

Review

Colonialism and African cultural values

Benson O. Igboin

Department of Religion and African Culture, Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria.
E-mail: ohisuccess@yahoo.com. Tel: +234 8057420868.

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It is no longer a debate that pre-colonial African life was heavily influenced by religion. Almost every aspect of life was seen and interpreted in the supernatural. The belief that the ancestors played prominent roles in the maintenance of morality in the community hardly dies, even today. However, it is true that colonialism altered the belief and values of the Africans significantly, just as its structure was almost completely eroded. Today, the argument oscillates between a return to the 'glorious' pre-colonial past as the minimum requirement for moral rearmament and a total break with the past. This paper clarifies these positions and posits that even though it is not practically possible to have a total return to the past, there are certain cultural values that consistently define the African personality, history and belief that cannot be jettisoned without consequences. Through the gristmill of scholarly and analytical framework, this paper argues that these values are critical to African identity in a post-colonial, global community, and as such, there is the need to revisit some of them in order to keep pace with the history and identity in the face of current global challenges.

Key words: Colonialism, Africa, values, religion, culture, morality.

INTRODUCTION

It is a fact that in African traditional belief, God is the explanation of all things. The world was created by him. The Africans therefore believe that the environment is knitted to the presence of God. As Mbiti (1969: 119) puts it, "God is the explanation of man's origin and sustenance; it is as if God exists for the sake of man." God's agents are charged with the responsibility of maintaining law and order in the society. Thus, both physical and supernatural forces are always present in the administration of the society. It is from this prism that one can begin to contemplate the relationship between religion and ethics as an engaging one. Different strands of opinions have characterised it. This centres on the idea of finding a causal link between religion and values. Do values have to be linked to religion to be meaningful and functional in human society? For the theists, morality, that is, practical ethics cannot stand without religion. In other words, religion is the basis for the meaningfulness and functionality of values. This is theonomous, that is, morality is God-given law. African Religion (henceforth referred to as Afrel) is uncompromisingly theonomous. The morality or value in Afrel is strictly traced to the Supernatural Being. Discussion on values in most African societies could not be divorced from religion. In Africa, there are agents of moral implementation. They police the responses of man to the values of the society. They

reward the obedient and punish the culprit.

Contrary to theonomous idea of values is the influence of colonial philosophy in Africa in which humanist philosophers argue that values are completely independent of religion. In fact, the gulf of its independence is so wide that they cannot be said to be related left alone identical. Humanism appreciates naturalism in its discourse of values. According to this philosophy, everything, including human beings, can be given a natural explanation without appealing to the supernatural. This is what evolutionism explains. Evolutionary theory debunks the claims of creationism. The application of this theory has extended virtually to all areas of human life. This, however, is the crux of the debate on human value.

For instance, in John Dewey's naturalism, there is a dualism: supernatural and natural. Everything is part of nature: the world of nature. Dewey argued that there is no permanence in the world of nature, no fixity. Put differently, "change is the only thing that is absolutely universal." Every other variable is a process; nature itself is a complex wheel of process. Recourse cannot be made to transcendent intelligence for the course of nature. In the circumstance, no cosmic purpose has a predetermined force to coordinate the plurality of events and organic entities that characterise nature. As a result,

human values are idealizable, and the values which we subscribe to divine origin or supreme quality are indeed an embodiment of nature (Rockefeller, 1993: 27 - 29).

In the naturalistic thesis, it is held that religion may function as an enduring accommodation that involves submission or acceptance of condition of life considered to be permanent. This forms a truly religious attitude that enables man to be more active instead of embracing stoic resignation. The proponents argue that there is a "sense of values which carry one through periods of darkness and despair to such an extent that they lose their usual depressive character." In spite of this religion's functionality, attitude and adjustment, Dewey's naturalism upholds the view that such functionality can occur without attributing it to religion. The function of religion can be explained without making reference to supernatural causation. The only desirable alternative in contemporary time is that religious values should not be connected in whatever form or guise, with institutional religion. To naturalism, religion is not essential to the formation and implementation of values in the society (Rockefeller, 1993: 27 - 29).

G. E. Moore argued against the position of humanists. He claims that any attempt to defend any version of ethical naturalism will lead to the commission of "naturalistic fallacy." The centerpiece of value is what is good, which is denoted in intrinsic value, "the goodness of the things which are good as ends in themselves." Besides, there are actions for instance, virtuous ones that are not end in themselves but serve as a means by which good can be brought about. Right action produces the greatest possible amount of good in itself (Norman, 1998: 158). These actions depend on intrinsic values which have reference to religion. And this is where African Religion stands. What therefore is African Religion?

DEFINING AFRICAN RELIGION

The necessity for the definition of Afrel hinges on the fact that the subsequent part of this work will focus on African values. The clarification made here will help in appreciating the values in Afrel. Awolalu defines Afrel as:

"...largely written in the people's myth and folktales, in their songs and dances, in their liturgies and shrines and in their proverbs and pithy sayings. It is a religion whose historical founder is neither known nor worshipped; it is a religion that has no zeal for membership drive, yet it offers persistent fascination for Africans, young and old" (Awolalu, 1976: 3).

Since the founder of Afrel is neither known nor worshipped, Afrel can be said to be as old as Africa. It is autochthonous to Africa and persistently meets the existential problems of its adherents in profound ways. However, it cannot be said for surety nowadays that Afrel

is not engaging in missionary drive. By unconscious or conscious design, Afrel is universalizing increasingly. The practice of Afrel by the Africans in Diaspora caused by slave trade and the recent attempts at organizing the religion are not unconnected with missionary zeal even though the latter has not become full blown.

Ekwenife (1990: 1) corroborated the above definition when he wrote that Afrel:

"means those institutionalized beliefs and practices of indigenous religion of Africa which are rooted in the past African religious culture, transmitted to the present rotaries by successive African forbears mainly through oral traditions ... sacred specialists and persons, sacred places and objects and religious work of art, a religion which is slowly but constantly updated by each generation in the light of new experiences through the dialectical process of continuities and discontinuities".

These definitions are properly regarded as descriptions of Afrel. They contain variant ideas of the religion in order to give it a wide coverage. Nevertheless, they create a visible import and a symbolic tool for the understanding of the religion. That is why African civilization is described as the civilization of symbol. In other words, Afrel is rich in symbols. The symbolic representation of the divine earned it the derogatory appellations ascribed to the religion. However, some objective Western travellers have written that Africans before the coming of the Westerners had "an idea of the true God, and ascribe to Him the attributes of Almighty and Omnipresent; they believe He created the universe, and therefore vastly prefer Him before their idol-gods; but they do not pray to Him or offer sacrifices to Him" (Gyekye 1996: 3 - 4). It is this true God that Africans respond to in their daily engagements, upon whom they depend for their moral law through the divinities, spirits and ancestors.

John Noss's relation of the implication of religious belief is apposite to conclude this segment.

"All religions imply in one way or another that man does not, and cannot stand alone, that he is virtually related with and even dependent on powers in nature and society external to himself. Dimly or clearly, he knows that he is not an independent center of force capable of standing apart from the world.... Religions, as a general rule, relate men closely with the power or powers at work in nature or society.... Most men from primitives in the jungle to members of societies far advanced in technology and intercultural relationships, do not think that men are all that matters" (Noss, 1969: 2).

These features enunciated by Noss are commonalities shared by almost all men in their response to the divine. Men's responses are hinged on so many factors: geography, culture, belief system, etc. Africans are not left out. In fact, as Bhagavan Das argued:

“Throughout history men have followed the religious faith of their own culture, and the majority has accepted their own faith as the only embodiment of truth. Yet in every religion there have been wise men holding the candle of light by which wisdom can be seen” (McDowell and Stewart, 1982: 12).

The candle of light of Afrel is well expressed as the cherished and shared values of the people.

THE CONCEPT OF VALUE

Values may be ideas that propel man’s daily actions. In other words, they are the standard which members of the community adhere to in their personal and communal interaction towards the achievement of the goals. It is they that determine those who are to be praised or reprimanded for their actions. In another sense, values refer to what is ‘good’ or ‘desired’. In the descriptive sense, value can mean the worth of something as when an article is evaluated. Values can be institutional and cherished by individual and by a group of people. Values can refer to the usefulness of a thing which is a function of choice-making. That is, there are options opened to one from which a choice is made. The concept of choice is preponderant to the greatest aptitude of the person making the choice (Ewelu, 1999: 40; Omotehinse, 2001: 101).

In so far as values are universal, they can be material, spiritual, religious, moral, aesthetic, communal or individualistic. Another feature is that values are found in all religions. People’s values are largely based upon traditional religious and moral principles that they cling to. Values can be influenced by what we see and hear. A Vatican II document positively attests to the universality and pervasive nature of values. It reads:

The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, etc). She has a high regard for the number of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which ... often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men... (Pazhayampalli, 1995: 527).

From the universal level, apart from religions, philosophies and ideologies also have the idea of values. These values are dynamic and often change to meet the ever-evolving nature of the society. These changes in society may reflect economic, technological and cultural changes. For instance, globalisation – a concept associated with unipolar tendencies, aggressive towards economic puissance, and imperialistic in disguise – is the latest in the drives towards unifying the world. Its values theoretically align with positive values but practically deny it. The Commission on Global Governance for example, reported in 1995 that “without a global ethic, the frictions and tensions of living in the global neighbourhood will multiply; without leadership, even the best designed

institutions and strategies will fail”. In order to achieve this lofty value of globalisation, the report recommended that “people should treat others as they would themselves wish to be treated” (Awake, February 8, 2003: 13). This global “Golden Rule” is not new. It is the melting point of all religions and perhaps philosophies and ideologies. The unfortunate aspect of this monumental value is that the leaders in the global ethics have unabatedly abased the ethics in their daily interaction with other people of the world. Somehow, the global value, devoid of spiritual import, tends to combine the instrumental and consummatory values. The instrumental values permit the adoption of new ideas based on their utility in order to produce a desired goal. Consummatory values on the other hand, link new ideas to the ultimate spiritual ends of the community and push them away when they feel they are not in line with spiritual needs (Khapoya, 1998: 61). There is a picturesque example of European combination of these two aspects of value, ostensibly for political interest as demonstrated in the colonization of Africa. We have not lost sight of our discussion. Moral values as universal phenomena are called the ‘highest good’ or ‘ultimate good’. This is known as intrinsic values. Extrinsic values are instruments or necessary conditions to realise intrinsic values. In other words, they are instrumentally valuable as a means, or causally necessary for the realisation of intrinsic values. The ‘good’ in extrinsic value depends on objects to exist and to be purposeful. Extrinsic value therefore derives its being from its service, that is, as an instrument of achieving an intrinsic value (Brink, 1989: 217- 218). On the other hand, intrinsic values are inherently good and end in themselves. That is to say, good in itself. Some philosophers agree that intrinsic value is “anything desirable or capable of arousing desire or interest; and as a ‘unity’ of any desirable thing which can cause interest to be aroused or as a capacity of being an end of action”. The assumption is that good is what we ought to desire. However, the subjectivists argue that goodness depends on persons for its existence. According to R. B. Perry and A. K. Roger, “good is partially dependent upon person as anything desired.” It could also be that goodness depends on persons as a satisfaction of any desire. Hedonism holds goodness to be a pleasant feeling (Omotehinse, 2001: 109).

FOUNDATIONS OF AFRICAN VALUES

The universe from the African understanding is a composite one; a blending of the divine, spirit, human, animate and inanimate beings, which constantly interact with one another. These visible and invisible elements that comprise the African cosmology are what have been referred to as the “forces of life” or “vital forces”. The vital forces are hierarchically structured in such a way that God, the creator of the universe is at the top. In the pyramidal structure where God is at the top, invisible forces of life,

like the divinities, spirits and ancestors, form part of the hierarchy. It is to this God – Osanobuwa (Edo), Nyame (Akan), Olodumare (Yoruba), Chukwu (Igbo), Ubangiji (Hausa), Soko (Nupe), Oghene (Urhobo), etc. – that devotion, worship and commitment are ascribed. It is because the Africans regard God as the Supreme Being that informed His reverence. The ethical demand of God, as the Holy, becomes part of the basis for the people's response to God.

African experience of God is depicted in their various attributes to Him. These attributes are somehow expressed mythically, metaphorically and anthropomorphically. In the mythical sense, the Africans transmit their experience of God in couched stories that are held to be sacred. Such stories tell us about the beginning of human life – creation. This leads to the belief in God as the creator of the universe. In the same vein, the ethical or moral standard of the Africans are also believed to be derived from God. It is to this thought that Africans hold ethics as theonomous. The metaphors attributed to God were such that God could be 'understood' from what He is. For instance, God is kind, God is just, etc.

Afrel's thought of moral codes is steeped in tradition, which flows from God to the ancestors. The ancestors are the repositories of the tradition. Through the spirits and the priests/medicine men, the morality of the society is maintained. Afrel holds the belief in the ubiquity of the spirits (Magesa, 1997: 41). This is why the spirits are believed to play stupendous role in the implementation and maintenance of morality. For example, Africans believe that the spirits punish the culprits. In the hay days, a seller would keep his wares on the roadside and designate the price with stones or pebbles. Without being there physically, the buyer would pay exactly the same amount and keep the money there for the owner of the goods. No other person would steal the money because it was believed the spirits were present. Thus, the belief was strong that the goods, the forests, the road, the money had spirits that could haunt any culprit. This helped a great deal in the maintenance of morality in African societies (Ejiogu, 2000: 9).

The ancestors, described as the "living dead" or the "revered dead", are believed to be the moral agents in their immediate families they have physically left behind. They oversee and superintend over the family ethical code. For example, whenever a woman commits adultery, it is believed that the ancestors will expose her by inflicting her with sickness. It is also true when a man commits adultery with a woman in the same ancestral affinity. The divinities supervise the activities of their worshippers. The worshippers of any particular divinity are careful in relation with the moral demands of that divinity. Otherwise, offenders would be punished.

It is in this case that we say African universe is a composite one. In other words, the universe is not made up of human beings alone but the dead and other supernatural forces are essentially parts of the universe.

These supernatural forces are not, and cannot be, inhibited from coming into, and going out from, the world. They guide man's activities, they reward the obedient as well as punish the culprits.

VALUES IN AFRICAN RELIGION

Godwin Sogolo (1993: 119) wrote that "African values...may be taken to mean a set of institutionalized ideals which guide and direct the patterns of life of Africans." African values therefore are goal-oriented because they point to a desired goal, which actions are geared towards and upon which the expectation of every individual and community is hinged. Individual actions are mirrored through the approved society's values upon which the test for justification is based. This makes an action a moral one. The question of moral justification provides us with the notion of ultimate value. The society may or may not actually or consciously recognise it, yet it is a part of its moral value.

Among the various African values, the sacredness of human life is of utmost importance. The respect and dignity accorded human life cannot be over-emphasised. Respect for humanity spreads beyond the confine of nuclear family. Members of extended family, community or tribe are regarded as brothers whose lives must be preserved and protected. In this case, the notion of human value is intrinsically linked with a wide range of brotherhood, which may not be biologically based. The concept of brotherhood in Africa goes beyond that of the Western understanding. Therefore, in whatever circumstance, the spirit of brotherhood stimulates patriotic response and disposition of one towards another. Man is valued above every other possession. This informs the reason African places high premium on children. African attitude to human life has an ultimate worth because of its intrinsic relation with the creator of life.

However, there are handful expressions of the abuse of life in spite of the appreciation of human value. The cases of inter-tribal wars and ethnic conflicts leading to the death of even blood-related African brothers are quintessence. African involvement in the ignoble slave trade is dehumanising. There used to be internecine burial of people along with deceased kings and nobles, which though is based on false metaphysics (Gyekye, 1996: 26).

Africans place high value on communal living. Communal values express the worth and appreciation of the community; the values which guide the social interaction of the people towards a common goal. Interpersonal bonds go beyond biological affinity in expressing the values of communality, Africans share mutually; they care for one another, they are interdependent and they solidarise. Whatever happens to one happens to the community as a whole. The joy and sorrow of one extend to other members of the community in profound ways.

The willingness to help others for the development of the community is reciprocal. It is within this communality that Africans are mostly fulfilled. This is beautifully expressed by Mbiti (1969) when he wrote: "I am because we are. And since we are therefore, I am." This is dialectically opposed to the Western rugged individualism, which has unfortunately threatened the very root of African communalism through colonial contact.

Individualistic values are linked closely with communal values. Africans have and also appreciate personal will and identity. Among the Edo, individualistic values are expressed in the following maxim: "You first see the forest before calling the trees by name". This means that from afar off the trees make up the forest. But on entering into the forest, one can begin to identify different trees by their names. The communal values that guide the social life of the individual members of the community appear to all that matter. But when one takes an intent look at the people, one discovers that there are individualistic values. Both communal and individualistic values co-exist perfectly together. They may sometimes clash, but the communal values are the superintending ones in adjudication. In spite of this, individualistic values of the persons in the community are not consciously trampled upon. They are respected just like the communal (Gyekye, 1996: 47).

Moral values are intrinsically social, which arise from interdependent relationship. Morality is crucial to the proper functioning of the community. It is central to the orderly nature of the community. We have said earlier that morality in Afrel is derived from supernatural powers. It is only through this basis that one can justify the African moral code. The total well-being and welfare of the community are essentially important to the moral values. Thus, responsibility, kindness, honesty, hospitality, accommodation, generosity, compassion, faithfulness, fruitfulness, love, dignity, diligence, etc., are all considered to be moral values. This forms the bedrock of social value which abhors ethical egotism. Ethical egotism in its conceptual meaning holds that everybody is to pursue to his own welfare and interest. This gives rise to selfishness.

In Africa, the value of the family cannot be over-emphasized. It is the primary unit of the social life of the community. Its cohesion is a *sine qua non* of the unity of the community. As fundamental as the family is, it has social and moral values. The nuclear family functions within the extended family. Interestingly children have their rights and obligations towards their parents, just as the parents towards the children. The husband has his duties and privileges as the head of the family just as the wife, towards her husband. In this unit, marriage becomes the basic institution for the establishment of a family. Marriage as part of rites of passage has its social and moral code in various societies that make it worth the name. For a woman to be found a virgin carries a high value and dignity that attracts respect and honour to her

parents. To bear children is very important because of the socio-religious implications. Divorce had no place except as an excruciating last resort. Even today, traditional Africans still view divorce as obstructing the solidarity, mutuality, love, care, togetherness, cohesion, nourishment, fellowship and continuity of the family (Gyekye, 1996; Megasa, 1997; Khapoya, 1998).

Hard work is highly appreciated by the Africans. Even the indolent also acknowledges that hard work is a value that engenders positive influence in the family and communal circles. The African who is hard working makes persistent efforts regardless of failures and setbacks. In fact, those who were not industrious became the initial victims of slave trade. Ironically, apart from the children of the kings and nobles, the hard-working people of Africa were almost the last in receiving Western education at the inception of Christian missions and colonialism. Parents only sent their lazy children to school while the hardworking ones were doing the family job. The value of hard work is appreciated at worksites with proverbs, songs and praise names. Work is regarded as the cure for poverty. Poverty or failure is an orphan while success has many fathers and a long genealogy. Nobody wants to associate with lazy people, and many of them cannot even get married or perform the required social responsibility demanded by the family and community.

Wealth results from hard work. Anyone who possessed wealth he could not account for was viewed with suspicion. The community scorned at such a person. The value of value is critically linked with accountability and transparency. Many maxims express the values of wealth. It also reflects in names. For instance, the Edo people bear Efeare, meaning: "It is wealth you greet". In other words, you greet those who are wealthy and could despise the wretched. Eghoghunu – "Money is mouth" – is an expression that the rich can talk and be listened to. The people also believe that he who is poor materially in the Elder's Council is also poor in wisdom. What this expresses is that, hard work is cure for poverty and the belief is strong that one could not be poor for being hard working unless there were extraneous reasons.

Political value is linked with chieftaincy title in Africa. The political structure could be complex. In some cultures, it was pyramidal and highly religious and traditionally fixed to the lineal succession. In some other societies, it could be hierarchical and centralized with the king as the head and commander-in-chief of the military. In this bureaucratic structure, the king had the final seal of approval or disapproval of any decision, but based on collective agreement. In segmental structure or in acephalous societies, the political power was diffused and shared. It is a stateless or decentralised political structure. Such society could run a geroncratic government. In spite of the various political structures, leadership value was essential to Africans, highly religious and morally demanding. The political leader was required to possess some traits that could engender

respect, unity and progress of the community. If he did not avail himself of the required standard, in some cultures, he was removed. The political head works in concerted efforts with the members of council to bring about development and progress in his domain. He does not work in isolation. He is to be responsible and responsive to his people (Khapoya, 1998: 62; Gyekye, 1996: 112). However, these features of values in African cultural heritage have been vitiated by colonialism.

COLONIAL INFLUENCE ON AFRICAN CULTURAL VALUES

It is doubtless that colonialism stimulated positive and negative changes in Africa. More importantly, colonial rule was an imposition that unleashed deadly blow on African culture with the immediate consequence of the introduction of such values as rugged individualism, corruption, capitalism and oppression. Colonial rule disrupted the traditional machinery of moral homogeneity and practice. The method of moral inculcation was vitiated, which resulted in the abandonment of traditional norms and values through a systematic depersonalisation of the African and paganisation of its values. Instead of the cherished communalism which defined the life of the African, for example, a burgeoning societal construct was introduced which alienates and destroys the organic fabric of the spirit of we-feeling.

According to Okoduwa (2008: 18), colonial rulers promoted their economic and religious values. This is evident in economic exploitation and socio-religious vitrification that characterised the colonial period. It is in this theorising that Irvin Markovitz conceives of colonialism as “one expression of an ever more encompassing capitalism” (Okoduwa, 2008: 18). However, apart from the economic exploitative agenda, colonialism expressed “the ethnocentric belief that the morals and values of the colonizer were superior to those of the colonized” (Okoduwa, 2008: 18). This belief was programmatically achieved through the establishment of schools, which curricula were tailored to achieve the goals of the coloniser rather than train the colonised to be independent, and the missionary ventures, which helped a great deal in vitrifying the religious concept and inclination of the colonised. This scenario naturally created two classes, one being the superogatory and the other the subordinatory, with deliberate administrative structure that favoured the former.

One consequence of this was the erosion of the values, culture and religion of the subordinatory. The African cosmos became a victim of extraneous ideology which it has continued to grapple with, with little or no success. For instance, as part of the erosion of the African cultural values, Africans now bear at least a European or Christian name. This means that African names, arts, music, religion, etc. are inferior of pagan in orientation

and value. The acceptance of this by the Africans has continued to have serious negative effects on the post-colonial Africa and its values.

APPRAISAL OF AFRICAN VALUES IN CONTEMPORARY PERIOD

It must be said that the values as discussed previously are not exhaustive. It is also necessary to say that African values were not at all times positively adhered to before the coming of the three incursive forces of slave trade, foreign religions and colonialism. While slave trade abused the sacredness and dignity of human value, some Africans were collaborators. With the foreign religions – Christianity and Islam – many changes took place in African values. Even those values that correspond to the values in these religions in traditional African values were disparaged. For colonialism, the political value of Africa was dislodged and replaced with a foreign one, thus putting a round stick in a square hole. Luke Mbefo argued that combined conspiracy of Christianity and colonialism resulted in the dereliction of African values. These new values have replaced the old ones (Ewelu, 1999: 40).

The question should be asked that without those three forces would there have been internal revolution in Africa that would have changed African values? One cannot say for certain but can haphazard that every society is dynamic. Nobody would be able to trace the deviant behaviour majorly outside the community in a closed set up. Therefore, there would have been changes no matter the magnitude and speed. But with interaction and contact with colonial forces, changes necessarily became an inevitable result whether positive or negative.

With the increasingly globalising world, greed, egotism and loss of community are taking over the age-long cherished values. The powerful media, especially of the West, have succeeded in spreading exotic values into the interior of people’s bedroom. In fact, even without cable, the “contentless” and “contextless” colonial values have been sold cheaply to Africa. The result is the systematic erosion of traditional African values. Through the media, the sanctity of human life has been consigned to the dustbin. You could hear a statement like, “I am not of the opinion that human life has value”. This valueless opinion of human life makes life more meaningless and the struggle for survival a crude effort. Thus, we can now find corpses littering our streets with abandon.

The decline of moral value is catastrophic. The “society is moving toward sexual norms that give wider latitude for individual sexual gratification and individual self-expression” (Awake, June 8, 2003: 4). This has led to the prevalence of children in giving birth to children syndrome, which is pervading our society. Dignity of labour as a cherished value has been infested with corrupt virus of quick and lewd way to success. The success

highway code does not include hard-work anymore for most people. This accounts for the thriving illegal but smart business called 419. Academic laurels among students have gone to stock exchange. Just as we now have organised crime, a more sophisticated organised examination, which in the slang is called "ECOMOG exams", is taking over the educational system. Miracle Centre Syndrome (MCS) where candidates pay exorbitantly to people who help them write their examinations is eroding the value of study. Certificate forgery and racketeering is no more viewed with serious disapproval because it is almost becoming a part of acceptable norm. The government too is not free from the agents of erosion of our values. Insincerity, dishonesty, unfaithfulness, cheat, corruption, bribery, favouritism, irresponsibility, irresponsiveness, pen-robbery, embezzlement, harassment, organised crime and gambling, deceit, lies, exploitation, etc. have characterised the activities of the government. The list is endless.

The deterioration of values is so pervading that Ewelu (1999: 43) wrote satirically that "in Nigeria, a blind person can be given a driving license if and only if he is able to put on table the "required amount". Mbefo did a crisp compendium of the devaluation of our value when he wrote:

"New values have been adopted and canonised. Dishonesty and cheating, fraud and getting away with it have now replaced ancestral moral uprightness and probity. Logic and legal smartness with their quibbling with their nuances of words have banished truth and integrity from traditional values to the archives (sic) of antiquarians.... Getting rich overnight without working for it has become the new criterion for achievement. Youths now take on titles such as chiefs by grace of unaccounted-for-wealth, titles that their ancestors merited through years of hard-work and honesty.... Nobody wants to be honest anymore simply because honesty "does not pay". Honesty has no cash value" (Ewelu, 1999: 43).

CONCLUSION

Reasons for the dereliction of moral value in Africa can be traced to the intrusion of colonial ideas and foreign religions. This position may not account for the whole truth. While it is however true that colonial influence are majorly concerned with imposition of their ideas, such as rugged individualism, which has destroyed the communalistic value of Africa, with its negative effects, the gullible reception by the Africans cannot be excused. Christian values may not be too different from the tradition African ones, except in the concept of salvation. The problem was and is still our flair for "anything Western, especially American, people have love.... They want to eat and be it" (Awake, May 22, 2002: 11).

Awolowo' brutal acknowledgement of this, even during the time of colonialism in Africa, is apposite here.

"It is surprising that our European guardians and tutors have not found it worth while to turn their attention to the wealth of knowledge which our country has in store for the world. It is more surprising still that the educated Africans have never stopped to think whether it is not possible to make some good out of what we generally term "devilish." This default on our side, of course, is partly due to the fact that the voices from the pulpits ... have always admonished us to close our eyes to the practices of our forefathers, and partly to the fact that we seem to prefer, in any case, Europeanism to Africanism, and thus every mistake in Britain is a style in Nigeria" (Awolowo, 1939: 30).

One dangerous effect of these incursions is the argument about the autonomy of morality from religion. This is where Africans were exposed to ideas which are contrary to their traditional values. With the belief in the separation of values from the superintending supernatural agents, things fell apart. This has affected every aspect of human life, from spiritual to physical.

Even in government policies, what we find is the importation of foreign ideas that do not have cultural soil to grow in Africa. Africans therefore have become queer mixture, only African in skin (although some have also bleached their skin), and foreign in skill or mentality. To live in between these two worlds is causing us a lot of devastation. As Basil Davidson frontally pointed out, "the problems and solutions of today have to be envisaged within a historical framework, an indigenous historical framework, no matter what contribution an external world may have made" (Magesa, 1997: 9).

It is not only to realise this, but to actually live it. Our religious and moral values constitute the frameworks for the sanity of our society. No religion has failed humanity. But practitioners of religion have syncretised their religions with other mundane ideologies to fashion a way for themselves. Africa did not escape this reality. It is on this false and doubtful foundation that the post-colonial Africa was built. The fruits of this are aplenty. The realities of foreign cultures and religions cannot be denied. Their persistent influences on the lives of Africans are certain. But the return to our moral value understood from the reality of the day is impossible in spite of the grubby consequences of not going back. As John Mary Waliggo wrote:

"No sane society chooses to build its future on foreign cultures, values and systems. Every society is obliged to search deep in its own history, culture, religion and morality in order to discover the values upon which its development and liberation, its civilization and its identity should be based. To do otherwise is nothing less than communal suicide" (Magesa, 1997: 9).

The realisation of this challenge and its pursuit will constitute our first step towards recovery from the perennial degradation of our cherished values. This nostalgia for the age-long values is not merely a feeling, but an active response to the challenges that confront us daily. It is here that sanity can be restored to our lives, government and society.

In order to achieve this goal, putting into consideration the incursion of foreign forces, Africa must have recourse to 'sifted' values of the past which are not detrimental to her development. This pungent resolve is based on the religious nature of Africa that goes through the mill of continuities and discontinuities. The progressive values are to be continued that respect the authentic dignity of humanity and those which are preposterous to the goal of human realisation are to be disposed and consigned to the garbage of history. Those which have passed through the refinery can be appropriated and become spontaneously the yardstick to measure acceptable and unacceptable foreign culture.

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