that:

If man only master and control the realm of the supernatural and natural, then the world would be at peace. This is because the vital force and spirit beings behind all human quest to control or influence nature had produced a variety of specialists such as medicinemen, rainmakers, mediums, diviners, sorcerers, magicians and witches. Superstitions, totems, taboos and rituals grew out of such beliefs (6).

For safety and protection in a world dominated by the spirit beings and powers, one needs a spiritual compass for guidance and practical efforts for control, protection and security through religious rites, reverence to ancestors, symbolic totems and regulative taboos, rituals, superstitions, customs and specialists. For guidance and protection in life, one needs some, if not all, of these. As we have already observed, in the African traditional thought system, spirits are believed to dwell or inhabit certain trees, rocks or mountains, caves, rivers, lakes, forests, animals, human beings, the skies, the ground and other cites, carved or moulded objects, charms, amulets.

The spirit beings are usually divided into two categories: (1) the spirits of the dead elders (the ancestors) and (2) the non-human spirit beings. The ancestors are close to the humans and serve as their custodians. All spirit beings are endowed with certain powers and they apply these powers upon the humans for their good or for their harm. Because the spirit beings are malicious, capricious and sometimes benevolent, man must be wise in his dealings with the spirit beings. They can easily be angered, provoked or injured by the humans and so man requires tact and wisdom in dealing with them. In dealing with both the impersonal (mystical) powers and the spirit beings, man needs human specialists who have gained experience and access to these two types of mysteries to help them live a successful life and acquire good human well-being. These spirit beings can be “manipulated” to serve the humans or vice versa.

This belief, just as in the case of the previous one, has a theological basis. Christianity must recognise and study this very theological basis of the traditional African belief in the existence of spirit beings. The religious and social role and function of this belief in the spirits must be thoroughly studied and understood.

The Nature of Spiritual Forces in African Metaphysics

Some scientists view Africa as the mother continent of the entire world's people. Africa has a very rich heritage of what previous generations of African people thought, did, experienced and passed on to their children. However, this heritage is not uniform. Thus, Mbiti describes the heritage under the following three headings: “firstly, historical heritage - where he describes African life in general; secondly, the cultural heritage - the way people act and live as well as their physical and intellectual achievements; and thirdly, he refers to religious heritage (4-10)”. He indicates that religious heritage may also be viewed as culture. According to the researcher, these three distinctions are so closely related that it can be captured under the umbrella term *spirituality*. Spirituality is not always religious but is always concerned with the quest for meaning of life. When such a quest involves an explicit reference to the Supreme Being, then that spirituality is religious (Amanze 1). This becomes the major reason why Wellman, Perkins & Wellman comes up with the view that:

Spirituality' then is not defined by an explicit set of religious beliefs or practices. On the contrary, spirituality does not need religion at all to define itself ... Spirituality, therefore, is more about how people identify themselves, how they view the world, interact with others, and make decisions (2).

Thinking about spirituality in Africa, this understanding of spirituality is most applicable, as it complements the holistic African worldview.

According to this understanding, Africa is a continent with a vast plethora of spiritualities some of which originated on African environment and others developed through individual contact with people from other parts of the universe. It needs to be stressed that there is not just one single African conceptualization of spirituality, although many of the characteristics of the African notion of spiritualism are said to act upon each other, but it may have different interpretations. It is in this regard that Nürnberger further states that:

Religions for African are not a fixed and watertight systems of meaning, but subject to internal change and external impact. Moreover, if genuine, they respond to changing needs and perceptions of reality. Religious assumptions

are always in historical flux, integrating elements from outside, reacting to new experiences, producing new intuitions. What matters in particular cases is not the ostensibly 'original' form of an African spirituality, which may or may not have been practised centuries ago, but its present, living form. (35)

Conclusion

Despite the abrasive effect of this westernization of the original conception of the African connection to spiritualism and the metaphysical operation of the universe, this research serves as an eye opener to the belief that Africans have the ability to recreate a system and an agreement that exists between the dual nature of the universe and spiritualism in Africa. It should be believed that this recovery can be made through a return to the mysticism of force. The western world has much more to gain the moment the self-consciousness is regained. Thus, the influence and impact of this traditional belief upon the African practices and behaviour of traditional Africans must be carefully studied and addressed by other researchers. A metaphysical understanding of the relationship that exist between **spiritual, environmental, metaphysics and forces** should be made based on the African conception of the universe.

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