REVIVING AFRICAN RELIGION AND CULTURE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract
African had survived functionally and effectively in the traditional society through its religion and culture and at the traditional days experience ethical and moral uprightnes as there was high level of morality in the society. This morality was broken down by the contact with western and Eastern religions, cultures and civilizations. In the light of these, Nigerians and Africa as a whole has fallen prey to immorality and many societal ills, such as corruption, arm robbery, and general indiscipline in the society. This paper advocates the reviving of African religion and culture which was capable of entrenching members of the society to be ethically and morally upright and would also be able to provide a way out of the moral mess in which modern society is enmeshed. The paper suggests a revival and rebranding of African religion and culture to authenticate the traditional values as the bases for sustainable development.

African religion and culture are intrinsically related. Religions are products of people’s culture and as such influenced by the respective cultures in which they are found. Therefore, African religion and culture are two inseparable entity that works harmoniously as African Religion.

The pre African society was woven around the traditional religion. The traditional religion dictated the events of individuals and society. Every day and every season was interpreted against the backdrop of religion. Traditional religion shaped the political and justice system, architecture and agricultural practices, music and arts and so on. In all these spheres and depending on the dictates of the gods the Africans worshipped with singular care and sacredness. Little wonder why Africans are described as notoriously religious. Leonard (1966) captured this religious dept when he remarked that Africans are in the natural sense of the word truly and deeply religious of whom it can be said that they eat religiously, drink religiously, bathe religiously, dress religiously and sin religiously. That is, the very existence of Africans is their religion and religion is their existence. It was religion that shaped their culture, their morality, ethics and their social and inter-personal life. African Traditional Religion, therefore, was a strong factor of moral and socio – ethical order. African Religion and Culture are concerned with the most sublime of human
aspirations, they are regarded as the source of morality and public order and the inner peace of the individual person. In the traditional days, African religion and culture was capable of motivating, socializing as well as enhancing moral uprightness in the society.

African traditional religion provided a rich moral code and demanded a high ethical standard which regulated the society and assured its corporate existence and sustainable development. Besides, its system of justice which was anchored on the oracle system and trial by ordeal gave expression to the deep religious insight in the African society. The society was peaceful, its people sincere and honest. People kept their oaths and there was trust in the tongue.

Africans in its contact with western and Eastern cultures and religions tended to abandon its religion and culture. In the words of Ikenga – Metuh (1996), emphasis on African religion and culture often gives the impression that African theology is backward looking and cares little about more recent historical experiences and current socio-political problems. If this were so it would be a wrong focus. The African theology thus produced, would be irrelevant to present day needs of African Christian and Muslims. This means that African in spite of the contact with alien religions and cultures, still realizes that African religion and culture are functional and capable of providing traditional values needed to effectively develop the society.

Any society without discipline and morality cannot develop effectively. Therefore, the paper calls for a revival of African Religion and culture to meet this target. This is because the Western and Eastern religions and cultures have fail in their effort to build the African society. Instead, of building the African youth morally, it rather corrupts their minds. Hence, African religion and culture functioned effectively only in the past. We call for the revival of African religion and culture for sustainable development.

Conceptual Framework
For clarity, some concepts in this paper will be considered, such as, Revival, African Traditional religion, Culture, and sustainable Development.

Revival: According to Encarta dictionary (2010) is defined as an instance of something becoming Popular, active, or important again. It is also an improvement in the condition or strength of something. It can further be defined as a reawakening of religious fervor, especially by means of evangelistic meetings. African traditional religion has been in a steady decline throughout the continent and this scenario needs to be reversed if we must join other nations of the world in their match towards sustainable development.
African Traditional Religion

Traditional African Religion is that religion that is indigenously African or that is customarily practiced by Africans. They are composite parts of the indigenous African culture and originate from within the specific or particular African culture (Unduigwomen 2006). From this definition of African religion, it is obvious that African religion and culture are homogenous phenomena.

Culture

According to Encarta dictionary (2010) is the arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement regarded collectively. It is also a refined understanding or appreciation of this. It is the customs, ideas, and social behaviour of a particular people or group. As has been posited earlier, African Traditional Religion was subsumed in the African culture and both religion and culture were intertwined.

Sustainable Development

This is the process of developing or being developed. It is a specific state of growth or advancement. It also connotes a new product or ideas. Further, it refer to an event constituting a new stage in a changing situation (MSDICT viewer version 2.14 2007) WWW.Mobi – system.com Sustainable Development has also been defined as the application of renewable resources to promote economic growth, the protection of animal species and biodiversity, and the commitment to maintain clean air, water and land (Giddens, Duneir and Appelbaum 2003). Sustainable Development implies meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs.

African Religion and Culture: An Overview

African religion can be describe as the religious beliefs and practices of the Africans. This religion incorporates the culture of the people their way of life as well as the food they eat, the way they dress, the houses they live in, their style of farming and so on. This is why Africans are often address as being notoriously religious.

In another perspective, African Religion is the term that is used to describe the religion that was founded by the fore-bears of Africans (Anyacho, 2005) that is, the religion being transmitted from generation to generation. It involves the handing down of tradition and culture from one generation to another. This therefore purport that the religion is part and parcel of the culture of Africans.

Religion and culture are two inseparable entities, one cannot go without the other. It is difficult to separate traditional religion from any aspect of the lives of the traditional African people. It provided and sanctioned the rules and principles that guided and upheld the life of the people in their social interaction with one another and with the spiritual world.
It could be said that African religion and culture is the religious beliefs system of Africans, the native religion of Africans, the indigenous religion of Africans, the religion of African’s fore – fathers and a religion transmitted within the African confines and the arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement regarded collectively within the African continent. It is also the understanding or appreciation of the African culture. It is further the customs, ideas, norms, ethics, taboos, totems’ and social behaviour of a particular people or a group in Africa.

Areas to be Revived in African Religion and Culture

Africans tend to embrace the western and Eastern religions and cultures because they presented an easy escape from the traditional religion which was very rigorous and difficult to practice because of its laws. Doctrines, liturgy and worship methods as well as the ethos, had great emphatic attached to its norms, ethics, morality, taboos, totems etc. where defaulter of the customs, norms, laws, rules and regulations were punished at the instance of the act and the wrath of the gods of the land were very active and functional pervading its wrath on all members of the society irrespective of one’s status and rank in the society, thus enhancing the fear of the supreme being, its oracles as well as the mouth piece of the gods.

This goes to explain that all members of the society were liable to punishment by the gods of the land in the traditional African society, be you a king or a slave. Therefore, there was high level of morality in the society. In the light of the above, Ikenga –Metuh (1987) asserted that African society is not strictly regimented. African is a sacral society, meaning the world of Africa comprises of the physical and the spiritual. In fact, the two worlds are intertwined and the palpable presence of the spirits/gods make the human world sober, to the extent that man is keenly conscious of doing right in all conceivable situation. The decrees of the gods make all men the object of sanction and reprisal for bad behaviour.

However, these moral degree and spirit/god guided society deteriorated in the contact with new religions and culture (Christianity and Islam), which Africans adapted too easily and these trend pave ways for corruption presently flourishing the African society. To attain the stage where the society will experience morality some good aspect of the traditional religion must be reenacted and revived to fit in, in the African countries constitutions. Some of the areas begging for reenactment include:

1. The renewing of African Traditional values
2. The reviving of Traditional laws, norms, ethics and morality
3. The reviving of Traditional sanctions
4. The reviving of traditional taboos
5. The oracles of all African societies must be recognize by the government
6. Traditional punishment or wrath of the gods of the land must be incorporated into the legal statutes and constitutions of the African countries.
7. Oath of office must be accompanied by traditional oath taking system not just by using the Bible or Quran alone

8. Traditional chiefs and elders must become the mouth piece of the gods and live uprightly to direct those in power to rule the nation according to the dictate of the gods.

**Factors for Sustainable Development**

Most African countries as at today are still at the dinner table instead of working. African countries are endowed with abundant natural and human resources, but score very low on economic indicators, and most with very low economic growth rates. For instance, Nigeria’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) Per Capita is US $2,300, Gabon and Namibia have Per Capita GDP of US $14,000 and US $5,400 respectively while countries like Japan has over US $100,000. The Per Capita Gross National Product (GNP) of Nigeria is US $520, while Gabon and Namibia have Per Capita GNP of US $4,390 and US $2,960 respectively while Britain has over US $60,000 (World Bank 2007). The Doctor/Patient ratio of most African Countries is equally very wide 28:100,000 people for Nigeria, 49:100,000 people for Namibia while the ratio for most developed countries is much narrower. Generally, African Countries have very high infant mortally rates, (95.74 per 1000 births for Nigeria for instance) and literacy rate still below 55 for most African countries (Heubler 2008). The General index of most African Countries shows a shameful over 50 % for Nigeria for instance. And the same goes for most other African countries, implying a very high income inequality.

Most African Countries rank very high on negative indices like corruption, conflicts, poverty, HIV/AIDS prevalence and so on, largely because of corruption. Nigeria for instance has remained top on the corruption index for a very long now. According to 2004 Transparency International Corruption Index, Nigeria still ranked as the third most corrupt country in the world, coming only after Haiti and Bangladesh which are first and second most corrupt countries respectively. Corruption robs countries of their potentials, and when it is carried out in large scale, it becomes a daunting obstacle to sustainable development, and results in large scale loss of public funds needed for provision of infrastructure and services. Governments function as if there is no tomorrow or posterity. This is clearly anti sustainability.

No society can make any meaningful development without morality, discipline which were all achieved through African traditional religious sanctions. (Odey 2011) posited that the advert of western (and Eastern) education in Nigeria for instance persuaded the indigenes to abandon their religious beliefs in favour of western values because they seem too convenient and since the provided an easy escape from stringent demands of the indigenous moral codes.

This implies that western and Eastern religions and cultures are not capable of controlling the character and behaviour of individuals in the society. Such that the
God of Christian and Islamic Religions do not take instant, and on the spot reaction to individual deeds, therefore people continuously go unpunished even when they are guilty of a crime. Besides, the people at the herm of affair make laws and do not keep to them. In fact they are the most defaulters of the law. This is so because the oath of office they take is far from what was obtainable in the traditional society.

Anya (1990) stated that “we live in a period of transition, a time of change in a complex but inter-related and parentally integrated world. In such a world, there is bound to be confusion as old certainties give way to new realities. To this effect, if the traditional oath taking system is re-introduce and the government officials are guided by this, they will lead uprightly in the fear of the wrath of the gods.

In terms of African traditional values, values were necessarily and holistic factors, which all and sundry were involved. If this is institutionalize today, the bad conduct of the governor, president, senator, commissioner etc will invite a spiritual sanction that will affect not only the leaders but also the entire society. This is because in African society before the advent of foreign civilizations, communities were holistic and punishment was also collective. No sector of human life in African was immune from the intervention of the gods. This kept the people watchful and sensitive to do what was right. Corporate solidarity was celebrated, that is “I am because we are” (Mbit, 1969). What this implies, is that, if this is revived into the modern day government the leaders will be watchful of their action as it will attract punishment from the gods not only to them but also to the citizenry, and this is a good factor for sustainable development.

Taboos in the traditional African society were essential factors that guided the morality of every African society. It dictated the dos and don’ts of the community. It was a social or religious custom placing prohibitions or restrictions on a particular thing or person. It was also things prohibited or restricted by social custom and designated as sacred and prohibited. There were things set apart or prohibited in the traditional society. A revival of this traditional culture (taboo) will help to guide human conduct in the society. Sacred places, groves, forests, streams and others could be preserved through the use of taboo system.

The oracles of every African society must be allow to join forces with the governmental agencies to fight against corruption and other societal ills. In this way, the prison yard will not only be the punishment for a crime committed rather, that from the spirit or the gods of the land should be utilize to pervade instant punishment as was in the past. This will be a more effective deterrent to others. For instance, in the traditional days, if one steals and he is found guilty, and he swears the traditional oath, he dies by swollen stomach instantly. Again, the police should utilize the oracle in their effort to combat crime and to dictate a criminal. These factors if religiously utilize would undoubtedly enhance sustainable development.
Conclusion

Quoting Ekeopara (2006) Africans no longer live in isolated ages of the past but are members of the new and emerging global community. It is within this new community that our future lies. Therefore, for Africans to make meaningful progress and attain sustainable development, there is need for Africans to embrace their traditional religion and cultural values in effort to combat corruption and crime in its society by revitalizing it to meet the demands of modern day society.

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