



ANCESTRAL VOICES
Spirit is Eternal

DALIAN Y ADOFO
Foreword by **ROBIN WALKER**

Ancestral Voices Spirit is Eternal

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Dedications

To the memories of

Felicia Ama Agyekumwaah Adofo (1943 - 2015)

My dearest mother, first teacher and role model. My eternal gratitude for being a pillar of strength and inspiration.

Damirifa Due

Max Gesner Beauvoir (1936 - 2015)

Appreciation for upholding and persevering our Ancestral Traditions and selflessly sharing to elucidate the world.

Rest In Power

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Foreword

Despite the interest that people of African heritage have in the spiritual realm there are surprisingly few books that have so far been written that give an overview of the indigenous African spiritual heritage and its dispersal to the African Diaspora. This book, *Ancestral Voices: Spirit is Eternal*, is one of those few exceptions. At once scholarly but very simply written, this book deserves a place in every home.

Scholars and teachers have written and taught learnedly on Africa and religion including Professor John Jackson, Professor Yosef ben-Jochannan, Professor Charles Finch and Ashra Kwesi. However their works largely demonstrated the African influence on the Abrahamic religions.

They did not discuss the African heritage itself in any particular detail. Other writers presented detailed accounts of the spiritual systems of their own locality in Africa but they did not attempt to connect and synthesise their knowledge with the other African spiritual systems to tell any big narrative. Professor John Mbiti was the exception.

He attempted to join the dots and presents African spiritual systems in a comprehensive and coherent way. Consequently he dominated the scholarly arena on the African spiritual heritage from 1969 until now. His **African Religions and Philosophy** is a classic.

This new book, *Ancestral Voices: Spirit is Eternal*, is therefore a welcome addition to the field. It builds upon the skeleton created

by Professor Mbiti but adds much meat onto that skeleton. The author draws upon and synthesises more recent research that was then unavailable to Professor Mbiti.

Moreover, the book includes some of the traditional spiritual systems practised in the African Diaspora. Again, this is a welcome advance on Mbiti.

Ancestral Voices: Spirit is Eternal provides a practical and relevant understanding of African spiritual systems showing their commonalities in ideas and practices from all over Africa and its Diaspora.

The author details the richness and the sophistication of the spiritual systems proving that they are in no way inferior to the Abrahamic and the other spiritual systems.

The book also provides the relevant details to show the differences between the different spiritual systems.

The author is careful not to present these different systems as a homogenised whole.

The book thus provides an excellent starting point for people who want to engage with and embrace this ancient heritage.

This is a particularly crucial issue since more and more people are seeing the holes in the Abrahamic religious heritage and wish to go deeper.

In writing the book, the author confronts the racist and religious bigotry that unfortunately still dominates the discourse surrounding African spiritual systems.

Despite living in a so-called Secularised Age, misinformation dating from the colonial era and their missionary agents still dominate the field.

This misinformation is the biggest single reason why so many Black people today are ashamed of their African spiritual heritage.

This book could not have come at a more opportune time. As most of the West is becoming more and more secular with an anything goes mentality, Christian Zionism is dominating Christianity in America on one hand and by right wing anti-government Second Amendment Christianity on the other.

Elsewhere, Wahhabi Islam is on the rise and spreading like wildfire. These hard line religious traditions are influencing Black people all over the world, especially those who have not done their own due diligence.

The big question we should be asking in this confused and conflicted era is: what are the African spiritual systems about? What are they saying? This book answers these questions.

Robin Walker

CHAPTER 1

African spiritual universe and cosmology

In beginning our exploration of African spiritual systems, it is necessary first to outline some key concepts and ideas that are important if the reader is to arrive at an accurate understanding of the contents of this book.

Especially when we discuss the nature of the African Creator, humanity, ancestors and particularly, ritual practices for veneration and manifestation.

It is necessary because these systems go beyond what we commonly understand by the word 'religion' as the impact of the spiritual philosophies of Africans extends beyond dogma and prescribed days for commemorations and veneration.

It is expansively much more and has "shaped their cultures, their social life, their political organisations and economic activities."¹ (Mbiti, pg10).

This introductory volume of work will focus on those areas that will aid the reader in attaining a body of knowledge that will be useful in cultivating a spiritually informed and enriched life experience. These fundamental concepts that inform the philosophies and practices include:

Nature of Existence

In the African worldview, the nature of existence does not comprise solely of what we can perceive with our visual sense, that is, our eyes.

The Universe is composed of two aspects or realms- the physical and spiritual realms - with the spiritual realm further stratified into various spaces or abodes.

These spaces include those of departed ancestors, spirits (deities) and that of the penultimate source of creation of all things in existence. These two realms are in constant interchange with each other and what happens in one realm can have an impact on the other. In so doing, order and harmony are maintained in the cosmos and on earth.

In fact, in some communities such as the Dagara (Burkina Faso) and Akan (Ghana) of West Africa and Vodun adherents in Haiti in the Caribbean, it is held that when we sleep our spirits journey via dreams into this invisible realm to enact causes that have corresponding effects in the physical realm.

It is also the reason why in continental African and Diasporic communities, dreams are highly regarded as containers of useful information that can aid in manoeuvring the physical reality we call life.

Order and Balance

Opposing but complimentary forces maintain order and balance as a necessity for harmony between realms of existence.

There can be no 'good' without 'bad', and the 'bad' is not to be dispelled entirely per say, but rather managed and utilised as a source of learning to inform future actions and attitudes.

All 'bad' things come with lessons for learning and growth, as does the 'good', and in overlooking their reasons for being in our lives, the consequent results are disharmony and disorder in the lived experience.

As such there is always a dichotomy of being with regards to all things in the African worldview and ritual is the tool used to address imbalances as well to maintain ideal states of being.

The interconnectedness of things

All things in existence have an impact on each other, and this interconnectedness and interplay is a constant dynamic. There are cause and effect relationships to be found in all experiences, acts and thoughts, and as such what we will in the mind is manifested in the flesh.

What is known in the mainstream as ‘the law of attraction’ also happens to be one of seven ancient universal laws identified by the Africans who inhabited the Nile Valley in ancient times, in the area now known as Egypt.

By the same token, it is understood that it is the kinetic energy expended in carrying out ritual practices that also aids in the physical realisation of the ends sought.

This theory thus provides us with an indication as to how and why seemingly unrelated acts of veneration can lead to a manifestation of the desired end goal, or aid in the maintenance of balance and harmony between individuals, communities and the cosmos at large.

This notion of interconnectedness is best summed up in the Akan proverb “Obiakofa na okum sono, nam amanson nhina di -It takes a man to kill an elephant, but the universe consumes it.”² (Danquah, 1968: 189)

Likewise, it is also evident in the Bantu concept of Ubuntu; that each member of a collective has a bearing on others within it, and the wellbeing or otherwise of the whole is not separate from that of the individual or their immediate environment.

In Chaos Theory, 'The Butterfly Effect' would only be coined as a term describing the same concept in western science in 1961 by Edward Lorenz and espouses the same idea of the interconnectivity of events and between things.

Such correlations between empirical science and African sacred concepts remind us of a need to re-investigate African Spirituality from an unbiased and objective perspective for useful knowledge that can inform contemporary social organisation and education.

Social & Spiritual Hierarchy

It is held that the structure of the social organisation is a reflection of the same hierarchical organisation in the spiritual realm. The king is thus, the symbolic representation of the Creator/'God' and the officials in court are the various spirits (of nature, cosmic, universal) that act as the 'intermediaries' who officiate matters between the masses and king, whilst upholding particular responsibilities according to the duties of their office or powers imbued.

So for example whilst there is an official responsible for overseeing crop growth, another for maintaining discipline within the standing army and so on, in a similar manner there are different deities with various abilities or powers; for healing, agricultural work, fishing and the like.

Such differentiations further explain why it is these deities that commonly have shrines and temples dedicated to them and are

usually the subject of prayers and rituals of veneration, rather than a direct appeal to the Creator / 'God'.

A direct appeal to a senior figure would be considered disrespectful in social circles. Thus the same is expected in spiritual circles- one must first approach the intermediary to pass the message on.

It is this lack of understanding concerning these norms and etiquette that likely led to early European missionaries mistakenly asserting that Africans lack a Supreme Being / 'God' in their cosmology and instead only worship spirits; a misunderstanding that still plagues traditional African spiritual adherents today.

Cyclical existence

All that is in creation is never lost, even when it decays, withers away and is no longer discernible by our visible senses. Instead, it is transformed into another form or function such that existence continuously replenishes itself.

This understanding explains why reincarnation is an accepted fact in African and Diasporic traditions because a person that has left the physical realm can be reborn as their spirit is ever present in the wider cosmos.

"Africans believe in reincarnation, but the African idea is not based on a written text; it is based on the belief that human beings live in a cycle, that things go around and come around. African reincarnation is based on the religion of ancient Egypt, where the priests said that we shall come back millions and millions of times."³ (Asante & Mazama, vol 1, Introduction.)

The notion is that one is provided with as many opportunities as necessary until they can attain their divine purpose for the benefit of self and all.

It therefore attributes to the African Creator, the ideas of justice, consideration and unconditional love without absolute judgement and condemnation. This is also why the notions of sin and hell are absent from the spiritual conceptions.

Spirit of being

In the African worldview, all things in creation have the quintessential essence (spirit) of the Creator contained within it, whether animate or inanimate; an extension of the aforementioned notion of the 'interconnectedness of things'.

This is why we find some rocks or other natural formations deemed worthy of veneration in African communities; because it as a sign of respect towards that aspect (spirit) of the Supreme Being within it. Therefore communication with the Creator can be virtually through all things.

The human body is a holding vessel for the spirit (and consciousness) of the Creator, and the ultimate aim is to seek reunification with it, which is achieved by living an exemplary life that affords one the status of 'Ancestor' upon death.

This animating essence is known by various names across Africa, such as 'Chi' amongst the Igbos of West Africa and 'Mana' amongst the Bantu of East and Central Africa.

It is also identified as the breath of life given to humans by the Supreme, as found amongst the Nuer of Sudan and the Konso of Ethiopia.

African conceptions of the Creator/'God'

The anthropomorphic conceptions of the Creator / 'God' amongst Africans have never been solely confined to the human form, hence it is quite common to have more than the one title of reference with varying meanings within the same community of people that each encapsulates an aspect or function of this Divine source.

The many titles of reference given and their meanings reflect the broad approaches utilised by Africans in conceptualising the penultimate source of all things.

So, for instance, the name might mean 'the provider' - indicating the community's understanding that all sustenance comes from this source, or it can mean 'the all-powerful rock', a reference to the Creator being a source of strength/support for adherents and so on.

The Kikuyu (Kenya, East Africa) name for the Supreme, 'Ngai', means Creator, a reference to a function, whereas 'Akongo' means 'the beginner and the unending Almighty and inexplicable' for the Ngombe of Congo (Central Africa), a reference to the power and greatness of this source.

The various titles show quite clearly that Africans sought not to personalise the concept of 'God' into a human being, "it does not make God in its image but tries to see itself in God's image. So if God is every and all things at once and we the human being, the bumblebee, the butterfly, the grass, the tree, the calaloo, the corn, we are all different expressions of that singular essence having our peculiar experiences, which all interdependent on one another for survival."⁴

(Small, 2013)

Mainstream religious attributions of God such as being Omnipotent (all powerful), Omnipresent (everywhere at every time) and Omniscient (all knowing) are also explicit in these African references to their Creator.

The Creator/ 'God' as Nature

Sobonfu Some (2013) encapsulates the importance of nature in African societies across all sectors of societies including its spiritual knowledge systems in the statement; 'In Africa, nature is everything'.

The reference to Nature is not just limited to the vegetation and soil, but also animals and the earth itself, including the four elemental sources- air, water, fire and minerals/ rocks.

This by no means excludes the planetary bodies and universe at large and the constellations within it, many of which also inform particular ritual ceremonies as evident in full moon rituals or the appearance of interstellar objects such as comets or meteorites visible in the earth's atmosphere.

The Omnipresence (ever present) of Nature is evident the world over. It is all encompassing and enduring. Even where vegetation is absent or gradually erodes, it assumes the form of sand (deserts), and even in such environs, we find whole ecosystems of life forms still striving and being sustained.

The Omnipotence (all-powerful) of Nature is explicit in the destruction wrought by tsunamis, tornadoes, whirlwinds, earthquakes, fires and the like. In these 'natural disasters', we witness an awesome power that even all the technological advancements of humanity has yet to surpass or even curtail.

Its incredible power is further gleaned in its ability to sustain life in some way, shape or form even in the harshest conditions. Often its power to destroy is complementary to that of its power to create, as is observed with new growth and fertile soil after a bush fire for example- again we see reflected in this the notion of balance as covered earlier.

The Omniscience (all knowing) of nature is witnessed in the changing of seasons at prescribed times, just as the day 'knows' when to become night.

In the same vein, the planets revolve in alignment, with their phenomenal effects on earth evident for all to see- whether it's the female menstrual cycle or the tidal effects at sea and on other water bodies.

There is an innate creative intelligence that spurs on a harmonious dynamic interchange that is well beyond human comprehension.

Nature also meets many existential needs for humans. It is a source of plentiful and varied food types; plants and animals with different vitamins and nutritional qualities.

It is also a source of housing materials to meet sheltering needs, medications to help cure various ailments and so on- the list is endless regarding nature knowingly providing for our needs.

It is thus not surprising that it is conceived of as Divine and worthy of veneration across the continent and its legacy in Diasporic communities that has carried on the traditions.

It also explains why we find different formations within nature being respected as sacred.

The Masai(Kenya, East Africa) refer to Mountain Kilimanjaro as ngaje ngai, "the house of God", whilst Matabele mountain in Kuruman, South Africa is revered amongst the Zulus and Xhosa.

Trees such as the Sycamore of ancient Kemet, Baobab, Iroko and Nyame Dua in West Africa and rivers as well as vast water bodies such as Lake Bosumtwi in Ghana or Lake Bamblin in Cameroun and so on.

The earth itself is also a prominent deity / spirit in the African mind and imaged as female, corresponding to the function of creating life (children) and providing for their needs (breastfeeding). Amongst the Akans (Ghana), she is revered as Asaase Yaa (Mother Earth), Ani for Igbos (Nigeria) and Maa-ndoo which means 'the wife of God', amongst the Mende (Sierra Leone) peoples (Opoku, 1978).

She is not just inanimate rocks and soil, but a living, functioning entity that can be communicated with via offerings and specific rituals to sustain a symbiotic and mutually beneficial relationship with her progeny.

The erudite Professor Charles Finch asserts that it is through observations and attributions gleaned from nature that is then extended unto 'zootypes', that is, animals, giving rise to the archetype of the 'mother goddesses'. (Walker, 2011)

The Creator / 'God' as female

The earliest depictions still on record in Africa to date are of the Creator as a female, and one with child, again pointing to the function of giving birth, that is, coming into being or form. For the ancient Africans of the Nile Valley Ta-Urt, a pregnant hippopotamus becomes a representation of the Great Mother Earth and its ability to sustain life. (Walker, 2011)

As such the feminine generative power provided the initial seed of thought, to identifying how creation came forth- as a process of birthing or becoming and therefore afforded to the female of the

species. Glimpsed in this conception is the utilitarian nature of African Spirituality, such that the creator is less an anthropomorphic rendition of human beings, but rather a functional conception relating to how all things comes into being.

Professor James Small (2013) provides further evidence of this with reference to the oldest written African document from the Nile Valley- the 'Book of the Coming Forth by Day', also known as 'The Egyptian Book of the Dead'.

When the visible aspect of the Supreme Being, Ra, comes into being from his hidden and unknowable aspect, Amen and states that he came into being out of his mother Nun- the primordial waters.

Here we have another clear indication again of the feminine at the genesis of creation, with yet another reference to the birthing process as the progenitor of all life in existence.

We find the process of birthing in the cosmology of the Dogon (Mali, West Africa) as well, and even though their Supreme Creator is referenced as a 'he', Amma creates the world through four clavicles whose form are in the shape of a millet seed and very much resemble the female reproductive organs.

That they are also four in number is indicative of the four primordial elements of nature, so within the Dogon Cosmology, we find both the notions of the Supreme Being as Nature and with feminine attributes intricately interwoven together.

Notably, the Supreme Being of the Ijaw of Nigeria, 'Woyengi', is still a Mother Goddess; responsible for the creation of the universe and everything in it.

As Male and Female pair

There is more surviving recorded evidence of the Creator as a male and female pair in existence as opposed to singular male God-heads. As previously covered in the genesis story of the ancient Kemetians, the male aspect, Ra, is borne out of the female, Nun. (Small, 2013).

Amongst the Akans, it is Nyankopon Kwame (Male) and Asaase Yaa (Female), for the Fon (Benin & Nigeria) and Ewe (Togo & Ghana) peoples Mawu-Lisa embodies the dual nature of the Supreme Being and is still retained in its legacy in Haitian Vodun in the Caribbean as the two serpents; Damballah-Wedo and his 'wife' Aida-Wedo.

The conceptualisation of a dual nature to the Creator is recognition of the involvement of both a masculine and feminine principle for creation to come about.

Even the designations of the father being in the sky (above) and the mother being the earth (below) alludes to one of the seven universal principles of Ancient Kemet (Egypt)- 'As above, so below' - the principle of balance.

Even the spatial roles assigned can be imagined in the sexual position, popularly known as the 'missionary position', with the man on top and the woman beneath.

An allegory for this can be imaged in the rain falling from the sky (sperm) that then fertilises the earth (womb), leading to the consequent sprouting and development of life.

It is thus easy to understand how and why the masculine principle (male) is held in African societies to represent the 'beyond comprehension' or 'unseen' aspect of creation whereas the female is the visible and 'discerned' aspect. Also why it is often held that the 'spirit' of the child is assigned to the father whilst the blood/body is to the mother.

It is important to note that these conceptions do not carry with it the semiotic associations of power as found in western ideological frameworks such as, because the male is 'up', it is more powerful than the female who is 'down'. Instead, it is a reference to a complementary and harmonising state of affairs necessary for creation to occur.

"Therefore, the sky and the Earth, respectively, the masculine and the feminine concepts of origin, as well as the metaphor of the two halves of a calabash, are also powerful symbols of creation in the traditional African systems of beliefs and are conceived exactly as any African compound."5 (Asante & Mazama, vol 2, pg 619)

As Spirit Energy & Consciousness

Beyond the attribution of masculine and feminine principles in gendered forms, the Creator is also envisioned as a formless, self-conscious and intelligent entity. It supports the reference to the Creative Source being Omnipresent- ever present and everywhere, at all times, within all things.

As a state of energy, it is beyond form and containment and can transmute into all forms, hence the various forms manifested on this earth.

It is held that this essence, or spirit of the Creator, is what is present in all things- both animate and inanimate- and gives form and life.

In African spiritual philosophy, there are many different expressions of the Creator/God and an unlimited number of the forms it can take, hence why it is not uncommon to have Africans paying homage to a range of naturally occurring forms with no mental conflict as to its Divine nature.

It is also the basis of reverence for spirits/deities/Forces of Nature, because they are understood to reflect a particular aspect of the Supreme Being.

What are known as Orishas, Obosum, Nkisi, Neteru etc are but microcosms of the all-encompassing macrocosm- the Supreme Being -but more will be covered on that in the relevant chapter. It is also one of the reasons why we hardly find shrines dedicated to the Supreme Being in African communities or prescribed days, times and places for prayers and observances.

It can happen at anytime and anywhere, as the presence of the divine source is constant. It is also the reason why proselytising is absent in African Spirituality because if the understanding is that we are all of 'God', then how can one convert another back to 'God'? Simply by way of adhering to a set dogma?

The all-pervasive and imminent nature of 'God' from the African worldview is best summed up in the Akan proverb 'If you want to speak to God, tell it to the wind'. It does not mean to say the Supreme is the wind, but rather that it is Omnipresent and unfathomable in form or space.

Also that there are no prescriptions for times or dates for prayers and veneration; the channel for communication is always open. Therefore, human beings are Spirit Beings first and foremost, not just the bodies or physical containers housing that animating spark, which follows then that in the African conception, all in existence are but different manifestations of the Creator.

'The bee is in me, the bird is in me, the fish is in me, I am in the fish. In other words, life is one. It is wrong to separate the different faces of God because as we say in Zulu "God is one" even on the furthest ends of creation. God is one.

He or she, she is many things just as the earth is many things, the earth is the tree, the earth is the rock, the earth is water, so is God, so is the human being.”⁶ (Mutwa, 2013)

It is explicitly expressed in the concept of the Chi (life force) in Igbo societies, this Chi is present in all things and is also the essence of the Supreme Deity, Chuwuku.

Similarly, Ase, the manifestation principle or life force concept within the Yoruba traditions, expresses the same notion. It is contained within the life-blood of humans, animals, plants and rocks alike and as a result, the Ase of Orishas can be invoked into inanimate objects such as stones for initiates of Shango, as an example. Likewise, the Dogon also of West Africa refers to this life force as ‘Nyama’ and is held to be transmittable from generation to generation and is also contained within the blood stream. (Dieterlien & Griaule, 1986)

In Central, East and Southern Africa, amongst the Bantu peoples, it is known as ‘Mana’ (vital/life force) and is contained in everything. Higher cultivation of it is held to confer material benefits and blessings to one’s life experience.

Amongst the Nuer of East Africa (Ethiopia), it is referred to as the life breath that sustains life and which returns to unite with their Creator Kwoth when one passes on.

That this spirit/essence of the Supreme is also self-aware (conscious) is evident in some African narratives of Creation where the source wills itself into being through the transmutation of thought/mind energy into physical matter.

In the ancient Kemetian texts (Book of the Coming Forth by Day) mentioned earlier by Professor James Small (2013), we find evidence of this in the dialogue concerning Ra.

He says of himself after becoming visible or taking on form from his 'hidden' self, 'I create myself out of myself. I cause existence to begin to exist when I begin to exist.

When I became conscious of myself, existence began to exist. I came from my mother Nun.'

What we are presented with are two notions; self-replication and birthing or becoming another form, as indicated by the change in 'gender'. Professor Small contends that what the discourse illustrates, in essence, is an allegory for 'Solid matter emanating out of liquid matter'.

Whereas this notion would have been treated with incredulity in Western science a few decades back, such a notion is now an accepted theory within the discipline of 'Quantum Physics'.

Dr. Kofi Bempah (2013) also states that in the creation story of the Akan, "God created a thing (Adie). Singular, a thing, not things, this is another way of saying that God willed and became. In the becoming mode, he assumed energy.

So we have wisdom (God) and Energy. Of course, matter is congealed energy so (a) human being is Matter and Divine spirit. The body is the matter and all created things disintegrates, but the divine aspect of man lives on forever, it is immortal."⁷

(Bempah, 2014)

Likewise, for the Dogon, Griaule & Dieterlen (1986) inform that "Amma created his own twin, that is, the universe itself. Just as the universe is the replica of Amma and contains him, this universe was- and will remain – contained by Amma in the form of signs."⁸ (pg86)

"Amma performed the work of creation in several stages. This work consisted of giving volume to that explosive force he had conferred on his own thought, projected outside of himself while

he was materializing the world...Amma produced his own creation by “opening (himself) up.”⁸ (pg 184)

On the use of the mind to manifest creation; “When Amma began (tono) things, he had his thought in his mind. The thought he had written (tono) in his mind.

His thought, it is the first figure (tonu) – Amma kize tonoy-go ku bonnu vomo-ne azubu vomo sebe. Azubu vomo ku bonnu vomo-ne tonu, azubu vomo tonu polo voy.”⁸ (pg 109)

What makes these notions particularly insightful and useful is that we find the will and creative use of the imagination as crucial elements required in the manifestation of desired outcomes in ritual practice.

The underlying principle being that the energy expended in bodily movements and the mind (thought), can manifest that which is visualised through energy transmutation, but this will be explored further in the chapter on rituals for living.

In much of contemporary popular and literary culture, self-help books such as ‘The Secret’ and ‘Think and Grow Rich’ amongst others, all espouse the principle of the ‘law of visualisation’ for achieving one’s goals and aims.

It is recommended by athletes, psychologists and even in branches of scientific endeavour such as Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP).

It is presented almost like a newly fangled concept within human activity, not an ancient African principle of manifestation and creation, thus removing an important contribution to world history and civilisation.

Such actions thus only further ignorance of what African Sacred Sciences encapsulate.

As Ancestor

The understanding that the Creator's essence is imminent in all things is a contributing factor to the conception that the Supreme Being/'God', is also the very first Ancestor or progenitor of some communities.

"African cosmological and religious interpretations of the world show commonalities that conceive the spirits and even the first creator as sharing the same life experiences, needs, and attributes as those of the average human being" (Asante & Mazama, vol 2, pg 619).

The Dogon of West Africa hold this to be true of Amma; "Having thought and then designed the world he wished to create, Amma tried as an experiment to superpose a bit of every kind of substance that formed a "flesh" originating from his own person, a "dross" to which he added his saliva." (Griaule & Dietressen, pg 100).

The Shona of Zimbabwe similarly conceive, the 'Mwari Triad- the Father, Mother and child trinity in their cosmology, to be related to their legendary king Soro-Re-Zhou.' (Asante & Mazama, 2009). For the Bakongo of Central Africa, one of the names for the Creator- Nzambi- is also interchangeable with that referring to human beings, nzambi.

The Akan have the saying 'God is the first Ancestor' and Credo Mutwa confirms that the very name of the Creator amongst the Zulus, Nkulunkulu, means 'Great Ancestor'.

It thus sheds further light as to why ancestor veneration is so important in African societies because it goes merely beyond just honouring the memory of a direct relative or seeking their assistance, it is ultimately an act of reverence to the Supreme

Creator. It is therefore not surprising that transitioned ancestors can be deified, particularly those who lived exemplary lives of benefit to the wider community and set worthy examples for emulation.

Elevating them to this sacred status, again, reflects the understanding that human beings are conceived of as aspects of the Creator having individually lived experiences, but on death, return to that source to reconcile again with it.

“However, an ordinary person could become a part of the god head if the society deified him or her if their deeds were great enough. Shango is now regarded as a Yoruba deity but was originally a Yoruba king whose contribution to metallurgy ultimately led to his deification.

In the Ancient Nile Valley, the same thing happened to Asar or Ausar. The Greek historian, Diodorus Siculus, portrayed him as a ruler in Ancient Sudan. At a later date, he was deified and became the deity of resurrection in the Nile Valley. Greek sources call him by the better-known name of Osiris.”⁹ (Walker, pg 14)

In the same Nile Valley, we find this to be the same for Imhotep, the world’s first recorded multi-genius; builder of the Sakara pyramid and renowned physician. (Walker, 2011).

Moving further south of the Sahara and of recent memory, the same was initiated for Okomfo Anokye of the Akan confederation (Ghana, West Africa), who summoned down the gold stool that is held to contain the spirit of power and unity of the Asante nation. In the Diaspora it still continues, with the deification of Jean-Jacques Dessalines of the Haitian Revolution.

Summary

What becomes immediately apparent in exploring the numerous African conceptualisations of a Supreme Creator is that it is primarily a philosophical pursuit for meaning, order and social cohesion as the concepts are underpinned by a functional and utilitarian focus

At its core is the understanding that the Creator is all things and is not separate from that created, thus its vastness cannot be contained in a single theory or idea.

“Using the African system of understanding, the nature of being one cannot conclude that there is only one divinity. Neither can one conclude that there are many creator deities. At best, one must accept that the nature of the divinity is one, but the attributes of the one are found in the numerous manifestations as the many.” (Asante & Mazama, vol 1, Introduction)

They also afford an experiential discovery of the self, others, community and the environment to create a harmonious ecology of balance, sustainability and continuity.

These conceptions bestow upon the community frameworks for living that inspires positive ideals and values of unity, inclusivity and communality, where all things are valued and respected as important and necessary constituents or aspects to the whole.

“Africans may use all the materials that their environment puts at their disposal in order to express their ideas about God. For them, everything that surrounds them exhibits a sort of transparency that allows them to communicate directly with heaven. Things and beings are not obstacles to the knowledge of God; rather they constitute signifiers and indices which reveal the divine being”¹⁰ (Zahan , 5)

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Notes

This book is a ground breaking exploration of humanity's oldest documented faith practice; African Spirituality. A term often criticised for assuming homogeneity in African philosophy and culture that apparently does not exist.

However, these research findings reveal intricate and broad commonalities across the various systems that clearly evidence a high level of unison in the Cosmological philosophies and practices of African people.

The Author explores the topic across millennia from the times of the Ancient Black Egyptians to contemporary practices on the Continent and in the Diaspora.

Evidenced are striking commonalities in the spiritual philosophies and practices over time and space, showing they are derived from a common mind or source.

That what we term Vodou, Vodun, Ifa, Kandomble, Palo Mayombe, Kemetic Spirituality and the like are all but localised offshoots of the same tree so to speak.

As such, African Spirituality is shown to be an apt umbrella term for the various expressions the world over, one that will give its adherents official recognition and rights in the same manner various sects within mainstream religions are protected by law.

The book also gives practical advice and suggestions from various systems on how to cultivate an African Centred Spiritual life, so it is not just an essential piece of scholarly work to read but also an invaluable manual of instruction to have for cultivating one's personal spiritual development.

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