

Return and Pick it

*An Introduction to
African Counseling and Therapy*



Adam K. arap Chepkwony

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to my wife, Betty Chepkemoi Chepkwony, our children; Chelangat Chepkwony, Chemutai Chepkwony and Kipkirui Chepkwony Jnr.



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I want to thank many people in my life who have opened my life to understand, appreciate and gave me an opportunity to promote the African way of life I have discussed in this book. My teachers at Kenya Institute of Professional Counseling, Cecilia Muthami, Lucy Murage and Solomon Karare, I cannot thank you enough. Sr. Macrina Cheruto did not only teach me but was the one who encouraged me to pursue the counseling course and later engaged me in teaching. She has been my inspiration particularly in writing this book. I salute the students, staff and my clients at the Tec Institute who helped me visualize things clearly.

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Preface

In the year 2003, I registered to pursue a Higher Diploma course in Psychological Counseling with Kenya Institute of Professional Studies in Eldoret, Kenya. Several reasons prompted me to take this unprecedented move especially because it was of a lower credential than what I already had. First, was my own issue of grief after my mother's death that took me a very long time to resolve. I wondered if this was normal to everybody and in particular I was concerned about how children overcome such similar situation. My traditional upbringing made me to believe that as a man, I was strong, mature and able to contain a certain amount of pain and suffering. In addition, my education was expected to have helped me to be stronger in this matter. Therefore, I was expected to handle this matter differently and in particular, I should not have allowed grief to bother me in the manner and the length of time it did.

Second, throughout my career as a secondary school teacher, teacher-training college and at the University, students approached me for help to solve personal issues. After assisting them, the best I knew, some students would come back to thank me for the help. On the other hand, others never came back again. This made me wonder whether I had really assisted these students. I therefore felt that training in counseling would enable me help my clients more efficiently and at the same time provide me with an assurance that I was doing the right thing.

Third, it was also clear to me then that I was taking a leadership role in the family as well as in the community. This was evident by the number of family members, relatives and other people who would visit me both at home and at work to seek my advice on a variety of issues. From their viewpoint, "Professor knows everything" and I was thus expected to provide counsel in all sorts of challenges faced by people in all walks of life.

The fourth reason in a way is related to all three above. The fact that I was not able to handle my own grief situation as well as I thought contributed significantly to making me take the decision to return to class. The question that kept ringing in my mind was: Can I really help others with their problems when I could not handle my own problems? This seems to me, was the final thing that pushed me to decide to take a diploma course in Psychological counseling. I really wanted to find a way to heal myself. This was coupled with the fact that, unfortunately, due to my status and people's expectations, I was not able to find anyone who could assist me resolve my issues as I would have liked.

So, with these objectives, I decided to take a course in Psychological Counseling. It was not an easy decision since I had a lot of financial commitments that made it difficult to find extra funds to meet this need. I also felt that it was unfair for me to do a lower level diploma when there were so many people who needed my assistance for basic education. It was a difficult decision to make and especially when asked why I needed a diploma when I already had a doctorate degree.

With some difficulties, I finally made the decision that I have never regretted. I felt it was time to do something for myself and I did it. And so I began my one year study in psychological counseling. In class, the first meeting was with the director of the institute who began by helping the class to discuss what counseling was. At the end of the discussion, the instructor made it very clear that whatever else we think counseling is, it is not "advice". He also indicated that as professional counselors we were not expected to help or counsel those who are close to us.

My uneasiness with the type of counseling I was encountering began on the first day of class. This feeling persisted throughout my training as I found myself disrupting my instructors to point out that certain aspects of the teachings; recommendations, methods, values, beliefs, ethics and attitudes were not compatible

with the African ways of thinking or doing things.

As I went through the training, it was clear to me that the training could not help me fulfill some of my original objectives that prompted me to take counseling. Apart from helping myself, I could not counsel my students, relatives and friends due to the stipulated ethics of professional counseling. In spite of this disappointment, I felt that the training had brought about a transformation in my own life and that it was worth the energy and the money I spent.

Deep inside me however, I still felt that it was unfair that I could not put into practice my newfound skills for the benefit of those close to me. In Africa, when one is awarded a degree or buys a car, the whole village rejoices because they too have a graduate (in this case a counselor) or a car, since the members of that community will benefit from the service. But in this case, it was not going to be so. I had acquired powerful tools to change people lives for better, but I could only help people I didn't know and totally ignore those whom I knew or close to me. This did not make sense to me, it did not sound African or even Christian to me. For what purpose then, was I doing all this, I wondered?

When I finished the training, I had the opportunity to provide therapy sessions to some clients. Majority of my clients were students of counseling institutions who were required to take therapy sessions as part of their training. It was during these therapy sessions that I encountered many challenges that the counseling training did not prepare me to meet. Most of the issues brought to the sessions concerned cultural beliefs and attitudes. It was also evident that Christianity and modernity or elitist attitudes hindered meaningful exploration of issues and the process of healing. It was only then that I realized that there was definitely something missing in the counseling training where I and others were undergoing and that there was need to do something about it.

I also had the opportunity to teach a few classes on counseling at TEC Institute in Eldoret. Due to my education

background of comparative religion with special emphasis on African religion, I was faced with many questions from my students on issues concerning African tradition counseling and issues on African beliefs versus Christian teaching and modernity. People wanted to know about witchcraft and how to counsel someone who has strong believes in witchcraft. Others sought an explanation as to why some clients skipped their sessions only to hear later that the client went to seek assistance from the elders in their rural homes. Christian counselors who did not accept traditional beliefs as taught by their churches found it even more difficult to handle clients with cultural issues. More often than not they were stuck in the therapy sessions.

My interaction with instructors in counseling institutions confirmed my fears. A few of the trainers had done counseling at a much higher level than me. Indeed some had done their Masters in Britain or in America. I found out that, they too were grabbling with similar issues. But to my surprise no one had any answers. My university on the other hand was not of much help. Most of those who taught counseling courses were not trained counselors but relied purely on books written by scholars outside Africa. None of the books addressed culturally oriented counseling let alone counseling from an African perspective. This, in a sense, motivated me to think of writing a book to address these issues for the sake of the many people who are now in the counseling profession in Africa and have to deal with such issues on daily basis.

These are the concerns that prompted me to write this book. As an African scholar, teacher and opinion leader, it is my responsibility to find ways and means to assist African people find answers to their problems. In this particular case, it is how to provide the most effective interventions for members of the community who are grabbling with issues of poverty, diseases, war, foreign religion and ideologies as well as modernity.

I am therefore writing this book not as an expert but as a

student of counseling. My writing is mainly informed by my discipline in Comparative Religion. In particular, my interest and expertise in African Religion plays a significant role in this book. My original idea was to write a book on counseling from an African perspective complete with theories, skills and techniques in comparison with modern Western books on counseling. However, when I started writing, it dawned on me that I needed more expertise than I had. I am hoping that some colleagues in counseling and those in psychology may see the need to do this in the near future. I am also hoping that we can team up with some practicing counselors and write a sequel to this book that will lay down in details the counseling approaches and techniques in African for Africans.

Meanwhile, I decided that this book will be an introduction to African counseling and Therapy. It will discuss the reasons why we need a counseling approach that is specific to the African people. It was clear to me that a rationale was necessary to assist people understand the need and more so because many Africans are prone to believing that everything from the West is good. On the same vein, many are ready to condemn and reject everything that is African on the understanding that it is old-fashioned, unchristian and anti-development. But, is it really right for us to think and believe so?

These, unfortunately, are misconceptions that have lingered among us far too long now. No one is to blame for these since the colonial and missionary era attempted to erase everything that was associated with African culture, counseling included. It is time to go back to the drawing board to pick the valuables we left behind. It is a time we realize that what we have is beautiful and many people in the West are now dying to experience what we have. We need to realize that what we have in form of family life and collective responsibility is wonderful and healthy. Some people in the West today would give up everything to experience communal life we take for granted in Africa.



CHAPTER ONE

Perception of Counseling in Africa

Introduction

In April 1997, a Board of Governors made up of African Ministers for Education was established to be responsible for policy decisions in the development of the Guidance and Counseling Programme in the continent. This explains the magnitude and the seriousness the African governments perceive to be the needs of counseling services. This seriousness is further demonstrated by the extent of the prominent international and regional agencies that offered to assist. Among the agencies are: UNESCO, UNICEF, UNFPA, FAWE, DANIDA, the Rockefeller Foundation, and countries like Finland and United States of America.

African Ministers for Education were motivated to undertake this continental project due to the growing social problems that affect the growing generation of young people. The ministers were concerned that it was the responsibilities of their ministries to promote the growth and development of young people in their respective countries. To do this effectively, the African countries collaborated in order to benefit from the best of the African experts in counseling.

The outcome of this venture was a training package on Guidance and Counseling prepared by African specialist and other competent persons from various countries. It consisted of eight training modules thus: Guidance, Counseling, Social Work, Behaviour Modification, Gender Sensitivity, Guidance and Counseling, Programme Development, Adolescent Reproductive Health, and Workshop Administration and Conduct Guidelines.

In the foreword to the module on 'Counseling', the Deputy

Director – General for Education, UNESCO, indicated that the programme would be dealt “with from the point of view of Africa”.¹ This recognition was important since it made it clear that problem of African youth needs unique home-bred approaches that would be relevant and effective. The problem facing African youth were clearly stipulated in the programme thus:

At present, sub-Saharan African countries experience many changes, which in turn have resulted in the weakening of the structures of society. The most outstanding examples are:

1. A gradual shift from the extended to the nuclear family unit, or single parent family unit;
2. A heavy reliance on a cash economy in poor countries;
3. Political demands and expectations;
4. A rapid rate of urbanization with a high unemployment rate compounded by a high illiteracy rate;
5. A high population growth rate, which leads to large classes in schools;
6. The infiltration of foreign culture through films, television, videos, live performances, and magazines, which are counter-productive;
7. Wars, political instability and epidemics, leading to increased numbers of orphans and refugees; and
8. Moral decay due to elements from within and outside the nation.²

Although it seems to me that the ministers and the experts who prepared the programme had good analysis of the problems facing Africa and indeed good intentions in preparing the programme, at the end, there still was a problem. Indeed they came up with an excellent programme but its objectives of anchoring it on “the view point of Africa” were not accomplished. In the

¹Module 8 Guidance and Counselling, Programme Development, UNESCO, Botswana, February 2000, See also http://www.unesco.org/education/meban/module_8pdf

²Ibid., 4

programme, the African Traditional Counseling is dismissed as “advice and wisdom”. In its place, the Western theories and approaches are upheld and presented as the ideal methods that will help solve the problem of the youth. In my view, these approaches cannot assist an African fully as intended. These approaches are inadequate to grapple with the problems of poverty, culture, urbanization, diseases, new ideologies and desired healing faced in Africa per se.

The problem facing Africa cannot also be restricted to youth alone; it is a situation that is confronting everybody, young and old on daily basis. One is confronted with decision on whether to stay in the rural areas or move to the urban, attend to traditional healers or go to the government hospital, follow traditional religion or adopt one of the new faiths, accept modern ideas or adhere to traditional wisdom, seek help from modern secular psychological counselor, or from Pastoral counselor or African traditional counselors/elders/family.

Scholars have described this African scenario as a state of being at the crossroads. In his book, Benjamin Kiriswa recognizes the dilemmas that the African youth in particular find themselves when they are caught at the cross roads, the two worlds of traditional and western modern life styles. He observes thus:

The tension of choosing between the two worlds-views (Western and Africa) can give rise to many undesirable problems and leave many questions unanswered causing the youth to feel isolated, and even confused. Such questions as: must I give up all the traditional tribal values in order to fit in the modern world; or in order to be good Christian; or in order to have my own identity? Who am I in today's world? Am I an imitation of European, or a person who needs to accept and appreciate some aspects of modern society and yet be African?³

³ Benjamin Kiriswa, *Christian Counseling for Schools and Colleges*, (Oxford University Press, 1988), 13

Such double living standards have contributed to rising rates of social degradation and consequently neurotic experiences among African communities. Yet more often than not, the methods adopted to solve African issues at hand are similarly foreign. The counseling institutions that are emerging in great numbers in Africa promote imported foreign ideas wholesale. In these institutions, western approaches of counseling practices are encouraged, taught and practiced.

The challenge to African scholars is to come up with relevant therapeutic approaches for the African people. This is because the Pastoral Counseling and Psychological counseling approaches in practice in Africa today are basically imported from Europe and America. These approaches do not consider the African world-view and counseling approaches that draw its strength from community help. The use of these approaches tends to ignore the past traditions that upheld the community together. It is the breakdown of such traditions in favour of modernity and western world-view that has isolated individuals and created an unhealthy society.

I am not suggesting here that these western approaches are irrelevant and do not serve any purpose among the Africans. Far from it, indeed many people, me included, have benefitted from these services. However, it is true to say that it does not serve the interest of the majority of people in Africa. In my view we should come up with an integrated approach that meets the needs of the people in its entirety.

I suggest so with full cognizance that in the past I have been accused of glorifying the African past. My critics argue that Africans are now living in a global village and to suggest that we adhere to the traditions of the past is not only an insult but also a big joke. Those who argue thus are of the opinion that Africans no longer have an African centred ethos and that the majority have instead embraced Euro-American worldview. I do not agree with these sentiments. In my opinion, deep within an Africa person, regardless of his/her

education level or the affiliation of faith, lingers the African ethos. It is this love and pride of being an African that must be catered for, in the way African worship, bring up their children, relate to each other and the way they solve their psychological disturbances. This definitely calls for an African centred counseling and therapy.

The Inadequacy of Western Therapy in Africa

In the preface, I mentioned that I was introduced to western counseling in the year 2003. During my training and later as a teacher and a counselor, I clearly saw the need for a different counseling approach for Africans. I was convinced and so were my fellow counselors and students as well as clients that western counseling was inadequate. It is for this reason that I find it necessary to delineate why it is necessary to argue for an African centred counseling. By African Centred Counseling I mean, a counseling approach that is relevant, effective and one, which makes the African to feel at home. It is counseling that recognizes the culture of the people concerned and puts it in consideration in the counseling process.

First, the direction already taken by disciplines like African Religion, African Theology, African Ethics, African Philosophy and even African Christianity, clearly suggest that African ways of thinking and doing things is not the same as those of America, Europe or any other part of the world for that matter. The implication here is that these disciplines are culture sensitive. Studies on African culture have shown that Africans have their own unique beliefs, values, way of thinking and doing things differently from other people of the world. It is therefore logical to say that in order to change a specific activity or behaviour of an individual, one must be conversant with the culture of that person and that one must approach the issues from that perspective. Therefore, counseling which is meant to shape and alter people's lives is useless unless they are predicated upon an understanding of a cultural framework that they operate within.

Second, many people are of the opinion that Africans are so westernized that they believe that everything from the West is good. On the contrary, the general feeling now is that what is good for the West is not necessarily good for Africa. It is apparent to many now that the blanket condemnation of African culture in totality by the missionaries at the turn of the century was not only absurd but was uninformed. As I was writing this chapter, I come across an article by Munene in the Standard Newspaper who expressed similar sentiments. He writes:

I am a modern person who respects the freedom of people to choose how they want to live in the brave new world order. I hold no brief for those who would rather remain stuck a hundred centuries back. I however, have serious problems with parts of the cultural orientation that is being praised as 'cool and progressive'...I am also familiar with the rather laughable culture of extolling the virtues of junk food, and dismissing everything that sustained our ancestors. In addition, our people lived almost forever without the benefit of the so-called "modern medicine". Therefore we buried the medicine men, touched the ritual equipment, flattened the shrines and laughed at the custodian of heritage. These were out of a fallacious conviction that all that we had was primitive and therefore what Achebe calls the "Pacification of the tribes of the lower Niger."⁴

Indeed, the ongoing discussion on African Renaissance and African Century is a call to a return to African cultural milieu, as one way of reinforcing African values and African identity. Relevant counseling practice is thus an essential component in bringing to reality these bold African aspirations. The search for appropriate counseling techniques is not an issue of Africa alone; indeed, more communities in the world are now looking for non-western alternative modes to counseling that suit their cultural background.

⁴ Henry Munene, *The Standard*, Sunday March 4, 2007

Third, the African Church has taken a lead in contextualizing Christianity. Here the church recognizes that culture is the prism through which people view the whole of their experiences that are expressed in their actions, feeling and thoughts. In the same way, Africa should resort to their culture when helping the disturbed members of their communities. It is only then that counseling and therapy can become realistic and effective.

Four, from purely a pragmatic perspective, many Africans have recognized the inadequacy of modern western oriented counseling. It is obvious that in many instances the imported approaches are ill prepared to handle African issues. In their book, *Guidance and Counseling in Schools and Colleges* (2000), George A. Lutomia and Laban W. Sikolia, admits that the services of elders are often required in dealing with difficult cases in Kenyan Schools and Colleges. They observed that:

This is normally when the case appears difficult and complicated. It may have implication that goes beyond the school. Let us take for example the case of immorality; elders can be called in schools or colleges to counsel the affected parties.⁵

For the purpose of this book, I did research among students at Moi University Kenya and students counselors at TEC Institute, Eldoret, Kenya. In a response to the questionnaire on how useful western model of counselling services are, one respondent had the following to say; “they are cold and detached; dimension of human touch is minimal or non-existence; it is purely theoretical”. Although I think the respondent was a bit too harsh in his observation, the underlying sentiments are true across Africa.

In their book, Wicks and Estadt quotes a Ghanaian pastoral theologian, Ghunney, who studied counseling in America but found it difficult to implement the theories he learned when he returned to Africa, observes that:

⁵ George A. Lutomia and Laban W. Sikolia, *Guidance and Counseling in Schools and Colleges* (Nairobi: 2000), 1-3

After completing the Masters Program in Pastoral Counseling at Loyola College in Maryland, where I learned many theories in counseling, I returned home to Ghana in West Africa with the hope of practicing the theories I had learned in the West. I realized, however, that though the theories I learned were good ones, most of them were not practicable in Ghana. The only way I could succeed in the counseling situations there was to contextualize and graft what I had learned with the Ghanaian culture.⁶

Similarly, in discussing the indigenous counseling techniques among the Yoruba and Igala of Nigeria, Olu Makinde shows that the training and the methods of indigenous practitioners are sound and that their philosophy and practice are comparable to any. In this regard he writes:

As much as Western education has affected the mind and the social pattern of the Yoruba and Igala, it has not been successful in severing him or her from many of the roots which secure him or her to the stable framework of customary behaviour in the village or rural areas. The reassuring cohesion of the extended family, the comforting sense of the continuity with ancestors and the uninterrupted consultation with the community counselor called Babalawo or Obozi have social values for helping an upright personality to arrive.⁷

And in South Africa, Palesa Makhale-Mahlangu adds to the voices by suggesting that:

“A psychologist who thus approaches human behaviour solely from western perspective will necessarily have to question its

⁶Quoted in Emmanuel Yartekwei Lartey, “Pastoral Counselling in Multi-Cultural Contexts”, *American Journal of Pastoral Counselling*, The Haworth Pastoral Press, Vol. 5, No (3/4), 319

⁷Olu Makinde “Indigenous counselling techniques among the Yoruba and Igala people of Nigeria” *International Journal of Advanced Counselling*, 3 (1980), 182 –183 <http://www.csvr.org.za/artpales.html>

relevance when working with an African population”⁸.

The implications here are clear: Secular counseling institutions to date find it necessary to resort to elders in the village for any meaningful interventions to occur. That there are scholars who return to Africa from western Universities loaded with modern counseling theories that fail to work in Africa because the theories they learned are not culture sensitive. At the same time, it is clear that regardless of one's western education, individuals are not influenced to the point of disowning their cultural values.

The fifth reason why Africa needs an African centred counseling and therapy lies in the new development in the field of counseling. In the past few decades, it has emerged among theoreticians, investigators and practitioners of counseling that culture centred perspective is a must for effective and relevant therapy. As a result of this discovery, cross-cultural counseling has now been recognized as the “fourth force” in the field of psychology. As a fourth force, cross-cultural counseling is seen as equal in its relevance and impact to the three traditional forces of psychoanalysis, behaviour modification, and humanistic counseling of western therapy.⁹

The idea behind the fourth force counseling is that one must consider the cultural context in counseling situations. This means that the cultures of both the counselor and the counselee “influences the counseling process both pervasively and profoundly”¹⁰. This development is very significant for Africa where Western concepts, skills, techniques and approaches of counseling are still used unabated and oblivious of the fact that African communities maintain their own cultural identity. In fact, very little has been done to acknowledge this important and unique perspective of African counseling. Even more disturbing is that there are very few resources

⁸ Palesa Makhale-Mahlangu “Reflections on Trauma Counselling Methods” Seminar No 6, 1996, 1

⁹ Paul B. Pedersen, Juris G. Draguns, Walter J. Lonner and Joseph E. Trimble eds., *Counseling Across Cultures*. (Sage Publications, Inc., 5th Edition, 2002), vii - viii

¹⁰ Ibid;

tailored to help scholars in counseling psychology to design appropriate approaches in this field. The same is true among the scholars who have advocated or have studied multi-cultural counseling; few have discussed African counseling as a cultural difference that needs to be addressed. And due to such gaps in literature, and lack of interest to develop the same, there are many misconceptions of what counseling is all about among the African peoples.

Misconception About Counseling

There are three types of counseling practices today in Africa. These are: Traditional counseling effected by family members, relatives, elders and the community at large. Pastoral counseling practiced in churches, Christian institutions, and also practiced by other religions in their worship places and institutions. And finally, psychological counseling taught in universities and other institutions and practiced by individuals as well as institutions that provide counseling services to the community. All the three types of counseling approaches have over the years been misunderstood, misinterpreted and misrepresented due to wrong misconceptions. To appreciate counseling, it is important that one has a clear picture of what it is and what it is not. This distinction can help the reader to distinguish the differences of the three types of counseling and counseling in general. It shall also help the reader to see the strength and the weakness of each counseling approach as well as what is common among them. And since my intention in the final analysis is to suggest an integrated perspective that suits the clients in an African context, these facts shall prove useful.

There are several misconceptions about traditional counseling in Africa. First, there is the assumption that African traditional counseling is something of the past and that it is non-existence in this time and age. And if it exists, only a few people who are yet to embrace modernity practice it. In this regard writers

normally described the practice of traditional counseling in past tense clearly giving the impression that it is an old fashion way of counseling. In the training package on Module 8 Guidance and Counseling alluded to earlier and prepared by African specialists from various countries, African traditional counseling is described as “In traditional African societies, counsel was given in various forms, the most common of which were giving advice and sharing wisdom”.¹¹

This however is not the correct reflection of how things are on the ground. Although I have no convincing statistics to prove my point, my calculated guess is that more than 80% of people in Africa still resort to traditional counseling. To support my “calculated guess” the following statistics from my study conducted between February and June 2006, clearly points out the fact that modern type of counseling is not popular. One of the question asked in my study was, “Who do you turn to for counseling?” Respondents were instructed to rank whether they would seek counseling from a list of nine categories that included a friend, father, mother, husband/wife, relative, counselor, pastor, elders and religious specialist in order of preference. The results indicated that only 11.1 rated counselor to be among the first three people they would see, another 11.1% between the 4th and the 6th person and 77.7% between the 7th and the 9th person. Indeed those who rated counselor as the 9th or last person they would see were 46.7%. This indeed is interesting since 50% of the respondents were student counselors.

Another study done in Nigeria in a book published in 1987 show that Nigerian preferred to be counseled by significant others associated to the family than by a counselor. In her findings, Nwachukwu concluded thus:

Three of the findings were contrary to expectations. Only about 35% of total sample would consult a counselor while 65%

¹¹ See *Module 8 Guidance and Counseling, Programme Development, UNESCO, Botswana, February 2000, 7*

would still seek help from significant others closely associated to the family. Only 11% of NCE (Nigerian Certificate of Education) holders representing middle management would seek the help of a counselor, while 89 % would resort to other helpers. Among the younger educated couples hypothesized to be more likely to accept counseling in preference to significant others, results show that 17% of the 20-25 years range, 31% of the 26-30 years range, and 29% of the 31-35 years age range would prefer being helped by the counselor while 89%, 69% and 71% of the respective ranges would still prefer significant others to the counselor. ...On the other hand, among the older couples of 46-50 years age range 40% would go to the counselor while 60% would prefer significant others.¹²

One reason that can explain this trend is that professional counseling services are often offered in big towns at a fee. Majority of the people both in rural and urban areas therefore resort to traditional counseling and a few attend to pastoral counseling. The large number of people who attend to traditional counseling in the two studies above is significant enough to warrant this study and to suggest the usefulness of traditional counseling.

The second misconception about traditional counseling is that the practice is suited for the rural people only. It is argued that the elite and those in urban centres cannot benefit from these services because their issues are far beyond the reach or the understanding of traditional counselors. This again is not the correct picture of the true situation. Many people who live in the urban centres have homes in the rural areas where they visit regularly and where they finally go to stay after retirement. These people are constantly in touch with the elders and other helpers in the rural areas. On the other hand, the majority of issues that an individual faces are normally associated with the family, relatives, and friends. Similarly the issues deal with

¹² Daisy N. Nwachukwu, "Perceptions of Family Counselling in Nigeria" in eds., Masamba ma Mpolo and Cecile De Sweemer, *The Case for Counselling in Context: Families in Transition*, (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1987), 64-65

cultural practices and most of which have their setting in the rural environment.

It is also common for people in urban areas to have ethnic self-help groups where they gather to solve issues that arise among them. Here, elders among them, or the group as a whole, sort the issues of their members in a traditional manner. In some cases, elders from the rural areas are invited to sort out issues or the urbanites with the problems travel up country for arbitration in the villages. This shows that the level of education or the fact that one is an urbanite does not stop one from resorting to traditional counseling.

Third, there is also another misconception, that it is un-Christians to seek the services of traditional counselors. This is based on Christian and in particular missionary teaching that saw everything that was traditional as evil. Some Christian are still of this view and more so those who are entrenched into the Christian faith, have been brainwashed to believe that anything traditional is evil. The majority of such Christians adhere to colonial period missionary teaching against African healers, medicine persons, counseling and the art of divination. As I wrote elsewhere:

The nineteenth century thus marked the decline of the practice of healing in Africa. The missionaries and colonial governments looked down upon, and greatly discouraged African medical beliefs and practices. Both Christianity and the colonists believed that the practice of African medicine was evil and their healers (witch doctors) practiced "black magic". The colonial governments thus put concerted efforts in place to accelerate the disintegration of the African social and religious fabric.¹³

Jomo Kenyatta in *Facing Mount Kenya* (1938) observes that the missionaries were "set out to uproot the African body and soul, from old customs and beliefs...with all his tribal traditions shattered

¹³ Adam K. arap Chepkwony, "The Environment in an Africa Spirituality" in *Science, Religion and Society: An Encyclopedia of History, Culture, and Controversies, Vol 2*, Edited by arri Eisen and Gary Laderman. (M.E Sharpe Publisher, 2006), 645

and his institutions trampled upon"¹⁴

The missionaries and colonialists attitude towards African beliefs greatly affected the African traditional healer and the healing practices throughout Africa. Africans believed that their God was the creator, the Almighty and most importantly, the healer and provider of life and good health. In spite of this belief, the missionary churches admonished the new converts to refuse and disown all African healing practices and also to reject the healers. African traditional counseling was part and parcel of traditional healing done by herbalists, diviners and elders.

William R. Bascom and Nelville J. Herskevits in *Continuity and Change in African Culture* (1959) has recorded an early sermon by a priest among the Kikuyu of Kenya who taught African Christians to "trust God, do not trust the medicine man.... I know some of you are hiding amulets beneath your garments. Those cannot protect you"¹⁵. The Christian teaching against African healers and healing practices was incorporated into the catechism. This was used to induct new converts into Christianity. The Catholic catechism of 1926 for example stated thus: "The first commandment forbid 'pagan practices... pagan practices are: to believe in things forbidden by the church, like dreams, divination...". Similarly, the catechisms of 1947, number 140 stipulate that "the forbidden pagan beliefs are: to practice false medicine and amulets, to divine"¹⁶.

These ideas still linger on in the minds of many modern Christians and especially those affiliated to missionary originated churches. Fortunately, things are changing so much that even the staunch Christians are now beginning to differentiate between the role of healers and witchcraft often misunderstood to embrace the entire healing system.

Fourth, the pastoral counseling administered by the churches has similarly been misunderstood in various ways. There

¹⁴ Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (Nairobi: Heinerman, 1938), 217

¹⁵ Adam K. arap Chepkwony, "African Traditional Medicine: Healing and Spirituality" *Science, Religion and Society: An Encyclopedia of History, Culture, and Controversy*, Vol 2 edited by Arri Eisen and Gary Laderman. (M.E Sharpe Publisher, 2006), 642 – 648.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

is for example the assumption that by virtue of being a pastor, one is a counselor. This is in spite of the fact that some pastors have not gone through any kind of theological training let alone counseling. Both Pastors and the Christians believe that it is the responsibility of the pastor to solve the problems that arise within and outside the congregation. Indeed David J. Hasselgrave admits that the nature of the work of the missionaries and the church leaders require them to counsel people from diverse background.¹⁷

In this regard, Hasselgrave, points out that at a conference of psychologists and counselors in Vail, Colorado, USA, it was recommended that it was unethical for counselors who are not trained in cross cultural counseling to provide professional services to people of other cultural background. He then observes that if it is unethical for secular counselors to serve people from other cultures, it should likewise be true of Christian counselors. It becomes even worse for those who have no training background at all to do any kind of counseling.¹⁸

The major problem faced by such un-trained pastors is that they tend to interpret the sources of all problems as sin or lack of faith. The remedy they normally prescribe to their clients is either they get saved to allow Christ to be in control of their lives or to exercise more faith. According to counseling specialists, pastors require training to equip them with skills to handle both religious and non-religious clients.¹⁹

Fifth, modern psychological counseling is not with its misconceptions either. More often than not, psychological counseling is associated with Christians of good character. In many institutions of learning, (primary, secondary schools, middle colleges and even University, particularly in Kenya) individuals who show strong Christians tendencies or those who have studied

¹⁷ David J. Hesselgrave, *Counselling Cross-Culturally: An introduction to Theory and Practice for Christians*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1984), FN. 19 and 20

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 20

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

religious studies are normally picked to provide the counseling services. The assumption here is that a good Christian can qualify to assist others on the basis of their faith.

Psychological counseling has also been associated with HIV/AIDS with the emergence of the epidemic. This can be explained by the many HIV/AIDS counseling centres that have emerged in the last twenty years. Indeed in many parts of Africa, counseling is synonymous with HIV/AIDS so much that when you advise somebody to go for counseling, they assume that you think they are suffering from AIDS. Karimi captures this sentiment when he writes, "Unfortunately, the stigma of HIV/AIDS is so immobilizing and the culture so strong that people avoid counseling even if it is free".²⁰

On the other hand, the world seems to understand counseling in Africa from an HIV/AIDS perspective. An entry of the words "Counseling in Africa" in the goggle search engine in the Internet for example shows that sixteen out of the first twenty entries (80%) deal with HIV/AIDS. This misconception has made it very difficult for many people to understand and accept the true role of counseling. It certainly gives the impression that counseling is for those suffering from the HIV/AIDS virus.

Another final general misconception of counseling is the assumption that it is for people who are mad or have serious mental illness. Although it is true that counseling deals with abnormal behaviour, people tend to see the extreme behaviour only and ignore the small disturbances that would otherwise benefit from counseling. Closely related to this is the idea that counseling is for women and children only. The assumption is that children and women are not strong enough to handle the current challenges of life. The counseling services offered in schools since the government prohibited caning in Kenya and the fact that the majority of those who go for counseling services and training are women have

²⁰ Samuel Karimi, "We are Therefore I am: A Psycho-Cosmos Counselling Model for Black Africans", *International journal for the Advancement of Counselling*, Vol. 28, No 3, (September 2006), 259



CHAPTER TWO

Africa Counseling and Therapy

Introduction

In this section, I develop the rationale for suggesting a counseling approach for the African people. To do this, there is need to first have an overview of the problem afflicting the continent. The African continent today is racked with the pain of suffering among the majority of people. The continent groans under the burden of poverty, oppression, violation of human rights, diseases, and desperation. In an attempt to solve the problems associated with poverty, some young people move to the urban areas in search of jobs and better life. This situation has brought about an increased mobilization to urban areas. More often than not, the urban perceived hope turn out to be a nightmare for some and a heaven for others. In urban areas, the majority fails to find jobs, decent housing and personal attention.

On the other hand those who live in the rural areas are not any better. The majority of the rural population comprise the old and the young who end up suffering in poverty since the breadwinners are not only away from home but are also often incapacitated to be of any help. To cope with the new situation, some people in the rural and urban areas resort to alcoholism, drug abuse, crime and other social evils. The results are social, emotional, economic and psychological disturbance. Whatever the cause, the vicious cycle of poverty creates hopelessness and despair. Some of the people who find themselves in such situations decide to solve their problems in different ways of which some are wanting. A few however resort to their religions for refuge. Others who can afford to pay seek help from modern western trained counselors who are found mainly in

towns. Those who have issues related to HIV/AIDS seek assistance in practically any hospitals while others go to Voluntary Counseling and Testing centres. The majority of people however, resort to their traditional support system for help and healing.

The African experience has been described earlier as being at the crossroads. This is due to the confusion created by merging traditional and foreign cultures and ideologies. It is a situation where people are not sure of the right direction to follow. This dilemma has contributed to the rising rates of social degradation and consequently neurotic experiences among African communities.

The Anomie Theory

The African scenario is thus characteristic of Anomie theory as developed by Emile Durkheim. The basic axiom of Anomie theory is based on structural functionalist perspective which advocates that, for a society to function well; all its component parts must be working. If a society is stable and its parts operating smoothly, the social arrangements are functional. Such a society is marked by cohesion, co-operation, and consensus. But if the components are arranged in such a way as to threaten the social order, the arrangements are said to be dysfunctional.

Durkheim argues that a dysfunctional society tends to be in a conflict. One way in which conflict occurs in a society is the effect of social change. He observes that when a simple society develops into a modern urban one, the intimacy needed to sustain a common set of norms declines. Groups become fragmental, and in the absence of a common set of rules, the action and the expectation of people in one sector may clash with those of people in another. He referred to the breakdown of social order as a result of the loss of standards and values as "anomie". Thus when behaviour becomes unpredictable, the system gradually breaks down, the society is said to be anomie.²¹

Durkheim relates the concept of anomie to suicide. His

²¹ Freda Adler et al., *Criminology* (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc. 1995), 109

studies indicated that suicide rates increase during times of sudden economic change. He suggested that in a period of rapid change, people are thrown into unfamiliar situations. In such cases rules that once guided behaviour no longer hold and in such circumstances someone can easily commit suicide.²²

Robert Merton later expanded this theory to explain criminal activities in migrant communities. According to him, "anomie is the form that societal incoherence takes when there is significant detachment between valued cultural ends and legitimate societal means to those ends".²³ Merton separated anomie in two categories. Macroside anomie describes the situation when the society fails to establish clear limits on goals and is unable to regulate the conduct of members in the society. Microside anomie, which is also referred to as strain, on the other hand, stresses its attention towards the breakdown of society. As a result of this breakdown, there is an increase in deviance associated with this declining change that produces a strong pressure among members of society to commit crimes.²⁴

The Situation of Africa

This theory describes the situation that the majority of African peoples find themselves in today. To illustrate this point, I shall rely heavily on my earlier chapter in a book, *Urban Ministry in Africa* (2010).²⁵ In that study, I utilized the findings from studies that were meant to assess how the church has served people who migrated into urban centres in Africa. These studies were carried out with the intention of finding out how the church can best serve their congregations in the urban ministry. Among these studies are those of Roger Tessie, 1983,²⁶ Fr. Daniel Moschetti, 1997,²⁷ Victoria Simon,

²² Ibid.

²³ Karen Michelle Collins, "Anomie and Strain Theory". *International Encyclopedia of Justice Studies*, N.D, 1, or See http://www.iejs.com/Criminology/anomie_and_strain_theory.htm

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Adam K. arap Chepkwony "An African Response to Urban Ministry in Africa" in Chinwe M.A Nwoye (ed.) *Urban Ministry in Africa* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2010), 30 - 45.

²⁶ Roger Tessier (ed), *Young People in African Towns – Their Pastoral Care* (Eldoret: Gaba Publications, 1983).

²⁷ Moschetti Daniel Moschetti, *Urban Ministry in Africa: Need new Models* (Eldoret: Amecea Gaba Publications, 1997).

1999²⁸ and a report prepared by the Dawns Ministries, 2004.²⁹ A look at these studies will guide us to understand the magnitude of the problems faced by the people moving into the urban areas and how they have been helped.

In 1983, Tessie did a study on the pastoral care of the young people in African towns. In this research Tessie was concerned with several issues. First, he was concerned about the rapid urbanization in Africa. He also noted that the rural exodus to urban areas affected mostly the youth. His second concern was the preparedness of the church to cope with the situation. He observed; "It must be admitted that the church is not yet organized to face the urban reality. The urban population is rapidly increasing and, with the present structures, the church feels rather outmatched"³⁰ Tessie was thus contented that the church has a hard task ahead. In the same way the governments are ill prepared to cater for the masses of people now living in slums like Mathare in Kenya or Soweto in South Africa.

To help the church accomplish this enormous task, Tessie embarked on a field research to unearth some of the problems and to seek their solutions. His research revealed several needs that the youth aspire in the new urban environment. I shall enumerate a few of these below.

The study showed that in spite of the fact that the youth enjoyed the benefits of modern society, they were nevertheless deeply attached to their traditional values. They rejected the values of urban areas which did not have any respect for family, elders, community and the ethnic bond in general.³¹

Tessie's findings also confirmed that the youth were not satisfied with the way the church was handling their situation. They felt that the church was an alienating milieu, which did not only degrade their culture in the past but one which is continuing to do so

²⁸ Victoria Simon, "Persistence of African Traditional Religion among the youth in Nairobi" *African Cultures and Religion*, Vol. 1, No. 3, (August 1999).

²⁹ The Unfinished Task: A National Survey of Churches in Kenya (Nairobi: ACM-FTT Afriserve, 2004).

³⁰ Tessie, 5

³¹ Tessie, 8

now. They saw the church as curtailing their freedom, refuse to recognize them in the Church structures and in general not making them part of the family in the church.³²

The third finding was that the youth aspired for an education that is integrated with life. The youth are aware that even in the city, good jobs require good papers as well as good guidance and advice. They therefore see the need for both formal and informal education to better their lives. This is only possible if there are people who care for them, appropriate educational programmes and people who can serve as models to emulate.³³

In 1997 fourteen years after Tessie's study, Fr. Daniel Moschetti carried another study on urban ministry in Africa. Fr. Moschetti wrote a well-documented analysis of urbanization in Africa. His main contention is that the church has not done enough as far as the urban ministry is concerned. In the preface to his book, Agatha Radoli put it thus:

Christianity has not, as yet addressed itself to their (Urban African) life experiences. It remains a foreign ideology as far as they are concerned, an attitude that needs to be changed through a meaningful evangelization.³⁴

Fr. Moschetti also notes that the majority of those who migrated to the cities are the youth who end up losing their African culture and replace it with a sub-culture which is more often than not a sub-human culture. He suggests that in such a situation, it is only "a well-accultured Christianity that will restore Christians religiosity and African humanness"³⁵

Another issue that seemed to be of great concern to Fr. Moschetti is the number of people who attend Church in the urban areas. He observes that many Christians are not regular in their

³² Tessie, 11

³³ Tessie, 13

³⁴ Moschetti, in the preface by the editor Agatha Radoli

³⁵ Moschetti, 62

church attendance. On the same note, there are many nominal Christians who have never been baptized but see themselves as Christians. He noted that less than 15% of church members attend church on Sunday. He further notes that two thirds of Catholics and more than half of Protestants in Nairobi never attend church.³⁶

Finally, the study indicated that there was an exodus of catholic Christians from the church. He notes that the attendance has declined from 60 per cent to under 30 per cent in the last twenty years. On the other hand, the non-catholic churches, particularly AIC's and sects have almost doubled their church attendance from a low 20 per cent to nearly 40 per cent.³⁷

The third study I choose to use is a field research paper done by Victoria Simon. Simon's objective in the study was to find out the attitudes of Nairobi youth towards African traditional Religion. The research asked the youth to identify and to describe aspects of traditional African Religion that are most meaningful to them today. Simon's findings showed that the African youth in Nairobi were aware, appreciates and even practice some aspects of their culture.³⁸

The last study I would like to refer to was done in 2004 by ACM-FIT Afriserve in partnership with Dawn Ministries. The Study published under the title, *The Unfinished Task: A National Survey of Churches in Kenya* considered only the Evangelical Urban Churches and ministry in Kenya. Although limited to a group of Christians, the study is impressive and has clearly documented in details church attendance pattern in evangelical churches in all the urban areas in Kenya. The study found out that the performance of the Evangelical Churches both in rural and urban areas is poor. The study concluded that the church had a deficit of 43,507 congregations in 2004 and that this was to rise to 49,527 by the year 2010.³⁹

Another challenge enumerated in this study is the sporadic nature of the church growth in urban areas. The study shows that

³⁶ Moschetti, 60

³⁷ Moschetti, *ibid*

³⁸ Simon, 69

³⁹ Dawn Ministries, 120

urban churches do not have steady members and that it is not unusual for the church to have different people every Sunday. The study referred to Christians who move from church to church as “butterfly Christians” or “sermon tasters.”⁴⁰

African needs in urban setting

The four studies undertaken reveal a lot on what is taking place in urban Africa. In particular, it shows very specific issues that need to be attended to in urban and by extension to those in the rural areas. In my view, the four studies have identified two major challenges in counseling that those interested in counseling psychology in Africa must consider.

a) Need to uphold cultural needs

The studies showed that Africans in urban areas want to uphold their African cultural values alongside their faith. The people who migrate to urban setting soon found themselves out of touch with their rich cultural values due to the influence of urban life. On the other hand, those born in urban areas occasionally visit their relatives in rural areas and experience the strong ties of communal living. Both group desires to be part and parcel of their ancestral traditions in spite of their alienation in urban setting. Tessie's finding for example showed that the youth greatly valued their traditional values.

They (youth) look back on traditional society as an ideal to be recovered. Young Africans people are attached to their traditions in so far as they see the meaning and value of solidarity, respect for elders, belonging to the clan, a tribe, an ethnic group... they still have a great feeling for community: success is not to be achieved only by individual, but it is for a whole family.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Ibid, 82

⁴¹ Tessie, 8

In his study, Fr. Moschetti has similarly shown that many Africans in urban areas fail to attend church because it does not appeal to them. He says that the poor tend to opt for the African Independent churches because “they feel at home in the indigenous churches and sects because the minister within slum areas and their style of worship appeals to the poor people”⁴²

Victoria Simon's research findings among the youth in Nairobi also came up with similar sentiments. She writes:

Each African youth I interviewed expressed great respect and admiration for his or her traditional African religious background... Another consistent message from many of our youthful informants, especially those in their twenties, focused on the importance of not copying or borrowing from non-African religions and traditions in lieu of their own traditional African beliefs and values.⁴³

It is clear here that African urban dwellers need a setting that can accommodate their traditional values as well as experience a social life style of communal living. The question to ask here then is: can the counselor in urban areas cater for this essential need expressed by the urban Africans? Although the counseling institutions and practitioners in urban as well as those in rural areas are Africans, the counseling structures are still built around the western worldview. In actual sense, the psychoanalysis, behavioural models and humanistic therapies have been lifted wholesale from West to Africa. The majority of Africans find western models of therapy unrealistic, makes them feel out of place and their issues unattended to in many counseling situations.

The sentiment conveyed in all the four studies shown above, explains the reason why people move from church to church. The

⁴² Moschetti, 62

⁴³ Simon, 76-77

African Christians go around in search for a suitable church where they can feel at home – a home where they feel wanted and their needs met and if not, at least listened to. This also explains the issue of many nominal Christians or even poor church attendance. People fail to see how the church can solve their numerous needs in a busy city and thus find alternative ways to make their stay in the new environment more comfortable. More often than not, they spend their time on Sunday visiting or entertaining relatives and friends who have arrived from rural areas recently.

This also shows the reason why Africans tend to find themselves in ethnic groups in urban areas. They prefer to stay with those who understand them best and thus ready to assist them unconditionally when crisis arise. It is interesting to note that when death occurs in the city, more often than not, it is not the church members of the affected family that come to their help. Normally it is the members of the same ethnic group who may belong to different churches who come to their assistance. This is because many times the church does not openly accept the traditions that accompany such rites. In other cases, the Christians themselves find the rites of other communities in their churches unnecessary and even said to be un-Christian. It is thus common for African Christians to avoid involving the church in resolving issues that have strong cultural inclinations. It is for this reason that many Christians find it difficult to consult or comply with pastoral counseling administered by the pastors in their churches.

b) Need of healing

The second challenge posed by the study is the dire need for healing by the urban dwellers. Apparently, the need for healing is not true of urban people alone but equally needed in the rural areas. In his book, O'Dovovan explains the plight of the youth in the new urban environments as scary, confusing and isolating. He writes:

There can be intense isolation, fear, loneliness and difficulty for people living in cities. Young people come to cities wanting to escape the hard work. . . instead what they often find is a poor job or no job at all, no true friends, no familiar life and the indifference or even hostility of other people.⁴⁴

Where do such youth in a new urban environment turn to? Can the western secular counseling or Pastoral counseling help them? Any counseling technique that claims to serve such people must cater for such emotions and prepare young Africans to real life situation in both urban and in rural setting. It must be a therapy that can heal the wounds, the anxieties, the loneness, the isolation and all other psychological disturbances experienced in such an environment. The counseling institution must help them not to see the counseling simply as a commercial business or a place to be reprimanded, but as a home where they can truly feel welcomed and administered to their satisfaction.

The Dawn reports showed that people in the cities moved from church to church and are certain to attend crusades or other churches where the preacher addresses the needs of the people. The study indicates that new pastors have been known to create huge congregations in a day mainly of Christians from already existing churches. Such scenarios are common in towns and are prompted by the needs of the people. According to the report:

Whenever a new preacher moves into the city and focuses on certain felt needs of the people, he appeals to the crowd. When there appears to be a manifestation of the working of the Holy Spirit or ostracizing of demons, the crowds move there in big numbers regardless of whether sound doctrinal truth is upheld or not.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Wilbur O'Donovan, *Biblical Christianity in Modern Africa* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 2000), 58.

⁴⁵ Dawn Ministries, 82

Although the study seemed to interpret this as a weakness on the side of the Christians, I see it differently. For me this clearly shows the weakness of the church that has failed to serve the needs of its congregation. It is only natural that someone should go where he/she thinks they can get help and their needs met. The woman in the gospel who suffered from bleeding for twelve years, for example, upon learning that there was a new preacher (healer) in town, she went to him and secretly touched his clothes, thereby receiving immediate healing (Luke 8: 40 - 56).

Why do we need relevant counseling services in Africa? The answer to this question is stipulated in the studies we have just read. How do we heal the people in the rural areas who know nothing about secular counseling and even if they did, have no money to pay for the services? How do we heal the people who are in the rural areas and have embraced Christianity and find themselves in a dilemma between Christian teaching and traditional values? How do we heal the people in the urban areas who are educated but still uphold African cultural values? How about the elite and the professionals, who have little to do with any faith and traditions except, of course in times of crisis?

To me these are crucial questions underneath all the challenges of counseling in Africa. The fact that Africa is at the crossroads has created several categories of people whose counseling needs are not only different but require a different approach to handle the situation. And yet at the same time, the rural individual is not different from the urban person, the Christian in urban or rural areas is not different from the elite, the politician or the professional. All are bound together by strong cultural beliefs that bind them as one and the same. It is these beliefs that serve as lenses through which they view their world. It is these same beliefs that serve as the bedrock of their behaviour and the essence of their effect. It is these beliefs that serve as the blueprint from which they

construct people's lives and intermingle them with the lives of others. As Wright and Watson clearly puts it:

An assessment of a family's experience with illness is incomplete without a thorough understanding of each family members beliefs....Likewise, an understanding of the clinical approach of any health professional is incomplete without a thorough knowledge of the clinician's beliefs about families, illness, change and clinicians.⁴⁶

It is these beliefs that provide the families with the wisdom that lead to the resources of healing the members of the community. Likewise, it is these same beliefs that inform the clinicians on how best to serve their patients.

This is the dilemma the African communities are facing. A dilemma they cannot escape from. They cannot hide behind foreign ideologies, modern professions or the new adopted faiths. African families and communities are bound together by spiritual and societal commitment to harmonious relationship between the Supreme Being, nature, the spirit world and the universe. This cultural construction of reality is known as a worldview. Each community in the world has its own worldview. Africa has its own. For a complete understanding of the African person and therefore his/her counseling needs and how to go about it, one must comprehend the African worldview. This is the topic of discussion in the next chapter.

⁴⁶ Lorraine M. Wright and Wendy L. Watson, *Beliefs: The Heart of healing in families and Illness*, (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 19



CHAPTER THREE

African Worldview

Introduction

In this chapter, we shall deal with the idea of an African worldview. I shall explain what a worldview is and its significance in counseling in an African perspective. A worldview, simply understood, is the way a community perceives the world in its totality – what makes sense of all the phenomena around them. In other words, it is a cultural construction of what a particular group of people perceives to be real. A dictionary definition of the term worldview reads as a “comprehensive conception or image of the universe and of humanity's relationship to it”.⁴⁷ The thrust of this definition should be on what the community believes about the universe and how human beings are expected to relate to that universe.

All individuals, all human communities in the world and indeed all religions have different conceptions of the universe and how human beings relate to it. It is important however to remember that the term “worldview” is a western terminology and understood in a western framework. The word in fact is a German translation of “Weltanschauung” which suggests a systematically ordered picture of reality and that, which could be expressed philosophically.⁴⁸ The term worldview is therefore defined within the Western perspective and may not be understood exactly in the same way in other cultures.

It is therefore important to understand that an African might not conceive their worldview in the same way as understood and indeed originated in Europe. Some modern scholars have suggested that a better terminology that can be used in place of worldview is

⁴⁷ Random House Webster's: College Dictionary, New York: Random House, 1997.

⁴⁸ Ian Ritchie, “African Theology and Social Change” PhD Dissertation, McGill University, 1993. See also <http://www3.sympatico.ca/ian.ritchie/ATSC.chapter4.htm>

“life-world”. Life-world in this case, describes the daily live experience of self, others, work, worship, the world and how each is related to each other. This terminology seems to encompass what an African understands a worldview to be; an experience of human being with the Supreme Being, the environment and the entire universe. This understanding of a worldview is different from the western understanding, which is more theoretical and academic in nature.⁴⁹

Ordinarily however, most people cannot articulate their worldviews. In an effort to understand the concept of a worldview, scholars have suggested several fundamental questions which when answered; guide one to understand what a worldview means. To help construct an African worldview, I shall explain six questions and the kind of answers expected of each as follows:

1. *Where do we come from?* This is the question that every community, every religion in the world has attempted to answer through stories, myths and legends. The response to this question elicits answers that are most important about human existence. In Africa, it explains their spirituality and how they understand where and how they come into being.

2. *Where are we?* The answer to this question involves what we perceive this world to be. Is it real or is it an illusion? A response to this question provides answers to the functions and the structures of the world. The term “world” here is taken to mean everything that exists around us, that is, the physical universe, living and non-living things, life, society and culture.

3. *Where are we going?* This question seeks to explain the purpose and the future of life in this world. In other words, is there a future life or life after this world? If so, what kind of life? And how different from the present life is the life after death.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

4. *What is good and what is evil?* This question determines the level of moral standard expected of human beings. It helps to give directions and purpose in guiding human actions. In real sense, it answers the question of the values cherished in each community.

5. *How shall we act?* The answer to this question explains how we should act upon knowing what is good and what is evil. The question seeks answers of the action needed to solve practical problems faced by human being on day-to-day basis. In answering this question, a plan of action is envisaged.

6. *What is true and what is false?* Again the answer to this question is connected with how we should act. A plan of action as suggested above must be based on knowledge and correct information. It is only when we acquire relevant knowledge that we can construct reliable models of life. The knowledge on which the action is based serves as pillars in which the entire worldview is anchored.⁵⁰

These then are the six questions that one must attempt to answer when considering what a worldview is. In discussing an African worldview, we shall see that while answering one question, we shall at the same time be answering another. In other words, the answers to all these questions shall waive into each other. In some cases it shall be very clear that we are dealing with a specific question and in others several questions at once. What is important is that at the end of a presentation of a worldview, one should ensure that the six questions have been answered either directly or in the process of answering other questions.

An African Worldview

Let us begin by answering the six questions in regards to an African worldview. The answers to the six questions help one or a community to see the meaning and the purpose of their existence and the world around them. The answers also build values, beliefs,

⁵⁰ F. Heylighen, "What is a world view? in <http://pespmcl.vub.ac.be/WORLDVIEW.html>

and knowledge that sustain and maintain the pillars of a worldview and indeed the community.

1. Where do we come from? - Human Beings are a creation of the Supreme Being. The Supreme Being created the universe and all the visible and the invisible things in it. How the Supreme Being did this differs from one community to the other.

2. Where are we? - Humans are on earth with others created things. It is a real place and has no end. It is therefore important to preserve the environment and to live in harmony with all creatures on earth.

3. Where are we going? – There is life after death in the ancestral world – life similar to the present worldly life except without the problem of this world such as diseases, pain, anger and grief. African people perceive history to be cyclic.

4. What is good and what is evil? – What is good is to live in harmony with other created things and to adhere to the moral values of the society. To break the cosmic harmony is evil, since this brings pain to the entire community.

5. How shall we act? – Proper action is to obey the Supreme Being, the elders, ancestors, parents and the rules of the cosmic harmony as dictated by the ethical values and individual conscience.

6. What is true and what is false? – Truth is that the Supreme Being exists and the source of life and the foundation of truth. The Supreme Being, the divinities, the ancestors and human experience over the years have provided humans with the foundation of what is true and false.

In Africa, spirituality provides a worldview as understood and lived by African peoples. An African worldview is a system of beliefs that provide people with a mechanism to understand the world in which they live in and to explain everyday events and occurrences. These constitute the beliefs, values and attitudes

learned by each individual from the time they are born. It is these culturally influenced values that provide the mechanism that control how one understands what happens to them, their community and the world in which they live in general.

The African worldview is complex, deeply spiritual, social and medicinal in nature. It is therefore not possible to discuss an African worldview that is devoid of the spiritual beings that surrounds human environment and how to restore and maintain good health. This worldview summarizes the healing wisdom in African spirituality. As suggested by many African scholars, life in Africa is not compartmentalized into religious and secular or sacred and profane. Life is seen and lived in a holistic manner. The African worldview therefore looks at the entire universe and how each aspect is related to each other. The universe that is under the control of the Supreme Being is inhabited by divinities, ancestral spirits, human beings, other spiritual beings, animate and inanimate things in that order of hierarchy . To have a grip of an African worldview, we must understand the place of the spiritual beings. We shall therefore discuss the role of each of the above components of the universe.

The Supreme Being in African Spirituality

African peoples believe in the existence of a Supreme Being or God. Without any exception, all African societies believe in one supreme God who created the world and all that is in it. In the past, the concept of the Supreme Being in Africa was grossly misunderstood. Early scholars of African Religion gave the impression that African people worshiped many gods. These explain why some scholars refer to African concept of God as polytheistic – that is the worship of many gods. In more recent scholarship however, scholars have shown that African understanding of God has always been monotheistic and that the early scholars and

missionaries were confused by the many spiritual beings in African religion.⁵¹ The following Pygmy prayer will suffice to ascertain the fact that there is only one God and that God is a spirit. This idea is common among all the African peoples.

In the beginning was God (Khmvoud)
Today is God.
Tomorrow will be God.
Who can make an image of God?
He has no body,
He is as a word that comes out of your mouth.
That word! It is no more,
It is past, and still it lives,
So is God.⁵²

Apart from creating the world, the Supreme Being sustains the creation, provides and protects the entire creation. The Supreme Being owns everything, rules over the universe and the source of life and reality. The Supreme Being is understood to be eternal, all-powerful, knows everything that happens in the world and present everywhere all the time. The Supreme Being is known to be kind, loving and cares for all the creation. The Supreme Being is holy, righteous and upholds justice. The Supreme Being is perceived as the pure spirit, unifier, immortal and beyond human comprehension.

The Supreme Being as understood in Africa has no gender, and it is for this reason that some Africans view their God as father or as mother. Due to this understanding, I shall avoid as much as possible referring to the Supreme Being as a he or a she. But when it is unavoidable, it should not be subjected to the western debate on

⁵¹ The recent book, *The Kalenjin People's Egypt Origin Legend Revisited: Was Isis Asis?* By Kipkoech araap Sambu,(Nairobi: Longhorn Publishers, 2007) is a well documented source on the monotheistic nature of African Religion but often expressed in polytheistic tendencies.

⁵² John Mbiti, "A Hawk eats through the help of the Shepherds", An Exploratory Paper at the first meeting of the standing Committee on *The Contribution of Africa to the Religious Heritage of the World*, 2. See <http://afrikaworld.net/afrel/Mbiti.htm>

gender sensitivity. In real sense, the “he” and “she” issue does not arise in the ordinary African languages.

In general the Supreme Being is seen as the creator, the absolute controller of the universe and the only Supreme Being. Among the Dinka, this is how God created the universe and human beings alone.

In the time when God created all things,
He created the sun
And the sun is born and dies and comes again.
He created the moon,
And the moon is born and dies and comes again.
He created the stars,
And the stars are born and die and comes again.
He created man,
And man is born and dies and comes not again.⁵³

African peoples are made up of different ethnic communities, each with its own language, beliefs and living in different and unique environments. The Supreme Being is therefore known to each of these societies by name in their own different languages. There are therefore many names to describe the same God according to each community.⁵⁴ There is no African community that believes that God is different and unique from the God of other communities. They see him as the same God who created different people, gave them different languages, culture and environment. It is for that reason that African religion has never been missionary.

⁵³ Ibid., 4

⁵⁴ See John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 75:42 –43

Spirit World in Africa

The African world-view is populated with spirits. The spiritual world is central in almost all African communities. These spirits include, the Supreme Being, Divinities, Human and other spirits. Spirits influence the lives of human beings as individuals and as communities in different ways. There are basically three functions of spirits, those known to assist human beings; those that create disturbances and those that are neutral, causing neither harm nor good to humans.

Divinities

Some African communities believe in spirits known as Divinities. Divinities are spiritual being that are close to the Supreme Being. Each community that believes in Divinities has an explanation on how they originated and their purpose in the world. However, the general understanding is that Divinities were created or bought into being to hold certain functions in the theocratic government of the universe. The divinities serve human beings under different ministries each with a portfolio in the Supreme Being's monarchical government. In some communities, the divinities form a pantheon. It is this concept of Divinities that some people have misunderstood and interpreted to mean that African people believe in many gods. Since this concept is not common throughout Africa, it will suffice to illustrate the idea with the divinities of the Yoruba community of Nigeria and the *Adigo* community in Kenya.

Among the Yoruba of Nigeria for example, the Supreme Being is known as *Oluddumare*. *Oluddumare* has many divinities that operate in various departments in the world and in particular to assist the administration of human beings. The Yoruba pantheon thus consists of hundreds of divinities that are venerated for an immense variety of purposes such as fertility, agriculture, and war

among many other human needs. To illustrate this point, some of the many Yoruba divinities in Nigeria are shown below.

Eshu who is also known as *Eleggua* is the messenger divinity. He mediates between humans and the Yoruba Supreme Being. He is also the benevolent trickster, who uses his tricks to teach human beings valuable lessons. *Eshu* is also the patron of roads, opportunities, healers and magicians. This divinity is known for his giving although he is known to be cruel. For that reason, he is always the first to be honoured during rites and ceremonies.

Obatala is also called *Orisa-nla*. He is the Yoruba arch-divinity who was commissioned by the Supreme Being to create the solid earth, equip it, and to mould the physical form of man. He is the deputy or son of *Oloddumare* the Supreme Being. He represents creative and procreative forces and is therefore very popular. Barren women usually take their petition to him so that they may be blessed with children. He is therefore the patron of humankind, and more specifically of the deformed, whom he created while in a drunken stupor.

Orunmila or *Ifa* is the divinity of prophecy in Yoruba land and the oldest son of *Obatala*. He is the deputy of *Oloddumare* in matters of wisdom, prognostication and foreknowledge. People consult *Orunmila* on all occasions for guidance and solutions to problems, and he is venerated everywhere by Yoruba communities.

Olokun is the divinity of the sea, and lives in a vast underwater palace. His servants are humans and fish. In some traditions this divinity is also seen as a female.

Oshun is the divinity and goddess of love and pleasure, beauty and diplomacy. She is very generous and loving to humans but also has an extraordinary temper, which is difficult to sway. However, in most cases she teaches mankind to overcome their difficulties through kindness and negotiation.

Oya is the female warrior goddess of the Yoruba tradition and the fierce divinity of wind, fire and thunder, as well as the patron of change. When enraged she creates tornadoes and hurricanes, and is the guardian of the gates of death.

Shango on the other hand is a deified former ruler. He was once the mortal fourth king of Yoruba, but after death he became immortalized as a powerful divinity of storms and thunder. *Shango's* storms are both devastating and cleansing.

Yemalla is the mother goddess of the sea and the moon. She is the patron of fertility and women's issues. She gives and sustains life lovingly but, like the sea itself, is equally dangerous when in a foul mood. *Yemalla* is also mysterious and the keeper of ancient secrets and memories.⁵⁵

Among the *Adingo* community in the coastal region of Kenya, divinities are referred to as the *Ana Mlungu* which means "the helpers of *Mlungu*" the Supreme Being. *Ana Mlungu* serves as special agents of *Mlungu* on earth. In that position, *Ana Mlungu* "enjoys close proximity to *Mlungu* than the ordinary spirits".⁵⁶ The known divinities among the *Adingo* include, *MwanaMlungu*, *Chitsimbakazi*, *MwanaMlungu Mridaziya* and *MwanaMlungu Mdigo*.⁵⁷

Human Spirits

African communities believe that after death, one enters into an ancestral community in the underworld. The spirits of those who have died are called the ancestral spirits. It is believed that the spirits of the ancestors are closely interested in what happens in families and communities they were associated with before death. As ancestral spirits they are close to the Supreme Being and can affect the lives of the living. There are two types of ancestral spirits as discussed below:

⁵⁵ Ade Dopamu, "The Yoruba Religious system", *African Update*, Vol.VI, Issue 3 (Summer 1999).

⁵⁶ Chembea, Sulleiman A. "The impact of Islam on the Belief in Spirits among the Adigo" MPhil. Theses, Moi University, 2011, 57.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*,

The Remembered Ancestors

The remembered ancestors or the “living –dead” according to *Mbiti*, are the spirits of people who died recently and are still remembered. *Mbiti* refers to these spirits as the ancestors in the *Sasa* (present/now) period. These are the spirits that have come back to the family and the clan through the birth of babies named after them. They are believed to be the owners of land and protectors of the living. These spirits remains actively interested and engaged in the life of their family and community. The new status in the ancestral land allows them to have special relationship with the Supreme Being, divinities and other ancestral spirits.

The ancestral spirits are mostly concerned about the prosperity and security of their families and communities. They intercede with the Supreme Being on behalf of individuals and their communities to protect them from harm. It is believed that these spirits have power over bad spirits that bring about evil. However, if individual members, families or communities engage in inappropriate behaviour, the ancestors withdraw their protection and their willingness to intercede for their descendants before God as a sign of displeasure.

When the ancestors withdraw their support to human being, it results in illness and misfortune. The ancestral spirits do not however wish to see their families and communities suffer. Instead, the ancestors hope that illness and misfortune will be seen as a warning to the people and communities. The ancestors themselves do not inflict misfortunes as normally misunderstood. The punishment comes as a result of failing to maintain the cosmic harmony.

As will be shown later, African people believe that it is important to follow the accepted social and cultural norms. It is this that brings about cosmic harmony and serves as the only way to guarantee security, prosperity and good health. The ancestral spirits

thus simply attempts to restrain the community from breaking the harmony by assuming the role of moral guardians of the community.

The No longer remembered Ancestors

The spirits of ancestors who died long ago and are no longer remembered in the community are the spirits J. S. Mbiti refers to as the spirits of the *Zamani* (distant past) period.⁵⁸ Since the ancestors died so long ago and have no living relatives directly related to them, the spirits withdraw from involvements in the daily activities of human lives. It is believed that these spirits live in the land of ancestors near the Supreme Being. They therefore have no direct effect on human beings.

However, some ancestral spirits who should be classified as the no longer remembered remain actively engaged in human affairs for many generations. This is particularly true of the spirits of heroes, national leaders, freedom fighters and revolutionaries. For example, the spirits of great rulers or founders of nations maintain their interest and power for a long time after their deaths. The spirits of Jomo Kenyatta, the first president of Kenya, Kwame Nkrumah the first president of Ghana, Haile Sellassie, the emperor of Ethiopia, Gamal Abdel Nasser, president of Egypt and Mwalimu Julius Nyerere the first president of Tanzania are among the ancestral spirits that shall live for a long time in Africa. These ancestors are interested in promoting the longevity and prosperity of their nations and communities. Like the recently died ancestral spirits, these spirits intervene to protect humans and the specific nations of interest.

The above explanation shows the importance of the ancestral spirits and why African peoples have great respect for them. Indeed some communities erect special shrines to commemorate their ancestors. Today, in many cities in Africa, monuments of national

⁵⁸ Mbiti, J. S., *African Religion and Philosophy*. London: Heinemann, 1969, 28-34.

leaders and heroes have been erected as signs of respect. It also serves as a constant reminder for the citizen to remember their leaders and heroes for a long time to come. Similarly, streets and important social areas like sports ground is named after great ancestors to recognize their contribution and place in the land. In addition, the ancestral spirits are usually invited to meals through libation. In this way the spirits join in human activities for fellowship and to bless the people. Although their blessings are important for personal and community well-being, the ancestral spirits are more concerned with appropriate behaviour in order to maintain social harmony, longevity, prosperity, and continued procreation.

Nature Spirits

Nature spirits are spirits that inhabit or live in nature. There are two types of nature spirits, those that live in the outer space and those that live on earth. The spirits of the outer space live among the planets, sun, stars and the moon. These spirits are important since they control the seasons which determines when to prepare the ground and when to plant, when to harvest, when to prepare for communal ceremonies and when to rest. The seasons that are controlled by this celestial bodies also alert the community as to when to pray, sacrifice, worship and when to undertake traditional festivals and ceremonies.

The nature spirits on the other hand lives on earth. These types of spirits live either in water or on land. The water spirits control springs, rivers, lakes and oceans. The spirits that inhabit water are very important since they are believed to control fish and animals that live in the waters. The nature spirits of land inhabits rocks, mountains, trees, valleys, forests and all sacred places. One of the reasons why the spirits inhabit these places is to protect the particular environments that serve as the God's pharmacy. For it is here that all kinds of herbs for all kinds of ailments for both human

being and animals are grown and harvested. It is also here that both human beings and other creatures dwell and find their survival needs.

The nature spirits are therefore very important to human being. They are good spirits who protect people and provide them with essential items in life like water, air, food, and medicine by preserving the environment. The nature spirits are directly under the control of the Supreme Being. The Supreme Being often uses these spirits to reward or punish human beings when they go astray. The Supreme Being is for example known to use thunder and lightning to settle disputes. In times of harsh climatic conditions, humans pray to the nature spirits to intervene on their behalf.

Bad Spirits

African people believe in the existence of bad spirits. The bad spirits are spirits of divinities that fell out of favour with the Supreme Beings. Others were human beings who were mistreated when they were alive or died bad deaths, like drowning, or those who commit suicide or dead people who did not make it to the land of the ancestors for any other reason. Bad spirits are also the spirits of witches and wizards who, although still alive, are able to leave their bodies and inhabit animals. Disguised in the form of an animal, these spirits harm and bring about misfortune to people. These turn out to be vengeful spirits and are viewed as evil.

This bad spirits are responsible for all kinds of human disturbances such as illness, premature death, suffering and misfortunes. African religious traditions hold that just as there is good in the world, there is also evil. Goodness is the result of the blessings from the Supreme Being in response to good behaviour on the part of the individuals and communities. Suffering and misfortune of individuals and communities are the result of either inappropriate behaviour on the part of individuals or communities,

or the intervention of bad or disruptive spirits.

In African religious traditions, bad spirits are therefore responsible for causing much of the misfortune that individuals and communities suffer. Most African societies have specially trained spiritual professionals who through the use of special medicines and communication with the ancestral spirits can provide protection against the wills of evil spirits.

Human Beings

The role of human beings in African religion is very important. In African spirituality, humanity takes the centre place in the universe. In this position, human beings can thus define the entire universe and its creator from a human perspective. This conception is a logical conclusion given that all God's actions and those of other spiritual being are normally directed towards the well-being of the human person. Scholars of religion have termed this African ontology as anthropocentric.⁵⁹ In real sense, this does not imply human dominance as has been argued by some scholars. Rather, it suggests that human being see the rest of the creation as "the friend, the beneficiary, the users".⁶⁰

In this position, human beings look for ways to exploit the universe to their advantage. To manage this appropriately without disturbing the cosmic harmony, there have arisen over the years a number of professionals who serve as links between human being with their fellow human being, the Supreme Being, the divinities, the ancestors and spirits.⁶¹ These specialists are thus found in every society and in each locality. These religious leaders are both men and women. They are God-fearing individuals who are blessed with talents and skills to decipher the mysteries surrounding mankind. In turn, they render their services to people for a modest fee,

⁵⁹ Mbiti, 1975, 60

⁶⁰ Allies, 1993, See also Mbiti, 1975

⁶¹ Mbiti, 1975, 150

normally regulated by the community to avoid exploitation. These specialists are classified in various categories⁶² as explained below.

Herbalists

Herbalists are individuals who mainly use herbs to treat their patients. Herbalists are categorized according to the kind of knowledge, skills, and methods they use to treat patients. They are basically of two levels, first, are those who concentrate on physical common diseases such as stomach upsets, malaria, migraines, asthma, arthritis, wounds and skin ulcers among others. The second level is those who treat more complicated diseases and they specialized in surgery, bone fractures, mental illnesses, divinations and ritual performance.

The herbal formulations are generally derived from roots, barks, leaves and fruits from trees and plants; bones, excreta, oils, skins, fur, features, fish oils, animal products and other ingredients suitable for yielding medicinal extracts. These are processed into powder, liquids or oils ready for use. The herbalist can thus be likened to the pharmacist since they do not only heal but also prepare and dispense medicine in the community.

The bone setting specialists, apart from using herbal jellies, adjust sprained and fractured bones with dexterity comparable to any surgical operation today. According to K.Thairu in *The African Civilisation* (1995): "... there were the surgeons. These were specialized in the treatment of fractures and in suturing wounds and even in some cases in performing real operations"⁶². Thairu illustrated further how traditional healers in Uganda demonstrated their surgical skills. He notes:

The best example of traditional surgery perhaps hails from Western Uganda ... It was recorded in 1884 that African

⁶² Adam K. arap Chepkwony, "The Environment in an Africa Spirituality" in *Science, Religion and Society: An Encyclopedia of History, Culture, and Controversy*, Vol. 2, Edited by Arri Eisen and Gary Laderman. (New York and London: M.E Sharpe Publisher, 2006), 643

surgeons from this region used to perform caesarean sections- using sharp knives which were first heated till red hot and then dipped in beer ...Another surgical procedure... was the craniotomy, i.e. opening the brain case to relieve pressure which cause headaches in the brain tumors etc. was practiced in Gusii in Kenya.⁶³

Apart from treating their patients, these specialists also serve as counsellors to their patients and the members of the affected families.

Diviners

The role of diviners is to reveal the difficult and unique causes of illness that the herbalists fail to discern. At times some diviners double up their specialty to serve as herbalist. The majority however work with the patients in discovering the hidden causes of their suffering. They serve as consultants to the herbalists if initial treatment fails. As such, it is assumed that there is hidden reason that causes disease, which could only be revealed by a diviner. It is also important to note that apart from curative medicine, diviners as well as the herbalists also provide preventive medicine. It is therefore not uncommon for patients to see a diviner for protection from misfortune. Similarly a person undertaking a long journey, or a leader during election period may want a remedy that will provide safety on their trip and wisdom and clarity in making important decisions respectively. The diviners pray to the ancestors or the Supreme Being to reveal to them the reason why one continue to be unwell, the required medication, or the healer who could ably assist the patient. Diviners sometimes seek the cause of illness of their patients through mediums who communicates directly with the spiritual world. If an illness is caused by inappropriate behaviour on

⁶³ K. Thairu, 1995 as quoted in Tessema, S.S. "Tradition Medicine: Past Growth and Future Development in East Africa" East Africa Medical Journal 57, No. 1 (January 1980), 51-52.

the part of the patient, a remedy or cure for the illness can only come through spiritual intervention. While herbal healer uses plants to treat diseases, a diviner seeks input from the spiritual world to understand the cause of the illness and prescribe a cure. Diviners use diverse tools to diagnose their patient's problems. Some use items such as shoes, stones, bones, seeds, beads, pebbles while others use gourds, drums, rattles, boards and books to cast lots and divine for their clients.

Mediums

Mediums who are mostly women work hand in hand with a diviner and acts as the mouthpiece of the spirits. As such a medium goes into trace to allow the spirits to speak through them. Sometimes, a medium require the assistance of ritual drumming, dancing and singing to become possessed in order to communicate with the spirit world. In such circumstances, the diviner in charge of the medium does interpret the message, for usually even the medium herself may not know or remember what transpired during the process. According to Mbiti, the medium can reveal:

Where to find lost things, who may have bewitched the sick, what type of ritual and medicine are necessary for the cure of people's troubles, whether an intended journey will be a success or not, which of the living dead may have a request to make and what kind, and many other things.⁶⁴

Seers

Seers are the equivalent of Biblical prophets. African seers have natural or God-given powers to "see" the future. They assist their communities by warning them of impending calamities and events. Since the science of medicine in Africa also involve protective medicine, it is important that the medicine person knows

⁶⁴ Mbiti, 1975, 157

the impending danger. An impending epidemic for example, will help the medicine person to prepare people in advance from panic and sickness. In that way, the medicine person does protect, prepare and warn their clients in advance. The divines, mediums and the seers play the role of counselors, psychiatrist and fortune revealers in the community.

Ritual Elders

Ritual elders are those men and women who perform healing rituals for individuals or for the entire community. Among them are priests, rain-callers and circumcisers. These are men and women who are well versed in all matters pertaining to their communities. These encompass knowledge in oral history, myths, beliefs, customs, taboos and religious practices in general. Every village therefore has such ritual healers. Ritual practices are thus an indispensable aspect of African healing.

Ritual practices themselves serve as remedies for certain illnesses and in certain cases, medicines are accompanied by rituals for the herbs to be potent. Rituals are also effective in treating certain diseases that are brought about by unsettled matters in one's life – the unfinished business. Ritual practices include prayers, sacrifices, offerings, or all a combination of some or all of these. Rituals are therefore necessary because there are certain ailments that cannot be resolved by herbs alone. Malidoma Patrice Some has summarized the importance of rituals thus:

As much as our body requires food for nourishment, our souls and spirits require rituals to stay whole. It is as if without the spirit being nourished in us, the body pays for the consequences. The food of psyche is the symbol, and it is through ritual that our spirit is fed.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Malidoma Patrice Some, *The Healing Wisdom of Africa*. (London: Thorsons, 1999), 160

This African wisdom of healing through rituals enable one to find new balance between the Supreme Being, community, environment and the self. It is this balance and harmony with the rest of creation that restores, retains and replenishes good health.

Priesthood

Priesthood is a profession held by both men and women in African religion. The most important functions of priests is to officiate at religious ceremonies and rituals. Religious ceremonies and rituals are very important to maintain religious and cultural traditions. Ritual ceremonies are held to celebrate the rite of passage thus; birth, initiation, marriage, elderhood and death. Rituals are also done during planting and harvest seasons, purification ceremonies and during anointment. Priests, who officiate at these rituals and ceremonies, play a central role in promoting a strong and united community since rituals help to reinforce values and appropriate behaviour within the community.

In addition to officiating at special ceremonies, priests are expected to interpret will of the Supreme Being to the people, pray and advise them in time of trouble. Priests are also expected to serve as moral role models in the community. Priests and their spouses must maintain a character that is beyond reproach.⁶⁶

Rain-makers/ callers

Rainmakers are special priests who are responsible for finding out the cause of drought. They are further expected to devise a remedy to the problem that has caused the drought. Rainmakers communicate with ancestral spirits to find the cause of the drought. When the cause and the remedy are arrived at, the priest presides over the reconciliation ceremony between the Supreme Being and the community. The remedy usually involves a ritual of purification

⁶⁶ M. J. Field, *Religion and Medicine of the Ga People*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939), 8

for the inappropriate behaviour that is believed to have caused the drought. More often than not, the rains fall on the same day or shortly thereafter.

Traditional Circumcisers And Midwives

Traditional circumcisers, who fall in the category of experts, combine their surgical knowledge with the ability to treat wounds. Similarly, midwives are experts whose knowledge extended to treating problems of fertility, pregnancy, childbirth, female and childhood diseases. In all the above cases, prayers always accompany treatments and operations. In all of these cases, counseling is an essential component of treatment. The circumcisers as well as the midwives take a lot of time with their patients and reassure them of good health and also ensure they are provided with the right food and the right condition to heal.

African culture and worldview

All the above essential components of an African worldview make up the African culture as we know it today. The main reason why people or religions are not alike can be attributed to the influence of culture. The diverse cultures of the world arise from a group's perception of the universe and the relationship of that world with humans and other living things. It is this perception that we have referred to here as a worldview. It is the world-views of different peoples and religions that have given birth to different cultures and a variety of ways of life styles and what they consider to be valuable. Ninian Smart affirms this when he writes:

Thus, the modern study of religion helps to illuminate world views, both traditional and secular, which are the engines of social and moral continuity and change, and therefore it explores beliefs and teaching, and tries to understand what exists inside the heads of people. What people believe is an

important aspect of reality whether or not what they believe is true.⁶⁷

A worldview is thus the core of culture, the ultimate cultural coding⁶⁸ and the source of cultural knowledge. The Africa worldview has created a culture that has served the African peoples from time immemorial. The African culture is unique to the African people albeit with some difference from one community to the other.

One common element of an Africa culture is the way they understand healing. The healing wisdom of the Africans is based on the understanding that the universe and all that is in it are dependent on each other. Human beings therefore depend on the rest of creation to maintain, replenish and restore their health.

⁶⁷ Ninian Smart, *Worldviews: Cross-cultural Explorations of human beliefs*. (New York: Charles Scribner's sons, 1983), 1

⁶⁸ Aylward Shorter, *African Culture: An Overview*, (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1998), 22-28.



CHAPTER FOUR

The Healing Power of African Spirituality

Human Relationship to the Universe

In this section, we explore how human beings relate to the rest of the universe. As already noted, Africans believe in a Supreme Being who created and controls the entire universe and all that is in it. This same Being is the source of cosmic harmony in the entire creation, that is, the orderly arrangements of day and nights, the seasons, the planets, the stars and the rhythm of life. All things in the universe are therefore intimately related and connected to the Supreme Being and to each other. All this is the responsibility of the Supreme Being alone.

Africans perceive the earth as a garden where human beings, spirits and all the living creatures dwell. In this garden God expects human beings and the rest of the creation to co-exist in harmony. For a peaceful co-existence of all creatures is necessary for the survival of life in the universe. In his part, God continues to nurture his creation in a benevolent manner. The Supreme Being thus expects human beings to live in the world in harmony with the rest of the creation. Ikenga-Metuh explained the importance of this relationship thus:

The goal of interaction of beings in African world-views is the maintenance of the integration and balance of the beings in it (the world). Harmonious interaction of beings leads to the mutual strengthening of the beings involved, and enhances the growth of life. A pernicious influence from one being weakens other beings and threatens the harmony and integration of the whole.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Godfrey Igwebuike Onah, "The Meaning of Peace in African Traditional Religion and Culture" Pontific Urban University, Rome in <http://afrikaworld.net/afrel/goddionah.htm>

This harmonious relationship is evident among the Shona people of Zimbabwe. *Mwari* (Supreme Being) is traditionally conceived as an ecological deity, the provider of life-giving rain and fertility in creation. *Mwari* thus expects humans, both living and the dead, other creatures, inanimate objects and the environment as a whole to exist in harmony. The interface of this reality among the Shona people is the personification of trees, animals, birds, water and land among others by giving them anthropomorphic characters. It is this understanding of kinship with other creatures that enforces human respect and responsibility for the care of the earth.

To maintain a healthy relationship with the creation, human beings are supposed to seek harmony on a cosmic scale. This can be achieved when human beings act righteously by following the acceptable moral values that ensure harmony between the Supreme Being and his creation. In the words of Rweyemanu,

...the African soul has perceived the moral obligation to collaborate with the ordered harmony in creation so as to preserve that equilibrium which visible and invisible forces must maintain. It is from the Supreme Being, the divine creator and author of order and harmony. It is therefore a sinful serious transgression to attempt to break or interrupt the free, harmonious and orderly functioning of the god-given peace which guarantees life, growth, survival in creation.⁷⁰

Africans therefore believe that any disorder in the universe causes disunity with the Supreme Being. Among the Kipsigis of Kenya, for example, this belief is based on the concept of *Ngogisto*. *Ngogisto* is the perception that The Supreme Being (*Asis*) is the ultimate upholder of tribal sanctity and the final arbiter of justice. *Asis* therefore sees all evildoers and punishes them regardless of

⁷⁰ Robert Rweyemanu, "Religion and Peace (An Experience with African Traditions)", *Studio Missionalia*, 38 (1989), as quoted in Godfrey Igwebiuke Onah, "The Meaning of Peace in African Traditional Religion and Culture" Pontific Urban University, Rome in <http://afrikaworld.net/afrel/goddionah.htm>, 5

whether there was any litigation against them or not. The idea suggests that the universe is a rigidly structured and ordered system such that any disruption of its normal function is followed by a counter reaction.⁷¹ Whoever abuses the harmonious relationship that exists between the Supreme Being and his creation is due for punishment for creating an imbalance of the proper state of equilibrium. As Taylor rightly puts it:

A man's well being consists... in keeping in harmony with cosmic totality. When things go well with him he knows he is at peace and of a piece with the scheme of things and there can be no greater good than that. If things go wrong then somewhere he has fallen out of step... The whole system of divination exists to help him discover the point at which the harmony has been broken and how it may be.⁷²

This idea of cosmic harmony is a widely acknowledged concept among all African communities. Among the Bambuti of Congo, harmony in a cosmic scale within the band is of capital importance and it is actually the basis of their ethics. If a man beats his wife among the Bambuti, this causes disharmony not only between the wife and the husband, but his family community and the cosmos in general. Cosmic harmony is therefore enhanced through proper relationships. The ethical relationships concern the behaviour of the individual or community towards Supreme Being, ancestors, fellow human beings, creatures, the environment and the spirits. Each of these relationships has a direct effect towards the Supreme Being. Bad relationships bring disharmony or ill health, while good ones bring harmony and prosperity. In other words, the African code of ethics that governs these relationships controls not only the individual and the community, but also the cosmos and its

⁷¹ Adam K. arap Chepkwony, "African Religion in the Study of Comparative Religion: A Case Study of Kipsigis Religious Practices" D. Phil Dissertation, Moi University, 1997

⁷² J.V Taylor, *The Primal Vision*, (London: S.C. M Press, 1963), 67 as quoted in Onah, 7

creator. Onah rightly observes that:

If a person breaks either the spiritual or the cosmic harmony, the lack of peace that ensues reverts on the entire community. Sometimes individual reparations in terms of sacrifices are not enough to restore sense of the social dimension of immoral conduct.⁷³

In summary, the alliance between Supreme Being and humans depends on whether humans maintain good relationship with fellow humans, fauna, flora and the spirits. The key idea behind environmental sustainability is to maintain harmony with Supreme Being and the rest of his creation. It is only when harmony exists between the Supreme Being and his creation that good health is enjoyed by the individual and the community at large. Onah summarizes this idea thus:

The goal of all moral conduct is therefore the fullness of life. Human life is considered full in Africa when it is marked by spiritual, material, and social blessings; when the network of relations with the spiritual, human and material beings is as it should be.⁷⁴

The Healing Power of Nature

The reason why it is important to have proper relationship with the entire universe is because this contributes to the well being of human being and all the created things in the universe. The African people's religiosity sees the natural world as an integral part of a community. The way human beings relate to the natural world and its natural laws determines the levels of their living standards. Hence the manner in which humans treats the mountains, forests, rivers, animals, minerals and their resources are of paramount

⁷³ Ibid.,

⁷⁴ Ibid., 5

importance. For example, it is the responsibility of the Chagonda clan among the Shona of Zimbabwe to protect Mount Rasa and its environs. Mount Rasa is perceived as the source of rain, agricultural produce, herbs, habitant of animals and the spirits.

According to Daneel in his *African Earth Keepers*,⁷⁵ the Chagonda clan pleases the Supreme Being *Mwari* and their ancestors by protecting the vegetation and animal life on the slopes of Mount Rasa, which is their sanctuary. In this way, they contribute to the equilibrium between the living and the spirit world that is necessary for good rainy seasons.

Human beings are therefore expected to live in harmony with nature. The Acholi of Uganda also believes that human beings are expected to behave well towards nature. It is said that the late Alice Lakwena, the prophetess who led the Holy Spirit Movement Forces against the National Resistance Army of Yoweri Museveni in Uganda in 1986 was called upon by nature, that is, animals, forest and mountains to deliver the people of Uganda from the sins committed by human beings against nature. The Acholi thus recognize the power of nature and expect good behaviour from human beings towards nature to stabilize life and order. Holger Bert Hansen notes that:

In Acholi, the order of nature and moral order were thus not separate but formed a continuum, which made it possible to causally connect natural events with moral feelings. A catastrophe could be seen as punishment for infringing upon the natural or social order, and the end of a plague could be seen as forgiveness.⁷⁶

In practical times, the absence of respect for nature will bring about disharmony and ill health to the community. Take for example what Samson Gitau notes about the Maasai of Kenya. He observes

⁷⁵ Daneel, Marthinus L. *Africa Earth Keepers*. (Mary knoll, New York: Orbis Book, 2001).

⁷⁶ Holger Bert Hansen, *Religion and Politics in East Africa*, (Nairobi: E.A.E.P., 1995), 64-65.

that according to the Maasai, irregular natural happening like drought, epidemic, famine, locust invasion, and earthquakes is attributed to disobedience of the society as a whole. The implication here is that when human beings cause havoc on nature, in whatever manner, nature retaliates and causes stress on human beings.⁷⁷

The power of nature is also evident in the healing process. In his book, *The Healing Wisdom of Africa*, Malidoma Patrice Some has discussed at length the healing power of nature. According to him, nature is the foundation of healing and the storehouse of remedies for human ills. He explains how every tree, plant, hill, mountain, rock and each thing that was here before us emanates or vibrates a subtle energy that has healing power whether we know it or not.⁷⁸ The common aspects of nature that plays important role in human healing are found in fauna and flora.

The Healing Power of Fauna

Many African societies believe in distant relationship with other living creatures. This relationship is enhanced through the totemic system in which some clan have totems in the form of an insect, bird or an animal. A Gikuyu (Kenya) song, which exhorts people to rise up before dawn for work, for example, refers to the guinea fowl affectionately as “my dear brother”.⁷⁹ Similarly, the Kalenjin of Kenya refer to their clan totem which are normally animals as manyun which means “my relative”.⁸⁰

The concept of totems provides a fundamental unity between humans' relations with the animal world. Due to this, Africans do not kill their totemic animal unless it becomes a threat to humans, domestic animals, or when needed for food. In this way, indiscriminate destruction of animals is restrained, and the animals are treated with kindness and their right of existence respected.

⁷⁷ Samson K Gitau, *The Environmental Crisis*. (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2000), 64

⁷⁸ Some, 1999, 38

⁷⁹ Hannah Kinoti, “Theology of Environment: Towards the Integrity of Creation_ Some Aspects of the African Perspective” A paper presented at Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians National Conference at Brackenhurst, Limuru, Kenya, 19 – 21, August 1993, 8

⁸⁰ arap Chepkwony 1997, 208

Indeed, animals that take refuge near homes or inside a house while being chased and animals on gestation are protected no matter how dangerous they are.⁸¹ Daneel has illustrated how the Rufura tribe of Zimbabwe has elaborate restriction of hunting rules to protect and preserve animals. The rules include the prohibition of hunting during winter, killing of young animals, females in foal, a quota system for individual hunters, restriction of hunting for commercial reasons and protection of certain birds and animals on account of being sacred.⁸²

It is interesting to note that the late Alice Lakwena of the Holy Spirit Movement Forces is said to have used animals as her allies against the NRA soldiers. In particular, snakes and bees were significant. According to Hansen in *Religion and Politics in East Africa*, the bees participated in the fights by driving the enemies away. They were also responsible for preserving the infrastructure of the country besides giving honey that was used as medicine to heal wounds. The snakes on the other hand watched over the Holy Spirit soldiers as well as to flush out the enemies in the forest. Whenever the soldiers encountered a snake in the forest, they said, "You are my fellow soldiers. Give me respect".⁸³

Besides these relationships, human being use fauna for food, medicine, sacrifice during healing rituals, clothing among other things. This African wisdom of kinship relationships with fauna enables one to find a new balance between the Supreme Being, community, environment and the self.

The Healing Power of Flora

Like the fauna, Africans have a special relationship with the flora. The affinity between human life and nature is considered to be an organic relationship, not a mechanical one. What transpires in the

⁸¹ arap Chepkwony, 1997, 210

⁸² Marthinus L. Danee, *African Earth Keepers*, MaryKnoll, NewYork: Orbis Books, 2001, 99

⁸³ Heike Behrend, "The Holy Spirit Movement & the forces of Nature in the North Of Uganda 1985 - 1987" in *Religion and Politics in East Africa*, Holger Bert Hansen and Michael Twaddle (eds.), (Nairobi: EAEP, 1995), 65.

natural world corresponds to the activities in the world of human affairs, and in the same way, when human beings do things, nature likewise responds accordingly. In other words, flora may exhibit stress because of human acts like deforestation, wars, destruction of human life, pollution of environment among others.

The Kipsigis community (Kenya) for example realizes that their social cohesion and harmony within the cosmos is only definable in terms of their total environment. Since the society is dependent upon arable and pastoral production, as well as harvesting wild flora, sustainability of the production is essential. Land and vegetation is perceived as the source of life. The entire ecosystem is purposeful and like totemic animals, some clans have sacred plants that they protect. The forest and bushy areas are used as sacred sanctuary where *Kapkoros*, the sacred shrine is built. The groves and valleys are homes to the spirits, medicinal herbs, sacred plants and also serve as water catchment sites. No one is allowed to cut down sacred trees, medicinal plants and trees near homesteads, springs and along rivers.

Similarly, among the Shona of Zimbabwe, individuals identify with specific trees as their kin. The individuals became the trees they are related to by adopting the character traits that are symbolized in the tree of their choice. In this way human beings are expected to observe all the rules that preserve and sustain the environment in order to maintain good health. Apart from fauna and flora, human beings also constitute the environment.

The Healing Power of Community

Africans believe that human beings are social creatures and that they are at their best when they belong to a community. The Human person can thus only exist by belonging both to a viable community as well as the ancestral community. Conversely, each individual value themselves in terms of the community they belong

to. J. S. Mbiti puts this concept well when he says that Africans see their existence because of others existence. The maxim “I am because we are, and since we are therefore I am” makes the point clear. In South Africa the same concept is expressed in the aphorism *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* which means, a person only become human through human community.⁸⁴

The implication of this is that a human being cannot exist alone. The absence of human companion as part of the environment can thus cause sickness and even death. Malidoma Patrice Some suggests that the reasons behind human need for another human is because humans crave for full realization of their innate gifts and to have these gifts approved, acknowledged and confirmed. He writes:

...our inner authority needs the fuel of external recognition to inspire us to fulfill our life's purpose, and until this happens, we wait in paralysis for the redemptive social response that rescues us from the dungeon of anonymity.⁸⁵

Healthy human relationships are thus expected to begin from the family level. Husband and wife must respect one another. The Bambuti of Congo for example believe that friction and hostility within the band, especially between the husband and wife are an offence against the forest, against God who loves peace. On the other hand, mutual respect and performance of communal duties by a couple attracts blessings from God and especially the gift of procreation. Procreation takes place when there is a balance and harmony in human acts. Children are likewise expected to respect and obey the elders and care for their parents contrary to which they may suffer a curse. When human-to-human relations are strained, then the environment also becomes strained. This can result in lack of procreation, poverty, disease and epidemic, among others.

⁸⁴ Allies, 2007, 29

⁸⁵ Some 1995, 27

According to arap Chepkwony, the Kalenjin of Kenya are expected to be kind, hospitable and helpful to one another especially the poor, the disabled and strangers. The concern for others is expressed in the aphorism "Do not eat while a suffering person is watching" and "A stranger should not be turned away from a feast". While the former dictum exhorts people to always remember to help the poor, the latter teaches that strangers need to be shown hospitality. This is because all human beings are the children of the Supreme Being regardless of their state or disability. By assisting the weak, one reduces their pain and suffering and as a result, accumulates blessing to ones credit and to the community. In this way, the power of the community is evident and effective.⁸⁶

Africans also believe that ancestral and natural spirits constitute members of the community. They believe that the spirits of dead relatives have great influence upon the living members. The benevolent spirits control and sanction the moral standards of their living relatives and serve as the guardians of traditions. To do so successfully, the spirits maintain tight control on virtually every crisis in a family. Pestilence, sickness, and death can be attributed to unhappy spirits. By surrendering to intercede for their relatives and thus allow trouble, the spirits make known their will through a diviner who in turn may advice on corrective measures.

When proper and harmonious relationship between the living and the spirits is interrupted, trouble is inevitable. Problems are inevitable among those who fail to follow the accepted customs; who neglect and refuse to fulfill the wishes of the ancestral spirits at the end of their life, and those who ignored the spirits when they are still alive. When this happens, the spirits can ruin a person, his family and the clan if the situation is not rectified.

Given that spirits have great power and influence upon the living, precaution is taken to appease them. Harmony must be

⁸⁶ arap Chepkwony, 1997, 208

maintained with the spirits for they play a critical role in the social unity of African community by binding them to their traditions. By following the traditions, Africans create harmony with fellow human beings, fauna, flora and the spirits. In the next chapter, we shall see how this harmonious relationship is put into practice. We shall see how it is translated into ethical values that govern the lives of individuals and the communities alike .For it is breaking of the harmony and not following the accepted ethical values that bring about disturbances .It is such psychological disturbances. Is such psychological disturbances and conflicts that eventually leads one to counseling.



CHAPTER FIVE

Healing and Cosmic Harmony

Introduction

In chapter three we noted that the African worldview is deeply religious. We also learnt that the central elements of an African worldview consist of the belief in the Supreme Being, spiritual beings, human beings, animate and inanimate things.

It was also articulated that in an African worldview, the characteristics are in such a way that they are integrated, interconnected and mutually dependent on each other. In this way, the elements of the universe are expected to co-exist in harmony. It was indicated that it is only when harmony exist between the Supreme Being and the rest of creation that stability and the well-being of the creation is guaranteed. In this scenario, human beings are at the centre, maintaining unbroken relationships with the Supreme Being who is the source of harmony, an intimate relationship with fellow human beings, spiritual being and the environment.

The one important aspect of an African worldview that comes out very strongly is the integration, interconnectedness and mutual dependence of all things in the universe on each other. In this way, the elements of the universe are expected to co-exist in harmony. In describing the fifteen cultural themes that constitute an African worldview, Kirwen demonstrates the oneness and the wholeness of an African cultural knowledge and the living reality in contemporary African life. He observes:

These fifteen cultural themes are on-line in one's brain in a subconscious manner, just like the grammar of a spoken language - one accesses them on demand giving meaning to one's daily activities. Furthermore, they are all inter-related, like

the instruments in a fifteen piece band; each one contributes to the whole and only predominates when needed.⁸⁷

This stability and the well-being of the creation is guaranteed only when harmony exists between the Supreme Being and the rest of creation. In this scenario, human beings are at the centre, maintaining unbroken relationships with the Supreme Being who is the source of harmony, an intimate relationship with fellow human beings, spiritual beings and the environment.

A strong sense of communal living has thus developed around the African world-view. Community is thus the centre of gravity in Africa. In these communal societies, the highest value of life lies in the interpersonal relations between human beings as depicted in rather popular quotation by Mbiti:

Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say, 'I am because we are; and since we are, I am'.⁸⁸

Philosophies that promote community counseling

The reality of inter-dependence as suggested by Mbiti above, is true throughout the African Continent albeit with minor differences. This Africa's spiritual reality is the embodiment of the ethical values that have sustained Africans from time immemorial. Due to the significance attached to the ethical values in Africa, some communities have found different ways to summarize the ethical ideas and values embedded in their spiritual world-view. In the following section, we shall examine three philosophies – basis for ethical values in which the people of African, have summarized their world-views for pragmatic purposes. The philosophies we shall

⁸⁷ Michael Kirwen, "African cultures: Structures and Beliefs" quoted in Mary N. Getui et.al eds., *Spirituality for Another Possible World*, (Nairobi: Twaweza Communication Ltd., 2008), 178.

⁸⁸ Mbiti 1969: 108; Also Mbiti 1975: 108-109).

consider are: *Ubuntu* as understood and practiced by Bantu group in from South Africa, the *Undugu* by communities in East Africa and the *Ntu* philosophy practiced by Bantu communities in Central Africa.

The Concept 'Ubuntu'

The *Ubuntu* concept comes from the Zulu people of South Africa. The term *Ubuntu* means "humanity", "humanness" or "humaneness". The idea of *Ubuntu* is derived from the Zulu aphorism, *umuntu, ngumuntu ngabantu* which is translated as "a person is a person through other persons".⁸⁹ This African traditional maxim has deep religious meanings imbued with ethical implications. According to Louw, "it not only describes human being as 'being with others', but also prescribes how we should relate to others, i.e. what 'being-with others' should be all about".⁹⁰

Ubuntu is thus the acceptance of the need for mutual recognition or reciprocal regard towards others. The importance of this concept is seen from the fact that the government of South Africa has recognized it officially. In the South Africa government white paper on social Welfare of 1997, *Ubuntu* was defined as:

The principle of caring for each other's well-being.... and a spirit of mutual support. ...Each individual's humanity is ideally expressed through his or her relationship with others and theirs in turn through a recognition of the individual's humanity. *Ubuntu* means that people are people through other people. It also acknowledges both the rights and the responsibilities of every citizen in promoting individual and societal well being.⁹¹

Louw has further shown how this concept carries deeper meaning embedded in an African worldview. He explains how a

⁸⁹ Dirk J. Louw, "Ubuntu and the Challenges of Multiculturalism in post-apartheid South Africa," *Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. No. 1-2, (2001), 1. Also see <http://guest-journal.net/2001.htm>

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid. Also see <http://www.gov.za/whitepaper/index.html>.

person becomes a person through others is connected with the spiritual world-view in which human beings are expected to live in harmony with the supreme Being, the ancestors and the environment in general. He observes:

The person one is to become “through other persons” is ultimately, an ancestor. And, by the same token, these “other persons” include ancestors. Ancestors are extended family. Dying is an ultimate homecoming. Not only the living must therefore share with and care for each other, but the living and the dead depend on each other.⁹²

The importance of this practice is so crucial that to be regarded as a “person”, one must go through a process. In Louw's own words, “becoming a “person through other persons” involves going through various community prescribed stages and being involved in certain ceremonies and initiation rituals”.⁹³ The idea of *Ubuntu* is therefore central to South African communities. In deed the term *Ubuntu* has its equivalent as *botho* among the Sotho, *(h)unhu* among the Shona, *bunhu* among the Tsonga and *vhutu* among the Venda.⁹⁴

The Concept of ‘Undugu’

In East Africa, the Swahili word *Undugu* portrays the oneness of all human beings. The word *ndugu* means blood sister or brother whereas *Undugu* describes an African richness of sisterhood and brotherhood that form a community of solidarity. Underlining the word *undugu* is another term, *utu* which means humanity. What propels one to be in solidarity with his/her fellow human being (*undugu*) is *utu* (humanity). The recognition that human beings are creatures of one creator compels Africans to respect and treat others as equals in a brotherly and sisterly manner.

⁹² Ibid., 3

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Louw, 1

Another way of understanding this concept is the commonly used Mbiti's maxim "I am because we are and since we are therefore I am". The Kiswahili saying "*Mtu ni Watu*" which means "a person is people," express the same idea. The one example of how *undugu* has been put into practice is the Late Mwalimu Nyerere's philosophy of *Ujamaa*. Laurenti Magesa explains this, thus: "Nyerere in Tanzania promoted the unity of the 140 ethnic groups of Tanzania by preaching *Ujamaa*, that is, relate to all as if they were a member of your lineal family."⁹⁵

Like *Ubuntu*, the message here is much deeper than simply saying that people need one another or that people are like the birds of the same feather. The oneness insinuated here goes beyond human being and instead describes the kind of harmony that is expected in an African world-view in its entirety. *Ubuntu* Philosophy is supported by scientific studies that have shown that humans are hard-wired to connect to each other. In his recent best-selling book, *The Great Turning*, David C. Korten notes:

The commission's report, based on scientific studies of human brain, concludes that we humans are physiologically "wired" to form "close attachments to other people, beginning with our mothers, fathers, and extended family, and then moving out to the broader community"⁹⁶

Similarly, Diarmuid O'Murchu laments how the contemporary society has lost its ability to relate wholistically. He observes that this trend has denied the western world a sense of human, planetary and global community. He writes:

The search for community is not merely a pursuit of security and intimacy to obviate our loneliness in an anonymous and

⁹⁵ Magesa, 2008, 177

⁹⁶ David C. Korten, *The Great Turning: From Empire to Earth Community*, (Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, 2006), 282

impersonal world. It is much more than that. It is the expression – however haphazardly and imperfectly made – of a yearning from deep within the created order itself, a groaning arising from the heart of creation, ... Seeking reciprocity and mutuality. The very fabric of creation and the very nature of God sing in unison a song of love.⁹⁷

This is the essence of *Undugu*, to acknowledge the strength and the weakness of the other, to forgive, to show compassion, to help and to sacrifice for others. The *Undugu* as well as the *Ubuntu* philosophies go beyond human boundaries and embraces the entire creation. African communities extend this relationship to animals, the environment and the earth, commonly referred to and admired as 'mother earth'.

The Concept of *Ntu*

Ntu is a root word from Central Africa among the Bantu speaking communities. To comprehend the concept behind *ntu*, we turn to the Kinyarwanda language from which *ntu* is derived. Alexis Kagame's studies of the Kinyarwanda language is indispensable here and the only road map to understanding, not only the concept of *ntu*, but the Bantu (African) worldview.

In his studies of the philosophy of Abantu people of Rwanda, Kagame noted that Kinyarwanda,⁹⁸ like all Bantu languages is grouped in certain classifications. According to his study, there are such four main linguistic classifications that differentiate human beings, things, place and time and modality. In other words, according to Bantu language, all beings, all essence, in whatever form is conceived under one of these four categories.

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. <i>Muntu</i> = human beings | = man, women, ancestors |
| 2. <i>Kintu</i> = things | = dogs, stones, rivers |

⁹⁷ Diarmuid O'Murchu, *Quantum Theology*, (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2004), 96.

⁹⁸ Janheinz Jahn, *Muntu: African Culture and Western World*, (New York: Grove Press, 1961), 99

3. *Hantu* = Place and time = East and yesterday,
 4. *Kuntu* = Modality = beauty and laughter.⁹⁹

A close look at the four categories, *Muntu*, *Kintu*, *Hantu* and *Kuntu* indicate that *Ntu* is common to all categories. Kagame referred to *Ntu* here as “determinative”. The significance of the “determinative” here is that without it, the stem of the word loses its meaning completely. In other words, *Mu*, *Ki*, *Ha* and *Ku* do not mean anything at all. On the other hand, when the stems are removed, what remains is “*ntu*” for all the categories.¹⁰⁰

The immediate conclusion and implication here is that all the four categories, which encompass everything conceivable, must belong together. Alternatively we can also say that there must be something that connects human beings; plants, animals, objects, stars; time, space; and beauty and laughter together. This thing, *ntu*, which holds everything together, has been understood as a force. In other words, “man is a force, all things are forces, place and time are forces and the 'modalities are forces’”.¹⁰¹

Accordingly, *Ntu* is the universal force, a force that only occurs in its manifestation of *Muntu*, *Kintu*, *Hantu* and *Kuntu*. According to Jahn:

NTU is the universal force as such, which, however, never occurs apart from its manifestations: *Muntu*, *Kintu*, *Hantu* and *Kuntu*. *Ntu* is being itself, the cosmic universal force, which only modern, rationalizing thought can abstract from its manifestation. *NTU* is that force in which Being and beings coalesce.... *NTU* is the point from which creation flows' that klee was speaking : 'I am seeking a far off point from which creation flows, where I suspect there is a formula for man, beast, plants, earth, fire, water, air and circling forces at once.... *Ntu*

⁹⁹ Ibid, 100

¹⁰⁰ Ibid 101

¹⁰¹ Ibid.,100

is what *Muntu*, *Kintu*, *Hantu*, and *Kuntu* all equally are. Force and matter are not being united in this conception; on the contrary, they have never been apart.¹⁰²

Incidentally, the concept of *NTU* has been developed into an Africentric psychotherapy known as *NTU* Psychotherapy. *Ntu* psychotherapy which originated and practiced today by the African American psychologists in USA is based on the African worldview we have discussed. The basic principles of *NTU* psychotherapy are harmony, balance, interconnectedness, awareness, effective epistemology and authenticity. *NTU* explains Phillips,

...is the basic elements which unifies the universe and, as such, it is the essence of life and living. *NTU* is the force in which Being and beings coalesce, and, insofar as human beings are concerned, *NTU* is both immanent and transcendent".¹⁰³

And in describing *NTU* psychotherapy, Phillips shows that "*NTU* psychotherapy is both holistic and spiritually based and aims to assist people and systems to become authentic and balanced within a shared energy and essence that is in alignment with natural order".¹⁰⁴

It is not difficult to see how the concept of *Ntu* is related to or the same as the cosmic harmony discussed at the beginning of this chapter. At the same time, it is easy to see the idea of *Ubuntu* coming out clearly here, which is "a person is a person through other persons". That is, if the force that is in *Muntu* is also present in *Kintu*, *Hantu* and *Kuntu*, then it can indeed be said that a person is a person through other persons, other living things as well as non-living things. Similarly, the idea of *Undugu* suggests that all creatures are

¹⁰² Ibid., 101

¹⁰³ Frederick B. Phillips, "NTU Psychotherapy: Principles and Processes" in Daudi Ajani Ya Azibo, ed., *African Psychology in Historical Perspective & Related commentary*, (Asmara, Eritrea: African World Press, Inc., 1996), 96.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid

related to each other. This explains why some African communities refer to some animals, birds, insects and objects as their relatives.

The concepts of *Ubuntu*, *Undugu*, and *Ntu* clearly demonstrate how human being are expected to relate to one another, the spiritual beings and to the surrounding. It is expected that if individuals and communities follow these rules and expectations, and thus live in perfect harmony, life would be perfect and no one will suffer. However, as experience has taught us, it is not always true that humans can avoid suffering all together. People are constantly confronted with all kinds of diseases, misfortunes and psychological disturbances.

What then are the causes of these disturbances and what should one or the communities do to eliminate or at least minimize these problems? In the following sections, we shall examine the theory behind the causes of diseases from an African perspective. We shall then explore how the individual and the community are expected to do in order to maintain the cosmic harmony as a way to avoid disturbances.

Theory of the causes of diseases, misfortunes and disturbances

Various African scholars have explained the theory of the causes of diseases, misfortunes and disturbances as understood in Africa. The African people believe that all problems have an origin or cause. We shall present three theories by De Jong, F. E. Clement and De Waal Malefijt.

According to De Jong, there are three fundamental ideas underlining the African attitude and behaviour concerning the causes of diseases as follows: first, that all things, which exist, and all things which come into existence or which happen, have a cause. That the cause possesses more power than the effect and thus possesses greater rights or privileges. Cause, is therefore seen to be superior.

Second, that all occurrences that affect human being, like birth, puberty, marriage, human fertility, crop growth, rain or drought, sickness and death are intentionally caused. The question concerning causality among Africans is: Who did it? The “who” here refers to either the Supreme Being or to a human being. The logic in this belief is that nothing comes into existence arbitrarily. Further, that there are neither obscure, irrational or by chance occurrences.

Third, that the cause of any occurrences can be ascertained in various ways. These ways include: divinations, memory, reason and empirical judgment or hearsay. It may also be a combination of two or more of the above methods.¹⁰⁵

F. E Clement theory of the causation of disease is in terms of the loss of substance from the body or the introduction of harmful substance into the body. Accordingly:

A disease is considered to be the result of loss of vital substance from the body (soul loss); of the introduction of a foreign and harmful substance into the body (spirit intrusion or possession); violation of taboo; witchcraft. (However, both soul loss and the introduction of a foreign substance into the body are caused by witchcraft and therefore need not be treated separately).¹⁰⁶

De Waal Malefijt theory of causation of disease is simple and straightforward. His theory has been summarized as; “Disease is caused by irate supernatural forces, by other human beings, or by the behaviour of an individual or his family”.¹⁰⁷ These three theories are representative of all other explanation of ill health in the Africa. These theories shall guide us in understanding the causes of disturbances as discussed below.

¹⁰⁵ Joop T.V. M. De Jong, *A Descent into African Psychiatry*, (Amsterdam: Royal tropical Institute, 1987), 28-29

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 28

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

In this section we shall deal with the “Who” who causes disturbances. The theory behind the causes of disease as portrayed in the Africans culture is one aspect that has been rejected and ignored in the modern scientific world. The argument often presented is that these theories have no empirical evidence and indeed are unscientific and thus superstitious. This is based on the understanding that modern scientific truth is congruent to Truth. This assumption is a disturbing phenomenon that has hindered the development of other modes of discovering the truth. It has further obscured many African and other people's insights of interpreting and approaching truth.

Although it is true that some of the causation claim of disease in Africa might seem unempirical to many, it must be understood that African belief about how diseases are caused are borne out of many years of observation and experience. Two past incidents will suffice here to illustrate this fact. First, in the 1850's when Sir Richard Burton visited Ethiopia, he scorned at the Ethiopian claim that malaria was caused by mosquitoes. He dismissed the claim as “superstition”. A few years later, the modern medical science discovered that indeed it was Anopheles mosquito that carries plasmodium which causes malaria.¹⁰⁸

Second, in the 1960's, Dr. Raymond of McGill University discovered that the Yoruba of Nigeria for centuries used rauwolfia plant to treat schizophrenia. It was only then that the medical science discovered that indeed the extract from the plant had ingredients that cure schizophrenia.¹⁰⁹ In the same way, today many drugs have been discovered using insights from African herbs and other forms of medicine. It is also true, that some of the modern psychiatry such as the one based on Freudian theory among others have not been empirically verified.

¹⁰⁸ Ian Ritchie, “African Theology and Social Change: An Anthropological Approach, PhD. Dissertation, McGill university, 1993, 5

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.,6

There is therefore need to be open, and more so in the area of medicine, that there are other ways, some of which are perceived as non-scientific. Referring to Horton's comments, Ritchie observes that:

Horton acknowledges that the search for purity of motive is the chief feature that distinguish modern science from African traditional thought, but points out that this is also what has robbed the west of any sense of mystery about the humanity and about life, and has made western relatively un-poetic and flat.¹¹⁰

To comprehend African causation of diseases therefore, one must consider the African world-view. As explained earlier, African perceives life as a whole with no distinction between sacred and secular. In the same way, there exists an integral unity between spirituality, social and medicine in an African understanding. This perception is different from the western perception that looks at only one aspect of a person's life in isolation from the rest of the body.

And just because African perception is different does not mean that it is wrong or unworkable. I have in the last five years attended several international conferences that have pointed out the weakness of the modern scientific reductionism method and I predict that in the near future, these methods will loss the credibility it has held for many years. The open method that has been adopted by Africans to search for health and wholeness is more all-encompassing framework that should be considered in health promoting issues.

¹¹⁰ Ritchie 6, as quoted in Horton 1977:170.

The causes of disease and psychological disturbances

Who then causes diseases and psychological disturbances in an African understanding? It is often said that Africans believe that every sickness has a cause and that even when it is clear that malaria is spread by mosquito bite, the question still remains, "who sent the mosquito?" I think this point has been taken too far. Africans generally accept the fact that there are cases when the causes are acknowledged to be due to an accident, personal carelessness, animal/insect bites or bad luck. I discuss below the causes of diseases in five main categories for our purpose.

Personal Causation

Africans believe that individuals can cause harm to themselves and bring about ill health. A few common examples will suffice here. When someone over does something like reading or studying too much and they end up having mental problems or depression, it is concluded that thinking or reading too much has caused the problem. Similarly people who drink or smoke too much and end up falling sick with ulcers or cancer, again it is believed that they brought this illness to themselves by smoking or drinking too much. The blame here is put squarely on the person himself or herself and no one else is blamed for this sickness.

Individuals can also bring about disease upon themselves by breaking the taboos. When one breaks a taboo knowingly, he/she is responsible for it and must suffer the consequences. When I was growing up, there was a man in my village who was mad and walked naked. The story went around the village that as a young man, he secretly climbed a tree to watch women performing an initiation ceremony in the river. The women and the initiate were in the nude. As a result of this, he went crazy and went around nude the rest of his life.

Other occasions when someone can inflict sickness upon themselves is when they neglect to adhere to personal hygiene and thus expose themselves to cold, rain, heat or unhealthy environment. In the above and similar cases, the individual is said to be responsible for their fate. In such case, the individual is expected to lead in his own recovery by complying to the rules and taking care of self. The role of the family and community is to give such a person support and encouragement and love as they undergo treatment and to remind them not to repeat the mistake in the future.

Environmental Causation

Environment is believed to be one of the main causes of bad health. When for example there is an epidemic, it is said that it is the bad air that has brought the diseases. This also applies when there is an outbreak among animals or plants in a region.

Water is also seen as a major determining factor of health in humans and animals alike. People are therefore careful about drinking water when they are visiting far away from home. If someone becomes sick on return from a journey, the immediate response is that he/she did not “agree” with the water of that land. In the same way, when someone goes to hot climates or vice versa, and feels unwell thereafter, it is either the cold or hot climate that is blamed for the problem. Therefore, if it happens that someone falls sick every time he/she visits a certain place, it is argued that the person does not rhyme with the air or water or the heat of the place. I have also known some couples who after marriage fail to conceive. In such cases, the couple are advised to move to another environment. More often than not, such couples are blessed with children when they migrate as advised.

Social Causation

Human being brings about problems during their social interaction with each other. When conflict arise, human being cause harm to their fellow human beings, their animals and crops. Here we shall examine some causes of diseases that bring about psychological disturbances.

a) Witchcraft and Sorcery

The majority of physical and psychological disturbances in Africa are normally attributed to witchcraft as the major cause. Witchcraft is one aspect of belief that has been and is continuing to be condemned by Christians, elite and governments. At the same time, witchcraft more than any practice in African, is misunderstood and misinterpreted by practically everybody. It is also a practice that is debated by all types of people in Africa and outside in regularly. It is therefore a difficult issue that cannot be wished away easily. As Magesa rightly observes:

Witchcraft is not an illusion, no less than evil is an illusion in this world. Witchcraft as evil is real. Therefore, it serves no intelligent pastoral purpose to eject or ridicule it, or to explain it away in racist or psychological terms.¹¹¹

Witchcraft must be understood as an African way of acknowledging, interpreting and dealing with evil in the society. To argue that witchcraft does not exist, is unscientific, does not make sense, or that Christians do not believe in it, is to be out of touch with the African world-view that believes in mystical powers.

The idea behind witchcraft is derived from the fact that everything in the universe is believed to vibrate certain powers all the time. This power can be taped and used for good or for evil.

¹¹¹ Laurenti Magesa, "Witchcraft: A pastoral Guide", *African Ecclesial Review*, Vol. 48, No.3, (September 2006), 185

While the medicine men and women tap this power and use it for the well being of life, the witches use it in a malevolent manner to harm and to cause havoc among human being. A witch is therefore “a person possessing, or possessed of, or by, the supernatural force to inflict evil”.¹¹²

From the above definition, one becomes a witch through inheritance or by training. Similarly, for some people, the mystical powers in themselves choose to inhabit an individual and use them as they wish to do evil. In such a case, a person is possessed without their consent and often cannot do anything about it.¹¹³

The witches as well as the sorcerers use the invisible forces and powers in the universe to accomplish their evil deeds. The difference between the two is in the methods they use to attack their victims. Whereas a witch uses incantations, words, ritual and magic objects, the sorcerer uses spells, poison or other form of physical injury to others or their property.¹¹⁴

In his book, *African Cultural Knowledge*, Kirwen has indicated that the strength, techniques, skills of witchcraft in African is founded on the following five principles:

1. All evil is personalized; nothing happens by accident, someone causes evil to happen.
2. Evil thoughts have power outside the person thinking them. They have a certain independence that can continue to harm and destroy another's health and life unless they are confronted and eliminated.
3. There is no source of evil outside the human heart and the offended wills of ancestors.
4. Evil is stopped and eliminated through appropriate rituals, charms and medicines provide by herbalist and diviners.

¹¹²Magesa 2006,179.

¹¹³See John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, (New York: Praeger Publishers, Inc. 1975), 164 – 174

¹¹⁴Ibid., 165 –166

5. Witchcraft activities always involve people known to one another.¹¹⁵

As noted earlier, witchcraft is a reality in contemporary Africa and one needs only to listen to people talking both in rural and urban areas or to check on the frequency of witchcraft reports in the daily newspapers to sense its existence and its impact on the people.

Research studies have revealed that witchcraft causes confusion, suspicion, hatred, disharmony and destruction in the community. In some communities, it limits people's development initiatives for fear of being bewitched. Due to this fear, all mysterious sickness, accidents, injuries, barrenness, abnormal behaviour and sudden unexpected deaths are always attributed to witchcraft.

The witchcraft phenomenon affects everybody irrespective of their faith, education and status in Africa. People find themselves compounded in fear every time they face some mysterious circumstances. To counsel such people, there is need for an African therapy that can encounter the vice directly and appropriately. In an African setting, the institution of diviners and herbalists are responsible for pin pointing and eliminating such evil. African counselors need to scrutinize the guiding principles used by African specialists to enable them provide relevant techniques in dealing with witchcraft and sorcery cases.

There is another threatening type of witchcraft known mainly in the coastal region of Kenya and Tanzania. The *majini* is a type of witchcraft although it is distinguished from the traditional witchcraft. The main difference is that *majini* witchcraft is purchased unlike the traditional witchcraft, which is inherited or obtained through training. The other difference is that whereas the traditional witchcraft requires the practitioner to acquire skills and knowledge to manipulate the mysterious powers, for *majini* the only requirement is money to buy them.

¹¹⁵Michael C. Kirwen, *African Cultural Knowledge: Themes and Embedded Beliefs*. (Nairobi: MIAS Books, 2005), 220.

This means that those who are wealthy can have the *majinis*. The money aspect of *majini* makes this type of witchcraft distinctive in that anyone; as long as one has money can access the power of the *majini*. The more wealthy a person the more *majinis* they can buy and thus acquire more power. This type of witchcraft has also been associated with urban areas and this can be explained on the ground that people in the urban areas are wealthier than those in rural areas. According to the Taita of Kenya, the *majinis* were originally good spirits known as *visugha* or *barumu*. However, due to human selfishness, they turned to be bad spirits. An interviewee explains the origin of *majinis* thus:

There are some things that God does not bring. Some things man brings on himself. Long ago, there were spirits living in the [Taita] forest called *visugha* [some also say *barumu*]. They lived separately from us, but would interact with us peacefully. They would help us sometimes, maybe in clearing our fields. Sometimes they would give us bananas. In return, we would offer them sacrifice. Sometimes they played trick on us.... But they were not bad. Now *visugha* have become bad. But why? Because of what we have done to them.¹¹⁶

The story goes on to tell how human being became selfish by withholding animal sacrifice to the dead. This behaviour starved the spirits who due to hunger, turned themselves to the evil spirits. The new state of the *visugha* spirits gave them a new thirst for blood. The *visugha* therefore sell themselves to anyone who can and who then own them.¹¹⁷

As I was writing this chapter, an article appeared in the Standard of Thursday March 17th 2007 entitled “Power of the supernatural forces” which explains *visugha*’s thirst for blood. The

¹¹⁶ James H. Smith, “Of Spirit Possession and structural Adjustment programs: Government Downsizing, Education, and their enchantments in Neoliberal Kenya”, in ed., Brad Weiss, *Producing African Futures: Ritual and Reproduction in a Neoliberal Age*, (Brill Leiden, 2004), 246.

¹¹⁷ Ibid

article narrated how the students of Mbaraki Primary and Secondary schools who were possessed by *majinis* wanted human blood. It was reported that “three bulls were slaughtered under the supervision of Mombasa Mayor, Mr. Ali Shekue. When the bulls had been slaughtered, 'the 50 'possessed' girls smiled, became gentle and regained composure.”¹¹⁸

Similar stories, which appear almost every year, show the reality and the power of this type of witchcraft. The fact that it can be purchased by any person who is wealthy expands its use beyond the coastal region and outside the Muslim faith where the belief is dominant. The fear of witchcraft both in the rural and urban areas is a reality and the source of a host of psychological distances.

b) Curses as Causation

There is no doubt among people in Africa today that curses are effective. A curse is a powerful tool that can be pronounced by practically everybody at one time during their life. The power to curse has the same origins as that of witchcraft. The main difference is that a curser is prompted by some definite grievances against the one cursed. In the case of a witch, the motivation is wanton and mischief. Normally those who curse are not necessarily professional, although there are professional cursers. A witch however operates his/her business as a profession. In fact witches form guilds in which several witches work together in their mission of causing havoc and misery on human beings and their property. For our purpose here, I categorize the curses into five groups as follows:

a) Curses by parents

The general rule among many communities in Africa is that a person who is older or of a higher status can curse those who are younger or of lower status. But curses by parents are seen as the most deadly. Parents here include uncles and aunts. Curses are

¹¹⁸ Omwa Ombara, “Power of the supernatural forces” in www.eastandard.net/hm_news.php?articleid=1143966172

administered by parents against their children due to gross misbehaviour or dishonour to the parents. The most common cases that make parents to curse are beating up parents, ignoring to take care of parents at old age or rebelling to the extent of refusing to take up family responsibilities.

It must be understood that not all parents curse their children even when they are pushed to the limit. Only those who are vexed and cannot bear it end up cursing. The worst curse is the one pronounced at the deathbed since upon the death of dying parent, the curse cannot be reversed. There are no ceremonies that are associated with a curse – normally it is simply a word often uttered in anger. It may go something like this: “May your children likewise beat you up” for someone who beat up a parents. Among the Kipsigis for example, if a parent says that to his or her child, he or she will surely be beaten by his or her own children in their old age.

There is however, a way out for those who are cursed when the parents or curser is still alive. If a cursed person recognizes their mistakes and repents and asks for forgiveness, the parents or the curser is bound to accept and withhold the curse. If however they refuse to forgive, the cursed person can plead with the elders to go and ask for forgiveness on his or her behalf. At this point the parent has very little choice to refuse although he or she still can stick to their decision and refuse to forgive. In that case the cursed will have to suffer the consequences of the curse.

b) Curses by elders

Since the elders are societal moral agents, they have the authority to curse anyone in the community who, in spite of the numerous warning and advice has refused to heed. These are individuals whose actions are perceived as a threat to the community at large. Here again those who confess their evil acts and promise to change are given a chance. But those who do not ask for

forgiveness end up suffering the effects of a curse.

Although it is true that every parent and elder has the potential to curse, there are certain individuals, sometimes from a specific clan, whose curse “power” is deadly. When a curse is administered to an unknown person for example, a thief, someone with powerful cursing ability is normally invited to ascertain that the curse is effective and immediate. In a case of a suspected thief or other offenders for example, a ritual is involved. The suspect is asked to perform a certain ritual to confirm that they did not commit the offence. If they are guilty and go ahead and performs the ritual, the effect of a curse shall surely follow them.

c) Corporate curses

Corporate curse happens when many people are adversely affected by the action of a person or persons. In other words, if too many people complain about the unfair treatment of one or a group of people, the anguish of the people can turn into a curse. This is common among some people in leadership position who refuse to understand the cries of the people and end up treating them inhumanely. In this case, it is said that it is the “mouths” of the people that has caused the curse. It is advisable therefore to always treat people humanely all the times even when the people are wrong.

d) Curses by strangers

Many African communities believe that strangers and visitors should always be treated with respect and shown hospitality. When a visitor or a stranger is mistreated, he or she can curse due to the ill treatment they receive. Such curses are normally interpreted as very serious since more often than not; the visitor may never be traced. That is even if the offender were to recognize his/her mistake, it may be impossible to trace the stranger who was passing by to withdraw the curse after the repentance.



CHAPTER SIX

Healing and Moral Values

Introduction

The question of ethics and moral values are of central concern in Africa social thought. In African Religion, moral values are associated with the Supreme Being and human beings. African people believe in an ethical order provided by the Supreme Being. The ethics and the moral values are meant for the well being of human beings and nature. As discussed in the African world-view, the sacred and the secular are inseparable in African society. Moral actions therefore stem from religion and man's understanding of God has everything to do with what is taken to be moral. When human beings were created, the Supreme Being implanted in them the sense of right and wrong. Therefore, there cannot be any morally good act that does not share the nature of religion. In Africa therefore, ethics are understood to be religious in nature.¹¹⁹

We can thus conclude from the above observations that morality in Africa religion embodies the will of the divine being. The Supreme Being according to African communities is holy and omniscience. Since God is holy, He is morally good and thus expects human beings to live morally upright lives. It is correct to say therefore that what African religion approves as moral is similarly accepted and treated as being moral by the society. Similarly, what religion forbids, society also forbids and condemns. Further, the society is always ready to approve what religion approves and sanctions.

¹¹⁹ The content of this chapter is revised material in my earlier chapter entitled, "Moral Values from an African Perspective" in Mary N. Getui ed., *Responsible Leadership in Marriage and Family*. (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2008), 14 -24.

The Supreme Being and Altruistic Values

The Supreme Being is understood not only as the source of morality but also its guardian and custodian. The Supreme Being is thus deeply concerned in the code of conduct followed by the people. The Supreme Being is therefore interested in the day-to-day acts of human being as they respond to the demands of life.

The Supreme Being supports and rewards those who show good character. On the other hand, the Supreme Being punishes those who fail to abide by the laid down moral standards. As the final judge, the law giver and the ultimate custodian of morality, the Supreme Being rewards those who are faithful through prosperity, longevity, fertility, wealth among others. Similarly, the Supreme Being punishes those who are immoral in the forms of diseases, epidemic, drought, disasters, lack of children to individuals or the community.

These sanctions by the Supreme Being are motivated by His love for human being. Since the Supreme Being is holy, provider of life and protector of the entire creation, God expect human beings to work towards the same path in an attempt to establish healthy communities. The deity is keen to protect the corporate nature of the society, to guarantee peace, harmony, justice and fair play. For this reason, the Supreme Being as understood in Africa does not allow any evil deeds done individually or corporately to go unpunished since God knows, sees and gives everything. But more importantly, the Supreme Being hates injustice and disharmony among his people since it in turn affects everything else. In other words, an offence against God is an offence against man and against the entire creation. Due to the importance of this subject, morality is not an issue that is restricted between the individual and his God in African religion. Morality is a responsibility of the entire community such that each person is expected to participate in ensuring that moral values are kept. For that reason, apart from self, there are other agents whose

duty is to ancestors oversee the behaviour of others in the community. I shall discuss the role of these agents namely: divinities, elders, rulers, priests, priestess and healers briefly below.

The communities who believe in Divinities generally regard them as the custodians of morality. Divinities play the dual role of intermediaries and monitors human behaviour on behalf of the Supreme Being. Among the Yoruba of Nigeria for example, *Ogun, Sango, Ayelala, Sonponna, Orisanla* among other divinities are guardians of public morality. They thus command the good behaviour of human being and likewise punish those who break the laws as laid down by the Supreme Being, *Olodumare*.

The ancestors, the departed souls who are still remembered in their families are also concerned about the well being of man. In their new abode in the underworld, the ancestors are keen to monitor the actions of members of their families who are still alive. They serve as the custodians of public morality by making sure that their families follow the accepted moral conduct and observe the rules of fair play. In that way, the ancestors ensure that their living relatives are not punished due to their moral behaviour either in this world before death or after. Similarly, the ancestors ensure that the Supreme Being rewards their relatives appropriately for their good moral behaviour.

In African societies, elders, rulers, priests, priestess and healers are among the societal agents of morality. These agents ensure that social ethics, rules and regulations that preserve the society are maintained and observed. It is their responsibility to see that all the members of the society uphold high moral standards. The societal agents also make sure that those who go astray are cleansed and brought back to normality. Those on the other hand who became stubborn are excommunicated to safeguard the solidarity of the community. Unlike the West, individualism is not tolerated since the action of an individual affects the entire

community. The social agents therefore reprimand individuals and groups who go against the accepted moral code.

Africans believe that the Supreme Being in creating a human being endowed him/her with a conscience. Each individual is aware of the moral expectation that is concretely reflected in moral issues. One is thus expected to be his/her own judge. He/she is expected to respond appropriately to the creator's demands as well as to comply with the requirements of ancestors and societal agents. It is therefore the responsibility of each individual to observe the various moral values in order not to disturb the relationship between the members of the community, the Supreme Being and the environment.

Apart from the above moral agents, African belief system has established other ways to enforce, maintain and promote moral behaviour. The system includes the belief in taboos, medicine, rites of passage, ritual and ceremonies. This is one area that is most misunderstood today especially by Christians and the elite. Many people tend to see this aspect of African beliefs as superstition, primitive and irrelevant in the modern setting. Yet in real sense, these are the laid down mechanisms to assist and remind the individuals and community not to break the set rules and regulations that ensure harmony and peaceful co-existence. It is the breaking of these rules that bring about psychological disturbances and the reason for the need of counseling. A brief discussion of each shall suffice to ascertain the part these aspects play in the healing wisdom of Africa.

Taboos

Taboos are sacred prohibitions placed upon some people or some things that makes them untouchable or unmentionable. Indeed taboos are the dos and don'ts or social restrictions resulting from the long traditions of a community. Although some taboos are social, they are also religious in that it has to do with what the Supreme Being forbids.

The purpose of taboos in African communities is to promote the needed sense of mutual responsibility and solidarity. Taboos thus serve to help people maintain good morals. To break taboos therefore may bring disorder not only to the individual but the entire community. Taboos therefore inculcate spiritual and moral values to individuals and to the community in general. Taboos are counseling hints that have been put there to assist individuals not to fall into the temptation or to do anything that might jeopardize them or others.

Medicine

In African understanding, medicine is power. The word *dawwa* (medicine) in Kiswahili connotes a substance with power. Medicine is normally used to treat disease and bring to about good health. Medicine on the other hand, can be used to bring about good fortune, good health, success, peace, love and protection from dangers. In this case, a charm is seen as medicine to protect one from disease or other dangers.

It is argued that Africans often visit the diviners and medicine persons to ascertain what they want to do, for example, traveling, starting a business or vying for a public seat. Interestingly, many people, regardless of their faith, education and status visit these specialists. In such a case, medicine persons diagnose/predict the situation or circumstances and prescribe some treatment. Along with the treatment, the healer gives instructions to the client on specific moral behaviour that is expected of him/her to exacerbate the expected results.

While giving their prescription, the healers always acknowledge the fact that the Supreme Being is the healer and one who ensures good welfare of the individual and the community. The role of healers here is therefore to treat and that God will do the healing. In other words the healer guides and counsels the client to behave well if they expect blessing as per their request.

Rites of passage

One aspect of African Religion that is disappearing very fast is the rites of passage. Yet these is the most importance vehicle of transmitting traditional moral values and at the same time an opportunity to provide guidance and counseling to the new initiates in the society. The rites of passage mark the rhythm of life measured by rituals and initiation ceremonies. The ritual carries religious implications that are often unnoticed by its critics. Langley, in her studies on the rites of passage among the Nandi of Kenya observed that:

On the surface, life crisis rituals in Nandi appear to be “non-religious” or “secular”. But this initial impression is not borne out of facts. The fact of the matter is that religious symbols and appeals to *Asis* in prayer occur frequently throughout these and other Nandi rituals.¹²⁰

Similarly, Orchardson, who lived among the Kipsigis of Kenya observed that “the belief in God appears in most of the ceremonies which take place at every stage of their life lives”¹²¹

The significance of these rites of passage in African and its implication to counseling is immense. Benjamin Ray for example, describes the role of the rites of passage as:

A bond between temporal processes and archetypal patterns in order to give form and meaning to human events. This is done to a threefold ritual pattern consisting of the rites of separation, transition and incorporation. The specific object of rituals of passage is to create fixed and meaningful transformation in the life cycle (birth, puberty, marriage, death).¹²²

¹²⁰ Langley as quoted in Adam K. arap Chepkwony “African Religion in the Study of Comparative Religion: A Case Study of Kipsigis Religious Practices” D.Phil Diss. , Moi University, 1997, See Footnote 35.

¹²¹ Ian Q. Orchardson, *The Kipsigis*, Nairobi: East Africa Literature Bureau, 1970, Fn, 34

¹²² Benjamin Ray , *African Religions: Symbols, Ritual and Community*, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1976), 90-91

In this book however, we have no room to discuss the issue in details. It will only suffice here to mention three significant contributions of these rites to human growth and development, that is, incorporation of individual into the society, inculcation of moral values and its therapeutic implication to the initiates and the community at large.

First, the most important role of the rite of passage is to incorporate an individual into the society. Among the Mijikenda community of Kenya for example, a newly born child is taken to each home of the immediate family members on the fourth or fifth day if it is a girl or boy child respectively. The child is introduced to each head of the family and its relationship to that person. It is also introduced to the children of that entire family as brother, sister, cousin etc. Then the entire community is invited to a meal to incorporate the child to the community.¹²³

Second, during the rite of initiation for example, the initiates are taught the acceptable moral behaviour expected of them and generally how to coexist with others in the community. The candidates are also guided and counseled on how to face life in their new status. As I have presented elsewhere, the initiates “are inured into unity and sharing. Individualism is completely discouraged... they are educated on tribal moral values and responsibility”.¹²⁴ In any of the rites, the candidates are blessed and prayed for by the family and the community at large. Blessing in this case is seen as a powerful source of healing and assurance of a successful future. Blessings are believed to be more expedient when it comes from parents and elders who are believed to be the most powerful.

Third, the period during the rites of passage normally serves as a great occasion for catharsis for the entire community. This is the time for members of the community to reflect, time to share and most importantly, a time to forgive each other. Anointing ceremony where

¹²³ Interview with Bishop Wellington Sanga of Lamu , Kenya on 26th May 2007 at Fuller Theological Seminary.

¹²⁴ arap Chepkwony, 1997, 280.

members of the community anoint the candidates among the Kalenjin for example, symbolized repentance and forgiveness. For this reason, no one with a grudge with another member of the community was allowed to participate in the anointing ceremony. The fact that one was willing to participate indicated that he or she has forgiven whoever had wronged him or her. In other words, the African people believe that the health of the initiates was dependent on the harmony and peace that existed among the members of the family and community.

In summary, rites of passage serve as an opportunity to socialize and to incorporate individuals from birth into the community. It is also the time to train individuals on how to ensure peaceful co-existence with one another by adhering to the ethical values laid down by the society. In other words, an individual is expected to perceive the world from an African perspective. And to do that successfully, the society has certain laid down moral guidelines to be followed by all in spite of the fact that each society has packaged the same message differently.

Moral issues in African communities

All communities throughout Africa have packaged their moral values differently. The Yoruba of Nigeria have eleven commandments while the Maasai of Kenya have Ten Commandments in similar manners as the Ten Commandments in the Old Testament. On the other hand, the Banande refer to their moral values as the five mountains to climb while the Kipsigis of Kenya have five pillars of life.

In general, Africans recommend certain approved conducts that are beneficial to the society and acceptable to the Supreme Being. Below are brief and recommended conducts, which enhance the well being of individuals and community at large. Similarly, there are the unwanted and shunned conducts that is harmful to individual and society in general.

Humility

African ethics lay much emphasis on the value of humility. Those who are humble are expected to prosper in life as opposed to those who are proud. Children are thus admonished to be humble so as to grow and prosper in life. For that reason, when one seeks a wife, he considers humble individuals and families.

Truth and Honesty

Truth and honesty are highly cherished values in African communities. Each person is thus expected to be truthful and honest at all times. Those who do not comply with the rules of truth and became dishonest end up hurting someone else. Honesty acts as the basis of trust and good relationships between humans and the Supreme Being. The Supreme Being thus rewards those who maintain these values with prolonged lives while those who bear false witness are regarded as sinful.

Liars are therefore seen as the perpetrators of crime against God, humanity and other spiritual beings. The oracle of *Ojiogbe* among the Yoruba says:

Be truthful, be just!
Oh, be truthful, be just!
It is the truthful that the divinities support.
Be truthful, be just!¹²⁵

Liars are therefore condemned and heavy punishment is due upon them at death. The oracle of *Odu Onara-meji* confirms these thus:

Lying does not prevent one from becoming rich.
Covenant breaking does not prevent one from reaching old age.
But the day of death will bring retribution.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ S. A Adewale, "Crime and African Traditional Religion" in <http://afrikaworld.net/afre/atr-crime.htm>, 3

¹²⁶ Ibid.

Kindness and Hospitality

The virtues of kindness and hospitality are highly esteemed in all communities in Africa. Today, Africans are known for their kindness and hospitality and more so to strangers. These virtues are extended not only to human being but also to other creatures. The basis of this understanding is that the Supreme Being created all creatures and it is by his kindness that he maintains and keeps everything alive. For that reason, those who abide by this virtue receive both spiritual and material blessings.

Kindness and hospitality are the strongest aspect of African culture. In spite of poverty people are always ready to share everything they have. This is motivated by the spiritual believe that the Supreme Being bless those who are hospitable and especially to strangers, children and the weak. Mbiti summarizes this African value thus:

It is held to be a moral evil to deny hospitality, even to a stranger. Therefore, when people travel they may stop anywhere for the night and receive hospitality in that homestead. They should not be molested unless, of course, they abuse the hospitality they have received.¹²⁷

Chastity

The past theories that described Africans as immoral or even amoral have greatly contributed to negative attitude toward the perception of chastity in Africa. The real situation however is that African enjoins both men and women to live a chaste life. Faithfulness is highly respected and the individuals and families who uphold it are honoured. This explains the great emphasis that was placed on virginity among many communities in Africa in the past.

¹²⁷ Mbiti 1975:177.

Loyalty and Respect to parents and elders

Loyalty, respect and protection all deal with issues of interpersonal relation. One is expected to demonstrate these three virtues to elders, parents, age mates, relatives, children and member of the opposite sex. In the final analysis, loyalty, respect and protection is due to all members of the community.

Similarly, the community at large is expected to guarantee the well-being and safety of all its members. Adewale has sighted several oracles that will illustrate the importance of respect to parents and elders:

Respect your mother and your father that you may live long on earth.

Ifa says, offer sacrifice to your mother and your father, the sacrifice of care, righteousness and humility, that you may regenerate yourself.

Ifa says, offer sacrifice to your mother and father, the sacrifice of care and obedience, that their curses may not rest on you.

The curses of your father and mother are the curses of the Almighty.

Ifa says, offer sacrifices to your father and mother, the sacrifice of love and of justice, that you may have rest, that you may have comfort.¹²⁸

Another oracle stresses the value of parents thus:

Parents will not labour in vain over me.
I was born because mother's luck was good;

¹²⁸ Adewale, 4

I was born because father's luck was good.
They gave birth to me; my arms were not burnt.
I was not born blind.
I was not born a leper
I too want to give birth to my own children,
so that I may have descendants.
I want to have houses.
I want to have property
I want to have money.
Parents will not labour in vain over me.
I came into the world because of their good luck.
I want to do good in my life.
Parents will not labour in vain over me.¹²⁹

And finally, the following oracle castigates the youth and warns them for disrespect of the elders:

If a child indulges in stubborn acts,
If he sees aged priest and slaps him,
If he comes across an aged physician and beats him mercilessly,
If he goes on and meets and aged priest and knocks him down,
Thus declares the oracles to the disobedient child.
"Who says nobody could control him?" Orunmila says:
Don't you know that there is no long life for any child who beats
an elderly priest, no long life for any child who slaps an aged
physician?
Any child who flogs and aged priest is seeking his own death.
Respect for elders means long life.¹³⁰

Stealing

All African communities consider stealing one of the sacrilegious offenses. Stealing is generally forbidden and those who are found to have committed this offense are punished. In the past,

¹²⁹ Ibid., 5

¹³⁰ Ibid., 5

severe penalties were meted on thieves. Some communities declared death sentence to thieves while others were warned and ridiculed by the community. In fact when a known thief passed by ones home, it was acceptable to announce to them that you have seen them and if anything got lost they would be blamed. Stealing is condemned because it deprives those who have worked hard and blessed by God of their property.

Stealing is a shameful event which tarnishes the reputation and the integrity of the family of the thief. No one wants to marry or be married to a family of thieves. In normal circumstances the society would not give any position of honour to a member of a family who have thieves. Stealing is therefore an immoral act against the family and society and punishable by God as warned by the *Ogbe-Ale* oracle:

If the earthly king does not see you,
The heavenly king is looking at you.
Thus declares the oracle to the one who steals under the cover of
darkness,
Who says that the earthly king does not see him?
God sees the thief and will surely punish him.¹³¹

Incest and adultery

Incest and adultery is seen as a breach of societal and religious norms. It is a crime committed not only against persons but against God and the ancestors who sanction the marriage and acceptable sex relationships. In addition, incest and adultery is an offence to the family of the offended. This behaviour breeds unhealthy and unwholesome relationships in society and creates disharmony.

Sexual relations with close relative in Africa is a serious offence. However, those who are considered relatives may differ from one ethnic community to the other. Sex and marriage

¹³¹ Ibid., 5

relationship is controlled by the clan system that does not normally allow members of the same clan to marry. Members of a clan who have the same origin are considered members of the same family regardless of the distance of their relationship. It is therefore believed that children born by close relatives results in misfortunes and normally the death of the offspring.¹³²

In the same way, sexual relationship with a married woman or a married man is forbidden. Among the Yoruba of Nigeria, an oracle warns against an adulterous woman thus:

She destroys the members of the household of the husband
She destroys the members of the household of the concubine
Thereafter she destroys herself, and goes on the far journey to heaven.
So declares the oracle to the adulterous woman who is a servant of death.¹³³

It is similarly wrong and a taboo for people of the same sex to have sexual relationship. In Africa, these are seen as abnormal acts and calls for condemnation by everybody. Among the Kipsigis for example, condemnation of this kind of abnormal behaviour is even extended to animals. That is, if an animal exhibits similar behaviour, let us say, a donkey climbs a cow, that animals is killed immediately since that action is believed to be an abomination.¹³⁴

Murder

Murder in African communities is totally condemned. The idea behind the prohibition of killing is that life comes from the Supreme Being and it is the Supreme Being alone who can take it. There is no time therefore when killing is justified. For that reason, even killing in self-defense, by accident or during war among the Kalenjins of Kenya is still perceived as wrong.

¹³² Mbiti 1975: 100-101

¹³³ Adewale, 2

¹³⁴ arap Chepkwony, 1997, 162

If someone therefore kills someone by accident and even if it was the victim who was in the wrong or in war, the one who caused the death is still held responsible. He/she is expected to perform tradition ritual, which will involve the entire clan in compensation agreement with the offended clan.¹³⁵ Those who fail to comply with the recommended rites are punished through strange death or other serious occurrences upon the members of their family.

Death by suicide in general is frowned at and considered a bad death. Individuals who kill themselves are usually denied the full rites to burials. However when suicide is committed due to terminal illness, protecting the family or community, it is tolerated and even praised as an act of courage.

Covenant-breaking

Africans regard covenant, oath and taboo breaking as one of the most serious moral crimes that one can commit. A person who breaks a covenant is regarded as worthless and does not command any respect in the community. The seriousness of covenant breaking is based on the fact that those who fail to observe the rules of a covenant do not value their fellow humans, the community and the Supreme Being. Keeping an agreed promise shows respect of person to person as well as person to deity relationships. It is thus believed that the Supreme Being will also not accept those who fail to keep the covenant with their fellow human beings.

In some religions of the world these moral values constitute the commandment, like the Jewish and Christian commandments. The African moral values can be summarized as follows:

1. You shall be humble.
2. You shall be truthful at all times.
3. You shall be kind and hospitable.
4. You shall be chaste.

¹³⁵ See arap Chepkwony, 1997, 212

5. You shall be loyal and respectful to God, parents and the elders.
6. You shall protect your community at all times.
7. You shall not steal.
8. You shall not commit incest or adultery.
9. You shall not kill.
10. You shall not break a covenant, an oath or a taboo.

The above moral values are not unique to Africans alone. Hans Kung observes that there are four basic ethical values in all the religions of the world. These are:

1. Thou shall not kill the innocent.
2. Thou shall not lie or break promise.
3. Thou shall not commit adultery or fornication.
4. Thou shall do good.¹³⁶

In my view the African moral values are comparable to the moral values present in the religions of the world. The only difference is the way the Africans have packaged them and how they have created rules and regulations to ensure that the majority of people adhere to these values. The other main difference is in the way Africans executed punishment to those who have failed to comply with the rules and regulations. Further, Africans see the breaking of these rules and regulation or commandments for this matter by individuals, as a disruptive element of the harmony and a source of ill health.

It is this difference more than anything else that creates disparity between Christian moral values and condemnation of African moral values today. Yet, this also, more than any other factor, is the source of the disturbances among young Africans today. The young Africans who are working in the cities or even outside African

¹³⁶ Kung, Hans "Towards a World Ethic of World Religions" in *The Ethics of the World Religions and Human Rights*. (London: SCM Press, 1990). 42

find themselves in dilemma not knowing what to do when faced by these circumstances.

Challenges facing Africans in observing moral issues today

The moral issues in African religion are still very relevant to the Africa today. However, we must admit that a lot of changes have taken place in regard to the perception of religion, the way of life and the moral issues facing African peoples today. Some of these challenges include:

a) Today the elite, outsiders and the new religions like Christianity and Islam have neglected African Religion. The elite believe that some African values are unscientific and illogical. Christianity on the other hand, has condemned African values as irrelevant and pagan. Indeed it is believed that to follow African religion is to be backwards. This is a wrong attitude that should be reversed since not everything African is wrong and not everything western is good.

These attitudes have a lot of implication in counseling. How do these values impact on African elite, an African Christian or an African Muslim and the majority who in spite of their status or faith, still hold on these African values? What does it mean for those who want to ignore the African values that are still cherished by their family members and the community? Where does this place an individual who has strong ties with the family members and cherish their community yet does not agree with some of their values? And how does a counselor help those who do not believe in some African values yet their disturbances arise from disrespects or failure to accomplish certain African beliefs. These are some of the questions that must be answered in order to provide effective and relevant counseling in Africa.

b) In many parts of Africa, there is a gradual extinction of devotees as well as religious leaders. This phenomenon has

convinced many that in the same way the African adherents and specialists are disappearing so must the values they stood for. This however is a false assumption since moral values are imbedded in each person's conscience. At the same time African moral values have been inculturated in African independent churches, missionary churches and many African institutions and political systems. It is presumptuous to think that these values are no longer in existence and that they have no impact on anyone.

c) The moral issues faced by African today are quite different and may not be addressed by ethical values of African past. Today for example, there are issues such as drug abuse, corruption, terrorism, euthanasia and genetic engineering which were unknown to African past. It is true that in the modern setting we are faced with unique moral issues and circumstances that necessitate a creative approach to problem solution.

However, African culture is dynamic and can adopt and accommodate new ideas that can enrich its values. This is where African can borrow and learn from the others who have experienced and established effective strategies to handle the situation. It is here that traditional approaches can incorporate new idea for maximum and effective therapies in Africa. Indeed, it is then true that Africans can also share its rich heritage and contribute its rich culture and approaches to other therapies of the world.

d) The individual and societies attitudes and the observance of African ways of solving ethical issues are no longer the same. This criticism and attitude towards African values today is motivated by individualism. This is a concept that should be discouraged and shunned by everybody. The strength of African moral values lay on interpersonal relationships as well as human's relations with the creator. The majority of problems associated with moral values faced today is that of self-interest and not the common good should serve as the guide.

e) Today moral issues are no longer treated with the religious significance they used to enjoy in the African past. In particular, the moral issues today have been stripped of the divine connotations. It is precisely for this reason that no one takes moral values seriously. This attitude is responsible for the ever-increasing number of moral issues without the corresponding tenacity of observance. As a result of these, we are confronted with a morally decadent society. The solution to this problem is to revisit African moral values that served as the foundation of culture.

f) There have been changes in the custodian of morality from traditional societal agents to the current judges in courts, laws of the land, police and prisons. Again, this is a true reflection of the present situation. In the modern setting, people are only afraid of the police and the courts and of course prisons. Few are concerned about the reactions of the divinities, ancestors, societal agents and even the Supreme Being. The police and the courts are there to solve their problems and when they succeed to convince the police and the courts that they are not wrong, their act is seen as moral even when they are guilty.

Conclusion

In the light of present status of African religion and in cognizance with the fact that the demands of contemporary society continue changing, I would like to propose the following ethical strategy.

a) The African salvation lies in commitment to responsibility. Theologians, pastors and the faithful in general must commit themselves to serious learning as a lifelong commitment. The knowledge sought should include the values imbedded in the Africa cultures. For an ethically sensitive person need not retreat from life into indifference but instead look for the wisdom shared by our people in the past and seek ways to incorporate the same to modern

life. This in my view is the problem faced by the majority of African elite and religious leaders who tend to see the African past as void and without any meaningful values in the present world.

b) Today we are faced with new ethical challenges. More often than not the changes are so abrupt that we find no time to reflect so as to take appropriate action. In such moments we are forced to follow our instincts. In such a case, the instincts shall most likely depend on the depth of our previous ethical reflection. How well and how consistently we are ethical in our day to day living will be beneficial in occasions requiring immediate action. In other words, the moral standards of our leaders both political and religious shall determine the behaviour of the rest of the society.

c) In dealing with modern ethical challenges, it is essential that we consider our past experiences, our customs, ethical values and the world-views. It is only then that we shall be able to come up with the best options that encompass the total context in question. Very often we accept other people's values that mean little to us. Since we lack the foundation of such values, many times one finds himself breaking the same values without any experience of guilt conscience.

d) It is important finally that we learn from the result of our past action. Examining the results of our past action helps us to build on experience beneficial for future living. In this case, it is prudent to reflect and act in conjunction with others for there is wisdom in collective decisions that supersede individual wisdom. African moral values are based on person to person, person to community, person to the Supreme Being and community to Supreme Being relationships. The role of societal agents that assists in the maintenance of moral values for the sake of all is of paramount importance. Today however, people have lost respect for their leaders in general. The majority of people have no faith in their members of parliament, their pastors, their local chiefs and even their bosses at work. It is indeed worse when we talk of the priests,

herbalist, diviners and ancestors.

In conclusion, I make the following observations. The moral issues as understood in African religion are still relevant to the African society today. Many African will do well to consider these values and adhere to them. Many times we accept foreign values that have no foundation in our culture and faith. African religion to date is deeply rooted in Africans and it may be difficult to sever the connection and loyalty to it. It is for this reason that many people find themselves in dilemma during times of crisis since the foreign values cannot address their problems.

Although African moral values are still relevant today, there is need to expand the scope and modify its consideration in the light of contemporary ethical issues. The values that were cherished in the past but have lost relevance in the present situation should be discarded and in its place new relevant values be incorporated. The training for war, for example, done during initiation is no longer relevant since the government maintains law and order for its citizen. This value should be replaced with training in others areas that shall provide the initiates with skills to serve in the country's labour force.

Finally, it seems to me that the African challenges to ethical issues in the past were airtight and served its adherent more faithfully than the ethical perception of imported religions. In this regard, Africans need to re-assess their stand in the light of incorporating African moral values to serve them within the new faiths as well as in modern setting. It is this dichotomy that has brought a lot of disturbances and indeed living double lives. These double lives are painful and substandard lives which are neither fulfilling nor satisfying. It is such impoverished lives that bring about both physical and psychological disturbances. To be able to solve issues that arise from such circumstances, one must appreciate and be aware of an African worldview and recommended ways of addressing such issues.



CHAPTER SEVEN

Analysis of Western and African Worldviews

Introduction

In this chapter, we discuss the Western worldview and contrast its characteristics with those of an African worldview. By “Western” here we mean European and American worldviews or Euro-American worldview. We shall therefore use the terms European, American, Euro-American and western worldview interchangeably throughout this work.

But first we need some caution here: that is, it is not necessarily true that Europe and America prescribe to the same worldview. In fact even some sections within Europe and America may not be sharing the same worldview. However, for the purpose of this work, we note that Europe and America share a common heritage of the enlightenment period that greatly influenced the present worldview.

On the other hand, the subject of our study in this book that is counseling, and indeed the counseling practices adhered to in most parts of Africa today have the same origin, Europe and America. At the same time, the factors that motivated the establishment of counseling in both Europe and America in the past as well as today are similar. For this reason alone we proceed with this generalization.

The chapter shall therefore discuss the western world-view that patronize the type of counseling approaches in practice in African today. We shall first examine the characteristics of a Western worldview in order to understand the practical implications of this worldview to the people of Europe and America. With this understanding at hand, we shall return to the African worldview and

similarly explore what it means to the ordinary African people on day-to-day basis.

Since many African are also Christians, we shall then explore the Biblical worldview as presented by the missionaries in the turn of the nineteenth century and assess the implication it had on African culture and religion. This will subsequently give us an opportunity to compare the characteristics of the two worldviews in the next chapter and design whether counseling theories and techniques developed in the West to fit the needs of people with the characteristics dictated by Western realities suit an African with the characteristics associated with an African worldview.

Development of Western Worldview

Since we have studied the African worldview in depth in Chapter two and three, we shall not repeat the issues of definition and what constitute a worldview. We shall discuss the content of the Western worldview directly with the previous knowledge in mind. But first, we need to begin with a brief history of how the West developed its worldview over the centuries to what it is today.

The Middle Ages preceded the enlightenment era in Europe, which is credited for the present western worldview. It is this period that contributed greatly to the development of the Euro-centric worldview as understood today. Although the early history of this period was characterized by multiple cultures, it acquired a Christian worldview that was held in common by the majority of the inhabitants of Europe. It was Christianity that turned the multi-cultural and multilingual groups of people into a single people with one language and one religious (Christian) worldview.

The Christian worldview of that period was based on the belief that the centre of all truth and experience was in God. Belief and total trust in God was thus of paramount importance during this period. It was during this era that theology was described as “the

queen of the sciences". It was called the "queen" because the study of God and his works was believed to be the highest solid foundation upon which any inquiry must stand. It was generally accepted that there was no more noble and sublime purpose to which one could commit oneself to than to know and understand God.¹³⁷

With this understanding, the medieval world-view therefore tendered not to trust human perception per se. Human perceptions were seen as variable and untrustworthy. To make the situation even worse was the belief that the material world itself was deceptive. Therefore, to be overly concerned with the material phenomena was interpreted as a neglect of one's soul and one's dependence on God. The purpose of the material world, it was believed, was to distract humans from living the honourable and godly life.

It is this period and these ideas that developed the scholastic system of thought in Europe. The central idea of scholasticism was that the sources of knowledge lie in the scriptures and the writing of the Church fathers. St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) was one of the greatest scholastic thinkers. In his book, the *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas produced a synthesis of Aristotle's science and Christian theology. Using Ptolemy's model of the universe, in which its centre was believed to be the earth, a coherent and unified medieval cosmology was constructed.¹³⁸

The medieval cosmology also imagined a hierarchy of all being that was known as the great chain. The great chain of being was an hierarchy of all creatures from the most primitive life form, animals kingdom, human beings, the nine orders of angels and finally to God. The point here was that everything and every person had a place in God's kingdom. This conception of the structure of the universe was integrated with Ptolemaic idea that the earth was the centre of the universe and not the sun, as we know it today.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Robert McFee Brown, "Theology and Education" in Daniel T. Jenkins (ed.), *The Scope of Theology*, (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1965), 230 – 231.

¹³⁸ *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 7 and 8: 106

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*,

This worldview however began to collapse when astronomers began to argue that the sun rather than the earth is the centre of the universe. This view challenged the Ptolemaic cosmology, Aristotelian ideas and the entire Christian world-view of that period. When Nicolas Copernicus in 1543 indicated that the universe was heliocentric (Sun centred), that marked the collapse of the European worldview. This was the beginning of another period, another worldview that attempted to explain the place and role of human being in the universe. This then marked the beginning of the enlightenment period that introduced the European worldview.¹⁴⁰

The Development of the Modern Western Worldview

Enlightenment was a European intellectual movement of the 17th and 18th Century. The age of enlightenment was so named because of the attitude some scholars in London and Paris towards their supposed informed culture as opposed to other's cultures. These groups of scholars believed that they were more enlightened than their compatriots and were ready to go out and enlighten them. This attitude of Europeans superiority over other cultures persists to date.

The enlightenment period used ideas concerning god, reason, nature and man to synthesize a world-view that is currently the guarding principle in Europe and America. The present western world is heavily influenced by enlightenment thinking which is characterized by humanism, rationalism, modernism and secularism. We shall briefly explain these "isms" for clarity.

Humanist believed that the use of reason which was understood to be sense and observation, was central to the enlightenment thinkers. Reason was celebrated as the power by which man understood the universe. And with this power it was possible to improve human condition, which would culminate in

¹⁴⁰ Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Vol. 1 and 2, 519

human knowledge, freedom and happiness.

Rationalist scholars like Rene Descartes (1596 – 1650), G. W Liebniz and Isaac Newton, believed that the way to truth is the application of reason alone. Descartes for example developed a method to attain truth in which only those things that were recognized by intellect or reason were accepted as knowledge. These ideas by Descartes greatly impacted on the way the modern world understood truth and by extension, the development of the European world-view. Descartes saw two realms of knowledge, that is objective knowledge, which incorporated physical matter, science, mathematics and rationale. On the other side, was the subjective knowledge, which consists of spiritual, intuitive or that which is not open to empirical or mathematical verification. For him, there exists a dichotomy between psychical and spiritual spheres.

The modernist thinkers emerged in the 18th century when intellectuals in Europe debated as to whether those who lived in the 18th century (Modern) were more superior to the Greeks and the Romans (Ancient). This debate brought about a dichotomy that remained of great concern to the modernist thinkers and the enlightenment period as a whole. Like the rationalist, the modernist believed that reason was the liberator of truth and hence the argument “the truth shall set you free”.

These 18th century thinkers believed that virtually everything could be subjected to reason, and that included, traditions, customs, and history among others. Similarly, they believed that the truth, revealed by reason, could be applied in politics and social spheres to correct and improve the political and social conditions of the human being. Baron de Montesquieu believed that the principles of science could be applied to create better governments. He wrote on the spirit of laws, which favoured governments that are based on the separation and balance of powers to prevent tyranny.¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Vol. 1 and 2, 369

John Locke on the other hand, introduced the idea that all humans possess certain natural rights such as right to life, liberty and property. He further suggested that it was the role of governments to protect these rights among its citizen. Jean-Jacques Rousseau in 1763 proposed a new society for the individuals. He declared the right of liberty and equality for men. Inspired by this spirit, the French attempted a revolution in 1789, which failed.¹⁴²

The picture that the enlightenment had painted was that intellectual, self-realization and freedom would create a new and better society. These tenets formed the bases of modernism whose alternate goal was to create a new world order. The major ideas of the enlightenment can thus be summarized as follows: First, enlightenment ideas were associated with human progress. Second that it placed complete confidence and trust in the powers of human reason alone. Finally, the spirit of enlightenment believed that scientific principles could be applied in politics for the improvement of a better society.

Humanism emerged in Italy and France in the 14th and 15th centuries among a group of thinkers known as humanist. The original idea as conceived by the group was to celebrate humanity as the crown of creation. The thinkers felt that they were fulfilling divine purpose by exercising their intellectual powers in achievement in arts such as music, painting, architecture and scholarship. Over the years however, people became more and more impressed with what humans could do and ended up virtually worshipping human accomplishment. In deed the scientific and technological achievement in the sectors of medicine, physics, biology and engineering was so impressive that science became the “religion” and “scientist” the new “priest” of that time. It was due to such influences that the spiritual aspects of humans began to fade away. Humans were instead perceived as body and soul or mind and emotion without any spiritual dimension associated to it.

¹⁴² Ibid.

It was such influences that the spiritual aspect of human began to fade away. Humans were instead perceived as body and soul or mind and emotion without any spiritual dimension associated to it. This separation of physical and spiritual, worldly and otherworldly, sacred and profane resulted in what came to be known as secularization. George Jacob Holyoake was the first person to use the term secularization in 1846 to denote "a form of opinion which concerns itself with questions, the issues of which can be tested by the experience of this life."¹⁴³ All these 'isms' are the development of an era that marked the separation of secular and spiritual matters in public life.

The enlightenment period with its strong belief in the scientific revolution challenged and questioned traditions. In particular it questioned traditional religious beliefs and institutions, the traditional political models and its institutions and traditional notions of social order and conventions.

Enlightened denial of any kind of transcendence of external world, of personal immortality, of the whole fabric of Christian sacraments, and the enlightened rejection of the dogma of the original sin, as well as much more in the enlightenment, is quite incompatible with Orthodox Christianity, Catholic and Protestants alike.¹⁴⁴

The enlightenment therefore reflects the modern Western world-view, which is associated with the development, the technology, the science and naturalistic explanations for most things. In this view, anything that cannot stand the test of empirical verification does not pass as truth or reality.

Due to the emphasis on empirical verification of truth, God and spiritual matters were closed out. For some, God was non-

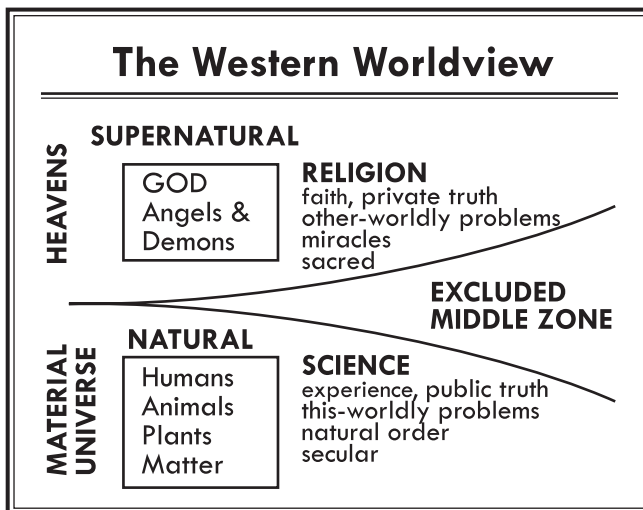
¹⁴³ Catholic Encyclopedia at www.newadvent.org

¹⁴⁴ Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Vol. 1 and 2, 521

existence while for others God was seen as a remote and impersonal creator. This meant that the scriptures were discredited as having no authority and its authenticity discredited. The Biblical accounts of miracles and deity of Christ was rejected since it could not pass the test of scientific verification.

The result of this perception was that matters of God, spirits, faith, and religion were separated from the scientifically verifiable things; the physical world, natural order, humans and a secular world. This forms what Paul Hiebert has referred to as the two – tiered view of reality with science on one side and religion on the other.¹⁴⁵ According to Augsburgur:

The two-tiered view of reality offers only two levels, the religious level, based on faith, manifest in miracles, and concerned with other worldly problems; and the scientific level, based on experience and manifest in the natural order dealing with the problems of this world.¹⁴⁶



¹⁴⁵ Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues*, (Grand Rapids Michigan: Baker Books, 1994).

¹⁴⁶ David W. Augsburgur, *Pastoral Counselling Across Cultures*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986, 33

This view, unlike the African worldview discussed in chapter 2, clearly delineates the upper from the lower tier. The two are perceived as distinct and nothing connects the two vertically, the natural and the supernatural or the earthly and the spiritual realms. It is the lack of this middle that an African writer earlier described the western worldview as “unpoetic and impoverished”.

This two tiered model represents the current Western worldview. This means that the majority of people in the West see and understand the world around them as such; that is, most people would rely on science and self for answers on issues of their daily problems and that only a small number of people would resort to spiritual intervention. Pearse confirms this when he writes:

Most, though not all, major cultures have been underpinned by adherence to a major religion. The West is unusual in having debunked its own and also rigorously excluding religious issues from public life. Even more remarkable is the cheerful confidence displayed by most Westerns in the falsity of any “hard” religious claims. What eighteenth and nineteenth century rationalism began, the rise of functional rationality and technocracy has completed.¹⁴⁷

Paul Hiebert, working as a missionary in India found himself confronted by two worldviews, his own Western and the worldview of the Indian people he was ministering to. He confesses that as a missionary, he felt a sense of uneasiness when he was faced with questions that dealt with the India worldview. The Indian worldview, like the African worldview has a lively middle tier that connects the physical world with the spiritual world. According to Hiebert, his Biblical worldview that was heavily influenced by the western worldview could not answer the questions raised by the Indians Christians he served. He observes that:

¹⁴⁷ Meic Pearse, *Why the Rest Hates the West*, (Dowers Grove, Illinois:Inter-Varsity Press, 2005), 40

The reason for my uneasiness with the biblical and Indian worldviews should be clear: I had excluded the middle level of supernatural, this worldly beings and forces from my own worldview. As a scientist I had been trained to deal with the empirical world in naturalistic terms. As a theologian I was taught to answer ultimate questions in theistic terms. For me the middle level did not really exist. Unlike Indian villagers, I had given little thought to spirits of this world, to local ancestors and ghosts, or to the souls of animals. For me these belonged to the realm of fairies, trolls, and other mythical beings. Consequently I had no answers to the questions they raised.¹⁴⁸

Like Hiebert in India, the missionaries who served in Africa in the past and those who are currently in the field, have and indeed experience similar difficulties in relating to Africans whose worldview share a lot of similarities with Indians. The Africans for sure have shown their uneasiness with the Biblical worldview that is greatly influenced by western worldview. This is especially evident when dealing with the crisis such as death and illness that cannot be explained scientifically. The unfortunate outcome of this misunderstanding is a divided, confused and ignorant Christian community in Africa. The many schisms and the rise of independent churches is a witness to this confusion in Africa.

The Biblical World-view as presented in Africa

Western missionaries replicated Paul Hiebert's experience of Indian in Africa at the turn of the 19th Century when the Gospel was first preached in the continent. Today, unfortunately, the missionaries are repeating the same mistakes since little has changed in the attempts to understand and approach different worldviews. The Western worldview says Hiebert, "left western Christians with a spiritual schizophrenia ... they lived in an ordinary world explained

¹⁴⁸ Paul Hiebert, 196

in naturalistic terms, in which there was little room for God¹⁴⁹. It is this reality of the world that African Christians and non-Christians alike have adapted in the midst of their own views of reality that point to the opposite direction.

Interestingly, the Biblical worldview does not make sharp distinctions between the natural and the supernatural phenomenon. The Bible unlike the western realities does not deny the spiritual realities. Indeed the Biblical stories portray vibrant encounters of human and spiritual forces. The missionaries in Africa however presented a biblical worldview that borrowed heavily from the secular West. The only difference from the secular western worldview was that the Biblical worldview introduced to Africa had Christ as the link between God and His creation. As already noted, the missionaries to Africa taught that the only mediator between man and God is Jesus Christ. For this reason, the missionaries and the colonial government discouraged, degraded and demonized the belief in spiritual beings such as ancestors, spirits and divinities. Further, they castigated their societal moral agents such as the priest, priestess, herbalist, diviners and healers in general. In fact, many African healers were arrested, fined or jailed for practicing their traditions. African religion was similarly labelled polytheistic, primitive, ancestor worship, fetish and sun – worship among others names to discourage and to lure convert into the new faith.

In East Africa, more than any other African region, traditional religion was almost wiped out completely. This has left African Christian rather lame in that they are totally inadequate in solving certain spiritual matters. In particular, issues of human well being and healing that the new Christian worldview is unable to address. Given that the African worldview is a complex spiritual, social and medicinal realities, many Christian are forced to return to the African tradition in times of crisis to resolve their issues.

¹⁴⁹ Paul Hiebert, 220

We note however that, the introduction of Christ as the mediator, the healer and the messiah was readily accepted by Africans as the source of power to heal. There has therefore been no internal dissonance in seeking the healing power wherever it can be found. In fact, Africans believe that healing power from distant lands is better and more powerful.

Unfortunately, although Christ power is accepted as powerful, it does not answer all the healing needs of an African, and more so, those that are catered for by the ancestors, spirits, nature and the divinities. An African worldview as we have seen provides many venues of addressing different issues. The Supreme Being is addressed by individuals daily on issues of blessing, protections, and sustenance among others. However, healers (priest, herbalist, diviners, elders) assist on issues that are not clear or are beyond individual understanding.

When the healers on the other hand are unable to identify the problems presented to them, they in turn seek counsel on behalf of the clients from the ancestors, the divinities or from the Supreme Being. When the issue at hand deals with individual relationship with the Supreme Being, the problem is life threatening and thus require someone who can provide the right answers. This calls for proper interpretation, that is, the cause of the broken relationship and how these broken relationships can be restored. In the new Christian faith adapted by the Africans, this level of interaction was missing completely. And since an African worldview provides answers to such issues, prayers to Christ do not seem to provide concrete responses and proper steps to be taken by the concerned.

Today there are many African Christians who are still struggling with these issues. Although many are faithful to the biblical worldview as presented by the missionaries over a century ago, they are brought up and socialized as an African from childhood and thus assimilate the ingredients of the basic African personality.

Therefore, in spite of the faithfulness of African Christians to the Church teachings, they nevertheless find the two world-views clashing causing confusion and conflict of interest constantly. This alone is a major source of psychological disturbances among African Christians requiring therapeutic attention.

Over the years, African Christians have sought ways to accommodate the Christian faith within their own world-view albeit with some adjustment. The very first reaction was the development of the African independent churches throughout Africa. These churches generally accept the Christian teaching and doctrines but also accept the spiritual world as understood in Africa context.

The Churches therefore accept the Biblical world-view with Jesus Christ as the only mediator between human being and God. Whereas the missionaries denied the existence of the mystical powers, the African Independent Churches acknowledged the existence of spiritual forces among them ancestral spirits, the power of witchcraft and other spirits in an African world-view. They were however in agreement with the missionaries in condemning the societal agents among the healers, priests, priestess, diviners and any other persons who ascribed to indigenous religion and supported the cause of their propagation. These meant that indigenous institutions and some practices are also regarded with contempt and rejection.

The resultant world-view is a biblical world-view discussed above but one which incorporates the mystical forces in the middle level. Unlike the African tradition that recognizes that some spiritual forces are good and helpful to humans, the African Christian Churches regard all the spiritual forces in the middle level as evil.

Interestingly, as I was working on this book at Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena in California, USA, I sat in a class entitled "Power Encounters". The class covered issues on spiritual powers in other cultures and how missionaries can encounter them

in a cross-cultural setting. The lecturer admitted that western Christians could no longer continue to ignore the existence of spiritual powers present in other cultures. He observed that:

Western world-view cross-cultural workers need a paradigm shift not only to be relevant but also to be Biblical. Westerns need to realize that our “r” [reality] is not God's “R” [Reality] (nor is the traditional views entirely correct either – we all see through a glass dimly!¹⁵⁰

In rather strong words, the lecturer indicated that the West must change their view towards other cultures and worldviews in order to be relevant to the present realities. He writes: “If we fail to heed the reality of the excluded middle we will be considered naive and uninformed at best, or stupid, unspiritual, irrelevant and/or arrogant at worst”.¹⁵¹

These increasingly accepted stand by evangelical Christians is supported by great writers and scholars among them Walter Wink, Clinton Arnold, Paul Hiebert, David Augsburg and Charles Kraft among others. Like the African independent Churches they acknowledge the existence of the mystical forces in the middle level of a three-tiered worldview. What was rather surprising for me to learn here was that the sources of all diseases are regarded as demonic powers and that the demons can be eliminated by casting them out to restore the health of the inflicted. This phenomenon is now common in Africa especially among the new Christian movements in the Pentecostal Churches and emerging Christian crusade meetings under the auspices of “ministries”.

Due to the multiplicity of world-views, and the lack of complete satisfaction of any, African people have adopted several ways of dealing with conflicts brought about by diverse realities. One, there are those African Christians who strongly believe in the

¹⁵⁰ Paul Hiebert, 220

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

Christian worldview and like the early missionaries believe that once a Christian, the Christian worldview replaces the indigenous one. Such Christians ignore the hard-wired African worldview and puts on the new lenses of the Christian worldview oblivious of the consequences.

The Christians in this category more often than not find themselves in difficulties. They fail to relate well with others and are often isolated since they find fault with indigenous world-views and think it unacceptable. The irony is that although they believe they have deleted the African reality, it actually does not, instead the rejected worldview disappears into the hide mode. From here, it appears once in a while when issues that cannot be catered for by the Christian teaching and which have solution in an African culture arise.

Two, there are those who recognize the importance of their African culture and spirituality but at the same time value the Christian faith. Such individual know when to lean and tap from the strength of each worldview for their benefit at the appropriate time and place. Although they are often seen as hypocrites or syncretists by the Christians described above, they are more comfortable. They relate well with both Christians and non-Christians. Many of them tend also to move to churches that are more sympathetic to their perspectives, the majority of these being Catholic Church or independent churches.

Three, there are a group of Africans who find it necessary not only to accept the African worldview but also Christian as well as the secular worldview. The majority of these are professionals and more so those in scientific and technological disciplines. This group of people tends to accept all the worldview separately, apply each when necessary but never merge the views together. These people tend to live double lives or even triple, as a traditional African, secular scientist and a Christian.¹⁵²

¹⁵² See Adam K. arap Chepkwony, "Religion and Science: Living 'Double' Lives in Africa" at http://www.metanexus.net/conference2005/pdf/arap_chepkwony.pdf.

This unfortunate situation has been instigated by a group of Christians, who although they enjoy the benefits of scientific inventions, see science as an attempt to compete with God. The preaching against science and elitism has either driven the people away from the Church or forced them to accept all the views but separately for survival purposes. This attitude has created a rift between science and religion and also Christianity with indigenous cultures. Those who find themselves in this situation live as if they are using tri-vocal lenses, using each for separate goals as need arises.



Those who believe in Secular, Christian and traditional world-views

Four, the last group of people are those who insist on traditional worldview but see no objection of the other views. This group relies on traditions and adapts what can fit the traditional view from other worldviews and practices. For them, culture is dynamic and as long as the core values of the traditions are intact, they see no problem in adopting and exploring new ideas. This is

actually the stand of the majority of the ordinary people many of whom are Christians and the beneficiaries of modern scientific achievements, traditional and Christian services. Also included here are the religious specialists who would for example, not have any problem in advising a patient to use modern drugs or encourage their patients to pray according to their respective faiths.

For the religious specialists in particular, the African worldview is the major lens to perceive the world. However, other lenses may be used occasionally as need arises. When the need proofs continues and they find no problem in adapting the new perspectives into their worldview they quickly adjust to suit them. The Christians, the educated and even the African governments however see this group with suspicion and mistrust. But those who benefit from them, among them the Christians and the elite who visit them in secret or by proxy praise them for their healing abilities and the general concern for human well-being.

It is clear from above that western and biblical worldview has created division among the African people. This has in a way exacerbated the idea of individualism as perceived in the West. Individualism however runs contrary to African realities and thus shunned and discouraged, since they cherish communal living. Since individualism is a product of both secular and Christian worldviews, let us explore more on why Christians find themselves entangled in different worldviews.

When African Christians join the Church, they often ignore the fact that they were brought up in an African worldview. This worldview provides a picture that translates into beliefs, values, attitudes and ultimately prompts them to act in a certain way. On conversion, African became Christians with a well-established or even hard-wired worldview. In their new faith, Christians are handily taught the biblical worldview they are joining well enough to understand what it means to them. Further, they are not shown

how the Christian beliefs translated to values and actions. In other words, they are not assisted to see the meaning of the new life in Christ and the world around them.

The African Christian therefore joins the faith and by so doing is expected to disown their worldview. On the other hand, the new faith does not provide them with a workable worldview, at least not like their own African worldview. The previous reality provided them not only with answers to their problems but a community to support them and where to turn in times of need. As a result, a Christian is confronted by two broken worldviews. This results in conflicts and confusion on how to handle new and old beliefs, values and how to behave.

This is the state in which most Christians find themselves. Many turn to simplistic answers to issues, use of bible as scapegoat, and very often memorize certain biblical verses to shoot down any non-Christian arguments. The church has failed to train and to equip its faithful adequately to face life fully without isolating themselves from the supporting community. The Church normally exposes new Christians to scattered bits of biblical knowledge provided during Church services. And although they are excited about their new faith and insights, they soon forget the new found truth in their complexity of life.

Their new faithful find it difficult to accommodate the new insight because they do not possess the context or the method to analyze, categorize and utilize the newfound knowledge. This is because the new Christian information has no foundation in their life system. The new Christians are not provided with a Christian worldview that can confront the new challenges they face. This is made worse when the Christians are taught that the Christian worldview is the only acceptable one. Again, the result is conflicts, confusion and frequent change of Churches in an effort to find a church that they would feel at home.

Individualism as Practiced in the West

One of the most obvious characteristics that the Western world-view has created is individualism. Individualism is so closely connected to the western values and modernity so much that it is associated with the industrialized wealthy and urban societies of the west. Indeed the West perceives individualism as good and credited for the development of Europe and America. Hofstede defines individualism thus: "Individualism pertains to societies in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family"¹⁵³.

The fundamental theme therefore in understanding individualism is the centrality of the autonomous individual. This is certainly associated with the enlightenment ideas in which the self replaces God. The focus in self in then emancipated in new values of personal realization, material comfort, immediate gratification and love of leisure.

The importance of the concept of individualism is evident in the many studies undertaken in this area among them Hofstede, Triandis and Schwartz. Anu Realo has put together the ten general features characteristic of individualism from the studies of the above three scholars as follows:

- a. ...are loosely linked and view themselves as independent of collectives.
- b. ...take care only of themselves and of their immediate family.
- c. ...have independent self-control defined by distinctive sets of internal attributes, qualities and processes.
- d. ...are primarily motivated by their own preferences, needs, rights, and the contracts they have established with others.

¹⁵³ Geert H. Hofstede, "Individualism and Collectivism: An Exploration of Individual Cultural Differences" Vol. 6, *Dissertationes Psychologicae Universitatis Tartuensis*, (Tartu University Press, 199), 55

- e.give priority to their personal goals over the goals of others.
- f.emphasize rational analyses of the advantages and disadvantages to associating with others.
- g. ...emphasize both affective and intellectual autonomy.
- h. ...prefer equal treatment of people and resources.
- i. ...want to be unique.
- j.want to be better than others.¹⁵⁴

These then are the general characteristics of individuals living in the West and indeed those who have adopted this world-view. These characteristics indicate that individualism is an isolating belief system in which individuals ignore the value of others around them unless they are of benefit to them.

Individualism is only one characteristic of a Western world-view among the many we have already discussed above. It may be fitting at this point to list as a way of summarizing this section the major characteristic of a Western world-view as follows:

1. The highest value of life lies in the object, or in the acquisition of the object.
2. One gains knowledge through counting and measuring.
3. One should control and dominate nature.
4. There is dichotomy, or separateness, between nature and man.
5. The survival of the fittest holds the utmost importance.
6. Men should have an unlimited exploitation of the materials around them.
7. One's self is distinct from others.
8. Change occurs to meet the immediate objectives, and is quite arbitrary.

¹⁵⁴ Anu Raelo, "Comparison of Public and Academic Discourses: Estonian Individualism and Collectivism Revisited" *Culture Psychology* 3003; 9; 47, 58, See also Sage Journals online, <http://cap.sagepub.com>.

9. A distant, impersonal god holds the most significance.
10. There is only one supreme deity to worship.
11. Competition, independence, separateness, and individual's rights are the key values to which all should strive to achieve.
12. All men are considered to be individualistic, unique and different.
13. The worldview is linear one. In which all events are separate and there is no togetherness.¹⁵⁵

In the next section we shall consider the communal characteristic that is common in an African worldview. The comparison of the two systems later will help us to understand the two approaches and therefore assess the influence each has on people's lives; lifestyles, health, and how to solve their health care needs.

Communalism as practiced in African

Whereas the West is associated with inclination towards individualism, Africa is characterized by communal societies. In communal societies, the centre of gravity is the people; the family, the clan, the community and the tribe. This is symbolized by the concepts of *Ubuntu*, *Undungu*, and *Ntu* discussed earlier. Communalism, also referred to as collectivism has been defines as that which,

...pertains to societies in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong cohesive in groups, which throughout peoples' life time continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ See www.swagga.com/wviews.htm

¹⁵⁶ Anu Raelo, 60

In the communal societies, the highest value of life lies in the interpersonal relationships between human as depicted in the following rather famous quotation by Mbiti:

Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say. 'I am because we are; and since we are, I am'.¹⁵⁷

The value and need of communal living is most felt in the well-being of each individual in the community at large. It is the community that meets the needs of the weak, the sick, the orphaned, the windowed and the old. When the health and well-being of someone is at risk, it is the responsibility of the community to unite and face the challenge. This could simply be in the form of visitation, help in chores, referral to a known specialist who can assist, or donate finances to defray bills. For as discussed earlier, fellow humans in African are known to be medicinal to other human beings. It is during these encounters that some of the best counseling sessions, not only to the patients, but also to the affected family and community at large, is experienced.

In comparison with the individualism, Anu has suggested the following characteristic of communalism.

1. ...are integrated (embedded) in strong, cohesive collectives.
2. ...are unquestionably loyal to the group which they belong.
3. ...have interdependent self-controls defined mostly by their social relationships with the members of the groups to which they belong.
4. ...are primarily motivated by the needs, norms and duties imposed by collectives to which they belong.

¹⁵⁷ Mbiti, 1969

5. ...are willing to give priority to the goals of these collectives over their own personal goals.
6. ...emphasize their connectedness to the members of these collectives.
7. ...participate in and identify with the group in carrying on its shared way of life.
8. ...accept hierarchical treatment of people and resources.
9. ...merge their selves with their in groups.
10. ..emphasize harmonious relationships with members of these collectives.¹⁵⁸

Communalism is therefore the foundation of an African worldview: a communion between the Supreme Being and the human being in connections with and in full participation of the ancestors and nature. The characteristics of an African worldview have therefore been summarized thus:

- a. The highest value of life lies in the interpersonal relationships between humans.
- b. One gains knowledge through symbolic imagery and rhythm.
- c. One should live in harmony with nature.
- d. There is oneness between humans and nature.
- e. The survival of the group holds the utmost important.
- f. Humans should appropriately utilize the material around them.
- g. One's self is complimentary to others.
- h. Change occurs in natural, evolutionary cycle.
- i. Spirituality and inner divinities hold the most significance.
- j. There are plethoras of deities to worship.
- k. Cooperation, collective responsibility, and interdependence are the key values to which all should strive to achieve.

¹⁵⁸ Anu Raelo, 58

- l.** All humans are considered to: be equal, share a common bond, and be a part of the group.
- m.** The Afrocentric worldview is a circular one, in which all events are tied together with one another.¹⁵⁹

Having articulated the African and the western world-views, it is important to note that these views describe the reality as understood by the majority of people in mind. This may not necessary apply to all individuals in the area of concern. In other words, it is not true to suggest that all Africans without exception ascribe in total the African world-view as described in chapter 2 and 3. Indeed, there is an emerging class of Africans who are oriented towards western world-view in their thinking and indeed their actions.

One should not buy the common mistake that claim that in African communalism, individuality is completely shunned. On the contrary, individuals in African are allowed to explore their abilities, uniqueness, talents and personal developments agendas that are propelled by personal initiative and ambitions. In the same way, it was wrong to assume that all Americans or Europeans adhere closely to the said characteristics of the western world-view. I have known people in the West who have close nit families, concerned with others people's welfare and sacrifice their life for others.

¹⁵⁹ See www.swagga.com/wviews.htm



CHAPTER EIGHT

Implications of Western Counseling Models, Theories and Psychotherapy For Practice In Africa

Introduction

In this chapter, we shall assess the suitability of counseling theories modelled in the West in serving African people who ascribe to an African worldview. We shall examine both the secular and Christian psychological theories as taught and practiced in the West and now imported, taught and practiced in Africa wholesale. Along with this, we shall also take note of the techniques and skills used in this counseling profession. Finally, we shall scrutinize the suitability of the ethical issues as understood in the West to counseling situations in African.

It is important to emphasize here that the purpose of discussing the two worldviews in the previous four chapters is not to suggest that one is bad and the other is good. I am not even suggesting that one is better than the other. What is important here is for us to acknowledge the fact that people are brought up in specific worldviews. That worldviews influences the way one thinks, the way one does things and the way one acts. In other words, it influences what one believes, what one values and the kind of actions one takes to enhance the beliefs and values. Similarly, in counseling, ones worldview dictates what they believe to be the causes of disturbances and how to go about solving the issues.

Similarly, it is essential for us to understand that a specific worldview is deeply ingrained in each one of us and that it is rather difficult to forget or ignore it all together. Even when a new worldview is introduced into our lives we cannot simply ignore the old one. What we are likely to do is to suppress the old views or cause it to disappear into the “hide mode” where it will occasionally

appear. This “appearing” and “disappearing” of certain values can be the cause of disturbances to many people especially if the values of the new worldview contradict the values of the old or rather, the original reality.

I hasten to say that there are however, certain characteristics in each worldview that can be said to bring about negative or destructive results to its adherence. I believe the negative aspects should concern us most especially when we are borrowing ideas from another culture. In this case, there is need to scrutinize the Western psychotherapy being adapted in Africa and appreciate its advantages but at the same time recognize its disadvantages. In this way, it is possible to improve and avoid past mistakes. And as we shall suggest in the last chapter, the ideal is to combine the positive aspects of each worldview and as much as possible, avoid the negatives aspects.

Our major problem in Africa is that we have borrowed Western counseling wholesale. Africa is better off; it seems to me, if we are especially critical of other people's views of counseling before we accept them wholesale. This is because counseling is a sensitive subject; it deals with human beings and more so human life. And as I mentioned early, there are many people who believe that everything that comes from the West is good. One thing is however clear, that even among the Westerners, many are dissatisfied with their models. The following long quotation is a witness to the fact that Africa need to use with caution borrowed ideas in psychotherapy. This quotation from, and indeed the entire book by William J. Doherty and a host of other western authors shows their dissatisfaction with the Western psychotherapy.

In the last decade of a century that had witnessed “the triumph of the therapeutic” in mainstream culture, **psychotherapy in America is facing a crisis of public confidence.** The crisis is not

about the perceived benefits of psychotherapy; more than one-third of all Americans think psychotherapy for personal problems is helpful. **Rather the crisis is over psychotherapy's ability to speak to the profound social problems of our day.** Are therapists making these problems worse by justifying the **contemporary flight from personal responsibility, moral accountability, and participatory community?** This concern is coming from within the psychotherapy community as well as from without and is provocatively expressed in the title of a book by the Jungian therapist James Hillman and his colleague Michael Ventura, *We've Had a Hundred Years of Psychotherapy – and the world's Getting Worse (emphasis mine)*.¹⁶⁰

There are three factors that I would like to highlight from the above quotation. First, we note that psychotherapy is facing crisis in America. If this is true, it is rather unfair if not foolish to blindly follow a system that those who have used it for more than a century have found loopholes in it. It would be prudent for Africans to carefully study the psychotherapies developed in the West and adapt aspects that are beneficial and supportive to their world-view and discard what is not relevant. At worst, African should at least be aware of what is making the West lose confidence in their therapist and therapeutic models.

Second, the cited source suggests that the present American psychotherapy is unable to adequately address the social problems today. Again, the question we need to ask is: if the methods we are copying have failed to satisfy the social needs of the America people, why should we think it shall suit the needs of the Africans. Of course, the American social needs are not the same as the African needs but a system that cannot solve social needs in African is not worthwhile. At the same time we must remember that the American

¹⁶⁰ William J. Doherty, *Soul Searching: Why Psychotherapy must Promote Moral Responsibility*. (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 5

psychotherapies, which are now seen as inadequate, were developed to suit and conform to the American/European/Western worldview.

Third, the fact that Western psychotherapy has difficulties in confronting social issues is of great concern. The main characteristic of a Western worldview is individualism and thus its psychotherapies are designed to speak more appropriately to individuals rather than social issues. On the other hand, the main characteristic of an African worldview is communalism in which people are dependent on each other. It therefore means that Western psychotherapies are deficient to address African social issues that are central in an African life.

Four, the quotation also indicates that the American psychotherapist encourage and justify individuals to run away from personal responsibilities, moral accountability, and participation in community. This again is totally unlike an African understanding of what life really means. For an African, life outside *Ubuntu*, *Undungu*, *Ntu* and *Sankofa* is no life. And if a counseling system is inadequate in addressing these communal beliefs and life style, then it is a folly to accommodate it for practice among the African people.

We shall therefore examine three aspects of Western psychotherapy and note their contribution or lack of it to African worldviews. These aspects are Western theories, skills and techniques and ethical issues in psychotherapy practice. We shall not dwell in details on any of the aspects, the assumption here is that the reader is familiar with the western theories and practices of counseling.

Theories and Psychotherapy

We shall begin by reminding ourselves the roots or origin of the various western theories of psychotherapy used in Africa today. There are basically four major secular traditional models of psychotherapies that have been developed over the years. These are:

1. Humanistic- existential therapies, 2. Dynamic therapies, 3. Cognitive-behavioural therapies and 4. Family system therapies.¹⁶¹

Besides these, there are medical /biological therapy practiced in western medical centres and hospitals where it is commonly referred to as psychiatry. There is also the Pastoral/Biblical therapy with its emphasis on moral and theological inclinations. The Biblical therapies have been in existence much longer than the secular therapies but have over the years been influenced by the prevailing secular worldviews and other approaches of therapy.

All the above therapies were developed in Europe and later in America and were inspired by the spirit of the enlightenment period. The roots of dynamic, cognitive-behavioural and family system are classical empiricism while humanistic therapies have its genesis in existentialism and romanticism. These therapies are also deeply imbedded in the worldviews of their times. In particular, they take into consideration the beliefs and values of that time and those which continue to be perpetuated currently in the Western world.

Of particular importance as far as the therapies are concerned, is the belief in scientific revolution which is incorporated into the understanding of these therapies. In other words, all these psychotherapies reflect the influence of classical empiricism as well as the enlightenment ideas. These theories are founded on individualistic, materialistic and naturalistic worldview of the Euro-America background.

In discussing Western theories of psychotherapy and their implications for practice in Africa, we shall in particular assess their applicability in an Afro-centric therapy. To do this effectively, we shall examine how Western therapies respond to some essential components of an African worldview among them religious cosmology, communal sense of belonging, harmonious relationships and psychology of human development.

¹⁶¹ L. Jones and Richard E. Butman, *Modern Psychotherapies*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 32

Western theories and Spirituality

Spirituality can be said to be the organizing principle of an African worldview. Everything as understood by Africans is imbued with religious significance. This means that African interpretation of their well-being incorporates spirituality in all levels of life. Therefore a therapeutic theory that lacks the spiritual component does not do justice to an African who believes in the importance of spiritual beings and interact with them daily and allows spiritual world to affect every aspect of their daily lives. This is not so in the western worldview as shall be articulated below.

The majority of the Western theories of psychotherapy are anti-religious. Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis for example does not have a place for religion in its system. In fact psychoanalysis is an atheistic system that believes that religion is an illusion. Freud described religion as inherently evil and that it is a form of neurosis.¹⁶² According to psychoanalysis, human beings tend to create an illusion to comfort and shield oneself from real or distorted memories developed during childhood.

Freud further suggests that due to human weakness and vulnerability as a child, children perceive loving parents as omnipotent, omniscient and as responsible for protecting them. These feeling are eventually projected in the belief in a Supreme Being who is in charge of the entire human life. Freud therefore argues that religious believes in adolescence or in adults is a reaction of the harsh realities in life. In an effort to maintain security and well-being, humans create an imaginary deity in some form of religion. In other words, according to Freud and his psychoanalysis, religion is not real and therefore it does not exist and consequently of no help to anyone.

Another Western theory that does not recognize the significance of religion is Albert Ellis' Rational Emotive therapy

¹⁶² Ibid.,

(RET). Although Ellis admits that belief in God can be emotionally healthy, he argues, "...devout belief ... tends to foster human dependency and increases emotional disturbances".¹⁶³ He warns that one should not be involved too much since too much of religion is bad. Ellis himself did not believe in God as explained by Jones:

The values that Ellis proposed contrasted with theistic values in asserting that there is no one supreme being in the universe, that personal identity is temporal and ephemeral, that self-acceptance does not depend on the existence of a deity, that self-satisfaction is central to personal growth, that the structure of the family life and sexual morality is a personal choice, that personal responsibility can exist without guilt, and that we determine our own meanings in life based on our personal desires and reason.¹⁶⁴

Other Western approaches that deny the existence of the supernatural are the behavioural approaches. Behavioural approaches are naturalistic and based on the idea that the universe is composed of matter and energy. There are therefore no such beings like gods, divinities, evil spirits and ancestral spirits as believed by African traditionalist and Christian alike.

Without necessarily pointing out how each of the majority of Western psychotherapy are anti-religions, the above examples will suffice. In our previous discussion, it was made clear that the role of religion in Africa is central in all aspects of life including seeking solutions to ill health. Christian Baeta's observation in this regard may help us to consolidate the African perspective of what we mean. In reference to Ghana, he observes that:

... in traditional Ghana, the solution to all problems of ill-health, as of concern or anxiety generally has been sought squarely

¹⁶³ Jones and Butman, 174

¹⁶⁴ Jones and Butman, 180

within the framework of religion. On a worldview which assumes the effective presence of numberless spirits, and regards all life as one; with no clear distinctions between the material and non-material, the natural and the supernatural let alone the secular and the religious, or even between man and other created things and beings, this could hardly be otherwise.¹⁶⁵

The importance of Freud's psychoanalysis can never be underestimated in the discipline of psychotherapy. Similarly Albert Ellis (RET) will always inform old and incoming psychotherapies. In spite of these, Freud claims that religion is an illusion which consequently has no significant value is not acceptable in an African understanding of well being. And although we agree with Ellis that religion can be dangerous when wrongly used, to suggest that a Supreme Being does not exist undermines how to address counseling issues of an Africa client who believes in the existence of a Supreme Being.

To exclude religious phenomena in Africa is to reduce to nothing the client's beliefs, values and relationship with the spiritual and invisible world. It is therefore not possible to ignore the spiritual elements that is: the belief in the Supreme Being, ancestors and spirits in psychotherapy when dealing with African clients irrespective of whether they believe in traditional religion or any of the imported faiths.

Communal sense of belonging

In the last chapter, we noted that the distinguishing characteristic of an African world-view is communal life where everyone acts as their "brothers' keepers". In such a setting, families, neighbours and communities are of paramount importance in

¹⁶⁵ Christian G. Baeta, "Christianity and Healing" Orita. (Ibadan) 1967, vol. 1, p. 51 as quoted in Emmanuel Yartekwei Lartey, *Pastoral Counselling in inter-cultural Perspective: A study of Some African (Ghanaian) and Anglo-American views of human existence and counselling*, (New York: Verlag Peter Lang, 1987), 118

therapeutic relationships. These ideas however, are almost totally discouraged in Western therapy. Doherty explains how Western psychotherapy has replaced family and community concerns with individualism. He makes the following observation:

For many people, psychotherapy has replaced family as the only reliable haven in a heartless world. In fact, psychotherapy is where people turn to be healed from the hurts they believe their families inflicted on them. Therapy is the ultimate private experience, occurring in small spaces bounded by thick walls of confidentiality.¹⁶⁶

Doherty has attributed the deterioration of the role of community in therapeutic intervention to individualism which is encouraged by western psychotherapy. He argues that instead of promoting the importance of family and community, the modern psychotherapy has rejected it on the assumption that this will benefit the individual “to pursue personal authenticity and psychological gain”.¹⁶⁷ James Hillman and Michael Ventura have expressed similar sentiments as paraphrased by Doherty:

The dominant models of psychotherapy have contributed to the breakdown of human community by ignoring the social and political domains and celebrating the private and personal domains.¹⁶⁸

The majority of Western therapists are not sympathetic to family and community issues so much that they do not entertain community affairs in their therapy. Studies have shown that although clients tend to mention family, community or world affairs

¹⁶⁶ William J. Doherty, *Soul Searching: Why Psychotherapy Must Promote Moral Responsibility*, (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 89

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 96

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 98

at the beginning of their therapy, therapists rarely integrate the information shared into their therapy session. According to Doherty, therapists interpret client's family and community activity to be a camouflage of their own personal issues and use it as a way to solve their own problems.

To drive the point home, Doherty gives an example of a client who went to see his therapist just before he traveled overseas to work with war-oppressed children. In response to this decision, "the therapist suggested that [he] was doing this work to deal with the internal war of his own childhood". In another example, he revealed that a client "curtailed her social activism after her therapist re-framed it as a misguided effort to fill a hole inside herself by trying to save the world".¹⁷⁰

A therapy that encourages this mentality does not only discourage communal participation but destroys communal spirit. In Africa, as already observed, no one is important by himself or herself except by being a member of a community. Indeed a traditional counselor spends significant amount of time discussing his client's relationship with the members of his/her family and community at large during exploration to determine the cause(s) of the disturbance. It is therefore unfair to assume that the issues brought to counseling sessions have everything to do with individual and nothing to do with the family or community. It is equally wrong to assume that the primary motivating factors of helping others is for self-healing.

As we noted earlier, major psychological disturbances in Africa arise from failing to fulfill the obligation to family, community, the ancestors and the Supreme Being. The individualistic nature of western psychotherapy marks a major rift between African and Western understanding and practice of counseling. The individualism depicted in the Western therapy is seemingly a socially irresponsible approach that calls for rejection from all who

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 98

value the aggregarian nature of human being. The Western psychotherapy can best be summarized in what has been said to be “Gestalt prayer” in which individualism is the main characteristic.

I do my thing and you do your thing,
I am not in this world to live up to your expectation,
And you are not in this world to live up to mine.
You are you and I am I.
And if by chance we find each other, it's beautiful.
If not, it can't be helped.¹⁷¹

Fortunately the above “prayer” is not completely true even among those who live in the West. Human beings truly need each other in spite of the fact that each person is unique. People therefore find each other even if it is among the family members. And finally, people need not merely meet by chance, people can surely find a million reasons to meet and make their meeting beautiful experience each time.

The harmonious relationships

The central objective of traditional counseling is to restore harmonious relationship between God, divinities, ancestors, human being, other created things and the environment. Therapy therefore deals with relationships, responsibilities, solidarity and how to fulfill the necessary obligations for a stable life in the community. In other words, African traditional therapy is an inquiry of once participation in a harmonious relationship within the cosmos and how to maintain and restore such relationships.

Over the years, African people have developed intricate system of how to communicate to the mystical world. The system incorporates symbols and ritual that interpret and give meanings to the providers and recipients of counseling. These techniques and

¹⁷¹ Lartey 1987, 84.

skills are more effective in dealing with African issues since they are founded on an understanding of an African worldview.

The Western therapies are on the other hand naturalistic and individualistic in their approach and do not accommodate the idea of spiritual and mystical powers nor communal responsibility. Take for example Carl Rogers theory of Person-Centred. The person centred theory is founded on the belief that an individual is the ultimate force and the master of his/her own destiny. In this scenario, the individual or self assumes the position of the supreme importance at the expense of family or community. As Jones puts it:

The self assumes a position of supreme importance in Rogers's person centred therapy, a notion that can be traced back to the philosophy of idealism and romanticism in the nineteenth century. The strong experiential, individualistic and relativistic "core assertions" of person centred therapy unquestionably lead to inflated notions of the self.¹⁷²

The development of the idea of individualism has its origin in the Euro-centric world-view as noted in the quotation above. In an African world-view however, self is not all that there is, and cannot be glorified above the *Ubuntu*. That is not to say that self is not cherished, it is, and in fact individuality is encouraged but not at the expense of the community.

Although African students of counseling find Carl Roger's person centred therapy exciting, they soon discover that it does not work in real situations. Individuals as posited by Rogers do not determine truth, knowledge and moral values. In African understanding, truth, knowledge and moral values are enshrined in the traditions and wisdom of the community. Rogerian concept is on the other hand, rather pessimistic about the value of culture, traditions and system of moral values. In summary, Western therapy

¹⁷² Jones and Butman, 262

is not comparable to the harmonious relationships inculcated in African worldview. Instead, western models of therapy encourage self-centredness and discourage communal life, responsibility and interdependence.

Growth and development of an African child

African continent has produced very few original studies, if any at all, in the field of psychology by Africans scholars. The continent has relied heavily on studies of psychology done in the West. The reason here is that psychology is a relatively a new discipline in Africa. But that does not mean that the African people have lacked the knowledge in psychology which is used to assist people understand themselves and how to solve and counsel those with problems.

Psychology and counseling are related to each other in that psychology offers insights that sharpen counseling knowledge, skills and increases effectiveness. Psychology as a science therefore helps us to understand human development and behaviour and consequently how to modify the unacceptable human behaviour.

The question that concerns us here is whether the different environments and the prevailing world-views influence human growth and development. If this were the case, psychology helps bring out certain awareness in understanding the physical, social, mental, intellectual, emotional and moral growth and development of human being. The implication of this is that the psychology of each group of people is shaped by their beliefs, values, environment or world-views. This means that all people do not necessarily adhere to the same understanding and interpretation of psychology.

The study of psychology explores the ways in which culture, individual uniqueness and human characteristic work and how it influences people in general. Kluckhohn and Murray's basic maxim that, " Every human person is in some respect **(a)** like others, **(b)** like

some others, (c) like no other''¹⁷³ recognizes that although human being have common characteristics, they also have their uniqueness. In explaining this maxim, Lartey clearly shows that:

By 'human characteristics' (we are all like others) refer to that which all humans share such as physiological, cognitive and psychological capabilities, with all the common human variations. The 'cultural' (we are like some others) refers to characteristic ways of knowing, interpreting and valuing the world which we receive through the socialization processes we go through in our social groupings. These include world-views, values, preferences and interpretive frames as well as language, customs and forms of social relationship. The 'individual' (like no other) or personal indicates that there characteristics – both physical (e.g. finger-prints and dental configuration) and psychosocial - which are unique to individuals.¹⁷⁴

The above observation leads us to the fact that although African may have some common characteristics with other people of the world, they also have some characteristics that are unique to them. Further, that even among Africans themselves, the individuals have some characteristics that are unique to each. This simply means that the psychological studies based in the West may not necessarily be applicable wholesale to people from other parts of the world.

To illustrate this point, we shall briefly point out some studies that have shown that the development of an African child is not the same as the development of a child raised in Europe or America. In a chapter in *African Psychology in Historical Perspective*(1996), Neferkare Abena Stewart has narrated several studies which show that sensori-motor development of infants born to African mothers in Africa develop faster than their counter parts in Europe and

¹⁷³ Emmanuel Yartekwei Lartey, "Pastoral Counseling in Multi-Cultural Contexts", *American Journal of Pastoral Counseling*, The Haworth Pastoral Press, Vol. 5, No (3/4), 327

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

America. The study by Brazelton, Koslowski and Tronick (1971), showed that children born of Zambian mothers surpassed the European - American babies "in cuddliness reactivity to stimulation, alertness, social interests and consolability".¹⁷⁵

In another study by Leiderman et al (1973) the infants of the Kikuyu of Kenya were tested on individual test items of the Bayley Mental and Psychomotor Scales. The study showed that Kikuyu infants performance were superior to infants of similar age in United States. That is, "Kikuyu infants scored significantly ($p < 0.01$) better on both the mental and psychomotor scales than would be expected in a United States group".¹⁷⁶

Freedman did another study among the Hausa people of Nigeria. Using Cambridge Neonatal Examination, Freedman tested Hausa neonates in their first ten days in the hospital. The results indicated that the African neonates demonstrated the precocious forms of neuromuscular and sensory development evident in Caucasians infants after the second or third month. The study notes that:

The African infants were simply precocious in exhibiting fully integrated musculature at so early an age. For example, one Nigerian (Hausa) infant of 45 minutes of age had full head control in the pull to sit, exhibited a straight back with no Kyphosis, and was able to hold a sitting position and looked around the chamber while held by hand. Another 24 hours old, exhibited the Wolfe-Landau responses, a full extension of the head and feet while rocking on the belly, a response not usually seen in Caucasians before the second or third month.¹⁷⁷

Scholars have not agreed on the reasons why African infants show such remarkable difference with their counter parts among the Caucasians. Some explanations have suggested that child rearing

¹⁷⁵ Neferkare Abena Stewart, "Melanin, the Melanin Hypothesis, and the Development and Assessment of African Infants" in Daudi Ajani ya Azibo ed., *African Psychology in Historical Perspective and Related Commentary*, (Asmara, Eritrea: Africa World Press, Inc., 1996), 118

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 119

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 120

practices and nurturance account for the African infants precocious developmental abilities. Others argue that “genetic factors account for the large proportion of the variability of the mental and motor test performance in the infants first years”.¹⁷⁸ Further, other also attribute the difference to socialization and the environment. In explaining the case of the Zambian infants, Stewart notes that:

These researchers also noted that the Zambian mothers created an active and energetic environment for their infants. They provided what was described as a high contact; loving environment which it was suggested facilitated the rapid recovery of the infants. The European American mothers, in contrast to Zambian mothers, handled their children less and used different feeding practices.¹⁷⁹

One more study will assist us further to appreciate how socialization, education and the environment influence child growth and development in Africa. Isaac Mashkgene Ramokgopa of the Rand Afrikaans University wrote a Doctor of Philosophy thesis in the year 2001 entitled “Developmental Staged of an African Child and their Psychological Implication: A Comparative Study”.¹⁸⁰ In this study Ramokgopa argued that although human development is a universal phenomenon, the stages of human development differ from one culture to another. Further that this developmental stages generate expectations that correspond to particular cultures.

In his research, Ramokgopa investigated the applicability of Eric Eriksons' developmental theory to an African child. Erikson was a psychologist who developed eight psychological stages in which humans develop throughout their entire life span. These stages are 1. Trust vs. Mistrust, 2. Autonomy vs. Shame, 3. Shame and

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 119

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 118

¹⁸⁰ Isaac Mashkgene Ramokgopa, “Developmental Stages of an African Child and their Psychological Implications: A Comparative Study. Doctor of Philosophy Thesis, Rand Afrikaans University, November 2001.

Doubt, Initiative vs. Guilt, 4. Industry vs. Inferiority, 5. Identity vs. Role Confusion, 6. Intimacy vs. Isolation, 7. Generativity vs. Stagnation and 8. Integrity vs. Despair

In his study, Ramokgopa compared the first six of the above stages to those an African child goes through. The study was conducted among the Balubedu people of South Africa who still adhere to their traditional life style. The study revealed that Balubedu children, like others, go through various stages of development; that the stages are accompanied by various problems and expectations and that people use different methods to address problems experienced during each stage of development.

The study showed that there are major differences between Erik Eriksons' developmental stages with those of Balubedu and by extension African communities. Briefly his study can be summarized as follows:

- 1) That Erikson's theory describes stages of development in terms of age alone while African developmental stages are described in terms of the child's readiness and ability to perform certain tasks. See table on the comparison of Erikson's and the Balubedu's Stages of human development below.
- 2) That while Erikson theory indicates the presence of psychological problems caused by developmental process, there was no indication of the presence of psycho-social problems found among African developmental process.
- 3) That the definition of the various stages is based on cultural values – that is, while Erikson emphasized the importance of concepts such as competition, independence and egoism, African tend to stress on cooperation, inter-dependence and altruism.

- 4) That Erikson's theory defines stages of development by age alone while African define the stages of development in terms of ability and readiness.
- 5) That there are no rituals and ceremonies in Erikson's model but African model is full of rituals and ceremonies.
- 6) That Erikson's theory puts more emphasis on competition for healthy personal development while African emphasizes cooperation.
- 7) That Erikson's theory puts more focus on individuals' achievements and failure while the Africans emphasize on collective responsibility and altruism.
- 8) That in the final analysis Erikson's development theory is not universally applicable.¹⁸¹

The above observation and conclusion arrived at by Ramokgopa study does not mean that African children do not experience any psychological problem like suggested by Erikson model. All it means is that the psychological problems are dealt with differently and at different times as indicated in the above table. In particular, we note that the African use of rituals and ceremonies tend to prepare children to adjust psychologically to new stages. Similarly, the care, attention given to a child and education by imitating adults tends to be crucial contribution to a child's development. The rites of passage in particular deal with issues of past stages and assist one to transform into the new one. In doing so, the child is assisted to clear any issues of the previous stage and prepared for the next stage.

¹⁸¹ Ramokgopa, 72 - 104

Another psychologist, Sigmund Freud, claims like Erik Erikson that all problems can be traced to developmental stages during childhood. If it is true that African children developmental stages are different, that any issues arising during the stages are dealt with appropriately, then, it would not be proper to use western theories to interpret African issues in counseling or for any curriculum development of an African child. This means that there is need to explore the relevance of western developmental theories and their psychological effects among Africans and other communities whose worldview differ from that of the Europeans and American as presented by Erik Erikson among others.

Whatever explanations the researchers have come up with, one thing is clear: that although human beings have certain common characteristics, they have unique characteristics that make them different as communities and also as individuals. This difference can be due to genetic makeup, environment influence and socialization among others factors. This means that the way we perceive problems and how we go about solving them, also differ depending on the worldviews of the group of people in question.

Comparison of Erikson's and the Balubedu's Stages of human development

Erikson Developmental Stages	Balubedu Developmental Stages
<p>1.Trust Versus Mistrust First Stage- learns to trust or mistrust the world through satisfaction of basic needs, attention and affection. Failure to satisfy needs leads to lack of trust.</p>	<p>1. Lekhatla First stage, problems related to adjustment, learns to walk, talk and communicate. Also dependent on adults learns to recognize family members.</p>
<p>2. Autonomy versus Shame. Second stage, self discovery, explore environment, self-confidence. Failure leads to doubt and shame</p>	<p>2. Ngwana Second stage, introduction of roles, socialization extended, introduction of conformity and cooperation learning, establishment of role identity.</p>
<p>3.Initiative versus Guilt. Third Stage, exploration, beyond self, gains sense of initiative. Failure leads to guilt</p>	
<p>4.Industry versus inferiority Fourth stage, learns to meet social demands, develops sense of self-worth through attaining and interaction with others. Failure leads to inferiority complex</p>	<p>3. Mosinana/Nwanernyana Third stage, perfection of existing roles and learning of new ones, self-identity develops further, collective responsibilities, increased socialization.</p>
<p>5. Identity versus Role confusion. Fifth stage, strong sense of self or becomes confused</p>	<p>4. Mohlanka/Monnyana Fourth stage, higher level of maturity, greater amount of responsibilities, communal initiative and involvement, more stable behaviour, initiation stage, making transition from child to adult.</p>
<p>6. Intimacy versus isolation Sixth stage, develops intimate relationships or remains isolated from others</p>	

Comparison of Erikson's and the Balubedu's Stages of human development



CHAPTER NINE

Implications of Western Counseling Skills and Techniques for Practice in Africa

Introduction

The practice of counseling in Africa has worked from time immemorial because of its effective technique and skills that have been improved and perfected over the years. And since counseling is an art as well as a science of helping people, its objective is to find solution to human distress. All helpers therefore regardless of the world-view are interested in the elevation of problems of their clients albeit using different methods. The skills and techniques used are therefore essential in therapeutic encounters.

In this respect, I agree with Julian Wohl in his article that all counselors regardless of the cultural background and methods used have one thing in common, that is, to alleviate problems of their clients. He observes that a Gestalt counselor, a pastoral counselor, a psychoanalytic psychotherapist, a shaman, a diviner, an astrologer, a reader, an adviser and a fortune teller who provide services to distressed people “will emit an air of confidence, convey concern and helpful intent, listen with careful attention and compassion”.¹⁸²

Wohl further observes that each specialist will assess the situation, try to understand the problem, formulate some reflections and prescribe some course of action intended for relieve of distress. He concludes that:

Despite the particular difference of theory and method, these varied practitioners, whether they employ modern, scientifically rooted approaches, folk methods, or supernatural

¹⁸² Julian Wohl in Paul B. Pedersen, Juris G. Draguns, Walter J. Lonner and Joseph E. Trimble eds., *Counseling Across Cultures*. (Sage Publications, Inc., 5th Edition, 2002), 79

ones, all will have the capacity to make careful, acute appraisals and exert psychological influences upon a supplicant eager and ready for relief.¹⁸³

In the same vein, Torrey has expressed similar views that the basic ingredients in the interventions of traditional healers and modern psychotherapists are identical. He suggests that effort should be taken to recover traditional knowledge of counseling skills from disappearing communities. He writes:

The kahunas, medicine and curanderos, may, in an indeterminate number of settings, be a dying breed. If that be so, it is all the more urgent to benefit from their experience and wisdom, to record their operations, to understand their rationale, and to transmit whatever is viable and applicable to future generations within their own cultures.¹⁸⁴

Finally, Draguns warns that it is imperative to vary the skills and techniques of counseling to cater for the cultural diversity. He observes that in the past few decades, theoreticians, investigators and practitioners of cross-cultural counseling have agreed on the following basic points:

- 1) That techniques or activities of counselors should be modified as they are applied in different cultural milieu.
- 2) That complication in the counseling process tends to increase as the gulf between the counselor and the counselee is widened.
- 3) That conception of counseling or more generally, interpersonal avenues of helping are related to the culturally established modes of self presentation and the communication of distress.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Torrey in Paul B. Pedersen, Juris G. Draguns, Walter J. Lonner and Joseph E. Trimble eds., *Counseling Across Cultures*. (Sage Publications, Inc., 5th Edition, 2002), 7

- 4) That complaints, presenting problems, and reported or communicated patterns of distress differ across cultures.
- 5) That norms and expectations, especially pertaining to coping with external and internal stress, are also subject to variation across cultures.¹⁸⁵

It is in the light of the above consideration that we need to consider the suitability of some skills and techniques in modern psychotherapy when applied to African clients. We shall also suggest some skills that are not common in Western psychotherapy but of central importance in Afro-centric therapy.

As already noted, all therapists, traditional or modern are expected to explore the issues as part of the diagnostic process through listening, providing the core-conditions of genuineness, unconditional positive regard and accurate empathic understanding as taught by Carl Rogers in his person-centred therapy. However, how this is done may differ from culture to culture.

Counseling skills and techniques

In this section, we assess a few skills and techniques that raise issues among the African peoples. I shall also examine some practices used in Western counseling that are incompatible with the African way of thinking and doing things. I shall finally suggest throughout this section some unique methods used by Africans and could be beneficial to therapy in Africa. These will serve only as a few of the issues that arise when counseling from a foreign country is applied to other people with a totally different worldview.

¹⁸⁵ Drauns in Paul B. Pedersen, Juris G. Draguns, Walter J. Lonner and Joseph E. Trimble eds., *Counselling Across Cultures*. (Sage Publications, Inc., 5th Edition, 2002), 8-9

The Core Conditions - Empathy

Empathy as understood in person-centred therapy is an important component in any therapy. This is because empathy creates close working alliance between the client and the therapist. Although any therapist can show empathy to his/her clients, it is more natural when the client is a member of the family, relative, friend, co-worker and other close associates. This is also true in regard to counselors ability to care, prize, acceptance and valuing of client. Indeed even trained counselors strain to show empathy to a total stranger than it would be if the client was familiar.

In Western therapy however, it is not ethical to counsel those who are close to you. I find this restriction rather regrettable as I mention at the beginning of this book. In an African world-view, empathy is part of the traditional philosophy and spirituality. Empathy is considered an essential social structure that reinforces harmonious relationship within the family, relatives and the community. For this reason, Africans tend to seek help from people who are close and understand them best. In particular, uncles, aunts, grandparents, age mates and the community healers and elders are the readily accepted counselors. In such interventions, empathy is not a pretense but a genuine and real experience.

The idea of counseling people known to the counselor has its values. For one, a counselor does not need to spent time in exploration to identify the cause of the issue at hand. The counselor in this case would be familiar with the history, family background as well as the client. Similarly the client cannot beat about the bush as he/she present the issue(s). In deed African traditional counseling does not require long discussions on what happened in the past, instead it is concerned with why the issue is happening and how to assist the client get out of it. Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis which emphasis the exploration of human past may not be of significance importance in this case.

This approach is also significant because it caters for the individual unique characteristic of the client. The African communities believe that each family has its own unique talents, weakness, strengths, secrets and spirits. It is only an insider who can understand and empathize with the client whom they share common characteristic and uniqueness. Traditional counselors are trained to understand the diverse family background in order to provide appropriate therapy to all.

It is proper therefore to suggest that we should not only be sensitive to cross-cultural counseling but also to individual and family uniqueness. For in communities where family secrets are considered a serious matter, it is only a member of that family who can adequately help alleviate psychological disturbances of its members. This is not to suggest however that counseling should be restricted to family members alone. The same traditions believe in inviting an outsider when dealing with family issues to serve as a third eye. On many occasion it is the outsider who makes transforming intervention possible due to their neutrality and fair assessment.

Client invitation

Another practice that is not acceptable in professional counseling is offering counseling services without prior invitation by the client. Western psychotherapy insists that one can only provide counseling services to a client when they request for the serves. In African, on the contrary, practitioners or family members do not hesitate to invite someone whom they believe is psychologically disturbed. This is because the family members or the practitioners are so familiar with them that they can recognize when one of their own is disturbed. In addition, they would also be familiar with the circumstances around them, their emotional stability and their needs. They would also be aware of who the client

relates to best or can handle the perceived problem.

Since it is the responsibility of everybody in African community to ensure the well-being of the other, no one waits for the sick person to announce or seek for counseling services on their own. This makes sense in that some problems are such that the sufferer is not even aware of what is happening to them. It is normally until someone observes and notices that they are not acting normal. I believe this is one area that modern counselors can learn and invite a client or encourage relatives to bring them instead of waiting in their offices.

Counseling environment

The idea of counseling in a specific environment leads us to another issue. Where exactly is the ideal place to hold counseling sessions. A Kipsigis saying admonishes that, "One does not look for a suitable ground for a battle". The implication of this saying is that problems should be tackled whenever and wherever it is encountered. Modern psychotherapy suggests that counseling session should take place in an office in privacy. This may not be ideal or necessary in some African situations.

As suggested by the saying above therefore, a battle should be fought at the point of encounter. This means that counseling can be done besides the road, in the market place, in the field, in the bus, at home or anywhere for that matter. The three-chair scenario advocated in modern psychotherapy in an office may not be applicable at all times. Included here are other counseling skills such as eye contact (SOLER) that may not be applicable or necessary.

Time and counseling fee

This brings us to another issue, that is, time. Modern psychotherapy limits counseling time to sessions of approximately one hour and at an interval of one week. This is understandable from a materialistic West in which time is believed to be money. Clients are

thus charged by the hour and issues are prolonged over a span of time for the benefit of the counselor and not the client. This arrangement also benefits the counselor because he/she can get as many clients as possible in a day. This too does not find enthusiastic support in Africa where human life is more important than time or money.

In traditional setting, issues that are threatening the life of a client are dealt with until a resolution is reached. Although Africans are accused of being insensitive to time, in matters of life and death, time is immaterial. Traditional African practitioners therefore have time to spare until and when it is clear that the client is no longer in danger. This may mean spending many hours and sometimes days to solve a client's issue.

Group Counseling

Although a one to one encounter in counseling is common and one way of counseling in Africa, group counseling is held with high esteem. Whereas one client one therapist counseling deals with personal issues, group counseling deals with complicated issues that goes beyond an individuals. There are three different categories of group counseling practiced by traditional Africa counselors.

The first category which we shall refer to as group counseling is where there is a single counselor or adviser and more than one client. This is the common method used in the West and now used in Schools and even universities in Africa. In Africa traditional counseling, this too is a popular method used often to test the gravity of the matter at hand. If the counselor feels that the issue is above him/her, or if the issue requires the involvement of other parties, the counselor will refer the matter to the appropriate counseling group.

The second category of group counseling may be referred to as "counseling group". This approach is where there are several counselors attending to one client or a couple or a few clients with the

same issue. The different counselors use their divergent experiences to address the issue at hand as a team. At the end of it, a common way forward is suggested with the clients playing a part of the decision.

The third type of group counseling can be named, Group-group counseling. In this scenario, there are more than one counselor and a plurality of clients. One counselor coordinates the contributions and acts as the spokesperson of the group. The value of this approach is that both the counselors and the clients benefit from each other's experiences and a solution is more likely to be reached faster. It is also important because the clients thereafter tend to support one another and at the same time receive the support of the community. It is important to understand here that counseling sessions in African are done in the open and everybody is welcomed to listen and to participate.

Rituals in Africa Therapy

An important technique of healing in Africa that is not very common in the West is the use of rituals. Healing rituals are essentials in Africa because of the strong believe in the supernatural beings and the spirit world. To communicate with the spirit world require a medium and in African, ritual serves this purposes. Malidome describes rituals as:

A dance with Spirits, the soul's way of interacting with other world, the human psyche's opportunity to develop relationship with the symbols of this world and the spirits of the other.¹⁸⁶

Rituals therefore provide people with space and time to reflect on life activities with the invisible world. There are various types of rituals among them verbal, non-verbal, direct, indirect, literal or symbolic modes of communication. Each type of ritual is

¹⁸⁶ Malidoma Patrice Some, *The Healing Wisdom of Africa: Finding life purpose through Nature, Ritual and Community*, (London: Thorsons, 1999), 146

meant to prevent or relieve emotional and physical stress that hinder an individual or group to function normally.

In his paper, Karimi rightly observes that rituals in Africa range from those of individual cleansing procedures and prayers to sacrifices and offering. The prayers, sacrifices or offering are meant to cater for specific causes of psychological disturbances or illness. Prayers for example may be used to express anger, frustration and confusion. Ritual are thus made to fit an occasion and must include some elements of personal and community orientation. It must also be accompanied by sincerity that leads to confession which establishes solidarity with the community and makes room for reconciliation.¹⁸⁷

Rituals fall in the group-group approach since the entire community is involved and its many religious leaders serve as counselors. The healing process in this case is not targeted to the clients alone but to the entire community. But more importantly, the community play the role in the healing process of the sick by creating the atmosphere conducive for the spirit to intervene and join in brings back good health. At the same time, the community provides the needed support, love and hope for its members who are unwell. In this way, the community becomes medicinal to the sick members of the community. As Malidoma explains:

Ritual is a gathering with others in order to feel Spirits call, to express spontaneously and publicly whatever emotion needs to be expressed, to create, in concert with others, an unrehearsed and deeply moving response to Spirit, and to feel the presence of the community, including the ancestors, throughout the experience.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷ Samuel Karimi, "We are Therefore I am: A Pyscho-Cosmos Counselling Model for Black Africans", *International journal for the Advancement of Counselling*, vol. 28, No 3, (September 2006), 263

¹⁸⁸ Some, 143

In his book *Understanding Grief as a Process*, Peter Mwitzi underscores the value of ritual healing process. He observes that rituals are vehicles that transmit messages that would otherwise be difficult to communicate to the bereaved. He then outlines four functions of rituals in an African society as:

- 1) Through rituals, polarities of life such as happiness and pain are brought together to one unit. They provide structures through which we can express our feelings of pain and joys of life.
- 2) Rituals provide continuity of life in the midst of rapid change. This is possible because of their power to recapture the past and the future moments of our existence and bring two dimensions of time to the present moment.
- 3) Rituals prepare us to meet the challenges of life, without which adjustment to those challenges would be difficult.
- 4) Rituals assist us to affirm our beliefs and integrate those beliefs into our life experiences.¹⁸⁹

Although some people think that rituals are no longer necessary in healing therapy, the power of ritual is also used in some Western therapy albeit without their spiritual component. Karimi, for example explains how putting a list of painful memories of a client in an ash tray and burning them, or burying symbols of unwanted relationship, are simple rituals used in modern psychotherapy.¹⁹⁰ Other examples of rituals used in Western therapy include story-telling, letter-writing, poetry, drawing and play therapy. "The use of symbolism in these techniques" say Karimi "is therapeutic for the client just as symbols are useful for the healer for use in the African client".¹⁹¹

The absence of a spiritual dimension in Western therapy inhibits the need and the use of ritual. In Africa therefore, where ill

¹⁸⁹ Peter Mwitzi, *Understanding Grief as a Process*, (Nairobi: Uzima Press), 2003, 15

¹⁹⁰ Karimi, 264

¹⁹¹ Ibid.,

health is believed to be caused by spiritual being, ritual as a mode of communication is absolutely necessary and indeed very effective.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is an important dimension in both Western and African therapy. In spite of this, the two therapies have different perceptions of how confidentiality should be enforced. Confidentiality can be defined as the right of a person giving information to another, to require the person receiving the information to keep it secret. The implication here is that the client who provides information in counseling session owns it. This means that the client has the right to establish the terms of how the information should be used.

Understandably, the West that emphasizes individualism is concerned with the protection of the client privacy and personal freedom of choice. According to Corey the general guidelines of confidentiality are;

Counselors must keep information related to counseling services confidential unless disclosure is in the best interests of clients, is required for welfare of others, is in response to obligations to society, or is required by law. When disclosure is required, only information that is essential is revealed.¹⁹²

The thrust of the matter is that individual rights are given prominence in the West. While writing this book in America for example, I decided to take a CPR and First Aid training course with the American Red Cross Association offered at the church I attended. One thing that was emphasized in this course was that before one decides to assist a victim who is conscious, he/she must first ask permission to help from the victim. We were also informed that if the victim declines to accept your assistance, then you should not assist

¹⁹² Gerald Corey, *Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy*, 5th Edition, (Pacific Grove: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, 1996), 61

them regardless of the prevailing circumstances. At this point the best one can do is to call the emergency help. This sounded very strange and unacceptable to me.

The idea of asking permission from someone in danger does not make sense in an African mentality. When somebody finds another human being choking, drowning, in an accident or in any situation that is a threat to their lives, including suicide, it is expected that one will swing into action and do what they consider best at that moment to save the life. In the spirit of *Undugu* each person is responsible for the well being of others. It is therefore illogical to ask if someone needs help when it is obvious that they are in danger or even if they do not want to be assisted.

In the case of any illness or abnormality in an African setting, confidentiality becomes a very tricky issue in deed. When someone is unwell, it is expected that every member of community should know the problem so as to provide the necessary comfort, support and assistance that is within their reach. In this case, an individual has no right to keep what is ailing them secret. Similarly, a counselor is expected to share with the members of the immediate family the issue raised by a client in a counseling session.

Again, the logic here is that the client needs the support of the family and the community at large in resolving the issue. If the issue is anxiety or depression for example, the family members are advised on how to support the client in order to reduce and avoid exacerbating the problem. This is also applicable in the community and more so if the cause of the issue at hand is somehow connected with the community.

In the West, ethical issues including confidentiality are well articulated and incorporated in the laws of the state or nations. Counselors therefore have guidelines of what to do. The privilege for confidentiality for example, provides counselors with protection from voluntary disclosure by the receiver of the information. They

also have “protection from involuntary disclosure by the receiver of information, from state law, a court of law or a court of the church who may seek to compel disclosure”.¹⁹³

The issue of confidentiality in the West seems to have driven counseling professionals to extreme position. For example, I was privileged to attend a seminar at Fuller Theological Seminary on “Legal issues in Church counseling” presented by a state Attorney. The meeting informed us that a licensed therapist or counselor should not counsel members of the church, he/she is attending and that should they find it necessary to do so, it would then be necessary for the therapist to move to another church. Again this does not make sense to an African church and community. In Africa, one would be more comfortable and confident to seek counseling services from someone who is familiar and attending the same church.

Confidentiality and HIV/AIDS

The issues of confidentiality in Africa become more apparent with the introduction of HIV/AIDS epidemic. Normally people are not concerned about who gets to know what is ailing them. In deed people tend to share freely about what is ailing them and even hope that the recipient would extend the information to their acquaintances elsewhere. In fact, a big portion of African greeting entails sharing about the well being of people and people in their communities. One reason for sharing is to provide opportunity for other to show their solidarity by visiting, suggesting medications or healers, or sending their sympathy to the sick.

In the case of HIV/AIDS however, this has not been the case. On the contrary, the infected seems to be reluctant to share this information publicly and so are the family members of the infected person. HIV/AIDS epidemic has changed the African way of understanding confidentiality in as far as health is concerned. In

¹⁹³ Dennis R. Rasper, “Legal Issues in church Counseling” Pastoral Care and Counseling Seminar held at Fuller Theological Seminary on August 2, 2007.

response to the effects of HIV/ADS, Katongole rightly observes that the disease has changed people attitudes: He writes:

We are becoming different people, assuming a different social and individual character or identity. Such transformation is marked not only by a shift in our understanding of sex and marriage, but also in the way we look at ourselves, at others, and the very conception of what we consider important or meaningful in life.¹⁹⁴

Katongole is further convinced that HIV/AIDS pandemic has changed the way African perceive their culture forever. He argues that AIDS pandemic:

... is succeeding in turning suspicion into a cultural pattern of life. This, to me, is going to be one of the very lasting legacies of the AIDS pandemic in Africa. Long after AIDS has been wiped in the face of the globe, we shall find ourselves struggling to cope with the self-destructive nihilism and cynicism generated by AIDS pandemic.¹⁹⁵

HIV/AIDS has therefore affected the very core of African life. The issue here is that this is not simply a matter of disease but death. The matter therefore does not only concern the individual but the entire family. In fact this is an issue that threatens the annihilation of the entire family. To announce that one is positive is tantamount to pronouncing death to self, the partner and possibly the offspring. And death of a member of the community is not a personal but a community issue.

All these dilemmas have made the issue of confidentiality very difficult in Africa. When a patient in the hospital tests

¹⁹⁴ Katongole, Emmanuel M. "Christian Ethics and AIDS in Africa Today: Exploring the limits of a culture of suspicion and despair" in *Missionalia*, Vol. 29.2 (August 2001), 146

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

HIV/AIDS positive, the health care providers are faced with dilemma. The family members prefer that they be informed first so that they can inform their patient and the family in the best way they know how. The healthcare personnel on the other hand are bound by the code of ethics which dictates that he/she can only inform the client his/her status and must keep it secret and tell no one else. The same applies in counseling such that a counselor is bound to confidentiality rule.

This is one area in counseling in Africa that requires serious consideration. There are many questions yet to be answered and sorted out in this aspect. For example, should Africans counselors just follow the rules guiding confidentiality as proposed from the Western counseling models? Would this be applicable or relevant to the African people?

There is also need for the counseling associations in Africa or even specific African counties to come up with the code of ethic governing confidentiality rules that conform to their situation. It is also necessary to find ways to incorporates counseling code of ethics with the laws of the land. It is within this setting that rules that govern personal rights and freedom of choice can be distinguished from those of personal responsibility, moral accountability and communal obligations.

Pastoral/Biblical counseling

Pastoral counseling ranks the second as the most popular type of counseling service after traditional counseling in Africa. The majority of Christians seek assistance from their pastors and fellow Christians when confronted with personal and family issues. The unfortunate thing however is that the majority of pastors have no training in counseling practice. It is also true that a good number of them do not have any theological training. This makes pastoral counseling a very delicate and indeed a dangerous affair.

As I mentioned in an earlier chapter, the pastors who lack theological training tend to associate all disturbances with unbelief and therefore use the opportunity of counseling to gain converts. Pastors and all Christians derive the authority to counsel from the Bible. The assumption here is that just by being a faithful Christians one gains enough knowledge to provide counseling help to others. As Joy Adams states:

The Bible itself provides the principles for understanding and for engaging in nouthetic counseling and directs Christian ministers to do such counseling as a part of their life calling in the ministry of the Word (other Christians also should counsel as God gives opportunity).¹⁹⁶

The assumption that untrained pastors and ordinary Christians can provide counseling services by virtue of being a Christian needs consideration. This is unfortunate because more often than not, the poor services tend to spoils the confidence that people have for the Church and the clergy who end up misleading the adherents. It is essential that pastoral workers be informed and equipped with skills and the know how to face modern life. As Sebastian Ssempijja observes:

The face of traditional pastoral counseling issue has changed and remains, as elusive and multi-coloured, as the chameleon. Ten years ago, who would have guessed the moral and psychological impact of AIDS; or the raising scourge of addictive drugs, that are so pervasive in the American and Western European countries, and are only around the corner toward the African continent. As our ship speeds on, such are some of the unforeseen factors that we have to face along the voyage.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ Joy E. Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), ix

¹⁹⁷ Sebastian Ssempijja, "Needed African pastoral Psychotherapy" *African Ecclesial Review*, Vol. 32, Number 3 (June 1990), 151

What Ssempijja points out in the quotation above is a true reflection of the present state in pastoral counseling in Africa. The challenge of counseling in Africa is more intense now than ever and calls for innovative ways if it is to succeed. However, this is easier said than done. For the last several decades, the church in Africa has been attempting to have its own identity as an African Church. And although it has succeeded to a certain extent, much remains to be achieved.

Some of the problems the church is facing include how to detach itself from the mother church and its western influences. The other is to acknowledge the fact that African culture can in some way inform the Christian church. Inculturation has therefore had a rough road to travel over the years in its effort to incorporate African elements in the church.

There is also a disturbing trend within the Pentecostal and some main lines churches which does not appreciate the need for theological training. The assumption here is that education is a worldly affair that does not add in any way to the development of Christians or the church. This is a worrying phenomenon that tends to take matters in a simplistic manner believing that all issues can only be solved through prayers and inspiration.

Yet for pastoral psychotherapy to take place, there is need to incorporate ideas of African theology, African psychology, African culture and African philosophy of life. Some Christians however see this as a wrong approach and insist that Biblical counseling per se is the only proper and acceptable counseling. In this regard, Adams states that:

Therefore, those who develop other systems, based on other sources of information, by which they attempt to achieve these same ends, by the very nature of the case become competitive. It is dangerous to compete with the Bible, since all such competition in the end turns out to be competition with God.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁸ Adams, ix

It is for this reason that some Christians go to the point of rejecting all other approaches of psychotherapy as unworthy and should be rejected. Among those rejected are the modern psychotherapy and African traditional therapy. For this reason, Adams admonishes Christian ministers to rely solely on Biblically counseling. He writes:

As future ministers of the Word, be just that –only that, and nothing else but that–ministers of the word! Do not forsake the Fountain of living water for the cracked cisterns of modern counseling systems. ¹⁹⁹

Adams would be more than happy to add, African traditional counseling among the cracked cisterns of counseling systems. Yet interestingly, although Christian therapy is different from secular modern therapies it often criticizes, it has borrowed heavily from it. The main difference, in my view, between Christian and secular counseling is that pastoral counseling derive its principles from the Bible while secular psychotherapy derive the same principles from outside spiritual realm.

Apart from that, Christian therapy has incorporated in its entirety the western worldview with its emphasis on individualism, materialism and empirical science. It has also adapted secular methods, approaches, and skills of counseling. In agreement to this, Jones confirms the need for Christian psychotherapy to incorporate western ideas. He writes:

Finally, as a matter of Christian stewardship, it behooves us to look not merely at the five more “conception” criteria listed above, but also at what the scientific research says about the effectiveness of a particular approach. We should add that we are using scientific in the broad sense discussed earlier, which

¹⁹⁹ Adams, xiv.

we take to include the standard empirical methods of traditional American psychology and those nontraditional methods that are variously known as phenomenological, “human-science” or humanistic.²⁰⁰

It is clear from the above quotation that Christian counseling has its roots in the Western worldview that was inspired by the enlightenment period. It is also clear that Christian counseling is in favour of all its approaches. I dare say at this point that the Christian principles and teaching are similar to those adhered to in an African worldview than those of the Western worldview. It is also true to say that because of the emphasis placed on western values in counseling, the uniqueness of Christian teaching seems to be over shadowed. In particular, the Christian command that Christians should care for one another, personal accountability, the communal obligations and community responsibility of loving neighbours as well as caring for the entire God's creation are ignored.

On these points, Christianity is in agreement with the African view that shuns individualism, materialism and naturalism. Like African teaching, Christianity emphasizes on harmonious relationship with others human being, strong social relationships, giving priority to the goals of others and in general living interdependent lives. In the absence of these values, Christian counseling in the West is practiced under circumstances or a worldview that is not in agreement with its teachings and aspirations. This makes it extremely difficult to be a genuine Christian in the West or for those who take seriously the Western values.

The African worldview on the other hand, provides a natural and rich environment for Christianity to thrive. In the same way, African worldview can provide suitable platform for a genuine Christian counseling. It is therefore ridiculous for Christians to fight

²⁰⁰ Jones and Butman, 34-35

against African values that are in many ways similar to those of Christianity. In my view therefore, Christian counseling in African must re-examine its objectives and align them with African values and needs for a relevant and effective therapy for the African peoples.



CHAPTER TEN

Return and Pick It

In this book I have argued that Africans have their unique ways of looking at the universe. Africans have their own way of knowing and acquiring knowledge. This unique way or worldview has produced a culture and a way of life that has served African people for centuries. However, in the last century or so, Africa was introduced to western culture and western Christianity. Today it is possible to say that western and Christian values are part and parcel of African life. It is also true to say that deep inside Africans; they still cherish and observe the African way of life. Indeed in the last few years, there is a general trend where it can be said that Africans are returning to their culture. Although the western and Christian worldviews have provided answers to the many issues afflicting Africans, the truth is that there are many issues that western and Christian approach have failed miserably. In such instances, African solutions are preferred and appreciated. The words of Awolowo demonstrate how Africans have copied western life style at the expense of their own ways of life which are hardwired in them. He writes:

It is surprising that our European guardians and tutors have not found it worthwhile 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 voice 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!²⁰¹

As Awolowo suggests, not everything western can be said to be good for the Africans. One such thing and indeed the concern of this book is counseling. As indicated in this book, the principles of counseling are the same whether western, Eastern or African. However, the approaches to counseling are not the same given that the western worldview is individualistic while the Africa perspective is communal in approach. It is for this precise reason that western therapy has placed too much emphasis upon individual self-interest and too little interest on family and community responsibilities. African counseling on the other hand tend to value justice, community, truthfulness and anchored on moral commitment to the entire universe. This African approach perceives the universe as one, interconnected and dependent on each other. In other words, the world is seen as a global community. This wholistic consciousness creates a community living system that O' Murchu describes as:

Living systems are by their very nature neither subject alone nor objects isolated, but both subjects and objects in a mutually communicating (and defining) universe of meaning. At a deep level, each living being is implicated in every other. Each suffering, each extinction affects us and impoverishes us. Similarly, we partake of the joy and creativity of each individual organism.²⁰²

This African approach dictates the need for cosmic harmony for peaceful and fulfilled life in the universe. The major players in controlling the cosmic harmony are humans. Human beings are thus

²⁰¹ Awolowo, O., Making Use of Juju" in *The West African Review*, (December 1939), 30.

²⁰² O'Murchu, 2004:36

expected to follow the moral standards as stipulated by the Supreme Being, the ancestral spirits and the society at large. In this regard, human beings are expected to be altruistic, tolerant, hospitable, co-operative, and kind and possess a spirit of forgiveness at all times.

In response to human co-operation with the universe, nature, which is an integral part of African community, provides the required remedies for healing. Nature thus provides medicine extracted from the flora, fauna, minerals, soils and even human serve as medicinal to other human beings. The healing wisdom of Africa is therefore a combination of medicine, spirituality, rituals and the right attitude of mind.

As I have done elsewhere,²⁰³ I find no better way to conclude this book than to use the concept of Sankofa. Among the Akan speaking people of West Africa, Sankofa literally translated means "it is not taboo to go back and fetch what you forgot"²⁰⁴ My suggestion here is that Africa need to go back and consider their therapeutic models and other ways of acquiring and appropriating knowledge. This comment will immediately draw criticism from scholars who argue that such thoughts and suggestions are retrogressive in this time and age. But is this really true? Let me explain.

The editors of one recent encyclopedia, an Encyclopedia of History, culture and Controversy (2007)²⁰⁵ found it worthwhile to include eleven chapters of articles under the title shamanism. Shamanism, among them African healing wisdom, describes the ancient or indigenous paths of healing and understanding. All the eleven articles narrate the healing activities of the indigenous people and its applicability today. A few quotations will suffice to explain the point. E. Barrie Kavasch points out that:

Shamanism is both extremely ancient and entirely modern because it suits human needs for inquiry into the vast unknown

²⁰³ Adam K. arap Chepkwony, "Re-discovering African Wholistic Approach to Life: Ways of Acquiring and Appropriating Knowledge" Inaugural Lecture delivered at Moi University of 26 th September, 2011.

²⁰⁴ See "The Meaning of symbolism of the Sankofa bird' in <http://www.duboisle/sankofa.meaning.html>.

²⁰⁵ Encyclopedia of History, culture and Controversy (2007)

realms. There is no other pathway to access the same information. Some of shamanism's greatest assets are in helping people explore dreams, mend from psychic traumas, and learn more about health and healing issues.²⁰⁶

Michael Winkelman, similarly explain how shamanism is integrated with modern models of healing. He observes,

The concept of shamanism has undergone rehabilitation. Once dismissed as a delusion or fraudulent manipulation, it is now perceived as an adaptive form of spiritual healing embedded in human biology. The biogenetic model of shamanism provide a paradigm for interpreting ancient human cultural activities, the rise of modern symbolic consciousness, and the worldwide distribution of strikingly similar healing practices. These universal of shamanism reflects an evolved psychology; a biological, and a social dynamic of thought, and healing community integration with deep evolutionary roots in the hominid heritage.²⁰⁷

Finally, Kavasch made the following observation;

Shamanism has many modern applications, especially in the field of medicine and psychotherapy, as well as in science and engineering. The human psyche can derive many therapeutic benefits from Shamanism, especially in the areas of soul loss.²⁰⁸

Sankofa concept resonates well with the ideas of shamanism. It is clear from the above quotation that indigenous ideas are still relevant and can be incorporated to modern science for the benefit of mankind. The idea of Sankofa comes in handy to suggest that

²⁰⁶ Encyclopedia of History, culture and Controversy (2007) 619

²⁰⁷ Encyclopedia of History, culture and Controversy (2007), 631

²⁰⁸ Encyclopedia of History, culture and Controversy (2007), 617

African people must go back to their roots; that they must reach out and gather the best of the African past. It is only then that they are able to move forward in order to achieve their full potentials. Indeed, Sankofa strongly suggests that whatever has been lost, forgotten or has been stripped of, should be claimed, revered, preserved and perpetuated (Ibid). The emphasis and lessons to be learned is that Africans must “return and get it”. Sankofa Education institute Website puts it thus:

We must go back and reclaim our past so that we can move forward; so we understand why and how we came to be who we are today. We must return to our past in order to move forward. No matter how far away we travel we must always return home.²⁰⁹

Sankofa is symbolically expressed as a mythic bird that flies forward while looking backward with an egg in its mouth or just about to pick it up. The lesson to learn from this is that Africa's past is as significant as its future. That being the case, African people must explore their past in order to discover the pathways to excellence in the future. *Sankofa*, like *Ubuntu* is reminding African communities that the African worldview and its values have sustained human life for ages. These values are embedded in the African languages, worship, myths, stories, proverbs, rituals, belief system and in particular African healing system.



²⁰⁹ See [www.http://www.sankofa.org.uk](http://www.sankofa.org.uk). 1

If Africans can only search their past diligently, their traditional values, and beliefs, only then can the people of the African continent face the present challenges and thus move forward. It is this past that is pregnant with ethical values that enable African posterity to live in harmony not only with each other, but also with the creator and the other creatures. It is this past that carries the healing wisdom as embodied in the offices of the herbalists, diviners, priests and elders. And without any exceptions, their wisdom is derived from the African past, from the African tradition that is governed by an African worldview that is build around wholistic approach to life.

If Africa will ever have its renaissance as anticipated, it must begin from here. It must understand, accept and own the African worldview. It is only then that Africa will see the need and appreciate the African past by building from the knowledge of their ancestors to the current prevailing knowledge. For knowledge is acquired and systematically build from the experiences, ideas and previous knowledge. Even Einstein, Argues Rolston III (2006), had to stand on the shoulders of others to come up with his theory of relativity, He observes:

Einstein constructed his theory with mental genius, achieved as he stood on the shoulders of thinkers standing on the shoulders of other thinkers for five thousand years - with ideas passing from mind to mind, critically evaluated in each new generation.²¹⁰

Africa therefore must look back to their past and stand on the shoulders of great African thinkers and ancestors. This has nothing to do with glorifying the past as some scholars will be quick to argue. It has everything to do with the reality as it is. That is not to suggest that everything about Africa past is right, indeed there are many things that need to been examined, revisited and/or discarded. But

²¹⁰ Rolston III 2006: xxiv

how can one do so without first accepting and understanding where such ideas come from, how it has served the people in the past, why it is not relevant anymore and should you decide to discard, with what shall this be replaced. In fact, this is all about the problems African people are facing now. There is need therefore for Africa to retrace its steps for its people to know where exactly they went wrong. For in the words of John Mary Waliggo,

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.²¹¹



²¹¹ Rolston III 2006: xxiv

