Africans and African Humanism: What Prospects?

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Abstract

This work on Africans and African Humanism is a philosophical enquiry into the significance of African sense of respect for the human person. The traditional values of hospitality, primacy of the person, respect for life, sense of the sacred, familihood, brotherhood, solidarity and other characteristic features of the communalistic life of an African person are brought into cognizance. Applying the descriptive, analytic and phenomenological methods of enquiry and spreading forth the scope of our coverage to include not only black Negroes within the confines of the geographical configuration of Africa but also diasporans and those of any race and colour within the continent, practical examples are sourced in order to illumine our subject matter. Salient questions are raised with respect to the essence of the centrality of the human person, his/her dignity, right and the need for fair-play and sense of responsibility on the part of the citizenry and general leadership. The notoriety of Africa and Africans in relation to their being religious in all aspects of life is being latched upon as a launch-pad for this all-important task. By and large, Africans are called upon not only to be more conscious of the latent potentials in this essentially humanistic light, but to harness and promote them assiduously and to give it a more cosmopolitan outlook as they anchor their lives on this rich cultural heritage. This, as it were, is expected to yield immense dividends of not only curbing violence, terrorism, genocide and all forms of social ills associated with our contemporary world, but it is also hoped that it will bring about the much needed peace, harmony and progress in all its ramifications world-over.

Introduction

In a bid to provide an appropriate solution to the lingering debate for the past half-a-century on whether there exists what could be strictly termed African philosophy, researchers have unearthed a particular type of philosophy which is basically humanistic in orientation and ideology. Thus, this brand of philosophy is tagged "African Humanism". It is argued here that the undercurrent of this philosophy has its basis on the African worldview which is overtly humanistic in its characterization. In other words, the African outlook is ontologically anthropocentric, since everything in it is viewed in terms of its relation to the human person. As Booth graphically affirms, "it is centered more on man than on God or on nature" (6). This same understanding is expressed by the Igala people of central Nigeria in the Igala name "*Onẹnyọ*" which means the human person is innately good. The name implies that the human person is of far greater value than any possessions or anything whatsoever in nature. For the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria, the name "*Maduka*" denotes that the human person is the most valuable possession (Ikenga-Metuh 163), in the same token, the Yoruba of Western Nigeria use "*Ọmọniyi*" to remind themselves that child is wealth and alternately that the gift of a child is of far greater value than any other form of wealth.

The contention here is that the mindset or orientation of a typical African ought to be jealously preserved and promoted even to the globalised level along with her rich cultural heritage. For, as Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia succinctly put it, to a certain extent, we in Africa have always had a gift for enjoying man for himself. It is at the heart of our traditional culture… the West have its Technology and Asia its Mysticism. Africa's gift to the world culture must be in the realm of human relationships (22).

However, before undertaking a brief excursus on this all-important topic, it is pertinent to briefly clarify the key concepts therein, namely, "Africans", "African Humanism" and "Prospects".

Clarification of Concepts

"Africans" refer to one or more of these three main ideas: First and foremost, those who belong to the geographical entity within the confines of the African continent (Northern, Southern, Eastern, Western and Central Africa inclusive). Secondly, various racial groups that inhabit the continent, whether they are of the North African Arab races, black sub-Saharan Africa, White South Africans or Negroes. And thirdly, those whose socio-political, historical and cultural ties link them to Africa. In this sense, "Africans are not one but many peoples and races with a diversity of cultural beliefs and traditions" (Okolo 25). Most times, they are also tied together by similar history of colonial yoke or tutelage. They are not only characterized by same traditional beliefs and practices but also different languages and cultures. As such, whether they live in Diaspora (e.g. African-Americans or African-Asians) or live within the continent, they are recognized as Africans. In other words, all "those who regard Africa as their home directly in Africa or in Diaspora" (Igwe 7) are considered properly so. Igala people of central Nigeria and other language groups within the author's immediate reach shall thereby be used in drawing home many salient points.

"Prospects" – simply refers to the possibility that something positive will emerge (*Macmillan* 1192, *Chambers* 1113) in order to bring about improvement, advancement, recovery. It has to do with what people should anticipate or look forward to or expect in the context of this investigation.

"African Humanism" in our context here refers to a philosophy which extols not only the good of the human person in general but also the good of the African person as the purpose of all actions. It entails an active concern for his/her welfare as the central object of policy. It is an ideology which encourages "the best in the evolution of society and the treatment of mankind, and in the exploitation or use of his natural environment" (Igwe 189). It is quite significant to observe too that even ecological concerns form part of the humanistic challenges of an African. That explains why Igwe further defines humanism as embracing, "the creation of the conditions that are favourable to the practical exercise of man's fundamental rights, and the treatment of his pains and tribulations as a direct concern of the collectivity" (189).

As noted in this definition of humanism, matters pertaining to justice or human rights are very central in this sphere. Worthy of note too is that humanism as an outlook pervades all ideologies, creeds and ethical positions (Igwe 190). In this case, any ideology that deals with "themes, challenges, contexts, history, experience and culture of Africa" (Azenabor 121) and their social, cultural, political, economic and physical welfare could be appropriately termed African Humanism. As a matter of fact, it is a philosophy aimed at finding purpose and meaning in the life and existence (Azenabor 123) of the people in question.

In this work, there are three basic strands of what we term as African Humanism, namely: Nationalist versus Colonialist Stance; the Conventionalists versus Neo-Colonialist Move; and the Trado-cultural versus Modernist mode.

Perhaps, owing to the common historical experiences of African oppression, exploitation and dehumanization by alien forces, the first form of African Humanism evolved. This is tied to the telling effects of colonialism, enslavement, capitalism and imperialism, prior to the independence of those various nations. Consequently, the nationalists were naturally bent on salvaging the land by means of this sort of philosophy which offered them some ray of hope. It was primarily based on the perceived need for liberation, freedom, independence, rebirth, emancipation, enlightenment and intellectual awakening on African personality and identity. Here, names of Nelson Mandela of South Africa; Nnamdi Azikiwe and Obafemi Awolowo of Nigeria, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana; Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia; Leopold Senghor of Senegal; Julius Nyerere of Tanzania and several other notable national ideologists ring bell.

The second type which has some semblance with the first is also a belief that this brand of African humanism possesses some kind of in-built mechanism for checks and balances against neo-colonialist tendencies as dictated by racism, apartheid, dictatorial regimes, corrupt practices and untoward globalization principles. And in the third instance, it is further held that the nature of this humanist philosophy is naturally strewn with traditional African humanistic undertones, such that, it is, as it were, believed to be so congenial with the African environment and that it is also inalienably anchored on the communalistic or relational nature of the African society. As a matter of fact, the African society is popularly characterized by African familihood, brotherhood, solidarity, hospitality, primacy of the person, sense of the sacred, respect for the elderly, and other positive cultural values (Egbunu 36-41).

These values, as a matter of decency, stand over and against untoward traditional beliefs and practices such as killing of twins, discrimination against descendants of slaves, ritual killing, witchcraft related crimes, maltreatment of widows, female genital cutting, and forced marriage, etc. They also stand against some relatively modernistic practices such as induced abortion, euthanasia, genocide, child abuse, rape, prostitution, unethical scientific experimentations, political thuggery, armed robbery, terrorism and so forth. We may now turn to a brief historical excursus on the concept of Humanism.

A Brief Historical Excursus on the Concept of Humanism

The history of the concept "Humanism" as such is not only "a source of endless debate" (Madigan 326), it is also very "complex but enlightening" (Abbaganano 70). Azenebor (113) offers us four different perspectives of Humanism, showing that in its ethical sense it relates to the need for according compassion and respect to fellow humans; in the sociological context, it entails viewing social structures as products of human agents; the historical sense of meaning is depicted in the different epochs such as that of Renaissance or Enlightenment when the human person became the focus of scholarly attention. It also depicts human sovereignty as opposed to the divine or supernatural, and thereby a synonym for atheism or egoism. Besides, it also denotes placing primacy or values on human essence or nature. The first noticeable humanist is said to be the 5th Century B.C figure, Protagoras, who asserted that "man is the measure of all things". Socrates, the ancient Greek philosopher who suggests "man, know thyself" is yet another. However, some scholars are of the view that humanism commenced only with the Renaissance in its bid to locate the proper status of the human person in the universe. Yet, even the Renaissance humanists pointed backwards to the Greek and Roman philosophers (among the Sophists, Skeptics, Stoics and the Cynics) who variously attempted finding solution to human existence in man (Madigan 326-327). Besides these opinions, there are other scholars who trace the origins of humanism even further back in time to the Afro-Asiatic roots of classical civilization in Egypt (Madigan 327). Nevertheless, it is most often traced basically to the 14th/15th Century AD.

By and large, it is said to have been employed in the 18th/19th Century by German scholars in designating "an intellectual and cultural movement linked to the revival of classical learning in the Renaissance" (Mautner 256), a study which was endorsed by the 14th and 15th century *Umanistic* educators (Ogunmodede 35) in Italy. It "adopted an ideal of the full development of the individual" (Mautner 256). It is sometimes referred to by philosophers as "human-being-ism" (Azenabor 111). The centrality of the person is a key humanistic attribute (Madigan 237).

As it were, the neo-humanists (Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Friedrich Schiller, Wilhelm Von Humboldt, etc.) of the 18th century espoused the ideal of a rich flourishing of individual potentiality, bolstered by the study of classical language and literature (Mautner 256, Goetz 723). And in the course of time, the 19th century humanism, Stood for a non-religious or anti-religious worldview, usually based on a belief in man's capacity for self-cultivation and self-improvement, and in the progress of mankind…In contemporary French philosophy, humanism is the conception of self-determination, together with the assumption that an individual's choices can make a real difference to a society, or to the course of history (Mautner 256).

It is clear from the above statement that to humanists, the human person can be a player in the game of life. This stance is in contradistinction with the anti-humanists' (Levi Strauss, Lacan, Althuser, Foucault, etc.) viewpoint which holds that all consciousness is causally or structurally determined. As such, so much emphasis is placed on the decisive influence of social, economic and psychological structures, in which case, man is left as only a pawn in the game of life, or rather, that the self determination of the individual is only an illusion (Mautner 256). But in spite of all the controversies, what remains incontrovertible is that "mankind, his nature and problems" are made the central focus (Azenabor 112). Consequently, the human person is called upon to make the best of life in this world, take delight in earthly achievements and build a better life here on earth, thereby "rejecting religious asceticism, narrow scholasticism and humble piety" (Mautner 256). This would eventually give birth to Marxists humanism which sees religion as the opium of the masses. In Marxism, the human person is absolutized through the medium of the society with an atheistic undertone (Ogunmodede 47). On this note, the human person is enjoined to place one's hope or aspirations in this world (Azenabor 111). On the ethical and social platform, humanism sets up service to one's fellowmen/women as the ultimate ideal (Lamont 15). Lamont rightly captured this trend when he posited that humanism, stems from the perennial need of human beings to find significance in their lives and to also integrate their personalities around some clear, consistent and compelling view of existence and to seek definite and reliable methods in the solution of their problems (15).

Great minds such as Petrarch and Machiavelli boasted of how they shared with the ancient people some wisdom on human affairs. Petrarch, the famous founder of humanistic movement sang loudly about his return to the ancient values or tradition as well as Machiavelli's own articulation of his experience, Evenings I return home and enter my study, and at its entrance I take off my everyday clothes, full of mud and dust, and don royal courtly garments; decorously retired. I enter the ancient session of ancient men. Received amicably by them, I partake of such food as is mine only for which I was born. There without shame, I speak with them and I ask about the reason for their actions; and they in their humanity respond to me (Goetz 724).

We hasten to observe at this juncture that Nicollo Machiavelli's thoughts were somehow representative of secular and atheistic Humanism. On closer look, one sees that it examines history, power and strength in an amoral and wholly scientific sense. By so doing, his achievements ironically and significantly eroded humanism (Ogunmodede 46). Machiavelli is said to have created a discipline that had no slightest regard for humanistic morality.

Desiderus Erasmus, for instance, is also said to have encouraged some sort of Christian hedonism while justifying earthly pleasure from a religious perspective (Ogunmodede 46). In Ludwig Feuerbach, for instance, we also find the "modern hyper deification of man" (Ogunmodede 47). Owing to that, religion was seen as nothing more than the projection of the noblest aspirations of humans. This thereby brought to the fore the death of God philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche. And for Jean Paul Sartre whose conviction on how "existence precedes essence" went a long way, there came the conclusion that there is no human nature, man is what he makes himself; man is how he acts and not determined by the essence of a Divine Creator (Cunningham 499). Cunningham terms this secular humanism as it "denies any supernatural realm, looks to empirical sciences as the ultimate arbiter of truth, and project the enlightenment values of freedom, social equality and the values of secular society" (499).

The above assertions explain how the 19th and 20th century secular Humanism pertains to philosophical, political or cultural affirmation of man as the principal object of concern to the detriment or outright exclusion of all religions and theological theses about the origin of mankind and their destiny (Haas 226). The effect of this form of secularist Humanism was enormous. On the negative impact, there was stark loss of the sense of the sacred and a corresponding rise of immorality, the culture of sexual promiscuity, open commercial prostitution, pornography, immodest dressing, homosexuality and lesbianism and gay marriage in the society. However, on the positive note of its influence, it opposed all forms of extremist beliefs in superstitions and dictatorial customs of the society. That apart, growth in science and technological advancement occasioned medical discoveries or breakthroughs, improvement in transportation system and information and communications media, progress in agricultural input, electricity and general standard of living. It is germane to note that Humanism, is however, not an exclusive preserve of any race, linguistic group or creed. Rather, it is a global phenomenon which holds no bars. According to Azenabor "it repudiates discrimination and reaffirms the spirit of cosmopolitanism, the spirit of international friendship, brotherhood and compassionate concern for fellow human beings throughout the globe" (111). The global nature of humanism, not withstanding, it exists in different shades and colouring.

Forms of Humanism

Humanism being what it is cannot be pinned down to a particular definition. It is a rather, nebulous or ambiguous concept which is ridden with webs of meaning. It is this ambiguous nature of the concept that is both its weakness and strength. The dilemma, as Igwe puts it, lies in the fact that "being a friend to almost all ideologies and creeds, it may not be clearly defined or systematically implemented by either" (190). This sort of definitional weakness leaves it bereft of any general criterion for its practical realization or non-realization except it is anchored on an ideology. And hanging it on an ideology, it would "factionalize its interpretation and application" (Igwe 190). This, unfortunately, waters down its universal quality which is responsible for its popular nature. As diverse as the definitions might be, a common trajectory that runs through all of them centers on concerns over human interests, human welfare and happiness or fulfillment. In classifying humanism therefore, we may roughly note that they are often classified in relation to goals or mindset. Thus Madigan (327) mentions five basic varieties: Renaissance Humanism, Enlightenment Humanism, Romantic Humanism, Religious Humanism and Secular Humanism. And Edword's (in Balogun 106) list comprises seven: Literary Humanism, Renaissance Humanism, Cultural Humanism, Philosophical Humanism, Christian Humanism, Modern Humanism and Secular Humanism. In our explanation, we choose to begin with those that are common to both of our authors before tabling the rest in any order. This would leave us with just eight after fusing some together, since many of their characteristics features dovetail into themselves.

Renaissance Humanism refers to the spirit of learning which developed within the Middle Ages in relation to classical letters and a new wave of confidence in human ability to decipher between truth and falsehood via the reasoning faculty. According to Madigan (327), the Renaissance Humanists were mainly concerned with the idea of *dignitas* i.e. the proper relationship of human beings to God and nature. They returned from the medieval scholastics stress on theology back to a study of the pre-christian era philosophers, under the rallying cry of "the proper study of man as man". They were propelled with the burning desire to understand those teachings on their own terms and in their own language instead of harmonizing it in the spirit of the Christian Scriptures. They did not seek to abolish Christianity but they actually sort to do away with impediments to free inquiry. They became fascinated with the occult and non-christian mysticism. Examples of Renaissance Humanists are Petrarch, Erasmus of Rotterdam and Picodella Mirandola.

Enlightenment Humanism began in France in the 17th century. They distanced themselves from the mystical bent of the Renaissance and relied on sweet reason as the best guide to knowledge and they remained highly critical of organized religion. They had a stoic-like avowal of the primacy of human reason. So, they were mostly deists or believers in a God of reason and Order. This God of theirs was to be understood basically by studying the laws of nature and not by yearning for mystical experiences or miracles (Madigan 329). Voltaire is a perfect example of this group.

Romantic Humanism laid much emphasis on human emotions (as against the primacy of the human reason of the enlightenment era). They believed that reason was corrupting (Madigan 329).

Religious Humanism pertains to the effort at finding a common principle which underlies all belief systems (Madigan 329) and trying to apply them in human life for human welfare. This emanated from the blending of the thoughts of Enlightenment Humanists who dwelt on reason and Romantic Humanists who dwelt on emotions. It was more of the brainchild of John Stuart Mill, who with his utilitarian philosophy (termed by Paul Kurtz as eupraxophy) tried not to offer a religion but a guiding principle (Madigan 329). Obviously, Edword's Christian Humanism which advocates the self-fulfillment of human persons while applying Christian principles, falls under this group. In this case, the trappings of religious rituals are kept while jettisoning or rejecting outrightly the worship of a supernatural deity. Comte and Feuerbach are fine examples here.

Secular Humanism – grew out of the 18th century enlightenment rationalism and 19th century free-thought. In other words, this form of humanism draws upon the earlier four categories.

> It shares with Renaissance Humanism a love for learning and an advocacy of free inquiry, but it is as skeptical of the occult as it is of religion; it agrees with the Enlightenment thinkers that the use of reason is our best guide for understanding, but it tries to avoid the former's near-deification of rationality; it affirms the romantic stress on the importance of human emotions, but it is wary of the anti-civilization aspects of this movement; and like Religious Humanism, it seeks to chart out the common moral decencies found throughout the denominations of humankind, but it does not desire to establish a secular denomination, a religion of man to take their place (Madigan 330).

There are many sources of Secular Humanism especially, Dewey's pragmatic instrumentalism, Sartre's existential emphasis on human freedom and Russel's logical analysis.

While Edword's Christian Humanism falls under the purview of Religious Humanism as discussed above, we may need to briefly mention that his Philosophical Humanism simply refers to any of the above strains as a way of life in relation to human interests and needs. The other varieties in Edword's framework include Literary Humanism, Modern Humanism and Cultural Humanism.

Literary Humanism refers to the study of the humanities – Literature, History, Philosophy. Scholars under these areas of specialty are thus tagged humanists in the same token as those under physics, chemistry and biology are simply termed naturalists. However, social scientists are considered neither of both (Balogun 106).

Modern Humanism embraces the different nomenclatures of either Naturalistic Humanism, Scientific Humanism, Ethical Humanism or Democratic Humanism. The common thread that runs through them is their rejection of supernaturalism while relying mainly on reason and science, democracy and human compassion (Balogun 106). It is ambivalent in nature owing to its combined secular and religious roots.

Cultural Humanism is exemplified in hermeneutics whose meaning is derived from a myth. It is rooted in a god that gives it its signification. This has to do with the rational and empirical tradition which evolved in the course of European history and has developed into a principal arm of the Western methodology for the sciences, ethics, law and politics. It is believed to have originated from Ancient Greece and Rome (Balogun 106).

As it might have been rightly observed, in the course of tracing the history of humanism, it is obvious that religion is made a major scapegoat and/or object of attack in the various shades of Humanism mentioned above. We shall therefore investigate into the depth of such a religious challenge.

The Religious Challenge

Madigan made a fine summary on the religious challenges in the various trajectories of humanism. This, as he pointed out, lies basically on de-emphasis of other-worldliness, emphasis on this world, and humanists' questioning of the authority of organized religions. Their overall emphasis has been in relation to ethics or the search for a moral system which is devoid of a divine lawgiver (331). This notion bears different nuances in the historical development and forms of humanism. Madigan explains that Renaissance Humanists did try to broaden the domain of the Triune God and that it hardly objected to the Christian interpretation; that Enlightenment Humanists were satisfied with a God who did not need to intervene in human affairs but who sets the universe in motion under rational foundations. Romantic Humanists looked to a personal deity who was closer to the joys of life than a policeman figure type of God; Religious Humanists on their own part aim at discovering the vital force or world spirit which could be tapped into by all human persons when and where necessary; and Secular Humanists, according to this explanation, from their atheistic and agnostic perspective fall in line with Nietzsche who declared that "God is dead" while searching rather for ethical principles from among the people themselves.
Within the context of all these forms of humanism thus far explained, especially in modern humanism and secular humanism are embedded other layers or brands of humanism such as Marxian Humanism, Chinese Humanism, Western Humanism, American Humanism, European Humanism, and very many other modes. It is in a similar vein we talk of African predicaments, challenges, realities or concrete situations. Thus, even though African Humanism ought necessarily to possess a cosmopolitan outlook, it is African in its inner essence. This would apparently lead us into making enquiry on the major attributes or characteristics of African Humanism.

Attributes of African Humanism

African Humanism like any of the other forms of humanism has the welfare or wellbeing of the human person as its key attribute. Nevertheless, in considering this, we should bear in mind that it is not all humanists that are atheistic, iconoclastic and religious. This precautionary measure becomes very crucial because since the 16th century, the term Humanism has been commonly applied to persons "with a set of entirely non religious beliefs and values" (Hinnells 225) and here we are making reference to Africans who are acclaimed worldwide as being "notoriously religious" and whose "traditional religions permeate all the departments" of their lives (Mbiti 2; Idowu 5). Among the attributes of African Humanism, it is most apparent that human persons who could be described as being "incurably religious" beings are found at its center. As a matter of fact, the major tapestry which runs through African Humanism in any part of Africa is quite discernible through their religion which informs their basic worldviews and/or ontology. This is in turn principally anthropocentric. That is, virtually everything is weighed from the viewpoint of the human persons' central position. Even God is said to exist for the sake of man (Awolalu and Dopamu 160). Booth harps on "how African Religion is centered more on man than God or nature" (6). For the Baluba of Zaire, for instance, religion is best understood as a form of Religious Humanism (Booth 34). For them, religion is focused on the enhancement of human existence rather than on the natural world or the divine.

The human person is seen as the center of the universe and the entire creation is seen as being there to serve human purpose, whether it is to good ends or evil. This idea of the human person as the center-piece of creation is buttressed by Mbiti when he observed that, "it is as if the whole world exists for the sake of mankind" (38). This shows thereby that African people look for the usefulness or otherwise of the universe in relation to humanity. It has to do with both what the world can do for the human person and how he/she can use the world for his/her own good. Mbiti (39) went further to posit that some parts of creation are used for building, others for fire; some for physical uses, others for religious uses and some for magical purposes. Thus, according to Ikenga-Metuh the human person in the African worldview is considered the "crown of God's creation" (167). The story of creation of the human person is often repeatedly told and forms the central theme of African creation myths.

The African worldview is centered on the human person. Especially, the Igbo culture, according to Oguejiofor (48) places the human being or man (*Mmadu*) at the center of the universe, nature, society itself and a host of innumerable spiritual beings are relevant in so far as they affect the human person (positively or negatively). And for Ezeanya, "God has made man and woman the focal point of the universe" (15). Mbiti records the Abulaya creation story which says "God created man so that the sun will have someone for whom to shine. Then he created plants, animals and birds to provide food for him" (93). From all indications, the human being is not only considered the centerpiece of the universe, "he is also like the priest of the universe, linking the universe with God its Creator. Man awakens the universe, he speaks to it, he listens to it, he tries to create a harmony with the universe" (Mbiti 33) but God remains the "sustainer and upholder".

As Okolo has it, the human person "is the ontological mean between beings, existing above and below him" (23-24). And as Idowu would put it in relation to the Yoruba people of central Nigeria, the various elements in their lives "form the warp and weft" (6) of their beliefs, as much as the keynote of their life is their religion (Idowu 5). Idowu also observes that, in all things, they are religious. Religion forms the foundation and the all-governing principle of life for them. As far as they are concerned, the full responsibility of all the affairs of life belongs to the Deity…Through all the circumstances of life, through all its changing scenes, its joys and troubles; it is the Deity who is in control. Before a child is born… at every stage of life – puberty, betrothal, marriage, taking up a career, building a house, going on a journey…(5).

These elements form the philosophical and religious ambience within which their humanism is built and revealed. Ikenga-Metuh beautifully articulated it when he averred that "in African worldviews, there is no clear line of demarcation between the material and the spiritual realms" (164). Both of the realms are so interwoven so much so that the human person forms the bridge, so to speak, between the two realms. It is from this role which he/she plays that the central positioning is derivable and the mission of his/her life is inextricably defined (Ikenga-Metuh 167). God is regarded not just as the originator, creator or sustainer of the universe and especially the father of the human person, He is more so, regarded as the source of every individual person's life.

In the attributes of African Humanism, it is also obvious that the human person is seen as a unitary being whose ontology is characteristically non-dualistic in nature. African worldview does not subscribe to the western doctrine of dualism, though it agrees that the human person is made up of body and spirit. A number of constituent elements are often associated with an individual person. Mbiti exhibited so much academic humility when he stated in his epoch-making book, *African Religions and Philosophy*, that "it is not always easy to divide up a person into more than two parts" (160). And he also agreed that this area would always "need further research and study". A person is often thought "to be composed of physical and spiritual entities, and among some societies, to these is added a 'shadow', a 'breath' or a 'personality'" (Mbiti 160).

Among the Igala people, for instance, the constituent parts of the human person is said to be the body (*angọla*) and the spirit or soul (*ọlai/inmi*). The body is the physical and visible aspect of the person; and spirit or soul is the spiritual and invisible dimension of the human person. However, the body is believed to be intricately connected to the spirit in such a way that it is not just seen as an ordinary 'container' or 'vessel' for the spirit. In other words, this group of Africans believe that there exists no clear-cut dichotomy between the body and the soul of the person. All the organs and every aspect of the body, including the brain (*ọkọtọ*), heart or lung (*ẹdọ*), blood (*ẹbiẹ*) would cease to function as soon as the breath (*inmi*) ceases. Igala people believe in the tripartite dimension of the soul or spirit, namely: *Ọlai/inmi* (breath), *ọjọ ki dọ'wa/ọkai* (personality-soul, ancestral guardian or spirit double). This means that, in Igala ontology, breath (*inmi*) is the principle of life or vital force that resides mainly in the lungs and the chest or the heart which is also invariably the seat of love will-power. Its cessation automatically spells the death of the individual.

The spirit double or personality-soul, on the other hand, is partially split into two. One part is believed to be dwelling in heaven with God (*Ọjọ*), the Creator while it would still be functioning in the individual. Meanwhile, the second part is said to be attached to the person's forehead and is known as *ẹbo oji*. This is said to be responsible for the person's destiny. In this case, it is also connected with the guardian spirit. The person's character, status or fortunes in life are believed to be dictated or determined by this aspect of the person. However, through constant sacrifice or offerings to one's spirit guardian, which is sometimes referred to as the ancestral spirit, it is believed that one's fate in life can be improved upon. This is the aspect of the soul that links the person through the bloodline with the ancestors. It is this aspect of the soul which is believed to be responsible for *adawa* (the coming again) or what we might term 'partial reincarnation'.

The first arm of the personality-soul or spirit double is strictly the *inmi* that relates to the 'divine spark' or God's emanation right from creation. This is the spirit of God in the human person which can never die. It returns back to God after death and it is responsible for the belief in the immortality of the soul (i.e. *inmi ogbegbe ilẹ*).

The Nupe of central Nigeria also distinguish between four basic elements including the physical body, breath (*Rayi*), shadow (*Fifingi*) and the personality-soul (*Kuchi*) (Ikenga-Metuh 166). The Igbo people of Eastern Nigeria mention four principal elements besides the body: breath or heart (*Obi*); shadow spirit (*Onyinyo*) which is sometimes said to be the real self; the destiny spirit (*Chi*) and personality or ancestral spirit (*Eke*) (Ikenga-Metuh 166). The Yoruba of Western Nigeria have a "tripartite conception of a person… thus the human personality", for them, "consists of *Ara* (body), *Emi* (soul) and *Ori* (inner head)" (Makinde 103-104). It would seem that this is a belief in multiple souls: the breath (*Emi*) is considered the vital force which is the life principle that resides in the lungs and chest or the heart; personal destiny (*Iponri* or *Eleda*) is associated with the head and also known as the spirit double. The personality-soul here is believed to be responsible for many things in a person's life.

However, what they call shadow (*ojiji*) is said to have no function (Ikenga-Metuh, *God and Man* 115). The Ashanti of Ghana also believe that the constituent parts of the human soul are: Ego or personality distinctive character (*Sunsum*); life force (*Kra*) which is said to be the small bit of the creator within the person's body, and this is directly from God and is related to the person's destiny. They also believe that what a person receives from his father is *Ntoro* and the spirit that forms him/her in the mother is *Mogya* (Ikenga-Metuh, *God and Man* 114).

Another attribute of African Humanism is its communalistic nature. The western individualistic manner of living is quite reprehensible to the typical African person. African style of life is rather collective and universalistic in character. This way of life is traceable to the forebears of the people and is powered by collective authority or consensus of the elders. As Nyirongo rightly articulates, "the community makes the individual. An African worth an identity among the people depends on where the community places him/her" (106). And as Nkemnkia points out, in this experience "the other is another self. The I is lost in the You; the You and the I is lost in the We" (201). He went further to explain that through the category of relation, "each one places him/herself in front of the Other and considers him/herself as the Other of the Other" (201). In this atmosphere, they are constrained by genuine love; solidarity and common good and are further motivated by the resulting sense of true identity, duty and right or justice.

The "I-You" relationship takes the back seat in this respect, as the "We" relationship takes pre-eminence. Cardinal Wojtyla's (Beller 31) essay on "Person, Subject and Communion" in relation to inculturation brings home this point, "The communion of "We" is this human plural form in which the person accomplishes itself to the highest degree as a subject". Okere (151) in relation to the Igbo culture opines that the "self" is congenitally communitarian self, incapable of being, existing and really unthinkable except in the complex of relations of the community. It is a web of relations. The human person lives out his perfection in relation and personhood is therefore attained in relation. As Menkiti (173) succinctly puts it, "The African emphasized the rituals of incorporation and the overarching necessity of learning the social rules by which the community lives, so that what was initially biologically given can come to attain social selfhood." That shows that personhood is attainable in relation to the level of participation in the communal life. Here, the message of the aphorism that "nobody is an island" is brought home more forcefully.

In the same light, Nwoko elucidates on how in the African ambience man is seen as, a family being. He is born and bred in the family; he lives, moves, marries and dies within the family of the living and the dead. This family within which man's being oscillates already embodies the spiritual root on the basis of the conviction that all members of the family belong to one ancestry, which traces back to God. Human beings are connected as family beings, and all families trace back to God (23).

Against this backdrop, Nwoko arrives at the concept of "Universal Consanguinity" for "all men sharing a common blood despite colour, race, religion (in Njoku 280). This is what Mulago meant when in no uncertain terms he averred:

> By the fact that we are born in a family, a class in a tribe we are plunged in a specific vital current, which "incorporates", moulds and orients us to live in a way of this community, modifies "ontically" all our being… in that way the family, the clan, the tribe, are a whole of which each member is only a part. The same blood, the same life partaken by all and received from the first ancestor, founder of the clan, flows in all the veins (in Beller 36).

In a certain manner, it is the community that initiates one into personhood through some initiation, either formerly or informally. Naming ceremonies, circumcision, initiation into adulthood and especially into womanhood, marriage ceremonies and a host of other ceremonies form particular examples or instances of initiation into personhood at some stages of the African life. The crux of this matter lies essentially in the fact that the African as a human being, culturally speaking is formed or initiated and receives his "ontology" and "being" from the community (Maritain 72). To the African mind, the concept of separate beings is entirely foreign. As Ansah expresses it, "Africans hold that created beings preserve a bond with one another, an intimate ontological relationship" (5).

For Bell, "Africans do not think of themselves as discrete individuals" (60), but rather understand themselves as part of a "community". Mbiti supports this view with his popular inversion of the well known aphorism "*Cogito ergo sum*" (I think, therefore I am) of Descartes. He rather states: "I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am". And Mbiti, in his *African Religions and Philosophy* opines that the: individual owes his/her existence to other people. He is simply part of the whole… whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say: "I am because we are; and since we are there I am (108).

This forms the cardinal idea on African humanism in view of communal relations. In Bantu language of Southern Africa, for instance, exists this African ethic or humanist philosophy which focuses on people's allegiance or relation to each other (*en-wikipedia*). The word "*Ubuntu*" is employed which means "I am what I am because of who we all are" (1). Desmond Tutu threw greater light on it when he explained that a person with *Ubuntu* is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, based on a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished when others are tortured or oppressed (1). He further stated that one cannot exist as a human being in isolation. "It is about interconnectedness. You cannot be human all by yourself and when you have this quality (*Ubuntu*) you are known for generosity" (1). In Nelson Mandela's own description of *Ubuntu* "a traveler through a country would stop at a village and didn't have to ask for food or for water. Once he stops, the people give him food, entertain him" (2).

In this light, happiness of others and catering for common good is the uppermost idea on people's mind. It is done in such a manner that its impact does affect the entire world. When one does well then it spreads forth for the good of humanity as a whole. It is all about being personally fulfilled by improving the lot of others. From the Igala perspective, this has to do with "team-spirit" "*udama*" (Igala communalism) gingered through the spirit of "*awadẹdẹ*" (solidarity or togetherness). By this principle, it is believed that in fair weather or bad weather, we do not enjoy or suffer alone (Egbunu 10, *Traditional Values*; Egbunu, *African Socialism* 1). Among the Ebira people, the concept of "*Ozovehe*" (the human person's life) (Ehusani 3) represents this quality. Jackson expanded on this topic while contrasting it with vengeance. In it he sees a high value placed on the life of a human being; high premium on dignity, compassion, humaneness and respect for humanity of another; there is a shift from confrontation to mediation and conciliation, good attitudes and shared concern; reestablishment of harmony in the relationship rather than retributive justice; it favours reconciliation rather than estrangement; it is towards changing conduct and not just punishment; promotes mutual understanding rather than conflict; favours civility and civilized dialogue premised on mutual tolerance (en-wikipedia 1).

This tallies also with what *Ubuntu* concept stands for in Rwanda Burundi: "Being considerate and humane; whoever refuses to show mercy is equated with an animal". In Botswana, it is represented by the concept of "*Botho*" whereby a person is regarded as a person through other people: "The process of earning respect is by first giving it, and to gain empowerment by empowering others" (en-wikipedia 2). This encourages people to applaud rather than resent those who succeed. This stands against anti-social, disgraceful, inhuman and criminal behavior and encourages social justice. In Malawi, it is known as "*Umunthu*" (I am because we are) to the effect that "when you are on your own you are as good as an animal of the wilds but when there are two of you, you form a community". In this light, the neighbour's child is one's own while his or her success is one's own as well (en-wikipedia). In Kenya, "*Utu*" which means humaneness – not just towards other human beings but also to nature or the care of the environment is used. What we explained elsewhere (Egbunu 6-7) in relation to personhood among the Igala is very apt here. The good wind of *Udama* that blows in the typical Igala traditional atmosphere seems to be echoing and re-echoing in almost all Africa, thus:

Your husband is our husband
Your wife is our wife
Your daughter is our daughter
Your son is our son
Your father is our father
Your mother is our mother
Your farm is our farm
Your problem is our problem
Your joy is our joy
Your pain is our pain
Your promotion is our promotion
Your demotion is our demotion
Who hurts you hurts us
Who fights you fights us
Who derides you derides us
Who insults you insults us
Who bewitches you bewitches us
Who pursues you pursues us
Our wife therefore must be cared for whether you are alive or dead
Our children must be catered for whether you are dead or alive
Our elders must be loved and protected whether you are alive or dead.

Come to think of it, the *Udama* concept of solidarity or communal living, stands in direct contrast to the individualism of the west and all forms of discriminatory attitudes. No gainsaying, the fact that it is akin to what Julius Nyerere of Tanzania dubbed *Ujamaa*. Onwubiko's commentary is quite applicable here too, "it builds community and is opposed to all forms of discrimination. But it does not eradicate distinctions. It respects stability, statuses and therefore upholds hierarchy" (10).

What is true in the Igala traditional society can also be said to be true to a large extent in other parts of Africa without any fear of contradiction that. Everybody is involved in the training of a child. The child belongs to the entire society. As it is often said, "*ichonę katete an'ǫma-n*" (it is not only an individual that raises a child) or "*ichęnę kibiǫma katete anęn*" (it is not only the parent of a child that raises him). In the traditional environment, virtually everybody takes responsibility in spanking a child who is red-herring. Anybody can feed a child who is hungry; anyone can train a child who has no sponsor; anyone can clothe a child that is naked or wretched-looking; anyone can shelter a child that is homeless; and adoption of children by one's relations or friends is a common practice. That such practices are prevalent does not mean there are no undergirding principles or rules. Everything may not be alright in certain situations in relation to the above, yet this is by and large, practicable and life-enhancing in many quarters.

In this obvious holism of complex interdependency and mutual interconnectedness or relationship between the cosmos, the spirit world, animate and inanimate world is found the seamless fabric whereby mankind as bridge-mender activates the vital forces. No dichotomizing room is left between the visible and invisible world. It is a spiritually suffused world to the degree that the atmosphere could be said to be dynamically saturated and spiritualized with supernatural powers. And considering the symbiotic nature of this mutual interrelationship, it is clear that African Humanism is communalistic. That notwithstanding, we need to probe into what prospects African Humanism holds for humanity.

Any Prospects?

We are not under any illusion in this work that we can exhaust everything necessary in this discourse on African Humanism. As a matter of fact, it is an apparently vast and all-encompassing subject. Nevertheless, we have, perhaps, merely succeeded in raising more salient questions in our continuous bid to search for solutions to our multifarious predicaments in Africa.

With the unitary and non-dualistic characteristics of African Humanism thus far related in the ontology of the human person, is it not possible that human life which is viewed as a continuum, both in this life and in the afterlife, should be better catered for?

In a similar vein, the sacred and dignified nature of human life has been laid bare *via* the great emphasis on the human person as the centerpiece or crown of God's creation. Does this not readily call for caution against despising of human life? But what about discrimination against descendants of ex-slaves (*Osu* caste system in Igboland and *Amoma Adu* among borderline Igala), albinos, the physically challenged, and the obnoxious practice of induced abortion, mercy-killing, etc?

Besides, with the human person as the centerpiece of creation in African Humanism, is it not germane that ecological issues bothering on deforestation, environmental degradation, pollution of the air, or gas-flaring be adequately taken care of?

Again, if African Humanism reminds us of the need to curb political thuggery, assassination, violence in all its forms, terrorism, murder, genocide in all its ramifications, since these practices constitute enormous danger to human life, would that not set the ball rolling in its rightful direction if this onerous task is taken more seriously?

And since African Humanism is principally about seeking human welfare, would it not be proper that all well-meaning individuals and the leadership of our nations develop policies that are capable of addressing the plight of indigent students, the unemployed lot in the society, the poor, the sick, the less privileged and marginalized, and especially widows and orphans?

What about frontally confronting or perhaps curbing certain obnoxious and anti-human practices within the traditional African society? Then shall female genital mutilation, forced marriage, child abuse, rape, ritual murder and other social vices, such as kidnapping, armed robbery and the like, not be conscientiously addressed?

Then finally, what of issues bothering on the vestiges or the effects of colonialism in our land, especially the neo-colonialist activities of many sit-tight, dictatorial African rulers? Shall the legacies of the likes of heroes such as Nelson Mandela fame of South Africa, Nnamdi Azikiwe (Zik of Africa) and Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, be allowed to rot?

Conclusion

What is being advanced here is similar to what Senghor suggested in his quest for West African Humanism, to raise the standard of culture so as to enjoy rise in standard of living… since, as it were, culture is inside and outside, above and beneath all human activities, it is the spirit that animates them that gives a civilization its unique style (594).

We are persuaded by our African Humanistic cultural heritage that the imperative of a social, political, spiritual, economic and other forms of challenges presented in our context would receive adequate and appropriate attention if only we, as Africans, could become more conscious of our natural endowments or heritage. It is only then our common African predicaments would be frontally resolved. Then and only then shall we be motivated to move a step further in "exporting" and sharing the spirit behind our African communalistic Humanist culture with other continents.

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