

Quashigah: The Trouble with African Spirituality

Some African traditional spiritualists will tell you by swearing on such famed African spiritualists like Ghana's legendary Okomfo Anokye, who conjured up a Golden Stool and used it to form one of the greatest empires in the world, the Asante Kingdom, that Christianity has disturbed the African and, by implications, his or her progress. In most parts of traditional Africa, there are many Okomfo Anokyes but are not projected as other religions have been doing.

But such African spiritualities are suppressed, its practices done in near-concealment. While there are African oracles continent-wide, there are no African religious churches of the Christian or Moslem or Jewish type openly. Almost all the African oracles and shrines are somehow shrouded in secrecy, in some forests or grooves or remote cottage, unlike similar shrines and oracles in Greece, Japan, Latin America, Korea, and Russia that function in the open and serve their peoples material and spiritual needs.

It is as if Africans do not allow daylight upon their traditional religion. It is as if Africans are so polluted spiritually, are ashamed of their traditional spiritualities, as Carleton University's Daniel Tetteh Osabu-Kle would say, that they are have become disgusted by their very traditional spirituality that served their ancestors over centuries. It is these same traditional religions that inform top traditional spiritualists like Okomfo Anokye to appropriate it to create one of the greatest empires in the world, the Asante Empire that extended from the present Asante and the Brong Ahafo Regions of Ghana to a good part of Cote d'Ivoire.

Nowhere in the world is ones traditional spirituality either bastardized or demeaned or kicked around badly as if it has no innate traditional spiritual soul so much than the Africans. The African spirituality, which is non-violent and with no problems of fundamentalism compared to other worldly religions, is so demeaned that even in the eyes of a good number of Africans they see it as heathen, pagan, evil, fetish, or primitive. And this has impacted negatively on Africa progress in all sort of developmental ways to the extent that its elites, who are supposed to know better, are dazed.

Such dim views of African religion have come about not necessarily because of colonialism's demeaning ventures but because of certain dark aspect of African spiritualities, its occult practices, which is in any religion or society any ways, that has come to overshadow the entire religion the juju, for instance. It is to refine such fearful practices that the Ghana-based Afrikania Mission, an umbrella of traditional religious groupings, is working to open up African religion and accord it the necessary respect.

At this juncture it is good to know that one of Africa's and Nigeria's foremost writers/thinkers, Chinua Achebe, of Things Fall Apart fame, is an Igbo traditional or ancestral worshiper. Another Nigerian who has written extensively on Yoruba cosmology, the Nobel Prize Laureate Wole Soyinka, of The Man Died: Prison Notes and The Lion and the Jewel fame, is another African traditional worshiper albeit from

Yoruba spirituality.

Prone to complexes because of the effects of the long-running trans-Atlantic slave trade and colonial propaganda that suppressed African spirituality and promoted European ones, if the spirituality confusion is anything to go by, Africans were told by Western colonizers and their accomplices, who misunderstood Africa, that their traditional spirituality is bad. And Africans swallowed it, more so its elites, setting off long-running spiritual crisis in Africans souls and their progress. This confusion has made the African pushed and pulled between their traditional spiritualities and either Christianity or Islam to the detriment of their progress as a Max Weber would tell you in the Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism.

It is in this dilemma that Courage Quashigah, Ghana's thoughtful Minister of Health, urged the clergy to preach the substance of Jesus Christ's message and desist from using certain exhortations in the Bible to strip Ghanaians of their cultural heritage Jesus Christ's message must be preached properly and not used to enslave the people mentally (Ghana News Agency, March 5, 2008). This comes against the backdrop of the Bible used to put African spiritualities down so much so that most bewildered Africans think African spiritualities, which sustained their ancestors for thousands of years without any trouble, is evil, primitive, fetish, pagan backward, and denigrating.

Unpalatable words to describe one religion. The challenge today, as Ronald Inglehart indicates in the Western world in relation to the various World Values Surveys, where rigid religious norms is declining and is simultaneously giving way to new re-directed spiritual concerns such as the environment, cultural diversity and women rights, is how to interpret African spiritualities within the context of the Bible and the global development process, so as to give them respect and confidence.

Despite unkind words used to describe African religion, it has been moving on and accessed by most Africans, even those in the diaspora. While African religion and its deities are worshiped wholly in Africa, diasporan Africans, with their heavy mixtures of all sorts of neo-liberal values, have been mixing African religion with other Western religions perfectly a feat that demonstrates the resilience of African religion as a global religion without any propaganda or fundamentalism or suicide bombing or the urge to convert anybody to its creed but as one sees it or feels it. African religion do not have problems with American social scientist Samuel P. Huntington The Clash of Civilizations that argues people's cultural and religious identities will be the primary source of conflict in the post-Cold War world.

In the United States of America and South America, among others, some think Jesus Christ is Black or African. In the Brazilian state of Bahia, where Yoruba Obatala has been syncretized with Catholic Our Lord of Bonfim or in Cuba where Santería is the fusion of Yoruba religion with Catholic Our Lady of Mercy, African religion has been mixed with Christianity, especially with Roman Catholicism across the Western Hemisphere.

In the Quashigan thinking, Christian priests should stress the message of Jesus, his love and dictates to man to strive to live by good deeds by relating this to African spirituality without demeaning African people, their culture and spirituality, as has

been the case in centuries. Almost everything African has been so denigrated as backward and apostate that Africans have lost their African identity, hardly knowing what to do to develop, Quashigah revealed in the context of Africa progress.

Noting the intersection between religion and development since the dawn of man and woman, Quashigah brilliant observation that non-Christian nations such as Malaysia, Japan, Singapore, India and China have outpaced Ghana in all spheres because they held on to their traditional beliefs of right and wrong challenges Ghanaian elites, ever sleepy, to wake up. And this foretell a Ghana which soul is confused and is reflected in its incomprehensible development process which isn't driven by its foundational spiritualities, as the brilliant Okomfo Anokye spiritual enterprise exemplify, among others.

This means, in the Quashigan thought, the Ghanaian Christian clergy should interpret the Bible from within the Ghanaian environment in such a critical way that they have to inform the booming uninformed about the confusion created by the European missionaries, as Quashigah argues, who came not only to evangelize us but also to manipulate us in the interest of their nations for their progress.

Quashigah thinking challenges Ghanaian Christians to re-think such prominent African Christianity thinkers like Ghana Peter Kwesi Sarpong, the now retired former Kumasi Catholic Diocese archbishop, and Zambia Archbishop Emmanuel Milingo on the issue of indigenization or Adaptation or Inculturation or Contextualization or Incarnation or Enfleshing. The idea is to wrap such high-sounding thinking into Ghana progress so as to lessen the degree of spiritual confusion and foster spiritual confidence in the Ghanaian for progress.

We see this more in the European development process where, as America Francis Fukuyama indicates in *The End of History and the last Man*, one cannot tell European progress without pointing to its innate spiritual origin, which did not suffer from any spiritual denigrations as Africa has gone through in centuries. Furthermore, Ronald Inglehart in *Globalization and Postmodern Values* argues that the rise of the Protestant Ethic in Europe played a crucial role in the rise of capitalism, paving the way for the Industrial Revolution.

Once again, the European Protestant Ethic wasn't denigrated as African spiritualities have. Inglehart reports that it is the same type of Protestant Ethic equivalent that is driving Southeast Asia progress without any denigrating of their Buddhist, Hindu, Confucian and other Vedic spiritual practices, with their oracles and shrines, as Africa religion has been going through.

No doubt, Quashigah argues rightly that No country in this world can develop outside its culture, and indigenous religion is one of them. As was the case with practitioners of the Protestant Ethics, who felt that hard work and frugality was an act of God, Quashigah encouraged clerics to search the Bible to bring out portion that taught people to be industrious. And African religion teaches that too but hasn't been projected globally. In Quashigah we see the challenge to use Africans innate traditional beliefs, religion or spiritualities for progress as the Europeans and Southeast Asians have done.

Source: Akosah-Sarpong, Kofi



<http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/artikel.php?ID=141159>