Reclaiming African Personality through Religious Powers: Indigenous Churches and Cultural Re-Awakening in Post-Colonial Era

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Abstract
The spread of Christianity and Islam ushered in colonialism and globalization in Africa which led to the elimination of various aspects of African culture, world-view and epistemologies. This brought about imperialism which involves extensively personality deformation, misrecognition, loss of self-esteem and identity. However, Africans of the post-colonial era have been in constant struggle to reclaim African personality and redefine their society. This search for African personality led to the establishment of African Indigenous Churches. This is particularly so because since African culture is intricately rooted in their religion, and since African primal personality was conflicted by the advent of foreign religions, it is only logical to conclude that the only way Africans could escape from this personality crisis was for them to evolve a unique African variant of the Christian faith. This paper was, therefore, conceived as an attempt to look at the cultural reawakening programme of African Indigenous Churches and the role it played towards the restoration of African personality. The paper made use of primary and secondary sources employing the qualitative research design to collect and analyze data for the study. The racial identity development theory of William Cross was applied in the explanation of the motive behind the establishment of African Indigenous Churches to conclude that it is important for the rest of global Christianity to see the indigenous Churches in Africa as part of the budding forth of African personality.

Keywords: African personality, religious powers, African, indigenous churches, cultural awakening, post-colonial era.

Introduction

The continent of Africa that received the two major religions which originated from the Middle East has suffered from a crisis of civilization and personality for centuries. These two religions, particularly Christianity, were encased in foreign cultures that are alien and suppressive of African culture and personality. The advent of Christianity for instance ushered in western secularism which lacks a universalizing power because it does not resonate in cultures with the

same rhythm of association. Colonialism, imperialism, globalization and neo-colonialism followed as natural cause and effects. All this culminated in the defamation and the bastardization of the African personality. Barr and Rosino (1994) believe that; when persons are bereft of their personality, their dignity, their freedom, their thought, their history, their language, their faith, the universe, and their basic creativity; deprived of all their rights, their hopes, their ambitions, that is when they are robbed of their ways of living and existence. This was the situation Africans found themselves as a result of Christianization, Islamization, colonization, slavery and globalization.

Elebeke (2010) defines personality as a "process located in the core of the individual and yet also at the core of his communal culture, a process which establishes, in fact, the personality of these two personalities. Your personality is who you are" (p. 22). Also, the principle of personality states that every being is determined in, is one in itself, and is consistent in itself. According to Asadu (2020), "the question of personality has proved interminable. It is the question of what constitutes the humanness, dignity and personal identity of a human being" (p. 1). If one does not have a personality, then everything would be everything, giving birth to one thing since nothing can be differentiated from the other. However, a major transformation in a people's corperate personality and the way they do things may occur if they have a personality crisis. Personality crisis is when you either lose track of who you are or do not feel happy with who you are and want to change your life or restructure it. This was the situation of Africans as they encountered the outside world through contacts with Christianity and Islam. It can be argued that no matter the level of cultural imperialism, non-western cultures, particularly from the Developing World will forsake their traditional values and lose their personality when they are solely exposed to Western media. Christianity came to Africa in the vessel of western culture, presently Africans see Christianity as an imposition. Ngugi (1981) posits that:

> The European missionary has attacked the primitive rites of our people; he condemned our beautiful African dances, the images of our gods recoiling from their suggestion of satanic sensuality. The early African converts did the same, often with even greater zeal, for he had to prove how Christian he was through the rejection of his past roots. So that in Kenya, while the European settler robbed people of their land and their sweat, the missionary robbed people of their soul. Thus, was the African, body and soul battered for thirty pieces of silver and the promise of European heaven... (p. 31).

Buhlmann (1978) adds that:

> At first, we had the land and the White men had the Gospel. Then the missionaries came and taught us to close our eyes and say our prayers, while the white men were stealing our land from us. Now we have the gospel and they have the land. (p. 89).

Christianity was introduced in Africa because Europe was interested in planting the seed of faith in Africa. The European Christians believed in the power of the Gospel to change any society; but there were many things that the missionaries did, which should be considered inappropriate. For instance, whatever way of life or customs the missionaries did not understand they often

condemned as 'fetish' or 'pagan'. Be that as it may, Christianity, Islam, westernization, colonialism and globalization marked the loss of African independence and also inaugurated the large scale destruction of lives, property, and works of arts, monuments and artifacts. Nevertheless, Africans hold the key to the future of the African continent. The world, as presently constituted, will not have a substantial hand in the transformation of Africa, unless there are radical changes in the present global social, economic, political, and cultural relations. The only path to truly human development and liberation for the majority of the people of Africa was through the transformation of their own lives in a struggle to replace and reshape the interfering worldviews that dominated their society and prescribed their existence. According to Vincent Harding (cited in Rodney, 2009):

> Now it is in our hands to overcome our history, to break the shackles of the past, to re-develop ourselves, our people, our nation and our world-to find humane, creative and fearless ways of dealing with those who presently oppose our development. These are audacious visions and truly awesome responsibilities. But we must go forward. Indeed, it seems clear to us that even without any guarantees of success, we must move with the flow of humankind's best, most creative imagination, in the direction of our most profoundly renewing dreams. (p. xxx).

Ekwenche (2002) asserts:

> Our ancestors gave up their lives in 1803 right here on Saint Simons Island seeking for freedom. Almost 200 years later, the Igbo in Nigeria is still not free. Yes, although the oppressors have changed many times, the reality of oppression remains unchanged. (p. 2).

Eze (2004) further adds that attempts have been made to introduce syncretistic forms of the foreign religions to interpret foreign faiths with African autochthonous religions but such attempts have not been successful. It is based on this that this paper will explore the trends in this effort to reclaim African personality, this time through religious powers as will be seen in the cultural reawakening of most African indigenous Christianity. It is a version of religiosity that teaches self-awareness, realization, self-development and esteem as needed to redeem Africans from the shackles of horrible conditions of life they found themselves in the colonial era (Amanambu, 2020.)

Theoretical Framework

This search for personality is, of course, hardly limited to blacks. Many Jews have taken personal odysseys to find their Jewish roots and the meaning of religion in their lives. The debaters within the black community can be understood by applying the 'black identity theory'. According to Carter, as published in the New York Times; "Each black person responds differently to their socialization and experience in terms of being black, the theory of racial identity development was posited by William Cross. He held that racial identity evolved in four stages, each stage is marked by different attitudes and psychological functioning. At first, the individual attempts to deny membership in a race. Then an experience challenges this individual's anti-black attitudes, causing psychological and emotional turmoil. Attempts to resolve the conflict are made in the third stage when a person discovers his or her cultural

heritage. The individual may develop new idealized images and intense emotions about being black, and feel hostile toward whites. In the fourth stage, the person assumes a positive black identity and begins to accept a bicultural personality. This is evident in African response to their encounter with the Christian religion. Such response, as will be shown in this paper, spans through loyalty, voice and exit.

Religious Powers as Tools for African Personality

The definition of religion is a controversial subject in religious studies with scholars failing to agree on any one definition. Lambek (2002) says that writers have not agreed on what constitutes religion, noting that part of the problem is biased (some of which might be innocent). Early anthropologists saw religion in terms of Christianity. Religion is the most important thing for the African because the world is seen through the eyes of faith; any other variable in the transformation of African society can only work if it is integrated into the religious life of the people. Idowu (1973) declares that for Africans:

> Life belongs to God. It is he who summons it into being, strengthens and preserves it. We find that in Africa, the real cohesive factor of religion is the living God and that without this one factor, all things would be falling to pieces… living it and practicing (i.e. Religion) … connects the past with the present and upon it that which they base the connection between now and eternity with all that, spiritually, they hope or fear. (p. 104).

It could be said of the African that every effect has a religious cause and every life puzzle can be unraveled through religion. Mbiti, (1992) echoes:

> Because traditional religions permeate all the departments of life, there is no formal distinction between the sacred and the secular, between the religious and the non-religious, between the spiritual and the material areas of life. Wherever the African is, there is his religion: He carries it to the fields, where he is sowing seeds or harvesting a new crop; he takes it with him to the beer party to attend the funeral ceremony; if he is educated, he takes religion with him to the examination room at school or in the university; if he is a politician he takes it to the house of parliament. (p. 2).

Ilo (2008) summarizes that the expression of religious sentiments in Africa takes different forms: In the mode of greetings, in the signs and symbols of religion that surround the people, in the various forms of prayers and deepest reverence that Africans show to religious places, religious objects and religious men and women.

Religious powers can be seen as focusing on the social dimension. In other words, religion holds political control or influence. Saints or scholars are viewed as mentally more capable of understanding God. Douglas (1996) concentrates on the power that lies within the margins of society. For him: "to have been on the margin is to be in contact with danger, to have been a source of power." (p. 98). Douglas distinguishes between controlled and uncontrolled religious power and contends that:

Pollution and sanctification rules are connected with their relationship to the 'right' kind of power. Where the social system explicitly recognizes the position of authority, those holding such positions are endowed with explicit spiritual power, controlled, conscious and external approved… where the social system requires people to hold dangerously ambiguous roles, these persons are credited with uncontrolled unconscious, dangerous, disapproved powers. (p. 100).

Otto (1958) declares that religion is composed of ethical and mysterious elements. The tremendous mystery, the ineffable unknown that is called God, is the impetus for the performance of religious acts including purity laws, prayer and sacrifice. Although ineffable, these acts are recognized by others as powerful because of the mysterious religious power (holiness) that they produce. Torah holds an immense amount of power in Judaism. The Western Wall is the last remnant of the Temple, so it is the most sacred location for prayer in all Jerusalem. In Christianity, power emanates from objects such as the Eucharist and the Bible. Christians believe the actual presence of Christ is in the sacrament of Eucharist. The Bible is the legal and ideological power which shapes the religion. Saints are people who hold power in Christianity.

Africa has become a breeding ground for different religious sects with various degrees of claims to deliver the people from bondage. There is a mass exodus from the mainline Churches to the Pentecostal, evangelical, and African Indigenous Churches (AICs). This is because they feel that the mainline Churches do not often offer them the answers to the pressing social, economic, religious and political concerns of the day, and most importantly their identity as Africans. The mainline Churches, sometimes, lack a sense of African communal life, where everyone is known by name and they often tend to proffer abstract solutions to concrete problems, which demand pastoral flexibility and creativity. In some of these new Churches in Africa, Christian worship has, however, become theatrical and bizarre in some cases. This appears in the very limited and sometimes fundamental interpretation of Christians scripture among the new religious leaders. Faith is seen through the lenses of miracle and some exaggerated claims of the fantastic and the sublime. Christianity has now been directed to casting out demons, spiritual combat against some real and imagined enemies, and negative forces against people's progress in life. Africa is here at the threshold of rediscovering the powers of their primal religion and by extension their personality.

African Cultural Reawakening and the Roadmaps to African Indigenous Churches

The concept of culture is a complicated one. Williams (1976) claims that culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language. The word 'culture' has been used in many different ways both by sociologist and in everyday conversation. All has been used implicitly or explicitly to contrast culture with nature. The things that humans produce or do are cultural whereas the things that exist or occur without human intervention are part of the natural world. Linton (1945) says "The culture of a society is the way of life of its members; the collection of ideas and habits which they learn, share and transmit from generation to generation" (p. 43). Nwabueze (2010) views culture as the entirety of norms, values, belief systems and life patterns that give a group identity. It is a universal truth that every nation or society is known for its own culture. This implies the dynamism and distinctiveness of every

culture. Culture is dynamic but it does not remove the fact that it is an attribute and identifying term. The sum of these gives rise to changes in permanence. It, therefore, follows that despite the erratic time there are some things which remain unchanged in culture and as such identifies and individuates people.

For Atlas (1985) "Cultural awakening is connected to all the major issues of our societies, economic stratification, race relations technology, and education and community development" (p. 7). For Atlas, the choice of a family to educate their children in the language, traditions and history of a particular ethnic group in cultural policy. A grant maker's criterion for quality and excellence is cultural policy, a community development corporation's decision to focus on cultural tourism or historic preservation is cultural policy, the convergence of television, internet and other digital media is also cultural policy.

Miller and Yudice (2002) maintain that cultural awakening is both a product and a process, a framework for making rules and decisions that are informed by social relations and values, cultural policies, public and private, implicit and explicit are all the time. It is part of our everyday life. All the decisions we take concerning our everyday life amount to some form of policymaking, which brings about improvement. Towse (1999) maintains that cultural reawakening remains a process that provides for the preservation of the arts and culture of a people which is foundational of their history and of utmost relevance for growth and development. Singh echoes that "A cultural policy remains important for the preservation of culture not just for Africa, but for the world at large" (p. 12).

It is common knowledge that every society must build on its past. It is history, traditional values and norms that make for a present and a future. In this case, Africa stands to gain a great deal, by being involved in this global discussion, for the light it can shed on how to keep the multiplicity of her cultural traditions alive. Cultural re-awakening incorporates a broad range of measures taken to develop cultural life. Many policies with profound cultural impact are made by decision-makers who have given cultural consideration a thought.

The festival of Black and African Arts and Culture in 1977, known as FESTAC 77 cannot be forgotten in a hurry. This Festival of Art and Culture brought the black and African descent together in an intellectual and cultural manifestation that was hitherto unknown and resulted in the most exalting celebration of Africa and Black history, literature, arts and performing arts. It provided an opportunity for recounting the achievement of African ancestors, contemporaries and their invaluable contributions to the enrichment of world thought and ideas.

More so, the festival helped in debunking erroneous ideas and beliefs regarding the cultural and spiritual values of the Black and African race. It also explained to the world that African culture was not only pre-historic objectives placed in museums to be cleared and displayed occasionally, but also to them as a living process containing and portraying the values and beliefs of African people. FESTAC 77 created a great impression to the world about the great cultural heritage which   Africans are known for.

Integration of cultural activities and values in all spheres of life has been very loudly pronounced in post-colonial Africa. Major ideas of African development have been linked to the authentic cultural values of the people. A draft copy of the final document became available in 1972 and by August 1989, cultural policy documents were received by various councils for Arts and

Culture nationwide. The clearly set objectives of the cultural policy include serving to mobilize and motivate the people by disseminating and propagating ideas which promote national pride, solidarity and consciousness. Cultural policy is categorized thus: Preservation of culture, promotion of culture, presentation of culture and the establishment of administrative structure and the provision of funds for its implementation.

The impact of cultural re-awakening in the quest for personality cannot be overemphasized. Cultural reawakening has helped to project national culture, pride, solidarity and consciousness. Cultural values and standards are important parts of history; therefore, the cultural reawakening incorporates them in the general national developmental process. This is achieved through the involvement of all agencies and individuals, both traditional and contemporary in cultural activities which remain the bedrock of national identity. Cultural re-awakening with the set of rules requirement and priorities set out to retrieve and restore history and heritage, cultural values and standards by protecting and projecting them for posterity. It is worthy to note that cultural re-awakening provides for the awareness of the traditional values, and generate respect and appreciation for each nation's heritage.

Although African culture gives Africans a distinct personality as peoples of various places, it is the values and standards which are practiced in cultural activities and are also observed in day to day activities that provide for sustenance and maintenance of what is referred to as culture. Cultural re-awakening serves as a platform and elevation for culture. It puts the spotlight on the very foundation of every nation; its culture alongside the standards and values that guide it. Nigeria is a multi-ethnic state endowed with rich cultures. Its major cultures seem to be decimated by geographic boundaries, giving birth to distinct cultures between the northern and southern regions of the nation. Because of this, John Paul II (1994) writes:

> Civilization belongs to human history because it answers man's spiritual and moral needs. Created in the image and likeness of God, man has received the world from the hands of the creator, together with the task of shaping it in his image and likeness. The fulfilment of this task gives rise to civilization, which is the final analysis is nothing than the humanization of the world. (p. 41).

Having said this, it is pertinent to note that African indigenous Churches have been at the forefront of this cultural re-awakening in a bid to reclaiming the lost personality of African people. This underscores the emergence of African Indigenous Churches as well as informed their continuous disposition and efforts at revamping the powers and relevance of African personality in a globalized world.

The Emergence of the African Indigenous Churches and the Quest for African Personality

African Indigenous Churches (AICs) represents over 10,000 Independent Christian denominations in Africa. It is referred to as African Independent Churches or African Instituted Churches. These African Churches came to life as a result of a revolt against the changing mission policy and practice in the twentieth century. It is worthy to note that Christianity among the Africans was started and nurtured in the era of colonialism. As a result of colonial factor, many of the converts to Christianity adopted a new personality based upon the colonial Christian order. Western Christianity was transplanted, root and branch in terms of doctrine, worship and

polity without the necessary adaptations and modifications which the African cultural context demanded. Iwe (1985) demonstrates that the origin of Christianity beheld African culture battling with cannibalism, nudity, infanticide, destruction of twins, and mass illiteracy among others which Christianity frowned at. It was these negative and transitory phases of African culture that struck the early missionaries and prompted them to adopt in general, a negative attitude towards African culture. This negative reaction sparked off a culture clash between Africans and Christianity. Christianity considered the customs and traditions of the people as primitive and "pagan." The idea of European cultural superiority was manifested in the actions of the missionaries. Western civilization was equated with Christianity. As these events unfold, Africans seem to have allowed other cultures to dominate their personality basically due to the net-effects of the so-called modern civilization with the invasion of alien cultures and values. Contemporary Africans were then becoming more and more Europeans and fewer Africans in their values, mentality and general outlook. In this regard, numerous core values and cultural patterns unique to Africans have been covered with ignorance. African Traditional Religion was, therefore, frequently devalued and only the authorities of imported religions seem to have significance. Thus John (2015) echoes that it is no exaggeration that African Traditional Religions have been seen as culturally irrelevant and imported religions are now so embedded in the psychology of Africans that most Africans were lulled into. By the by, African pioneer converts to Christianity started to see what showed up more like lip service and "holier than thou" mentalities in the lives of most European missionaries. European missionaries, African converts claimed, were so vocal even where the Bible seems to be silent. This observation called for questioning of the Christian faith that the Africans shared with their European counterparts who more or less were pioneers of European fortune seekers in Africa at the expense of Africans themselves. Hence, the voice of African converts began to long for the return of their ancient values and personality pattern. Ogbukagu, (2008) avers that the restoration of the dignity of man and the consequent preservation of his inalienable rights and privileges as a sovereign group, demands the sustenance of his personality (cultural norms and values). It was this search to reclaim African personality that led to the establishment of African Indigenous Churches (AICs). Idowu (1973) affirms that "The Christian leaders should be held responsible to a certain degree because Christianity remained a foreigner and never belonged in the environment in which she lived" (p. 3). This was because Christian leaders did not care to learn the peoples' worldview and condemned every aspect of the peoples' culture. This spurred the spirit of self-personality on Africans and led to the establishment of African Indigenous Churches. African Indigenous Churches are scattered in all African regions but, they are more adequately documented in West Africa and Southern Africa. AICs are independent in origin and organization. These are Churches founded by Africans and which inculcate aspects of African culture in the system.

African Indigenous Churches are well established by African initiatives rather than by foreign missionary agenda. Though many of these Churches are said to have mission Churches denominational names and relationships, they are not defined by these traditions. Moreover, AICs emphasize the biblical warrant to include African cultural norms into their modes of worship because the importance of culture in any nation cannot be over-emphasized. UNESCO has observed that cultural and economic independence and restoration are important springboards to the attainment of sovereign statuses. Culture is an icon of personality for every citizen or member of a community, hence there is, need for every race to protect and promote her

culture and basic institutions since a distinct society can only be recognized by the culture which its members share. Maathai (2009) advocates that:

> If Africa is to build for the future, it must first face its past. Africa's colonial history as a disastrous period for the continent and how many of the problems faced by its people today stems from the past, it tells of Africa's loss of identity under its colonial occupiers and the disintegration of societal hierarchies that had developed over centuries. (p. 7).

It is interesting to observe that the Christian missions, which helped in the establishment of British rule in West Africa also began to work for its end, though unwittingly. The study of the Bible and the teachings of the missionaries taught the early converts to the idea of equality, justice and non-racialism. Thus African Indigenous Churches came as a result of the frustrations experienced by Africans, in locations across the continent over the European and American missionaries and decided to form their own Christian Churches where they will be fully accepted. They combine local African religions with Christianity in variable ways, placing different amounts of emphasis on each tradition.

Some scholars think that AICs are syncretistic in that they combine indigenous African religion with Christian beliefs, but the degree to which this occurs is varying. Be that as it may, a process of acculturation between and African culture does occur. AICs have also demonstrated a strong missionary tendency in that most of the spread of Christianity throughout Africa in the 20th century can be attributed to African Indigenous Churches. Some AICs were established by Charismatic African Religious leaders such as Simon Kimbangu, Isaiah Shembe, Garrick Braide or William Wade Harris. The Bible is considered authoritative and found to contain empowering messages. Both leaders and laypeople read it carefully and on their own, believing that missionaries' interpretations were incorrect and biased because of their interests in the colonial administration.

African Indigenous Churches differentiate themselves from missionary Churches by incorporating local traditions into their practices of Christianity. They use African languages, dancing and drumming in their services, allowed polygamy and practice female excision. They are aware that African personality is the only reality and the gift that they carry in their relationship with others; if that is eroded they cannot build an African civilization nor relate to others from a certain perspective. If they are rooted in African tribal traditions Africans would have a base to relate with others and a locus of safety in the cultural crisis which has set the world on a confusing moral bazaar.

Allen (1991) posits that AICs lay much emphasis on divine healing; they so much believe that their Church is directed by the Holy Spirit. Most of their founders and leaders are men in quest of spiritual contemplation, and they all claim spiritual motivation for the founding of their organization. Spiritual interpretation is given to virtually all happenings especially misfortunes and failure in life, such as barrenness, poverty, illnesses among others. The Holy Spirit is believed to feature prominently in their worship as He manifests through visions, interpretation of dreams, ecstatic behavior and prophetic utterances. African Indigenous Churches help Africans survive in the modern world without losing their African personality.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The quest for the rediscovery of the African personality emerged as a result of racial discrimination, slavery and colonialism and currently globalization. It is an attempt to reaffirm African heritage and personality collapsing before Western bias. African Indigenous Churches, Religious powers and cultural reawakening have contributed immensely to the regaining of the African personality in Post-colonial Africa. AICs help Africans survive in the modern world without losing their African culture. African Indigenous Churches differentiate themselves from missionary Churches by incorporating local traditions into their practice of Christianity. They permitted the use of African languages, dancing and drumming in their services and the use of African names and polygamy.

One of the greatest instruments for African Renaissance is language. Language is an avenue through which man opens himself to his fellow man and in so doing, lives up to his nature as a social animal. It is the bedrock of people's culture. It defines lives, heralds existence, formulates thoughts, enables all people are and have. It became a policy in African Indigenous Churches for the gospel to be read and spread in African indigenous languages to command the deeper meanings it is meant to convey to the people. This policy was consequent upon a disheartening fact that many Africans do not value their language and culture. Many people rightly believe that the fading use of the native languages of most African countries is perhaps the greatest evil that colonization caused in the continent. In many African societies today, it has been the sign of civility to speak and communicate in foreign languages. Most so-called high-class families prefer not to teach their children how to speak the native language, which in certain circles in Africa are seen as, sign of primitivism. However, Indigenous Churches preach that irrespective of where parents find themselves with their children they should endeavour to teach them their native languages because language carries with it the culture, personality and worldview of a people.

In this age of globalization, science and technology, it is needful that parents should insist on sound African moral values for their children. Kanu (2013) asserts that in the age where 'economism' has become the yardstick, it is crucial to inculcate African values, such as solidarity, the sacred, hospitality and love for life.

The African lawmaking bodies have a role to play. Kanu (2011) opines that if the laws and policies that can safeguard our values are promulgated by the government or enacted by traditional ruling councils, the decay of our values will be impeded and their recovery enhanced. There should be censorship of whatever comes from outside before they are allowed for consumption.

Also, learning institutions have a major role to play in this personality movement. It is through education that Africa values can be restored in the hearts of young Africans. Therefore, an Africa system of education needs to have an African dimension. This will enable young Africans to learn Africa's fundamental tradition and cultural values and truth.

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