Some Yoruba Belief Systems as Antithesis of Science and Technology

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ABSTRACT

It is a usual practice to articulate the challenges of human development in Nigeria within the folder of socio-political, economic and cultural inadequacies. In the cultural context, ethnicity, inhuman practices like female circumcision, voodoo, gender discrimination among others, have been advanced as reasons responsible for the low level of development in Nigeria. Much of these claims are coming from monotheistic religions, especially Christianity, which in many respects, is equated with scientific and technological advancement by its adherents. Great inventors and discoverers such as Leonardo da Vinci, Michael Faraday, Samuel Morse, Albert Boyle, Johann Kepler among many others are frequently mentioned as devout Christians who impacted people's lives immensely. This paper explores the cultural perspective further. It zeroes in on deities in the Yoruba section of Nigeria to find out if these gods, their oracles and priests perform communication functions that are at variance with the elements of contemporary development especially in the areas of science and technology. Study has shown that while these gods and oracles have been said to communicate ways to overcome diseases, spells, and generally bring about wholeness, there is no cause to suggest that they offer any roadmap that can make Nigeria develop scientifically or technologically. The claim that this should not be blamed on the gods notwithstanding. This paper concludes from the findings that when you worship a deity that does not offer any appreciable solution to the modern development needs, looking elsewhere may be an idea worth considering.

Keywords: Beliefs, Communication, Yoruba, Science and Technology

Introduction

Many theories and propositions have been advanced with regards to man's belief systems, especially when they relate to a higher external being. For instance, the fetishism school teaches that many practice religion in which they are subordinated to objects that, though inanimate, have soul and spirit and are capable of exercising strong magical powers under which human beings can be positively influenced. Here, anthropologists use the term to mean a concept of some kind of devotion to non-human objects that have the capability to exercise a higher form of power over humans. Therefore, supernatural omnipotence is believed vested in immaterial objects that are often seen stationary but can move in the spiritual realm. Such objects can be made from clay, carved out of wood, shaped from glass or any other material suitable for that purpose.

One of the characteristics of such an object is that its exterior appearance may bear some semblance with a human face or other animate objects that probably had earlier been known. Such semblance somehow helps the subjects to justify the imputation of supernatural powers. Even when the object does not bear semblance with some known animate object, say for instance, a rock, or a river or a tree, some marks are made b the devotee to show that though his god is immobile in the physical realm, it is mobile in the spirit. The French philosopher, August Comte, coined the term "fetishism" when he was referring to a general theory of religion. He attributed fetishism to the beginning of the religious period of humanity from where it moved to polytheism before culminating in monotheism. The fetishist mode of worship is rooted in idolatry and this is still very common in Africa and Nigeria in particular despite the overbearing influence of Christianity.

Closely linked to fetishism is *panpsychism,* which has been simplified by the German chemist, Georg Ernst Stahl (1660-1734) who coined the alternative word "animism" to convince people of his theory that the soul is a crucial element in organic development. Oxford University's first professor of anthropology, Edward Burnett Taylor, picked up this term to describe the origin of religion and primitive beliefs. Every religion has some elements of animism involved in it where the term is taken to mean a general belief in the spiritual (Tylor, 1958). To Tylor, the belief in deities was as a result of man's dreams and visions, which do not occur within the confines of the physical world. This prompted him to conclude that man is bifurcated into a body and a soul. At death, a separation occurs by which the soul departs to assume an ancestral status. This gave rise to the idea of non-human spirits which have been deified. The result is the eventual emergence of such spirits as gods that should be worshipped and this is where the minimum definition of religion proceeds, where religion is viewed as the belief in spiritual beings. Implicit in the animistic and fetishist postulations is n obvious proliferation. This explains the multiplicity of deities in nearly all parts of the world and the case is particularly profound among peoples with unwritten traditions, like many that are found in Africa.

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