

What if God was one of us?

Although the period between 1957 to 1990 was a season of triumph for the African continent as 47 countries gained their political independence and started their journey of acclimating to their fragmented roots and beliefs, it is safe to say that, throughout the oppression and the decades that followed, 'Modern Africa' has found itself deeply disconnected from the ethos of Africanism it once had. Moreover, Africa went as far as completely adopting the colonialists' ways of life and belief systems: **Christianity**, for example. But there are many issues pertaining to the adoption of foreign religions in Africa, a few of which are examined here.

Creating God in man's limited imagination

God doesn't subscribe to the worldly conceptualisation of the divine. In fact, human perceptions of God are merely perspectives conditioned by socio-politico-economical environments. God is neither Christian nor Muslim nor all these things because God is so big and elusive a 'concept' that it cannot be entirely grasped by our limited human intellect. That is essentially why religious doctrines end up reflecting the values of the society in which they operate, or from which they were borrowed.

As a matter of fact, Christianity is a post-Christ religion that appropriated God to itself through civilisation, and, through the years, whitened "God". When Christ was taken to the middle east, he was not as white as depicted by Christianity today, for instance. Later, Christ was taken to Greece, which made him white and Greek-speaking. He was then taken to Rome, which made him Latin-speaking. He was then taken to England to allow King Henry VIII to marry as the church of England was renamed; then to Scotland, where he was a Presbyterian; and then to the United States, where he became an Episcopalian.

As Paul brilliantly put it in 1 Corinthians 9:20-22, *“To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law, I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law, I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.”*

Although Paul was referring to securing the interests of Jesus’s kingdom, this shows us that any conceptualisation of God expresses the conceptor’s interest. That is the power of a local divine concept: it reflects the people’s values and interests. Africa is the only place where Jesus didn’t transform. Why?

Africa, as a whole, missed that vital part and adopted an alien concept of God, which propagates other people’s values and interests. It is tragic! The consequences include the denigration of African culture.

Consider this. The bible is written in a way that paints everything associated with African indigenous practices as pagan while promoting Western Judeo-Christian ideologies and beliefs.

To be fair, the bible paints anything that contradicts its message as pagan. For instance, Christianity justified Africa’s partition and initial colonisation; it was used as a double-edged sword to subjugate the masses while portraying the violent conquest of Africa as a divine mission. The arrogance of colonialism and European Christianity completely disregarded African indigenous knowledge systems and imposed their own systems at the expense of African indigenous religions.

The question is, why was Africa’s “paganism” exorcised instead

of transforming Jesus into its image as had been the practice elsewhere? One possible explanation is that indigenous African religions are mainly heterogeneous, often concerned with carrying out the obligations of the communal aspect of life. A transformed Jesus to African religious reality would have been preoccupied with the communal facets of life. Indeed, African spirituality simply acknowledges that all religious beliefs and practices touch on and inform every facet of human life. Therefore, African religion cannot be separated from everyday life issues of ethnicity, health, diet, marriage, death, politics, art, or the economy, according to new research by [Jacob-olupona](#). This attests to the imperishable prerogative of indigenous religion and its aptness to adapt Christianity and Islam to the realities of Modern Africa. The essence of African indigenous spirituality does not seek to hold or maintain a uniform doctrine; on the contrary, African indigenous religions are dynamic, inclusive, and flexible.

The very nature of African spirituality is in its social dynamism, and, for that reason, written scriptures are not necessary for its objective to be achieved. This essence of African spirituality means that it is not constrained by written texts like faith-based religions (Christianity, Islam). Rather, African religious doctrines are transmitted through the oral tradition, and, as a result, spirituality has to be engraved in the collective minds of the people, their daily habits, their roles, their names, etc. For this reason, the occupation of the African mind was essential for colonisation and explains why the decolonisation has been nearly impossible: our memory and minds were the first casualties of colonial education, and, since it has remained unchanged, the mind remains captive. This mental occupation has been as all-encompassing in determining the life of the African but in the opposite direction of African spirituality.

What we are losing

By indulging, albeit now programmed, in the arrogance that

demoted our traditional ways of praising and calling onto the higher powers (supreme being), may it be, Christ, Nyabinghi (Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda), Yoruba pantheon (Nigeria), and others, Africa is losing a standpoint that has collectively sustained, enriched, and given meaning to the continent for centuries.

“Let me create man in my own image, and He took soil and moulded man out of it.” If God made all humans (including Africans) in His own image, why then was Africa forcefully Christianized and Islamized? Was the God who created us Nuer, Igbo, Yoruba, Fulani, Ndika, Zulu, Xhosa, Luo, dense? If He is all-wise, is He not a God of diversity who wants to be celebrated in diverse ways?

It follows that the efforts by dominant religions to claim universal representation of a fundamentally dynamic and abstract concept is dubious at the very least. It is a tool for domination, a means of supplanting indigenous knowledge systems with an alien worldview, and a premise that decolonisation efforts ought to reject.

If Africans are committed to Christianity, at the very least they ought to ask themselves this question: If Jesus had transformed to an African, and if the image of God in which Africans were created was African, what would their ultimate saviour look like? This is not a casual question. It helps to build the consciousness of how people see themselves. For instance, someone built in the image of God is likely to see themselves as worthy of dignity and embrace his identity. An African God would nurture a stronger feeling of belonging and a deeper connection to an Africa rooted in its idea of life. It would mean that passing on these “pagan” ways – our ancestors lived and prospered by – to the next generations would carry no shame.

If anything, the shame should lie in helping invaders reduce our identity to nothing by embracing their own identity hook,

line, and sinker.