

# Zikism and Africa's Mental Emancipation

Nnamdi Azikiwe, also known as Zik of Africa, one of the foremost champions of nationalism across sub-Saharan Africa. He was a philosopher, poet, thinker, and researcher whose major pre-occupation was the liberation of Africa from the clutches of colonial rule. Beyond the mere exchange of flags, however, Nnamdi Azikiwe through the philosophy of Zikism emphasized that true independence for Africa ought to be a multi-dimensional experience of immense depth, which will result in the spiritual, social, mental, economic and political freedom and advancement for the people.

## **The Philosophy of Zikism**

Zikism, as defined by Nnamdi Azikiwe is founded on five principles needed for the liberation of the continent of Africa. These principles are; balanced spirituality, social regeneration, financial independence, mental liberation and political resurgence.

*Balanced Spirituality:* By the first principle of a balanced spirituality, Zik implied that spirituality that is balanced is characterized by a live-and-let-live approach to human existence. It perceives life and living, not as a winner takes it all concept, but as a game of cooperation, in which the person who is able to cooperate more wins. Respect for the opinion of one's self if keenly followed by an appreciation and respect for the opinion of others, no matter how different.

*Social Regeneration:* The second principle of Zikism is social regeneration, which states that liberation must have as a foundation, freedom from any form of bias within the

individuals who desire to be free. Africans must strive to free themselves of religious, ethnic, racial, class or ethical prejudice. Under this second pillar of Zikism, Africans desiring to be completely liberated from a position of being sub-servants to others must eschew any form of sentiments and irrationalism in their understanding and analysis of others. Stereotyping, chauvinism, prejudice and other forms of people classification and rejection should not feature in the thinking of the African in search of growth and advancement. The African's mind should be broadened enough to see others as individual human beings who are different in terms of experiences.

*Financial Independence:* Also known as the principle of Economic Determinism, the third pillar of Zikism states that liberation for Africa would be an illusion without financial independence. All avenues must be explored to ensure that African economies become productive and that Africans become consumers of what they produce, and exporters of surplus products. Finance holds the key to Africa's respect and appreciation by the rest of the world. Financial expansion for Africa transcends the mere holding of raw cash in the form of raw materials, but the establishment of industries and manufacturing concerns that would add value to the continent's resources. Financial independence or economic determinism implies that Africans cease to be dependent on external factors for adding value to their natural resources. Africans must also source for materials for sustenance from within the continent, and rid themselves of acquired tastes that will only perpetuate the state of dependency in the sub-region.

*Mental Emancipation:* The fourth pillar of Zikism is mental emancipation. This principle forms the foundation for this paper. If thinking is what differentiates man from other mammals, and thought determines actions, then one can rightly say that the fourth pillar is the principal or most important pillar of Zikism. Zik states here that for Africans to aspire

towards advancement in any area, knowledge of self is not only crucial, but urgently needed. The African has to go on an intentional, self-motivated and self-sustainable effort to search out its history and accomplishments and to be so knowledgeable in them as to shun any form of complex that might have been imposed upon them by historical exigencies and prevailing global judgments.

Mental emancipation according to Zik transcends the mere establishment of more universities and colleges of learning for Africans, to imply the freeing of the African's thought pattern from a dependency on the thought pattern of the former colonialists. What this means is that even the curriculum of education in Africa ought to be different from that of the Europeans who established formal education on the continent. Africa's curriculum of learning must directly address the needs of the locality.

In his 1955 speech during the motion he seconded in the Parliament for the establishment of the first university in Eastern Nigeria, Zik stated that it is particularly important for the students to learn what is needed to change their immediate environment, and not some tailor-made courses imported from Europe and the United States.

I notice that it is envisaged that the university should have six degree-conferring Faculties: Arts, Science, Law, Theology, Engineering, and Medicine. I hope that the curricula of the university will be related to the day-to-day life of our people and that they will be so organized as to relate the mission of the university to the social and economic needs of the Region. (Azikiwe, 1961, p. 284).

Zik's words echo the writings of Mahatma Gandhi during the struggle in which he led India to gain independence from Britain. Gandhi was quite emphatic in stating that it is not the mere laying down of the Union Jack and hosting of the Indian flag that denotes Independence. Indians, must, over and

above political independence, strive for mental independence from several centuries of indoctrination by the British. For Gandhi, India's indigenous knowledge must form the foundation of all teaching and learning, both at the formal, informal and non-formal levels. Speaking of what is termed national education in India, Mahatma Gandhi asserts that "the curriculum and pedagogic ideas which form the fabric of modern education were imported from Oxford and Cambridge, Edinburgh and London. But they are essentially foreign, and till they are repudiated, there never can be national education" (Ghandi, 1956, p. 26) . Gandhi rejected the British entrenched education, which upturned the ancient educational system in India founded on the tradition of pride and service. Education, to be considered sound, must be able to ensure continuity from one generation to another. No generation, should due to education, lose touch of the investments, knowledge bank and core values of its predecessors. British education, Gandhi contends, has succeeded in doing this by breaking the continuity of India's existence (Ghandi, 1956) .

*To be continued...*

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