

THE CENTRALITY OF MAN IN AFRICAN COSMOGONIC ORDER

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Abstract

Repetitions are often said to be for emphasis, especially in situations of seeming nefarious neglect. In contemporary religiosity history, humans seem relegated to divine-related cosmogonies, especially in Africa. A gap to the point that robots take over human positions like in rituals and worship chiefly, against mankind's central connection in cosmogonies or rather religious history. Recallable, most African mystical religious traditions were declared idolatrous at the inception of some missionary religions which affected cosmogony, the history of the cosmos. This understandably involves the story of creation or origin of the world and the place of humans in it according to the African religious concept. The divine controls the physical no doubt but without worshippers or humans, certain gods if not all would go extinct. This warrants a 21st-century reminiscence of the centrality of man at least in the African cosmogonic order. This qualitative research, with a phenomenological approach same time multi-dimensional as allowing historio-comparative analysis, advocates the enculturation, or 'africanisation' of all religions. So to give more cognizance to African religious arts. Enthroning thus, right information and understanding otherwise socio-religio-reasonable reasoning for a more progressive society. Of all the wealth the world possesses, the most decisive and important is the people. This research guided by the functionalism theoretical framework emphasizes that cosmogony remains a source of social solidarity and cohesion if it provides succour and functional unity. So, it recommended that non-inimical thoughts serving humanity some good be simply tolerated for good services to society conclusively.

Keywords: Religion; African Cosmogonic Order; Man; Centrality

Introduction

Some world cosmological chronology remains orderly and retains records or cosmogonies in a sequence that cannot be distorted. Sources of information like art forms, institutions (sacred kingship, priesthood, chieftaincy titles, initiation rites, festivals, other observances) and oral traditions (myths, proverbs, names, riddles, daily speeches, prayers, invocations, blessings, curses, oaths, spells, songs)¹ amongst others, stress some cosmogonic order. Consistently and depending on event, there has remained 'a beginning and an end,' of which, creation or rather human history has been directed by this imperative. That has also accentuated a centrality of focus in the cosmogonic order, both of events and beings. Human serves as an intermediary between human

¹ E. E. Nwosu. "African Religious Thought in Traditional Marriage and Family: The Ngwa Experience," *Journal of the Nigerian Association for the Study of Religions* Vol. 26 No 1. (Makurdi: Obeta Continental Press, 2016), p.39.

and spirit beings or rather divine and other lives.² For instance, the Christian tradition, basing itself largely upon the accounts of creation, has insisted that humanity is the height of God's creation, set over and above the animal kingdom.³ Islam corroborates nearly the same narrative. Thus the world was created by God's word, *Kun* ("Be") out of nothing after the creation of the angelic beings from light. As well, Adam was formed from clay and destined to be God's vicegerent, *khalīfah*.⁴ The idea remains irrevocable in many religious worldviews, whether or not of the book, and also, not minding whether such religion's scripture provided any classified anthropology.

Howbeit, there is the existence of the most number of principles, concerning the very important nature of humanity which is based on other scriptural doctrines or beliefs. This makes an interesting study timelessly, for groups and individuals in religion. For Africa and her religion particularly, there remains the love and need of regular retouch of such essential foundational ideologies, for the upcoming, especially in Africa's phenomenal history and cosmology. Amongst other reasons, the purpose is both pragmatic and soteriological. Could one determine how creation came into being, one could reverse it or overcome it and be saved. For more enlightenment, therefore, is this study via African traditional religious concept on, 'the centrality of man in African cosmogonic order,' and, guided by Ubuntu philosophy.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework employed in this research is Ubuntu philosophy and its prominent proponents include, Nelson Mandela (the South African anti-apartheid leader), Desmond Mpilo Tutu (Anglican Archbishop) and Mabogo Percy (South African philosopher).

Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, 18 July 1918 to 5 December 2013, was born in Umtata, Cape of Good Hope, South Africa. The nationalist and statesman whose long imprisonment (1962–90) and subsequent ascension to the presidency (1994) symbolized the aspirations of South Africa's black majority. He led the country until 1999. The son of Chief Henry Mandela of the Xhosa-speaking Tembu people, Nelson, renounced his claim to the chieftainship to become a lawyer. He attended the University College of Fort Hare and studied law at the University of Witwatersrand.

² E.E. Nwosu and O.E. Ekpenyong, "the Role of Agwu (Divinity of Divination) in Human Quest for Resource Control in Nigeria," *International Journal of Integrative Humanism*, Volume 12, Number 1, (Cameroon: University of Yaounde 1, March 2020), p.195.

³ T. Austin-Sparks. *What is Man?* (Indiana: Premium Literature Co Indianapolis, 1946), p.9.

⁴ "Creation," *Encyclopaedia Britannica Ultimate Reference Suite 2010* (Link unavailable), Assessed 7/10/2024.

He passed the qualification exam to become a lawyer and in 1952 opened a firm with Oliver Tambo. In 1944 he joined the African National Congress or ANC, a black-liberation group, and in 1949 became one of its leaders. Mandela and de Klerk worked to end apartheid and bring about a peaceful transition to nonracial democracy in South Africa. In 1993 they were awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace for their efforts. In April 1994 South Africa held its first all-race elections, which were won by Mandela and the ANC. Mandela's writings and speeches were collected in *No Easy Walk to Freedom* (1965) and *I Am Prepared to Die*, 4th revised edition, (1979). His autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*, was published in 1994.⁵

Desmond Mpilo Tutu was born, on 7 October 1931 and died, in 2021, in Klerksdorp, South Africa. Ordained an Anglican priest in 1961, he lectured at a theological seminary in Johannesburg. In the late 1960s, he moved to London, where he obtained an M.A. from Kings College, London. Archbishop Tutu was an activist and played a pivotal role in the fight against apartheid, thereby promoting reconciliation and forgiveness. He opposed apartheid through non-violent resistance, an advocacy with Nelson Mandela and other anti-apartheid leaders.⁶ *The Divine Intention*, a collection of his lectures, was published in 1982 and *Hope and Suffering*, a collection of his sermons, was published also in 1983. Consecrated a bishop in 1985 he was enthroned Johannesburg's first black Anglican pontiff, and in 1986 was elected the first black archbishop of Cape Town. Thus becoming the Primate of South Africa's 1,600,000-member Church and then retired from the primacy in 1996. Recallable is, in 1995 President Nelson Mandela appointed Tutu head of, the Truth and Reconciliation Committee, which investigated allegations of human rights abuses during the apartheid era. Again, in 1988 Tutu became chancellor of the University of the Western Cape in Bellville, South Africa, before he transited in 2021.

Mabogo Percy More (1947-2018) was born in Sekhukhuneland, South Africa. An outstanding philosopher, academic and author widely known for his work on, African Ubuntu philosophy and intercultural dialogue. He studied philosophy at the University of the North for his BA and MA and at the University of Vienna, for his PhD. He taught philosophy at the

⁵ "Mandela, Nelson R." *Encyclopaedia Britannica 2010 Ultimate Reference Suite* (Link unavailable), assessed 30/10/2024.

⁶ "Tutu, Desmond M." *Encyclopaedia Britannica 2010 Ultimate Reference Suite* (Link unavailable), assessed 30/10/2024.

University of the North and the University of Pretoria. He explored Ubuntu's meaning, significance and applications in modern society.⁷ Famous more for his books, *the Philosophy of Ubuntu* 1996, *African Philosophy: Identity and Culture* 1998, *Looking Through Philosophy: Reflections on African Philosophy* 2004 and *Ubuntu and the Law: African Ideals in Law* 2017.⁸ He passed away in 2018.

An interesting background is accordingly formed in the proponents of Ubuntu philosophy here traced. The Ubuntu philosophy is an African ethical and philosophical framework, which emphasises community, interconnectedness and interdependence prominently. Such, well fits this work. The term originates from the Nguni Bantu language, roughly translating to: humanity towards others or *I am because we are*. Its key values depict, interconnectedness, reciprocity, empathy and respect. Keeping that individuals are part of the larger community as well that individual actions affect others and the community. Thus requiring the understanding and sharing of each other's experiences, through which there be respect for other's dignity and, otherwise, value for humanity. Its philosophical implications amongst others included a challenge of individualism with an emphasis on cooperation for collective wellbeing.⁹ To the mind of this research, the spirit beings are part of the community of beings or simply, spirit and human beings belong to a community of beings and relate at least in worship, as the spiritual controls the physical which also manifests the spiritual. What a wonderful marriage of the two beings and interconnectivity.

In further religious application, Ubuntu has deep connections with various religious traditions – African Traditional Religion interchangeable as ATR, Christianity and Islam, a religious unity classified and clarified by Mbiti as, African indigenous religions.¹⁰ Also, Buddhism emphasises interconnectedness and compassion), as well, Hinduism's focus on community and collective responsibility agrees with Hindu concepts of dharma and karma, still linking Ubuntu. It yet does not ignore the culture of the area, Africa, which in itself does not take unity lying low. No doubt therefore, the emphasis on, collective responsibility of even shared accountability for community wellbeing; summarise-able in the core concepts: *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (a person is a person because of other people); or,

⁷ "Mabogo Percy More," *Encyclopaedia Britannica 2010 Ultimate Reference Suite* (Link unavailable), assessed 30/10/2024.

⁸ "M. P. More," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, assessed 30/10/2024.

⁹ en.wikipedia.org, retrieved, 7/10/2024.

¹⁰ J. S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, (London: Heinemann Press, 1977), p.229.

I am because we are, simply put, *Ubuntu ngumutu* (humanity towards others) which is extensive to the spirit world.¹¹ No matter the critics' claims of Ubuntu's overemphasis on the collective over individual rights, or, the potential for cultural homogenization due to the insinuations of growing from African traditional religion and cultures, yet, its global ethics and human rights, stand tall. Ubuntu philosophy offers a unique perspective on human relationships, community and responsibility not only social but religious too, its overlap beyond humans to the supersensible world cannot be overemphasised. The religious implication therefore is wonderful in interfaith dialogue and contextual theology. Ubuntu fosters understanding and cooperation among diverse faiths which involves the two beings (human and spirit) involved in religion. Invariably it becomes arguable that Ubuntu informs African indigenous theological perspectives (contextual theology).

African Cosmogonic Order

The directional use of African cosmogonic order here connects cosmogony, which is more or less religious. 'Cosmogonic' hence is an adjectival of cosmogony which in astronomy, for instance, is the study of the evolutionary behaviour of the universe and the origin of its characteristic features.¹² Order is a kind of sequence or, how people or things are arranged about each other.¹³ It is contextually traced via African religiosity *ad hoc*. Ekeopara corroborates that, order and stability can only be meaningful when applied to the situation of life (*sitz-im-lebem*),¹⁴ and there is no life including science, at least in the physical that is void of order, which again, anchors religiosity. In Hinduism for instance, Vedic literature contains accounts of the origin of the universe, that the creator built the universe with timber as a carpenter builds a house. In Greek religion, a true cosmogonic and cosmological myth deals centrally with the origins, structuring, and functional principles of the universe. Hellenistic religion also employs myths about the origin and ordering of the world.¹⁵ Thus, specifying that cosmogonies deal with the origins of the world

¹¹ en.wikipedia.org, retrieved, 7/10/2024.

¹² "Merriam-Webster's Dictionary and Thesaurus," *Encyclopaedia Britannica 2010 Ultimate Reference Suite* (Link unavailable), assessed 30/10/2024.

¹³ A.S. Hornby, *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary International Student's Edition*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p.1035.

¹⁴ C.A. Ekeopara, *Ethical Order and Stability in Traditional Igbo Society*, (Calabar: Excel Publishers Nigeria, 2011), p. 28.

¹⁵ "Hellenism" *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, assessed 30/10/2024

and cosmologies deal with the ordering of the world. In no doubt, there are as many cosmogonies traceably as one would desire. From the referent background, this work on African Traditional Religion interchangeable as ATR, puts forth a working definition simply thus, cosmogony is the history of the origin of the universe with some religious bias.

It involves the story of the creation or origin of the world and the place of humans in it according to the African religious concept. This shall take us back to sources of ATR. But before that is to say that, Africa is a continent conceived to be highly religious in every sense of religiosity. Her heritage and mega culture can be said to be religious and she never doubts anything about God or the divine most of the time. Little wonder Mbiti's claim that religion permeates into all the departments of life so fully that it is not easy or possible always to isolate it.¹⁶ Probably the greatest influence upon the education, thinking and living of Africa or culture generally, has some backing in her religion. Her history invariably is of her religion to a very large extent. Cosmogony here includes cosmology or worldview at the safest referent, ascertaining the conception of reality. Ogbu Kalu recalls that the African worldview is predominantly religious, both human life and nature are held sacred, intricately intertwined and under the governance of God, the Supreme Being and His multifarious divinities.¹⁷ Although God, divinities and other spiritual beings remain in existence, much of the activities in the world are undertaken by humans. To some extent, it nearly becomes easy to say that human sends the divine on errands, of course, that happens in witchcraft.¹⁸ Even at that, there needed some constructed number of controls, like the character of moral uprightness, peace with the divine and men; a condition in which the situation of life and everything in society is controlled, as it should be, where individual beings perform their correct functions in society.¹⁹ Ironically still, in the human-divine relationship, all is controlled by cosmology believed to have been put in place from time also by humans. We make man the entry point as designated by the framing of the topic.

Man (Human):

¹⁶ J. S. Mbiti, 1.

¹⁷ O. U. Kalu, *African Cultural Development*, (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers Nigeria, 1978), p.43.

¹⁸ E.E. Nwosu, "Contemporary Consideration of Metamorphosis of the Structure of African Traditional Religion," *International Journal of Humanitatis Theoreticus*, Volume 4, Number 1. (Cameroon: University of Yaounde 1, September 2020), p.196.

¹⁹ -- Ekeopara, 28.

At the mention of man, the minds of many scholars including Ninian Smart, go to man and his religion.²⁰ Nonetheless to come from some narrow sense is to lightly examine man from what man here, is not. Man here is not the town in western Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast). Situated along the Ko River, in a mountainous area (Massif de Man) on the eastern edge of the Nimba Range, in the continent of Africa.²¹ Anthropology, the scientific comparative study of mankind, from human's first appearance to any time present,²² with archaeological, biological, primatology (study of primates) and paleopathology (study of diseases in prehistory) is not attainable here, though it may apply indirectly.

In this usage, man is generic.²³ It involves both male and female, or it means human. Man in African religion is a creature of God. A culture-bearing primate that is anatomically similar and related to the other great apes. However, man is distinguished by a more highly developed brain and a resultant capacity for articulate speech and abstract reasoning. Humanity is identifiable with several distinct traits, such as *homo sapiens* (a rational being), *homo symbolicus* (a symbol-using and meaning-seeking being) or *homo viator* (a being that hopes).²⁴ J. Omoregbe avers that human is composed of both material and spiritual elements. The material element is his physical body while the spiritual element is the soul. This supports the acceptance into the annals of cosmogonies, that human is of two extents, spiritual and physical.²⁵ But Ikenga-Metuh rather argues that the African doctrine of man does not admit the dualism which is characteristic of Greco-Roman culture. Man is not split into two conflicting principles, the body and the soul...rather one unit.²⁶ Dead or alive, human retains a vital bond with nature, God, deities, ancestors, the tribe, the clan, the extended family and self. Each of the components of life forces in a man is a channel for maintaining this relationship.²⁷ Also in spirituality, humanity is a principal actor in all life

²⁰ N. Smart, *The World Religions*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.9.

²¹ -- en.wikipedia.org, assessed 7/10/2024.

²² G. Ferraro, *Cultural Anthropology, An Applied Perspective 5th ed.* (Belmont: Thompson Wadsworth USA, 2004), p.5.

²³ F. B. Sinclair and D.F. Wright, *New Dictionary of Theology*, (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press England, 1991), p.28.

²⁴ E.E. Nwosu, "Religion, Culture and Morality from the African Background," *AKSU Diakonia, Journal of Religion and Culture*, (Uyo: AKSU Press, 2018), p.272.

²⁵ J.I. Omoregbe, *Comparative Religion, Christianity and other World Religions in Dialogue*, (Lagos: Joja Press Limited Nigeria, 2002), p.183.

²⁶ E. Ikenga-Metuh, *Comparative Studies of African Traditional Religions*, (Onitsha: IMICO Publishers Nigeria, 1987), p.183.

²⁷ -- Ikenga-Metuh, 189.

activities. Nwosu explains that virtually everything revolves around and depends on it, as the highest of physical beings.²⁸ Many scholars especially, Mpigi and Alokwu consent to this thought, like in, deconstructing the Christian theology of otherworldliness.²⁹ This is more or less a warranty in which, human is variously studied in most disciplines. Human beings display marked characteristics and a variety of advanced abilities, describable as culture and believed by many, to go beyond the physical world. About the human study, Ikenga-Metuh outlined Man in the universe, God and man's destiny, man and other life forces, and man and society;³⁰ thus painted a picture of its complexity.

There are also evolutionary theories on the origin and progress of human beings. But, the majority of the religions of the world, including Christianity, accept the origin of humanity from the divine, against evolutionary theory(s). Moss (1961) and Hammond (1965) up to 21st century religious scholars and systematic theologians, have never ceased to make frantic observations about humanity's religious inclination. For instance, Moss alleges that,

Most doctrines of the nature of humanity (man) are either optimistic or pessimistic. Some hold, with Rousseau, that man is naturally kind and good, and that humanity's (his) present miserable state is due to ignorance and false guides. Others, with Hobbes and Freud, claim that humanity (he) is a vile, savage creature whose apparent goodness is always the product of selfishness or lust.³¹

The Christian doctrine of humanity differs profoundly from both. It is neither optimistic nor pessimistic. Humanity was created wholly good but underdeveloped. Humanity by own fault became a fallen being. Between the Divine conception and its ultimate realization is all the tragedy of human disruption, and all the glory of Divine grace in redemption. Though margins between religions appear tiny, the scope here is ATR.

In the words of Awolalu and Dopamu, ATR recognises humanity's relationship with God essentially in three ways. The creation of humans is God's work, man is related to God in consequence of the essence of being which can only be put in man by the Supreme Deity, and, the belief that it is the Supreme Being who seals the destiny of man. We find that man, before his birth, at his birth,

²⁸ -- E.E. Nwosu, 270.

²⁹ C.O. Alokwu and G.M. Mpigi, "Deconstructing the Christian Theology of Otherworldliness: a Panacea for Environmental Sustainability," *Journal of Religion and Culture, Department of Religious and Cultural Studies, University of Port Harcourt, Volume 18 Number 1*, (Choba: University of Port Harcourt Press, 2018), p.2.

³⁰ -- Ikenga-Metuh, 189.

³¹ T.C. Hammond, *In Understanding Be Men*, (London: Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1965), p.146.

throughout life, and at his death is inseparable from God, but closely related to Him.³² Corroborating, Mbiti thinks out and aloud too that the African ontology is anthropocentric.³³ Man is at the very centre of existence, and African peoples see everything else about this central position of humans. Apart from names like *madudinkpa* (human is important) and *maduka* (human is head of all wealth and life), and so on; there are many myths of origin supportive of the centrality of humans in Africa's cosmogony as Mbiti rightly recalls.

The Kakwa and Tiv narrate that the first men did not know how to cultivate until God taught them the art of raising crops on the ground. According to Acholi, He taught them cooking, beer-making and hunting; according to the Bambuti, He taught them how to forge metals - something essential to the Pygmy life of hunting. From these and other examples, we see that God and His presence provided for the main needs of mankind: food, knowledge of fundamental skills, domestic animals, light and fire, weapons and tools, children, doctors and medicines, on top of immortality, or rejuvenation or rising again after death.³⁴

Consequently, the myths stress human centrality, for which humanity interacts with God, and practices morality, norms and values; thereby human is certified as political, social and most of all, religious beings. Its personality and actions within the environment; as well, as sanctions for control, maturation, socialization and the development of the entire society, even religious culture are all informed by its perception of the world or cosmology.

Human and Worldviews

The centrality of man in African cosmogony is rooted in worldview. Man, rather than humanity's perception of the world, is called worldview or cosmology. It is simply how the religious mind views reality;³⁵ although literally, cosmology is the scientific study of the universe, its origin and development.³⁶ A look at perception of the world becomes necessary, for science education deals with things that providence has given. But, attitudes of awe, wonder, and humility

³² J.O. Awolalu and P.A. Dopamu, *West African Traditional Religion*, (Ibadan: Onibonje Press, 1979), p.155.

³³ -- Mbiti, 92.

³⁴ -- Mbiti, 96.

³⁵ C. I. Ejizu, *Between Religion and Morality: Their Inter-Connection and Significance in Public Life, An Inaugural Lecture Series No. 59*, (Choba: University of Port Harcourt Press, 2008), p.27.

³⁶ "Cosmology," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, assessed 30/10/2024.

before the facts are essential if humans are to be in harmony with both the environment and the creator. This understanding turns many to religion. In all religions more so from our background worship in ATR, cosmology is prevalent.³⁷ However, whether it be Christianity or otherwise, religion is fundamentally a worldview. Aligning with Ninian Smart, the importance of understanding the world's worldviews is stressed at least in three ways. First, they are a vital ingredient in the varied story of humankind's various experiments in living. Second, to grasp the meanings and values of the plural cultures of today's world, we need to know something about the worldviews which underlie them. Third, we may as individuals be trying to form our own coherent and emotionally satisfying picture of reality, and it is always relevant to see the great ideas and practices of various important cultures and civilizations.³⁸

Agreeably, it provides a unified picture of the cosmos, consisting usually of interconnected beliefs,³⁹ ideas and symbols that seek to explain rationally the order in the universe *cosmogonically*. Humanity advances in personal life including salvation, as much as one sees and hopes to find in one's religious worldview.⁴⁰ This is one of the reasons why religion remains a factor in human life. Nevertheless, we need to recognize secular ideologies as part of the story of human worldviews. Because the distinction between religious and secular beliefs and practices is a modern Western one and does not represent how other cultures categorize human values, although they (secular worldviews) sometimes function in societies like religion. So religious and secular worldviews have to learn to adapt to one another. Smart, further suggests that, for us to understand religious and secular worldviews and their practical meaning, we have to use imagination. We have to enter the lives of those for whom such ideas and actions are important.⁴¹ Although it is impossible to speak of contemporary religion without touching on secularism; yet in, humans' inability to satisfy inherent needs, control either nature (warding off old age, death and the like) or the primordial social processes, still finds a channel in spirituality or magic – religion. As an example, the Igbo worldview could perhaps help to domesticate further this worldwide thought of worldview. This worldview explains how everything came into being. It is

³⁷ K.A. Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, (Singapore: FEP International Private Ltd., 1978), p.25.

³⁸ N. Smart, 9.

³⁹ E. E. Nwosu, 270.

⁴⁰ D.A. Brown, *A Guide to Religions*, (Bukuru, SPCK African Christian Textbooks, 2017), p.14.

⁴¹ N. Smart, 10.

not only an explanatory device and guide to conduct, it is also an action system. It seeks to answer questions about the place and relationship of humanity (man) with the universe. Anyanwu opines that, in considering the worldview of the Igbo, analysis is based on the view of each of the common schemes which consist of a sort of systematic theology in which the basic aspects of the religion are considered. These five basic aspects which cover essential beliefs or worldviews of the people include: the natural world - the environment, the spiritual - the unseen world, man and life, ethics – behavioural conduct and eschatology.⁴² The

Igbo worldview as an aspect of Africa, pictures the world as perceived to exist in three dimensions, the *Elu*, (sky), *Ala* (the solid earth), and the *Alammuo* (the world beneath), believed to be the land of spirits - hell or kingdom.⁴³ From Igbo as a grass-root, there could even be a reference to Christianity as part of the background of the study. Categorically we can have a helpful digression if at all, as Smart clarifies more about the nature of secular worldviews. Although nationalism is not strictly speaking a single worldview or even in itself a complete worldview, it is convenient. Nationalism has given shape decisively to the modern world, because its popularity in part, stems from how assembling peoples into states, has helped with the process of organization. The nation-state has many of the appurtenances of a religion.⁴⁴ In

consonance, therefore, it becomes acceptable that mankind's expression of the view of reality is cosmology or worldview. It is a general phenomenon, not minding theories and reckless random claims. To look well at man and his culture is from how humanity views reality. Consequently, understanding differing worldviews, including the religious, should in these circumstances become an integral part of human education; to understand ideas and practices putting humans at the centre of Africa's cosmogonic order. An African vernacular language idea and example could help as in, *omenala* (culture) and *odinala* (tradition) to emphasize a traditional balance between the spiritual and the pragmatic, and, the moral and the material when further examined. All thereby are pinpointing a Centre in this discourse.

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⁴² H.O. Anyanwu, *African Traditional Religion from the Grassroots*, (Owerri: Lasen Publishers, 1999), p.20.

⁴³ A.O. Iwuagwu, *African Traditional Religion Students Handbook*, (Owerri: Ager Publishers, 1998), p.170.

⁴⁴ -- N. Smart, 21.

Reflecting Christian claims for instance, the human as “being-as-person” is the real seal of human as “being-as-the-image-of-God;”⁴⁵ therefore, humanity’s creation or coming into being is not chaotic and purposeless. Rather very organized and purposeful, as God is never a wasteful manager. Again, there is no gender discrepancy here as man is taken as human. So, the centrality of man in African cosmogony is prove-ably a truism. Kalu in Anyanwu & Aguwa opines that space is conceived as three-tiered. The sky where the creator lives, the earth or human world shared with the sea and animals and the spirit world where the ancestors live.⁴⁶ Arguably, between the sky and the spirit world, is the human world, which does not require much interpretation for one to conceive centrality. Nothing physical surpasses humans, to the point of awesome rapport with the divine of varied grades. The African religious tradition places humanity as the seen God in a sense. Humanity retains the height of creation even in ‘the big-bang theory’ or evolution and this is variously conveyed in this work as human roles. But suffice the unification for comprehension be discussed thus: (a) human and the development of society and (b) human’ hope for the future.

Humans and the Development of Society

In life, humanity faces a lot of challenges, even with unfavourable spiritual forces; but for practical purposes, human is left to combat the evil forces by manipulating the patron gods and ancestors to ward off the evil forces. This informed inquiries into spiritual enlightenment and development. As Ogbu Kalu emphasizes, the universe is created by God and sustained through many patron spirits. Particularly ubiquitous are the various evil spirits who lay siege to the human world. *Ogbanje*, souls of those who lived wicked lives, died bad deaths or did not get second burials, with other malevolent spirits returning to pepper the human world.⁴⁷ This heightens moral uprightness and religiosity believably as purity to an extent becomes essential in diverting the anger of the gods. Rituals, festivals and rites so came into being, as well as divination and other consultations, to pry at least into the divine mind or agenda. Cautions are so taken not to be careless with rituals, both as the chief officiants and the general partakers.⁴⁸ The ancestors by

⁴⁵ C.B. Moss, *The Christian Faith, Introduction to Dogmatic Theology*, (London: SPCK, 1961), p.2.

⁴⁶ U.D. Anyanwu and J.C.U. Aguwa, *The Igbo and The Tradition of Politics*, (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1993), p.13.

⁴⁷ O.U. Kalu, “Ethical Value in Igbo Tradition of Politics,” in Anyanwu and Aguwa, *The Igbo and Tradition of Politics*, (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1993), p.9-19.

⁴⁸ -- Kalu 1978, 43.

passing to the spirit world believably acquire spiritual powers for the protection of their human families. This spiritual care so bestowed on the living humans, is believed to guide humanity into long life as to achieve continuity. Continuity includes here, making some developmental achievements for the good of society (present), the unborn, as well as hereafter. For instance, one must not die a bad death in order to qualify as an ancestor. Such a person's children mostly sons, would not fail to give the transiting parent(s), a befitting burial. Taboos are not generally toyed with both for the good of the living and even the past ones. Change visible today invariably projects human centrality in the cosmic order. Change does not only manifest in human look (maturation),⁴⁹ it is visible also in the outlook of society. African time, for instance, is more considered as two-dimensional, past and present, but, there is at least an attenuated future. So, as life moves cyclically according to agricultural seasons, it also accentuates time for societal development. Probably a development that Mbiti thinks is a total change and one which affects all spheres of life,⁵⁰ the purported traditional set-up of the African two-dimensional time concept, notwithstanding.

Humanity is not therefore passive at all in the environment, the physical space and surroundings in which man lives,⁵¹ but rather conscious and active. When we talk about distinguishing between the pre-modern, modern or postmodern, development of the society is involved. There are changes in the way people today make use of their discoveries and learning. Engineers have discovered wonderful ways in which to make tasks easier than before, radios and cellphones, electricity and means of movement like airplanes and many more, and even sophisticated war weapons. The economic, social, and political innovations that emerged centuries back often resisted at first but were eventually accepted and improved. Chemists have discovered drugs for the prevention and healing of illnesses. We can here refer to the news of China building a special hospital within some days, for coronavirus (COVID-19) cure; and even the vaccination seems still ongoing.⁵² HIV/AIDS serves as another good illustration up to the present. We cannot completely verify, as rumours carry quarantine or

⁴⁹ A.U. Anusiem and R.C. Osuala, *Understanding Basic Concepts in Child and Human Psychology*, (Owerri: Clear Concept Publishers Nigeria, 2017), p.3.

⁵⁰ -- Mbiti, 216.

⁵¹ M.A.O Aluko, "The Environment, Ecosystem and Social Life," in K. Ogubameru and R. Wale ed., *Man and His Environment*, (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 2006), p.298.

⁵² en.wikipedia.org, retrieved, 7/10/2024.

mercy killing of some of the infected people either of Covid 19 or HIV/AIDS.⁵³ All the same, the process of cure has greatly improved. Today, although development cannot end, one can easily say there is progress in development, and, humanity is seen as responsible for all these advancements by the grace of God. By this little attempt, humanity no doubt remains at the centre even of activities, as per the development of the human world thereby leading to striving for future hope.

Humanity's Future and Hope

Preparation for a better here-after is an added credit, supportive of human centrality the more. Referent to the traditional African thought about time once more, the future appears reduced compared to the past and present. However, in any discourse about the afterlife of humanity, at least amongst other reasons, eschatology, soteriology, reincarnation or ancestor-ship in whichever understanding, is not taken lying low. Everything that deals or concerns with life hereafter remains a duty of grave importance to humanity. Some cosmogonic trace rests on this premium. Could one determine how creation came into being, one could reverse it or overcome it and be saved. Many teachings no doubt, seriously focus on, worldviews and doctrines of the future; ranging from the world as, a permanent place, a three-decker universe, reincarnation, kingdom of ancestors, categories of ancestors, the cult of ancestors, to rites of passage, and so on.

Incidentally, God is seen as sovereign over all things, yet acknowledged are many spirit beings opposing humans. African people are very aware of evil in the world and in various ways endeavour to fight it. In nearly all African societies, it is thought that spirits are either the origin of evil or agents of evil. Many think that improper burial, or, the living dead have a grudge, are neglected or disobeyed, they can take revenge or punish the offenders. In this case, it is humans who provoke the living dead to act in 'evil' ways.⁵⁴ In response, peace and order become essential and sacred, for which are, many laws, customs, set forms of behaviour, regulations, rules, observances and taboos, constituting the moral code and ethics. It is even believed that God punishes from the present life. So the human world as, an alive universe and life itself is, therefore, regarded as the struggle to have salvation. Continuity of life in the African religiosity tilts towards

⁵³ -- en.wikipedia.org.

⁵⁴ -- Mbiti, 205.

either reincarnation or ancestor-ship. None of the positions is easily come by from the viewpoint of what it takes to live a life worthy of emulation. Like Tao to the Chinese understanding, is both the primordial eternal force of the universe and the way to this force.⁵⁵ ‘Way’ has a function that needs to be understood and that is that it centralizes the seekers of the way between where they are coming from and where they go. Believably for the human future or life hereafter, G. Ntamu ventured into identifying ‘the problem of the way’ in religions. Insisting that the concept of way exists in almost all the world religions and may mean different things to different religions.⁵⁶ Howbeit, in almost all of them the concept is used to suggest the way (s) to man’s salvation or spiritual emancipation.

Religion generally has been found to have two groups of understanding in connection with salvation. There are religions grouped as “other-help” and others of, “self-help.”⁵⁷ Two of them help some steps further in underscoring the centrality of humanity as is found in African cosmogonies. Illustrative is that, in the “other-help types, there is a continuous anticipation of salvation in the future. In the “self-help” variety, man, through his personal and conscious efforts seeks to attain spiritual and physical emancipation.⁵⁸

Conclusion

From worldviews, human societal development, future and hope of salvation or emancipation, this study has looked at a vital aspect of African religion. In which cosmogonic order has consistently reflected human’s central position in cosmologies. The work specifically identified secular cosmology and religious cosmology.⁵⁹ And tilted towards religious cosmology of which talking about worldview or cosmology is invariably discussing religion. Humanity has always found itself in between the abode of the Supreme Being and the world of the spirits. Simply, the second world is at the centre of the first and third worlds and it mostly houses humanity as the apex physical being. Again, Scholars have typically seen African religion as an agent of social change. The relationship between religion and political consciousness also contributes to a lot of

⁵⁵ “Taoism”, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, assessed 31/10/2024.

⁵⁶ G.U. Ntamu, *The Concept of the Way in Christianity and Islam*, (Calabar: Jochrisam Publishers, 2011), p.4.

⁵⁷ G.U. Ntamu, *Salvation in Christianity and Islam: Studies in Comparative Religion*, (Calabar: Jochrisam Publishers, 2011), p.6.

⁵⁸ -- Ntamu, 6.

⁵⁹ M. Haralambos, et al., *Sociology, Themes and Perspectives 8th ed.*, (London: Harper Collins Ltd., 2013), p.730.

societal progress. Developments that go on in human society also contribute to an acceptable conclusion that there remains the centrality of humans in the African cosmogonic order. Humanity remains at the height of God's creation and even the evolutionary theory cannot displace humanity from being central and thus emphasized even in the Christian religion as the image of God. Therein this work concludes by recommending, a proper understanding of what humanity's position requires, to adequately do the same. Noting assiduously, that of all the wealth the world possesses, the most decisive and important is humanity, a warranty for centrality. The image of God is stamped into the sphere of human corporeality; which ATR captures as, human is not split into two conflicting principles, the body and the soul, rather man is one unit.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ -- Ikenga-Metuh, 189.