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Introduction

In African Religion, human beings are the most important of the creatures of God, and they are composed of the material and the immaterial parts. The material part is that which is tangible, visible, and can be described in concrete terms. This, in fact, is the body. Any part of the body can be lost without the loss of life. A damaged part can be cured or replaced, and people continue in existence. But this is not the same when we come to the second part of a person which is the immaterial, the intangible and the invisible entity. This entity can indeed be related to the vital principle of human beings. Its presence or absence in people indicate the existence or "death" of people. In other words and unlike the physical part of a person, when this vital principle is lost in a person, both cannot be regained, and the whole person both the material and the immaterial, is lost. It ceases to exist in the physical form, in the physical realm of life. Just like life existed before the physical appearance¹ here on planet earth, it also moves on after physical existence into the abode of the Ancestors.

This article is set out to show from the stand point of African Religion that the beginnings of human beings cannot be separated from their end. This beginning is an off-shoot of previous existence, and the end is a beginning of another realm of life. It will also show that the African belief of the composition of woman and man is that they are both scientific and spiritual. They have bodies, which is matter and a soul- the domain of emotions, will, and intellect-, which is spiritual (intangible).

Our submission is that the human life continues. There is no end to it. Just like matter, in science, decays to nourish another circle of life; death in African Religion does not put an end to life. It opens up another realm of existence albeit spiritual. African Eschatology therefore, and its significance to the future of the cosmos is interwoven. The cosmic composition and structure is dynamic. It re-creates, it keeps re-inventing itself. just like 'end' in African Religion is dynamic – it re-creates and it re-invents itself into another plane of existence. Eschatology is cyclic in African Religion.

Another aspect of this work is the necessity to say a few things about creation stories or Myths in African Religion, if we must talk about African Eschatology in relation to the cosmos. Whatever has an end must at least have a beginning. African peoples believe that the world was created by God. But as regards how the creation of the Universe and everything therein took place, there is no general agreement. However, each people have one story or the other of how the solid universe came into existence. Some of these stories are put in systematic, orderly narrations, while there are those, which are disjointed and verge on absurdity. But when they are all pieced together, one will find that they all point rather conclusively to a creator God. Whatever exists owes its existence to the Supreme Deity. Thus creation is the most widely acknowledged work of God throughout Africa.

Eschatology in African Religion

Is there life after death? This is a question that has perplexed mankind for millennia. "Even theologians are embarrassed when faced with it," says Hans Kung, a Catholic scholar. Over the ages, people in every society have pondered the subject, and there is no shortage of proposed answers.

In African Religion there is no hellfire. The wicked people according to the Yoruba are confined to *Orun - Apaadi* (heaven of potsherds). Death does not put an end to the human life. The good people continue to live in the ancestral realm, as ancestors. This is why Mbiti refers to them as the, "living-dead". In African Religion, the world of forces is held like a spider's web of which no single thread can be caused to vibrate without shaking the whole network². The ancestors form a chain through the links of which the forces of the elders (now with the community) exercise their vitalizing influence on the living generation. If we compare the interaction of vital forces in the universe to a spider's web, then in day to day life the ancestors form the principal strand without which the fabrics collapses.

African people believe that life here on earth is not interminable. They hold that sooner or later, the inevitable phenomenon called death will come upon them, who are sojourner on God's earth. No matter how long a person lives, death must come as a necessary end. But the people believe that death is only a transition. It is only a means of passing from the world of human beings to the world of spirits. Human beings, as we have seen, are made up of the physical, tangible body and the personality - soul, which is the real human essence. Africans believe that when death occurs, the personality - soul, which is the spiritual substance, the essential person, is separated from the physical body. The physical body decays, while the personality - soul returns to the source of Being from whom it comes. This belief is demonstrated in the importance which the Africans attach to funeral rites.

After death good people assume that status of the ancestors. More than any other force, the ancestors are the protectors of the society as well as its most feared direct critic and source of punishment.³ Above all, they are the direct watch-dogs of the moral behaviour of the individual, the family, the clan and the entire society with which they are associated. No serious misbehaviour or anti-life attitude among their descendants, in thought, word and deed, escapes their gaze. The ancestors are in a real sense "authority figures, who maintain the norms of social action and cause trouble when these are not obeyed"⁴. Therefore, for as long as societies exist in Africa, the roles of the ancestors become relevant and inevitable. There is no end to the interwoven relationships. It is a continuous process that has no end.

The next question is: what is the nature of the new world, the world of the ancestors, the life after death? The answer to this question gives the various facets of African thinking with reference to the condition of people in the next world. Opinions differ as to this. Some people believe that this new world is in no other place than on this planet.⁵ They hold that those who die here on earth have only changed places on this same earth. They remain here on earth; but they do not usually make themselves visible to their kith and kin. They only establish themselves in new localities where they remain until they die again, or until something happens and they change places on this earth⁶. People believe that when this change of places happens, the deceased lives normal life, retains or changes occupation, marries and has children.

In some areas, this concept is modified by saying that it is only those who die prematurely that continue to live on this earth. The people hold that the spirit world is really meant for those who have lived to a ripe old age. But people who die at their prime of life have to live somewhere else in order to complete their time here on earth. For example, the Yoruba talk of those who die young and live somewhere again as *Aku-da-aya* (the ghost of a dead person appearing in a place other than his/her home town). They believe that those who live in a community for many years without the community knowing their origin, and without some relatives coming to visit them are *Aku-da-aya*.

Some other people again modify this notion by saying that the wicked persons, or those who die a bad death through their sins, continue to live on this earth because they cannot find a resting place in the world of the spirits. The ghosts of such bad persons would continue to haunt human habitations; they may even enter into animals, reptiles, birds or trees.⁷

However, majority of African people believe that there are real and specific places where the deceased go. They think of two different compartments or areas each of which is occupied by the spirits of the dead. For example, the Yoruba would call the compartments *Orun* (heaven). The first compartment is *Orun rere* (good *Orun*). This is the *Orun* of one's ancestors. It belongs to the deceased. It is meant to be occupied by those who die a good death, and those who have been allotted the place by the Supreme Being. The other compartment is *Orun Apaadi* (the heaven of potsherds or rubbish heap). This is the portion for the wicked, and those who die a bad death as a punishment for their sins.

But how do people get into either of these places which are allotted to the spirits of the departed? Those who hold the belief in the existence of good and bad heavens strongly believe that one gets to the place through the judgement of the Supreme Being. They conceive that after death, when all burial rites have been performed, the deceased go before the Supreme Being to give account of what he had done on earth. He would be judged accordingly. According to the Yoruba, what God judges is a person's character. And in consequence of the judgement of the Supreme God, the one with good character is given good heaven, while the one with bad character receives bad heaven.

For those in bad heaven, it is believed that their after-life is miserable. They are denied the company of ancestors, and they cannot re-incarnate. They are not remembered since they cannot become ancestors. People think that their life is hopeless and restless; they have no permanent abode, but they are wanderers and lost souls that cannot appear to people in dreams and visions.

For those in good heaven, life is pleasant and serene. They are endowed with a never-ending life of bliss. Such a life of bliss is a continuation of earthly life in the company of the ancestors. They become ancestors capable of interfering in the family affairs of the living. They can also re-incarnate in a child born into the family. Such re-incarnation is an indication that they continue existence somewhere.

For example, among the Yoruba, when a child is born, the oracle is consulted to find out which ancestor or ancestress has come back. Also, a child born some time after the death of an old person in the family, and who bears certain marks of the deceased, is named after the deceased. Thus we have *Babatunde* (father has come again) and *Iyabode* (mother has come back).

The main point about re-incarnation is that the genius (i.e. the guardian spirit) of the family never dies. This means that something of the genius and character of the family continues to appear from one generation to another to the effect that the family is perpetuated. Chinua Achebe⁸, ceaselessly made reference to the interwoven world of the ancestors and the living.

The Scientific Cosmos

The rise of modern science and its interpretation by the Enlightenment philosophies of reductionism, materialism, and naturalism brought a new dimension to the created world of the Supreme Deity. The cosmos became a wide field of explorations for the Copernicans, Newtonians, Darwinians and the rest of the scientific and philosophical theories. We are also

living witnesses to the commendable technological discoveries and findings which have improved the lots of humankind and in some areas devastated (and is still threatening) it.

Cosmology can be regarded as the subject dealing with the structure, the evolution and origin of the entire universe (cosmogony is a term occasionally used for the latter aspects). The universe or cosmos used to mean the solar system which was accounted for by first the Ptolemaic and then the Copernican systems but as the range of astronomy increased the term came to refer to the totality of fixed stars which were shown by William Herschel to make up our galaxy, the milky way. The fixed stars occurred in large numbers, separated by enormous distances⁹, still later it became clear that our galaxy was only one amongst many millions of galaxies and nowadays the term universe or cosmos generally means the universe of galaxies. Each of these is 10,000-100,000 light-year across and separated from its neighbors by distances of the order of a million light-years. Following pioneering findings by Sliplier, Edwin Hubble and Milton Humason established in the 1920s that, correlated with the distance of a galaxy (as inferred by its apparent faintness), there is a red shift of the lines of its spectrum, the only plausible interpretation of which is a velocity of recession, so that its velocity is proportional to its distance¹⁰. This fitted in with theoretical work (started by de Sitter) that showed that such a motive was not only uniquely compatible with the idea of the homogeneity of the universe (i.e. it looks the same on average from each galaxy) but is demanded by our theoretical understanding. All major theories agree both on this uniformity in space and on the universal motion of recession.

The most widely studied model of the universe is the big bang, according to which motion of recession began in tremendous explosion when all the content of the universe was densely packed. The discoveries in the 1960s of a universal weak background radiation, interpreted as the highly red shifted flash of the big bang, greatly strengthened support for it and counted against its rival, the steady-state theory, which added unchanging character in to the homogeneity in space. This assumption implies a process of continual creation of matter, so that in spite of the universal motion of recession the mean density of matter is constant. Though no longer favored, in the 1950s the steady-state theory stimulated the work that accounts satisfactorily for the origin of all the elements heavier than helium¹¹. One of the most significant points of shared interest between science and theological reflection is the concern for the origin of the universe. The question that easily comes to one's mind is. What do we now know from science about the origin and history of the universe that may touch on what theologians believe about God's creating us and our world with a purpose? First, we now know that there was a unique time in the history of the universe. About 15 billion years ago it exploded with the 'Big Bang' from a minuscule size to its present enormous extent. Afterwards the sun and the earth came together, and life began. This is contrary to the intuitive beliefs of many scientists of the past that the universe has always been more or less the same; that there can be nothing unique about us nor in the history of our universe. What is behind this beginning is the source of much scientific thought and speculation. The theologians can say that it was God's creation, and avoid the question of what then was God's origin. Scientists try to probe beyond this beginning, but we cannot avoid confronting the concept of a beginning¹².

We have also learned from science that very special circumstances were necessary for us to be here. The early kinetic energy of the Big Bang explosion had to match the mass of material more closely than one part in a million in order for the universe to both be long-lived as it is and also to develop galaxies and stars. The nuclear and electronic forces in atoms had to have just the right ratio for this universe to have the rich variety of chemicals needed for our

life. The gravitational force and nuclear reaction properties had to be very well matched to allow formation of long-lived stars. The energy level characteristics of oxygen and carbon nuclei had to be remarkably well matched for both carbon and oxygen to be abundant, as we need them to be.

Also of particular interest is the close tie between life and nature of our planet earth. Many planets are likely circling other stars; and so life may not be rare. In principle we suppose that life may have developed in many locations. Yet, when we look at all the planets within our solar system, our earth looks unique, Jupiter, Saturn, and the other large planets are too cold, too gassy, Mercury is too close to the sun and hot. Mars and Venus seem at first glance to be similar to Earth. Although life may have existed in the past on Mars, today it is cold and without an appropriate atmosphere.¹³ Earth's sister planet Venus, earlier thought to be a promising planet for life, we now know is covered with a heavy atmosphere of carbon dioxide and surface is hot enough to melt lead.¹⁴

Regardless of what one may think this can say about God, what is striking here is that scientific evidence leads to a feeling and hypothesis that the course of natural history is guided at least in part by an intelligence and a purpose. This is referred to as intelligent universe. Physicists have been brought much closer to questions of interest to theologians as they succeed in delving more fundamentally into the origins of our universe and nature of universe laws. We can say that as far as scientific cosmos is concerned and based on the synthesis of scientists and theologians submissions God is the ultimate cause of the universe, whatever that first event may have been. God designed the universe with creatures like us in mind; so of course the cosmological constants are fine-tuned to permit life. The laws of nature therefore reflect the will of God for ordering the cosmos. This is why Templeton foundation believes a path of cooperation between the sciences and all religions will lead humanity to a deeper understanding of the universe, the unlimited creative spirit behind it, and our place in it"¹⁵. The classic way of putting it in the western tradition is that God is revealed in two books. One is the book of nature. So science is a way of recording the metaphorical Book of nature, and knowledge coming from either of the two sources ought to lead us back to the one Author-God or the creator of nature (scientific and theological cosmos).

Modern science can be seen as approaching religion on the continuum of thought. Or, it can be seen as growing farther apart. According to 'Anthropic principle' a striking feature of the new cosmological theories is that even a small change in the physical constants would have resulted in an uninhabitable universe'. Among the many possible universes consistent with Einstein's equations, ours is one of the few, which supports organic life. The big bang, then, is an analogue to the biblical concept of Genesis, which is also shared by African religionists in their cosmic viewpoint. And ascending to Kalman Bland both religion and science make claims and proposition about the one world that we live in, and they both have an eye on what the other is saying. This means that there is a convergence of scientific cosmos and religious/theological cosmos. This is because science and religion are products of 'autonomous cosmic evolution.

African Eschatology and the Cosmos

African eschatology emphasizes the influence the diseased kindred have on the living. It enables us to recognize and appreciate the fact that human life is not terminated by death. In other words death is not a terminal point of human life. African eschatology also reminds us that life is a continuum and endless life. Therefore, life is then a transition. Humans transit from the terrestrial world/life to celestial world/life. This belief and convictions are reinforced

by the belief in ancestor and ancestor worship and the elaborate funeral ceremony. Ancestor worship is based on a variety of mingled motives: continuity with the past; respect for the wisdom of elders; a desire for the blessing that may be given by the dead, who are endowed with knowledge and power beyond human experience; a desire to assuage grief and to tend the dead by offering and prayers for their well being; and fear of ghostly visitors and their possible vengeful acts.

African eschatology as encapsulated in ancestral belief and worship is borne in two principal ideas (i) that "those who have gone before" have a continuing and beneficent interest in the affairs of the living; and (ii) more widespread, uneasiness or fear of the dead, with practices to placate them¹⁶. There is symbolic relationship between the dead or the world of the spirit and living or the world of the physical being. This belief is demonstrated by Africans who perform rites in connection with passage of life. Passage of life connotes meaningful transformations in the life cycle. The cycle of life commences from the conception of a child, and ends at death are important points in human life as far as physical body is concerned. They involve transition or crossing from one stage of life to another. The life cycle in earthly world starts with the birth of a child. When the child finally comes out, there is great jubilation. Arrangements are made by the parents to find out which of the ancestors in the family lineage in spirit world has re-incarnated. The oracle is consulted on the third day to know and confirm this. This is known as *ese-n-taye* in Yoruba, - "the first step of the child into the world"¹⁷. The oracle declares the divinity that will protect the child during his/her life, what the child will be, what taboos she/he should observe, her/his mission on earth, the name to bear and what should be done by the parents in order that the child may have a happy destiny.

The naming of the child takes various forms according to the custom of each family. The name given to the child on this occasion is called *Abiso*- "that which is given as a name after birth". The Yoruba say: *ile ni a nwo ki a to so omo loruko* - "we consider the state of affairs in the family before we name a child". For this reason, the *Abiso* is framed to refer to the circumstances prevailing in the family at the time of birth. The child consequently passes through many stages of life - birth, puberty and marriage rite until he becomes old and dies. His/her death becomes a turning point. Death is considered as an inevitable 'end'. However African people believe that life here on earth is temporary and is not interminable. They believe that human is only a sojourner on God's earth. They also believe that death is only a transition. It is only a means of passing from the world of humans to the world of spirits. This is because human is made up of the physical, tangible body and the personality soul, which is the real human essence. The soul is not perishable and cannot be captured or destroyed by death unlike the physical body¹⁸.

When death occurs the soul which is the spiritual substance is separated from the physical body. The physical body decays, while soul returns to the source of being from whom it comes. This belief is demonstrated in the importance which the African peoples attach to funeral rites, for if everything ended with the passing away of the physical body, Africans would not bother to engage themselves in elaborate ceremonies. They know that death only bring a change of life, and that at death, man passes from this physical world into a new type of life where the conduct of man in the physical world will be judged, the people then prepare themselves for this final end²⁵. The belief is that the ancestral spirit will come back to that family and continuously like that. Therefore human life is a circle between the body and the spirit.

The Future of the Cosmos in African Perspective

African eschatology gives prospect of the future development of the cosmos in the sense that the spirit world which the ancestors occupy and through which generations originate will help in explaining and according weight to scientific finding on genetic and DNA as well as the possibility of extra terrestrial and celestial lives. The new child who is now coming for the first time must have a number in the spiritual cosmic world.

Possible project by the scientist in this regards include the development of a website which would encourage children and young adult to link explanatory science with theological questions relating to meaning, purpose and ultimate reality. The African eschatology will become a veritable source of nature cyclic system of human existence, the life and death of human, sprouting up again and die and continues cyclically. Scientists have the charge of exploring the broad significance of the discovery of a cosmos and African eschatology of potentially infinite 'other' planetary worlds which could lead to the possible recovery of evidence for extra terrestrial intelligence. The thought of life existing on other planets speaks directly to one's beliefs and ideas of a God who may have created life not just here on earth, but else where as well-the life of the dead, the cosmos of the ancestors. This lend credence to the idea and belief of Africans in eschatology. Science will be able to explain the gene a newborn baby amongst the ancestors in the spirit world is carrying. His/her physical structure, blood group, can be scientifically proven based on ancestrological traits; as family include not only the living but ancestors or the 'living dead' as well-for there is continuity of family ties in the two scientific cosmos and theological cosmos in which a person (physical body and the soul) had lived. Life cyclic process is in living in the two cosmos. That is life in terrestrial world and life in celestial world through reincarnation processes in the form of relay race in which baton of life is exchanged between the living and the 'living dead'.

Conclusion

We have seen from the foregoing that Africans are not opposed to trial and error, in fact empiricism is native to African thought and action. The idea of *a priori* deduction is not common in Africa. This is because Africans are very close to nature and as it is, it is to nature they go to learn if there is trouble. In fact, the material and the spiritual are not seen as separate. The livings owe some responsibilities to the dead. The world of spirit is considered real in Africa's cosmology. There must always be a balance between what is seen and what is unseen. Resources are to be managed in such a way that when one returns as child after death and reincarnation, there would be something to return to. In other words, there was the concept of an unbroken chain linking the present, the past and the future. With this kind of worldview, there is a sense of balance between people and their environment. The concept of sustainability easily developed from this.

We have seen from the above that African Eschatology and the future of the Cosmos are synonymous to each other. There is no permanent end in African Eschatology. There is continuous creativity going on in that the end of one life leads to another as we have seen in death being a transition into another form of life. This gives the impression that there is no separation between the beginning and the end in African Religion. This is exactly what science preaches. There is no end to scientific world (Cosmos). Creation continues as the dynamic human world diligently explores the inhabited world. The meeting point between African Eschatology and the future of the Cosmos is the continuation of life between the cosmic world and the spiritual world. There is no end to life it only metamorphose into another form of elevated creation.

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