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Item Type	Article
Authors	Onunwa, U
Publisher	Calabar School of Philosophy (CSP)
Rights	Creative Commons Copyright (CC 2.5)
Download date	2026-11-19 18:40:37
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/236021

HUMANISTIC BASIS FOR AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS THEOLOGY AND ETHICS: (A CHALLENGE TO THE CHURCH IN NIGERIA)

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Preamble

'African Theology has been a very confused term in theological discurse. It has been described as the Theology of African Traditional Religion or African version of Christian Theology. Each view has had its own strong supporters and has been projected to imply African ideas. In this paper, the present writer would uphold African Theology to mean and represent the theological expression of the Traditional African Religion which is the modern version of the religion of the ancestral founding fathers of the communities. The ethics also relate to the same religious faith of the ancestors. Christian theology is yet to be made African both in its ontological existence and expression by African indigenous Christians. Sad enough, many African Christians have no Christology in their vernacular and cannot think of God and Jesus in their local language. Many in fact find it difficult to pray in vernacular and as such cannot express Christian theological ideas in their own language, thought-pattern and conceptual scheme. This lack of in depth experience of Christianity in many African minds has made African brand of Christianity a mere epiphenomenon on both African life and society. The Jewish cosmology and milieu which formed the core background of Jesus' teaching and explanation of the universe while he was here on earth has continued to be appropriated by many different African groups who cannot fully decode and apply Jesus' teaching in their own context. It is sad to note that the early attempt to translate the Bible in many African Languages, though a noble effort, was mere transliteration rather than deep meaningful and contextual translation. A deep and analytical reading of the Igbo Bible in particular, by one who understands classical Hebrew and Greek would discover many pitfalls in the efforts of those early translators whose knowledge of Hebrew and the Igbo was not deep

enough. More so, they translated from the King James Version of the Bible with its numerous weaknesses and errors.

Many early missionaries and colonial administrators who came to evangelize and civilize Africa rejected African ways of life as inarticulate and unintelligible. First there was that overt cynicism as to whether Africans ever had a religion. Secondly, Emil Ludwig and those of his own milieu and views projected the hypothesis that Africans have no knowledge of God on the grounds of intellectual inferiority. Thirdly, it was inferred that since Africans had neither religion nor knowledge of God, their moral world was without basis. The African mind was a clear illustration of the negative source of being- The Devil. This outdated European view led to their distorted picture of African Society as the incarnation of evil (Pobee,102). Moral values were therefore non-existent in Africa.

Thomas Thompson, the first African missionary to the then Gold Coast- present Ghana- was nurtured in the age that projected this distorted view of Africa. Having been fed with the prevalent lies of his milieu that Africans were morally depraved because of their ignorance of the Supreme Being, Thompson spoke pejoratively of the Fante people of Ghana in a tone that depicted his ignorance of the people's way of life and thought. For instance, he was heard to say at a time that: as to their sense of vices and virtues, they have only cold and unaffecting notions of both… spiritual matters made no impressions on them (Thompson, 688)

The notion that the traditional African had no sense of sin but at best belonged to a Shame Culture rather than a Guilt Culture whose norms and sanctions of morality derive from society is now an over flogged issue. (Welbourne, 182 – 189)The present writer has no time to debunk it.

The School of Thought which upholds the Shame- Culture stance insists that in African ethical system, which is invariably a product of their theological belief; the greatest deterrent is the shame and loss of esteem which follow the exposure of a person's misconduct (Ikenga-Metuh,97). To them, offences are against the spirits and ancestors and never against the Supreme Being (Sawyer, 63). This long and outdated view is beyond the scope of this paper.

Nonetheless, some later indigenous African theologians and scholars influenced by the views of this School of Thought had expressed similar views in a different way. For instance, F.A. Arinze had in the early

1970s opined that although Chukwu is ranked Supreme in estimate and attributes in Igbo traditional religious system, he is not generally given pride of place in the Igbo man's mind on moral issue (Arinze, 31). In other words, the Supreme Being is not primarily the first port of call in moral and ethical decisions. On the other hand, another Church Prelate, A.K. Obiefuna, a contemporary of Arinze holds a different view. To him, there are people who feel the pricking of conscience- obi ya piara ya utali, when they felt remorseful and penitent on realizing that they had committed some sins. Similarly, he discussed, onye obi ya kwu ekere si which implies one with a straight heart and one with clean conscience (Obiefuna, 19).

This paper is not a critique of those who hold either view on African Traditional Religious ideas, their ethics and theology nor is it out to explain the traditional indigenous ethical or theological systems. It is indeed a new approach to unravel the subtle and complex problems surrounding morality in today's Nigerian society. It will try to argue that the African traditional religious ethics seems to have influenced the type of morality which Christians operate with in today's Nigerian society. It will further corroborate the idea that since African Traditional Religious Theology and Ethics is basically humanistic rather than theistic, man-centred rather than God-centred, it has invariably influenced the contemporary Christian theological views in many African Christian churches.

Although Theology is literally Theo- Logos- God Word, in African traditional theological parlance, understanding and praxis, it is man-centred and focused. The new investigation is trying to examine the anthropocentric import in every ethical and theological norm and expression in African traditional religious system which invariably has affected African Christianity. This is based on the centrality of man- Homo Sapiens – in the traditional religious cosmology of the Africans. The primary focus of this work, in other words, is to establish that African traditional religious theology which is basically ethical in nature is centred on preservation of human interest, life, fecundity and destiny. Every ethical norm or rule is devised to preserve man. Today's African church seems to be more interested in the welfare and success of man than in the glory of God. Hence the popularization of Prosperity Gospel!

The data for this work which were obtained through primary and secondary sources came from the Igbo of South Eastern Nigeria. They

have been supplemented with some evidences from some other African societies which help to throw more light and validate our view points. A holistic approach has been adopted in the presentation and analysis of the data because of the all-embracing nature of African traditional religion.

2. Historical Relationship between Religion and Morality (Ethics) in Traditional African Society

The African worldview is primarily religious. Morality is basically the sum total of the outlook and way of life of a given religious community, their concept of what may be done or avoided in the effort to attain the goal of union with the Supreme Deity. Morality in its religious signification is always with reference to God implying that it is concerned with how humans should behave in order to attain a standard of life that would please the gods and the Supreme Being. From the Latin root mos/moris, (hence moral), morality refers to conduct, the way of life of humans in society. It is the relation of human act to man's absolute value (Higgins, 352).

In classical society, it must be distinguished from Ethics- which in its philosophical connotation is concerned with the Codes of Conduct of society. From the Greek word Ethos/ethica, it refers to the norm and rule of conduct, manner or way or custom of doing things or simply sphere of duty. (Rahnar, 152) It refers to the prevailing custom and manner of acting which a particular society approves or disapproves as helpful or harmful to the common interest. Those concepts are expressed and concretized in Laws called Moral Laws. This distinction is not very clearly marked in traditional African society. The African society is holistic and has not been plagued by Cartesian dualism which was prevalent in Europe at the initial period of development and maturation of the study of religion as an academic discipline. Similar distinction cannot be clearly made between Religion and Morality (ethics) in African traditional setting. We know that religion is simply the bond of relationship between man and God (deities). Morality is the concrete expression of this bond in human life. Hence, moralities and ethics are in practice inseparable particularly in traditional African society.

There is, however, a degree of separation between ethics (morality) and religion in complex societies. In traditional and un-dislocated African societies, the violation of the moral order is also a breach in religion and also an invitation to incurring supernatural

chastisement. We shall throughout this work see morality/ethics and religion in African traditional society as completely inseparable although each has its own corporate existence and identity. Just as E. E. Evans-Pritchard had earlier warned, we shall in this paper try to avoid imposing Western theological and philosophical concepts of sin and ethics on the Africans whose lives are essentially holistic (Pritchard, 5). The integral quality of religion and ethics (morality) in traditional African society is not simply an ideological fusion. Societies with prescriptive religious system within which detailed rules of conduct are laid down are always seen to produce predictable results which fit into the total social system. For instance, careless ritual or immoral behavior can nullify the efficacy of a man's religious action and even endanger the life of a religious celebrant of a ritual sacrifice. An inexplicable thunder could kill the offending priest (Kalu, 44).

3. The Place of Man in African Traditional Religious Cosmology

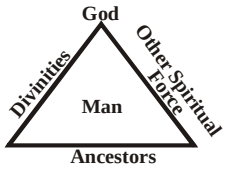
Many scholars have not seriously examined the place and role of man - homo sapiens- in African traditional religious worldview. Dominic Zahan and Emefie Ikenga -Metuh had, however, in the early 1970s and 1980s respectively tried to explore this apparently neglected aspect of African studies. They both in separate studies tried to explore the relationship between God and man as well as the unique position of man in African traditional religious cosmology (Zahan, 4; Metuh, 3). Through their incisive hermeneutical exposition, the central position of man in African traditional worldview has been made obvious and convincing. It was discovered that the whole African world revolves on Man. Obed Anizoba picked up the gauntlet and threw more light on the dignity and centrality of Human life in African traditional scheme of things. In a brilliant doctoral thesis, he tried to establish the dignity of man in Igbo traditional world view which is a representative of African concept of man in the universe. Professor Anizoba clearly stated that the laws, moral and ethical regulations, covenant enactments and ritual performances in African societies are primarily focused on the central and dignified position of man- homo sapiens- in African cosmos. Ethical laws are enacted to protect man's highly and dignified position and to enhance his welfare (Anizoba, 24-30)

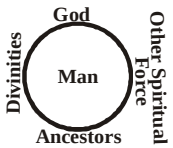
The African traditional religion affirms that the human life is superior to any other created in the cosmos. Man is the Supreme

irreducible reality. The divinity itself enters human affairs in the same way as do other beings which man is close to and uses. . This underlines the importance of the Homo sapiens in the religious context. Even the deity is meant to serve human interests. Man does not, however, place himself in opposition to God (Supreme Deity). It is this relationship that brings the full cycle of life which includes reincarnation into focus. It is pertinent to note that when an African venerates the divinity, it is not for the glory of the deity per se but for man's personal development, progress and security. Religion and its ethical implications become thus essentially a function of the human element and of its domain, the Earth. It is not only utilitarian but also teleological (Zahan, 6-9).

The Primacy of man in relation to the rest of the world is due to his central position in the Universe. In a graphic imagery and presentation of the African world, God (the Supreme Deity), is at the apex of an isosceles triangle. The ancestors are at the base while the divinities and the other spiritual forces occupy the other two sides of the triangle. Man (Homo Sapiens), is placed at the centre of the triangle.

Looking at the illustration critically, it seems as if man appears like a microcosm in which converge the innumerable forces and influences from the beings which inhabit the other arms of the triangular figure. On the other hand, if we accept the cyclical figure or view of the universe, man is still at the centre of the world and around him, all beings move in a continuum: each object, moving away from man, only returns to him, seizes in the course of the voyage, all that is not man himself and which surpasses him. (Zahan 1970:20).





Man is the central object in which converge the innumerable invisible threads spun by objects and beings between themselves, in consonance with the rules of correspondence given by categories of classification. He does not see himself as the King of Creation but rather as a central element of a system on which he imposes centripetal orientation (Zahan, 6). This implies that African Traditional world- view and Religion are

anthropocentric. It is a humanism of a sort. Certainly man sees himself as the centre of the universe and when he speaks, he tries to strike his chest- a whole me, me alone!

Therefore, all of African spiritual life is based on this vision of man's situation and role. The idea of finality outside of man is foreign to … Man was not made for God or for the universe… It is not to please God or out of love for God that the African prays, implores or makes sacrifice but rather to become himself and to realize the order in which he finds himself implicated (Zahan, 5).

Man's central position in African cosmology is overtly expressed in the myriads of creation myths that exist in every community. From the myths emerge the world views. It is essential to stress that world views are the intellectual or rational explanations of the order which under-girds human lives and environments. (Kalu, 44) The pattern of this underlying order could be derived from the myths, taboos, customs and proverbs of a community. Through the world view, man achieves much. For instance, the insecure feeling of being lost in an inexplicable, uncontrollable and unpredictable cosmos is taken care of. (Onunwa, 6). Thus, maintenance of social order, control of various forms of forces, and the quest for survival and happiness are possible if man understands his central position in the universe as well as the things that make the world tick. Consequently, devices to control and predict space-time (tempero-spatio) events are constructed by man who finds himself at the centre of a precarious world. Among such devices were self-discipline, prayers, character modeling, character moderation, charms, etc.

4. Implications of Man's Realization of His Central Position in the Cosmos.

Sequel to man's realization of his central position in the universe is his use of his intellectual power to control the innumerable forces that converge on him. The precarious universe must be brought under control. He himself must bring his own movement under control. He must curb his excesses if he would survive in a precarious environment.

The ethical implications of such a universe (where man is at a central position) are immense. In a world view that is predominantly religious, both human life and nature are held to be sacred. Human life, in

particular is held to be sacrosanct. Since human life is held to be sacred, whenever man is faced with uncontrollable forces of nature, his reaction will be to imbue them with spirits and seek the aid of good and friendly ones, patron ancestors, magic, divination and elaborate propitiatory rituals as counters to the evil forces. Worship in such settings (in fact in most cases) emphasized the wish of the client. A votary would variously plead with patron gods, placate the angry and evil spirits, and end up by threatening any deity that if he failed to perform, his grove and shrine will be overgrown with weeds. (Kalu, 42). There is no need, after all for an African to continue to waste time and precious gifts on a deity that cannot help. There are many occasions when man's actions are explained in terms of the Machiavellian policy which states that the end justifies the means. The African is interested in results. He can offer sacrificial rituals to both good and evil spirits. The essence is to secure the good of man, the happiness of the central figure who occupies the cosmos. He is not particularly interested in seeking the glory of the deity per se.

Man is not particularly materialistic in that sense. He is quite aware of the fact that character is essential in all his activities. For instance, the Igbo of South East Nigeria would insist that Agwa bu nma-, in other words, character is the essence of beauty, and character is essential to achieving good living conditions. In this case, character implies moral uprightness, peace with the gods, natural forces and peace with men and other peers. Purity of life is therefore essential in blocking the anger of evil spirits and ancestors. Any immoral act could incur the wrath of spirit beings who could withhold rains, sunshine, fertility, etc. For the African, therefore, laws and moral constructs are made in order to enhance the position of man on earth. People are more important than profit, policies, ideologies and systems because human life is sacred and sacrosanct. . The sanctity of human life, its preservation and protection, become the primary aim of individual and social ethic. When an individual or a community offers sacrifice to God or a deity, the plea is to God to come down for man's good and to bless him. Man does not pray to God or to a deity, to wait for him above or to rapture him in the end some where above the universe. Man rather persuades the deity to come and dwell among men for the good of humans in the world. In Africa, therefore, religion and its inseparable ethical implications become a function of human development and improvement of social conditions.

The African places high premium on life. Anything that threatens human life or impedes his success on earth is resisted with vehemence. Bad character is one of those impediments.

The Igbo call human beings Nmadu- a shortened form of Nma-Ndu. Literally, a close translation would mean 'the Beauty of Life'. The essence of this name is that human life on earth is the source of beauty to the created Universe. The universe according to the Igbo creation myth was dull, meaningless and uneventful till the first human being who was created came into the world. If there are no human beings populating the world, the whole place would not be vibrant and active. It is the position of man in the universe that has made him construct the theory of reincarnation which gives him hope to 'return' after physical death, to continue with another cycle here on earth. One of the conditions for such privilege is pure ethical life lived in this present world of time and space.

For the African, it is important to state that there is no theological summae that teaches a paradise to hope for or hell to avoid in the hereafter. The soul of man does not hope for spiritual redemption or for a closer contact with a Big Deity or God in the next world beyond. This is important if we really want to understand why there is much emphasis of African religiosity or spirituality on things that would enhance man's life here and now. For instance, exploitation of man by either a deity or fellow man is abhorrent to man's concept of the dignity and sanctity of the human person. Any African Christian is still influenced by this thought pattern. He can be a very highly disciplined man who believes in God seriously and even can serve as a highly placed Church prelate in his Christian denomination. Yet he scarcely believes in the Mansion above in John 14 which Jesus promised those who believe in him. The African Church leader would amass wealth; some unscrupulous ones could even own jets and houses all over Europe and Africa in the name of Prosperity Gospel. A traditional African religious votary would do similar thing, i.e. amass as much wealth as he could, hoping to come back to the world through the process of reincarnation and repossess what he bequeathed his children before his demise. A typical Christian whose world-view is like Christ's would be reluctant to amass wealth here on earth where moth and termites eat and devour. Such Christians are hard to come by in today's Nigerian Church where every one aspires to be a millionaire!

African names are reflective of the centrality of man and the sanctity of human life in the traditional religious scheme of life. A few examples drawn from the Igbo of Nigeria can suffice to validate our view points.

Madu-akolam	-	May I not lack human beings
Maduka	-	humans are more precious than any other material possessions
Madubuike	-	human being is the source of support and strength.
Madu bu –uko	-	humans are essence of fame and wealth
Maduwu-uba	-	humans are evidence of wealth, humans are the essence of wealth

From such high premium placed on the central position of humans in African world view, we can appreciate why all ethical principles, systems, norms and rules are geared towards the preservation, protection and enhancement of human conditions in African society. If there is a programme or project that does not promote the human life, it is rated low. The human-face factor in a policy makes it more acceptable and popular. A policy is in-human if it does not project the high premium the Africans place on human life. (Magesa, 45)

5. Humanistic Factor in African Nationalism

In this section, we intend to apply the traditional African humanistic philosophy and ethical principles to an entirely different sector of human affairs. It is not necessarily a religious issue per se. But African religion is holistic and affects every aspect of life and action. This section may rightly be described as secular or political but from the holistic nature of African traditional religion, no aspect of human life and action is outside its scope. From this premises, therefore, we may infer that in a subtle way, many African nationalists who fought for the rights and independence of their nation from colonial rule and post colonial oppression of their people were influenced by the 'humanism ' of African traditional religion and ethics which indirectly and unequivocally influenced their lives in their younger days. They might not come up openly to claim that they were influenced by the traditional religious customs of their people, but unconsciously their mind- set and psyche were influenced by the ethical system into which they were born.

It is important to emphasize the primacy of man – homo sapiens- in relation to the rest of the world in African perception. It is an anthropocentric world, a man-centred, person-centred and people-oriented world. God is always mentioned only in relation to the welfare and best interest of human beings. Man tries to use God primarily to achieve the highest good for man on earth.

In Africa, the individual can firmly say that I am because we are

and since we are, I am. This is a cardinal point in the understanding of the African concept of man and his place in human society. (Mbiti, 108 – 109). The African warm heart makes him gregarious, rugged individualism of the West is rare in African social system as well as in his religious world. The ethical prohibition of certain anti-social acts like incest, adultery, homosexuality, stealing, lying, cheating of fellows, and such other vices, is based on the understanding of their dehumanizing effect on the individual not necessarily offences that can wound the heart of a loving God. It is the painful effect of the crime of stealing on the victim that the Africans condemn the act as inhuman and not necessarily ungodly. Their explanation of the enormity of any evil is based on its effect on human victims and not on the spiritual beings who dwell in the Spirit world or on God who dwells in his own domain away from the home of man here on earth. It is still difficult for the African to conceive of a Weeping God who is wounded by the physical injury on a little child raped by angry and vicious paedophile. Some unconventional acts of misconduct might be allowed in some African societies primarily because they served as social short term relief for the good of man. Often the good of humans are looked upon as being more important than rules, principles and ideologies. Where a rule becomes a burden on man, such rule is reviewed or abrogated. (Isichie, 121 -134). It is in-human! It is not in favour of man.

When the late Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana got up to fight imperialism of the colonial administration, he stated that he did so because it dehumanized the African people of Ghana. He stated that his aim was the building of a society in which the principles of social justice, human dignity, full employment, good housing and equal opportunity for education would be paramount. (Nkrumah, 118). He saw in British colonial system of administration, laws and policies in pre-independent Ghana, evidences of dehumanization-something he considered a travesty of the traditional African way of life. Although Nkrumah or other nationalists did not state that they were influenced by the traditional religious values of their people, they nonetheless, subscribed to those humanistic principles of African society.

In the same vein, late Julius Nyerere (118) was articulate to state that he opposed British system of government which seeks to build a happy society on the basis of the exploitation of man by man. Exploitation is ethically obnoxious to the African concept of the dignity of the human

person. The nationalists saw in foreign governments' policies, serious attack on the cherished African ethical values.

Similarly, the late Sekou Toure of Guinea in the West African sub-region, spoke with some emotion when he stated that the primary task of African leaders was to harmonize living conditions by correcting the contradictions between the haves and the have-nots without necessarily dispossessing the haves and turn them into have -not's. (Toure, 18). This has an implication of co-existence which is paramount in the traditional ethical system of Africa. The notion of co-existence, live and let live, demands absolute moral principle of mutual respect, one for the other. No one should look down on the other nor cheat his fellow. Both rich and poor, male and female, literate and illiterate, should live side by side and respect the rights of each other.

The primary and constant slogan of Kenya Africa Union- (KAU) - the leading political party in the country at the hey-day of colonial administration was Uhuru- meaning freedom. By all implication, freedom in traditional socio-religious Kenyan society meant re-acquisition of the land from colonialists. Jomo Kenyatta, an outstanding Kenyan nationalist, fought against such oppressive acts by the whites. He saw it as dehumanization of the African peoples, de-sacralization of the religio-economic and political factor –the land- which is the physical expression of the Earth deity in Kenyan society. (Kenyatta, 22) This was a situation that impoverished the citizens, reduced their freedom and turned them into paupers and puppets The dignity and sanctity of the human person as conceptualized by Africans was thus defiled.

The late Nnamdi Azikiwe – the famous Zik of Africa- did Africa proud when he made the motto of the first indigenous university in Nigeria, the University of Nigeria Nsukka, established in October 1960, To Restore the Dignity of Man. It was a direct response to the white colonialists that higher education planned and run by the Black man would restore his dignity despite many years of dehumanization and exploitation by white imperialists.

We see in the above examples a common theme of humanism running through the motives and actions of African nationalists in their efforts to redeem their people and restore the dignity of man. Political, economic as well as religious freedom was a factor of the human values deeply imbedded in African religion and spirituality and their unwritten theological and ethical beliefs and practices extol the ideas. African ethics has thus been primarily and pre-eminently 'humanistic' and man-centred.

6. The Humanistic Ethical System and Contemporary Christian Theology

The traditional African humanistic ethics seems to have made in roads in contemporary Christian theology in Africa. More often than not, the glory of God is not the key issue and immediate reason for Christian belief and practice. Just like Moses continued to tell the Hebrews that they should keep the commandments and obey Jehovah in all things so that things may go well with the people and their children (Deut. 4: 40), it seems that many people in the Churches obey God these days primarily to escape punishment here and now and for immediate prosperity now. The Prosperity Gospel which promises immediate increase in fortune for those who sow seeds of faith, pay tithes regularly, appreciate the minister regularly with gifts of money and provisions and fully give sacrificially to the Church , seems to make people get closer to God and obey him primarily for immediate reward and solution to their problems. The poor, sick, unemployed, hungry, emotionally distressed, frightened rich and those seeking high political offices seem to flock to the Crusade ground to hear the Good News, not necessarily of Salvation of the Soul but of deliverance from the hands of the enemy and increase in material prosperity. No Pentecostal preacher or his audience would openly accept this view but inwardly, it is what many of them expect and why they flock to him.

Satan was bold to challenge God to the face that Job was faithful because God had blessed him and protected him from harm. He challenged God to withdraw his help from Job and see how Job would immediately curse God. (Job 1: 8- 10). More often than not, most Africans who go to Church do so primarily for various reasons. There has been critical investigation into the motives for African conversion to Christianity. The early missionaries brought the Gospel wrapped in European cultural garb full of many goodies which attracted the prudent African leaders and converts. Many who saw the acceptance of 'white man's religion' as a stepping stone to social high ranking , obviously became Christians but retained their faith in their time-tested ancestral faith. Some would be Christians in the day but revert to the traditional religious worship in the night, especially in times of great suffering, hardship, sickness and extreme family difficulty that stubbornly resisted all known medical or modern western remedy. That is why any

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theological stance that ignores the welfare and success of the human person would eventually collapse. Any preaching that does not make an African Christian a wealthy man here is losing ground. That is one of the secrets of the success of the Pentecostal theological trends in every African Christian Church today. Pentecostalism is no longer peculiar to those who claim to be Pentecostal but common trend in all churches in Africa.

The contemporary New Religious Movements in Africa especially those espoused by the Pentecostal revival groups seem to have caught the African traditional concept of centrality of human needs at the core of African Spirituality. Although Pentecostals seem to give frontal attack on the fetish traditional belief systems and practices, they are out to admit and pursue in practical terms all that the African man needs- protection, material success, healing, abundant life, fecundity, prosperity and absence of death. Most Pentecostal prayers are full of attack on the enemy that might block man's chances to success. The Deliverance Ministries are geared towards fighting the spiritual and physical enemies that block man's chances to a good and pleasant life. Ancestral and generational evil spirits are cast out and bound together in order to allow the living prodigies of a wicked man to enjoy life here in great freedom and abundance. Every African sickness and misfortune must be given spiritual interpretation. The Africans know how to spiritualize every misfortune or incident. The explanatory category for any misfortune must be through the instrumentality of evil, witchcraft, enemy attack or failure on man's ethical behaviors. A very strict moral behavior is enjoined in order to block the anger of the evil spirits. The prophecies in most Pentecostal churches and indigenous religious movements seem to corroborate the traditional divining processes that predict the future. Some Pentecostal theological emphasis on strict puritanical life-style, ascetic and modest way of life, night vigil, fasting and longish prayers aim at making man's life here on earth a very easy and enjoyable one. The Fast is not to glorify God per se but to obtain success that will be for the good of the worshipper. More often than not, the prayers of a typical African turn to be a Shopping List to a benevolent Father Christmas somewhere above the sky or a strong persuasive insistence on trying to win the favour of an unwilling Deity.

It may look like an exercise of faith but in most cases it is the uncertainty of the goodness and willingness of a Holy God and Father of

Jesus Christ that makes people scream and punish themselves in prayers like those Baal Worshippers who contended with Elijah on Mount Carmel. (1 Kings 18: 1 – end). Pentecostal churches where miracles take place regularly seem to be attracting many suffering Africans. Hence there was mass exodus from the established Mission Churches at the early 1970s to the Churches that promised healing, success and break through in financial matters. The wise African Church Leaders have been able to incorporate this trend in their theological thinking, liturgy and practice. Hence Pentecostalism is no longer a group of individual churches that go that way but a common trend in all the Churches. Even the conservative Roman Catholic Church which refused to change the language of the Mass till of late has now approved the use of Pentecostal forms of prayers and practices in order to retain her members from drifting away to other churches that offer them full African humanistic solution to their problems.

If the churches in Africa would grow as African Churches, not as extensions of the parishes of Rome and Canterbury, they must be deeply rooted in African soil. They must appeal to the African traditional religious spirituality and confront African felt-needs in such a way that makes Jesus the Real Saviour of the World including the Africans. In most cases, when an African Christian fails to find a solution to his needs, there is nothing more he could do than to revert to his time-tested ancestral faith to seek relief and solution or move from one church to the other where he is informed that a mighty Man of God is performing wonders. The adverts on many posters for Open Air Crusade Missions in Africa read thus:

Bring the sick, the lame, the blind, the barren, the dumb, and the deaf. Looking for financial breakthrough, success in examination, etc? There will be prayers for family deliverance,liberation, ministrations of all kinds. Come and meet the Great Healer and Saviour

Why should this not happen in a country where social services to the poor are non-existent, no medical care, no social security and no free education to the less privileged? If there is free and affordable health care delivery, many could contact their family doctors and physicians for little ailments that people take to the Crusade Grounds. It is obvious in the minds of many clients and worshippers that they came for solution of problems that debase their lives, impoverish them, humiliate them, and reduce their dignity. A lame is turned to a beggar which is a diminution of

human dignity in many parts of Africa. Barrenness is regarded as the greatest misfortune to a woman and a curse of immense magnitude. To remove the reproach, one can appeal to the God Almighty that gives babies. To appeal to that God is primarily for the good of man who comes as a clientele. Invariably, the human -needs factor determines to a large extent the reasons why people flock to modern day religious groups. It used to be so in the traditional religious community that saw the deities as agents of solution to the problems. Any deity who could not deliver or offer the needed help would be abandoned.

Although grace is mentioned in many Churches today, invariably, it is difficult for most people to appreciate it in the way St Paul understood it. In many African traditional societies, we are saved by good works but in orthodox Christian theology, we are saved for good work. Christians who have the humble faith in the God of Grace like Paul and other apostles would be hesitant to pray in the way many people pray in the churches in Africa today. The will of God is not done but mine. I become more important, central and prominent than the glory of the Almighty God. That is why the priest or diviner of African traditional religion would recommend an elaborate ritual offering to a votary to attract the patronage of a deity if one wants success. The essence is to get what you want. A Christian of the mid 19th Century like Augustus Toplady would not pray that way. In a popular hymn, Rock of Ages, he writes in verses two and three:

2. *Not the labours of my hands can fulfill Thy Laws demands Could my zeal for no respite know? Could my tears for ever flow? All for sin could not atone Thou must save and Thou alone*

3. *Nothing in my hands I bring Simply to thy Cross I cling Naked come to Thee for dress Helpless look to Thee for grace Foul to the Fountain I fly, Wash me Saviour or I die. (Toplady, 1834)*

In African traditional theological parlance, we must do something to deserve the help of the deity or the Supreme Being – that is either in material or spiritual offering. In other words, strict ethical observance or complex sacrificial ritual must precede an act of salvation or help from the deity. You must sow a seed, or make a pledge or a vow to the Lord, in some today's churches before you get a miracle. You must challenge God by offering or pledging to offer some money in anticipation of success, big contract award or any form of blessing! What a travesty of Christian

Theology of Grace! A person like St Paul in the New Testament would be unwilling to see the trust and faith in God this way. This could be seen as a modern day priest- craft where the officiating minister preys on the gullible and vulnerable members instead of praying for them. This traditional religious idea of deity has influenced our current theological view of the Almighty God, the Father of Jesus Christ. The New Testament did not record any time or place where Jesus advised those he helped or healed to offer sacrifice first or promise to offer something before he healed them. Rather he encouraged recipients of Divine help to offer thanks to God for their miracle. He advised the healed leper to go and show himself to the priest and offer the prescribed sacrifice by the Law of Moses. (Mk 1: 43- 44)

7. Analysis and Evaluation

Thus far, this paper has struggled to establish the centrality of the Human Person in African cosmological views. This seems to have placed human needs far above the glory of the deity. Most African spiritual quests for success and perfection are aimed at the welfare of the human person- (man- anthropos). The primacy of the Homo Sapiens in African conceptual scheme has made humans seek human success more than the glory of the deity. The importance of man in African religious system is practically illustrated in the ethical norms and regulations constructed to protect, secure and preserve the interest and life of the central figure – man himself. It is man who devised or contrived the schema for his own good not necessarily for the good or honour of the deities and other supernatural powers. This goes to confirm the fact that Theology is a human construct to explain the deity. The ethical system which regulates man's character in the world embraces every aspect of his life. Man's ethics emerge in his daily conversations, sayings, proverbs, myths, folklore and names which sometimes spell out his ideals, aspirations as well as his philosophy of life and theology.

It is gathered from the primordial myths that man's rebellion precipitated in the disruption of God's plans for an orderly society. In such precarious situation man suffers most. God and the divinities may be provoked but the victim of any breach of order in the cosmos is Man himself. He and his offspring suffer the awful consequences of any mishap and disruption in the scheme of ordered universe. Man has carefully and wisely realized that both the divinity and the sky exist to

please him, serve his own purpose and advance his own course. In order to enjoy such bountiful benefits to the full, man's own contribution is to lead an upright life, an ethical life that is without blemish and this has been incorporated in a theology that gives the corpus of the religion a holistic view. Any misdemeanor will certainly cause a disruption in the ordered universe. Any immoral act can result in a disruption in the systematic order of events. There is harmony and rhythm in the created cosmos. The more the stability and harmony is maintained, the better and safer for man's existence in the world of time and space.

Man believes that failure in role performance and fulfillment on his part might spell out misfortune which would not be to the best interest of an individual and his community. Consequently, rebellion-prone man is controlled and held in check by the construction of ethical norms which include prohibitions, legal constructs, taboos, enactment of covenants, establishment of totems, etc. Man's very existence in the universe where he occupies a central position is somehow dependent on the conditions that he maintains harmonious relationship between himself, God, the natural forces and other created beings that surround him (Barret, 186).

Besides, any human misdemeanor has two dangerous consequences- moral and ontological. Morally, it is a rebellion against the Deity – whose protective favour he risks by incurring the wrath of One who could help his sojourn through the vicissitudes of life in a precarious world. Secondly, man's wrong acts can trigger a chain reaction which could disrupt the inherent existential system which invariably might set in motion a multiplicity of physical evils to the detriment of humans who occupy the universe. In all the Myths of Paradise Lost, it is man's misbehavior (especially that of a woman) that caused the alienation of man from God. To restore the relationship, man has devised and contrived such methods like strict ethical norms, magic, charms, good character, sacrificial rituals, etc. Many taboos and prohibitions in African societies against women and children are not only a function of chauvinistic male dominated society but also a life-saving device to protect humans on the face of the earth.

Not many investigators have critically concentrated on the ultimate scope of African traditional ethics and morals. We believe that African ethics is teleological and this has helped to shape the form of traditional theological explanation of religious events and actions. Yet it would have been relatively easy to perceive that the African valorizes above all, the

mastery of self, making it, in fact, the foundation of his conduct. (Zahan, 110) .It is through the knowledge of self that the human being arrives at the mastery of the self. Self knowledge is as it were, the motive force behind the mastery of self, which is the foundation of ethics. To know oneself, is to be aware of one's humanity, of the favourable and privileged position which as a Man, one occupies in the universe.

The centrality of the position of Man- homo sapiens- in the cosmos makes his actions have long term implications within the system. On realizing this, man does not any more see himself as a helpless pawn in the hands of many capricious ubiquitous spirits in the universe. Although he is fated to a point, he sees himself as one who is a free moral being who with good character and effective sacrificial rites and charms can manipulate the universe to his own good. This is a theological notion that has subtle import and relevance that attracts the African Christian in his expression of his Faith as a Christian in Africa. It is a form of theology that enables him act and behave in some stipulated and systematic order that would enable him overcome the ills of a society that is full of unwanted and unfriendly spiritual beings. Sylvia Leith-Ross observed soon before the Second World War that

> an Igbo attends Holy Communion at the same time as he believes in the potency of traditional magic; he ties in the same handkerchief the Rosary and the traditional talisman and plants side by side in the garden round his new cement and corrugated iron sheets, some traditional ritual Ogilisi plants and hibiscus flowers (292-293).

It is still doubtful if such is still not happening in many parts of the country. A theology that places the security and interest of the human worshipper at the centre of the cosmos and far above the glory of the Lord Almighty would always encourage such inconsistency and dual loyalty in religious expression of faith. It is basic in African traditional religion.

8. Summary and Conclusion

The primacy of Man in African cosmology is the basic factor in understanding the foundations and ultimate goals of ethics and religious expression in African societies. This is also a fact in African traditional theology. Man's primary interest, security, preservation, fecundity,

longevity and other aspects of comfort in the world are the primary motives for leading an ordered and disciplined life in society. It is not for a heaven to gain or hell to avoid in the hereafter. The aim is not to glorify a deity but to preserve human life. (Magesa, 45).

Most traditional moral codes are common –sense prescriptions which are prerequisite for co-existence and progress if man would happily live on earth. They are not essentially heaven-oriented code but earth-oriented devices and stipulations for peaceful and successful life here. For instance, the Igbo call such ethical and moral laws Omenala – (Omenani). Culturally-speaking, Omenala is the means by which social ethos are measured, the values of the society are continued from one generation to another, and the processes of socialization through the education of the young ones are facilitated. Harmony and equilibrium are in this way maintained as every member of the society knows what to expect from his neighbors and what to give in return, simply by observing the well known customary way of behavior and moral code that is acceptable and normal (Ilogu, 22-23, 124 – 126). It is implying – things that happen normally on earth, traditions, customs, etc. All abominations and taboos are Nso-Ala- what the Earth goddess abhors. A society whose economy is predominantly agricultural cannot afford to toy with the land which is the chief factor of production. The Earth has to be deified in order to give validity to a system on which the human life depends. Man builds his house on the Earth, he gets his food from there and when he dies, he is buried in the Earth- the Mother Earth- and on reincarnation, he comes back to continue another course of sojourn on the Earth. Man is a persistent Earth-dweller. Human life depends on it. Laws are therefore enacted to preserve life on earth. Man's primary concern is not to please God or other beings but to preserve Humanity- the most important and central figure in African created universe. Divinity enters the affairs of man in the same way as do other beings. In other words, to be divine, sacred, holy and religious, is to be human. This Human –face factor becomes the basis for all human thought and action in traditional religious life and society. The joy and blessings on man are at the centre of worship and all other religious functions. Man is in the end the greatest beneficiary or loser if a religious system does not put him at its centre. No matter the amount of criticisms a detached non-votary gives African concept of life- shame culture, guilt culture, materialistic, teleological, etc, the underlying Humanism that looms high in African world view

makes him World-Affirming and not World- Renouncing.

The negative impact of this World-affirming theological belief has made African Christians invest very heavily on earth. Many Christians interpret heavenly blessings with acquisition of material wealth here on earth. That faith is germane in African traditional religious belief. It is doubtful if any African Christian does not interpret God's blessings with material success on earth and successful wealthy life-style as an index of Divine Favour- a theology that has got root through Prosperity Gospel in Africa. The danger of ethics of material success is that it breeds greed, jealousy, corruption, affluent life-style and desire to live like the Joneses. No wonder, in spite of the overt expression of vibrant Christianity in Nigeria, corruption is still endemic in the society.

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