AFRICAN TRADITIONAL CONCEPT OF GOD: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Oneness of God joined its moral vision with the traditional activities, which have opened the way to the triumph of the African traditional religious followers in their expectations of life and spiritual satisfactions. Monotheism’s insistence on the concept of One God directs their lives in every dimension and point towards dignity, gratefulness, values, achievements, hopes, etc. It is important to note that within their traditional culture and religiosity, there is a potential spectrum of possible perspectives on the inner significances of the spiritual tradition, including how they associate with their feelings, social behavior and actions. This paper introduces varieties of prayer, types of offering, devotion toward God and routine works broadly found in different traditions and vary significantly among various tribes or societies. The critical analysis indicates various tribal aspects and identifies the diversity of African society and concept of One God in same vein. Diversity of Supreme God is quite common in various monotheistic religions. But the way of God’s true appreciation and acceptance in African traditional culture can be really commendable and interesting as well.

Key Words: Morality, Concept of Supreme God, Tradition, Diverse Manifestations, Rituals, Offerings.

1. INTRODUCTION

God is the Supreme entity to the adherents of the traditional religions of Africa and is considered to be the origin of everything in this universe. In Africa, God is viewed in both immanent and transcendent dimensions. This very idea of Oneness of the Supreme Being is core to the followers and this belief creates no place for the atheists in their traditional concept of God. There is no sacred text in written form, but the root of this traditional idea of God is mainly taken from proverbs, short statements, stories, religious rituals, prayers, songs, myths, etc. The knowledge of God is a gift given at the time of birth to a newborn baby. According to an Ashanti proverb, ‘No one shows a child the Supreme Being’.1 Knowing about God is believed to be an instinctive knowledge to the religious adherents. Along with the traditional culture, Islam and Christianity have inspired them most. African religions take inspiration and encouragement from the morality and belief system of Christianity and Islam, but have their original exploration of religion. The African

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God is characterized by many prime attributes including concrete knowledge. According to John S. Mbiti, “It is tough for a person to be detached from his/her religion, for to do so is to be served from his roots, foundation, his context of security, his kinship and the entire group of those who make him aware of his own existence.” There are several examples of this thought. Human beings are limited in all aspect, but God is designated to be great, supreme, omnipotent (Almighty), omniscient (All-Knowing), Sustainer, Transcendent and Immanent, Self-Existent and Pre-Eminent, etc. No entity or being is comparable to God.

2. METHODOLOGY

This is an explanatory and analytical research based on African traditional religions in terms of the life style and their inclusive faith in One God. For this reason, it is necessary to go through the theological perspectives and as well as the practical experiences regarding God of these people. Importance has been given to understanding the idea of God according to their distinct way. This article is mainly based on secondary sources like books, journals and internet websites. In addition, this work provides a deeper critical analysis. For getting a traditional idea of God, this research has especially emphasized on the books which were published before 2000 C.E.

3. GOD IN AFRICAN TRADITION

African religious followers mostly adhere to the same faith about God like the Islamic and Christian concept of monotheism, but holding their own way of practicing rituals. That is why Monotheistic God appears to them with all possible qualities a God can be attributed to.

Islamic religious adherents all over the world hold the common sacred text (The Holy Quran) and their same faith in all aspect of their religiosity, except cultural variations of their national heritage and ethnic peculiarities. The very core or primary meaning of Islam is to have complete surrender or submission to One God. In the same way, African traditional religious followers surrender to their All-powerful God in almost each and every step they take for them. Whether they sleep or wake up from dream, or even go for their goals or vision in lives, or their sincerity to pray to that God, they are rarely to divert from their Supreme Being.

In case of Christianity, a true Christian believes in the Trinitarian Identity of God and these are to believe Him as ‘God the Father’, ‘God the Son’ and ‘God the Holy Spirit’. Among African traditional followers, we find the ‘Father God’ in
societies like the Nuer, the Bambuti and in several other tribes too. If we talk about the Barundi people, here God is prayed to as a ‘Spirit’ or ‘Spiritual Entity’.

The concept of ‘Ex nihilo’ and many other ideas are to be found in traditional practice of Africa, where they seem very much compatible with the Christians and Muslims. A thorough discussion and depiction afterward will make us clear about the mingling of African traditional religion, Islam and Christianity.

3.1 Greatness and Supremacy of God

God is supreme and great over all visible and invisible beings or things that we believe to exist. One of the best Zulu names of God is ‘Unkulunkulu’, which means ‘the Great-great-One’ and like them the neighboring people call God as the ‘Ndebele’, which also means ‘the Greatest of the great’. Like them, the Tonga, the Ngoni, the Akan, the Baluba and some other tribes designate God as ‘Great God’, or ‘Great One’, or ‘the Great King’.

3.2 God as both Transcendent and Immanent

Many religions see God as transcendent or immanent dimension, but in African traditional concept, ‘He is both transcendent and immanent’. He dwells inside human souls and He is also beyond any reach. People cannot even appreciate Him fully in their imagination.

3.2.1 Transcendent Nature of God

God’s transcendence outlook stretches over and beyond the whole Zamani period. He is the prime reality of being without lacking any incompleteness. According to a Bacongo saying, ‘God is made by no other; no one beyond Him is’. The Akan refer to God as ‘He Who is there now as from ancient times’ and the Tonga people express Him as, ‘the Ancient of Days’. The Ngombe encloses this feature of God to the forest and that’s why they call Him as ‘the everlasting One of the forest’. God’s existence is never ending and it preceded the beginning of His creation too. He transcends all boundaries and all things we ever know. African people think that, the sky is beyond human reach and God dwells somewhere above.

3.2.2 Immanent Nature of God

God has His immanent feature too for the need of His people. That is why, religious followers address Him through prayers, invocations, offerings and sacrifices by thinking Him near to them. God is contemporaneous to the traditional
people of Africa. He exists in all objects and He manifests through natural phenomena. The Ngombe prefer to designate God as the One Who fills everything. The important concept is that, God’s immanence here cannot be mixed up with pantheism because His immanent character is associated with the acts of worship or in short practice.

3.3 Supremely Wise God

God holds the supreme position and wisdom as well. He is absolute and beyond all knowledge. The Sona and the Ndebele report God as ‘Father, Mother and Son’. To the Akan people, ‘God is He Who knows or sees all’ and according to the Zulu and the Banyarwanda, ‘God is the wise One’. The Yoruba people say that, ‘Only God is wise’ and ‘He is the Discerner of hearts’ Who ‘sees both the inside and outside of man’. Among the Barundi, ‘He is the Watcher of everything’ and the Ila society utter ‘His ears are long’. So, God knows, hears, sees, observes and controls everything in this cosmos and beyond.

3.4 God as Almighty

In a simple sense, God is all-powerful to the followers of the Ashanti, the Yoruba, the Ngombe and the Akan. To the Ngombe, the forest is full of struggle and they think God’s omnipotence is linked up to the forest. They believe that ‘He is the One Who clears the forest’. The Yoruba hold a practical sense about God that ‘duties or challenges are easy to do as that which God performs but difficult to do as that which God enables not’. But the Zulu tribe thinks God in a political way that ‘God is He Who bends down … even majesties’, and ‘He Who roars so that all nations be struck with terror’.

God’s omnipotence also manifests in His power to this nature. According to the Banyarwanda proverbs, ‘God has very long arms’ and ‘the plant protected by God is never hurt by the wind’. God seems as all-powerful also to many other tribes in Africa, such as the Vugusu, the Teso, the Gikuyu, the Akamba, the Kiga, etc. The Gikuyu address God in their prayer for rain, the Kiga believe God ‘Who makes the sun set’ and some hold that ‘He makes quake and flows river’, etc. So in these above mentioned context, God is the sole possessor of all highest qualities and every being including mankind is lower and limited than Him.

3.5 Self-perfect God

God is Self-dependent, Self-supporting, Self-sufficient and Self-containing too. Self-existent and Pre- eminent features of God are found mainly among the
Gikuyu, the Zulu and the Bambuti groups. In a biological sense, the Herero say that ‘God has no father and is not a man and does not even eat at all’.\(^15\) The Gikuyu believe that God has,

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{"No father nor mother, nor wife nor children;}
\text{He is all alone}
\text{He is neither a child nor an old man;}
\text{He is the same today as He was yesterday".}\(^16\)
\end{align*}
\]

As His theological aspect, the Zulu group thinks God as ‘He Who is of Himself’ or ‘He Who came of Himself into being’.\(^17\) The Bambuti designate that ‘God was the First, Who had always been in existence, and would never die’.\(^18\)

### 3.6 Spiritual Outlook on God

Along with the greatness of God, African traditional concept also holds the view that, He is a ‘Spiritual Being’ or a ‘Spirit’. Since the beginning of human consciousness about God, He remains unseen and thus there is no physical manifestation of God to the people. But God is a never ending creative force, that inspires people to go for innovative ideals and actions. One of the most explicit Shona hymns describes God as ‘the Great Spirit’ Who piles up rocks to make mountains, causes branches to grow and gives rain to mankind.\(^19\) According to a traditional Pygmy hymn:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{"In the beginning was God}
\text{Today is God}
\text{Tomorrow will be God}
\text{Who can make an image of God?}
\text{He has no body}
\text{He is as a word which comes out of your mouth.}
\text{That word! It is no more,}
\text{It is past, and still it lives!}
\text{So is God".}\(^20\)
\end{align*}
\]

To support this evidence of God’s spirituality, societies like the Shilluk, the Ga and the Langi call Him to be like air or wind. Air has no visibility in that sense but we can feel its presence. Though, there is no one or no intellect can examine Him and that is why the Ashanti designate Him as the Fathomless Spirit. As God is unknown to us, some refer to Him like the Lunda which means the God of the unknown or the Maasai which designates the Unknown or that of the Ngombe which means the Unexplainable. God is not a stranger to the African people. People have personal characteristics, but God’s essential attributes are mysterious and almost totally unknowable.
3.7 God as Eternal Being

Eternity of God is very much associated with His nature. According to the Ngombe, ‘God is the everlasting One of the woodlands’. The Ashanti and the Baganda assess Him directly as ‘the Eternal One’. The Tonga group compares God as heaven and thus they expressed His immortality as that ‘The heaven never dies, only men do!’ Like them, the Baluba, the Ila and some other groups refer God as ‘He of many suns’ or ‘He of the suns’. But the Yoruba describe Him in a different flavor like ‘the Mighty Immovable Rock that never dies’. God is unchangeable and will remain so forever. The Yoruba hold the same idea that ‘one never hears the demise of God!’

3.8 Moral Features of God

Apart from above manifestations of the African God, He has given numerous moral attributes too. Followers from the Ila, the Bacongo, the Akamba, the Igbo, the Herero, the Banyarwanda and several others believe Him to be very Kind, Merciful, Generous to His people, Fortune Provider, Pitiful, etc. In time of personal and natural problems or difficulties, people feel the need of His urgent help and feel Him as Merciful.

God causes rain during drought, provides fertility to all animals and averts calamities. The Vugusu consider that material prosperity comes from God; the Nandi invoke God daily to grant fertility to the women, cattle and fields; and the Langi believe that rich harvests come only from God. God uses to solve difficulties and that is why, the Akan and the Akamba call God as ‘the God of comfort’.

Most of the African believers think that God does only good to them and they need not to be worried at all. The Ewe firmly believe that ‘He is good, for He has never withdrawn the good things from us which He gave us’. But for the evil deeds, they do not categorically blame God. They think those as the works of spirits, magic workers or as punishment for their own misdeeds. That is why, God always seems to be ‘Just’.

The Nuer consider that, God throws things out and He is ever rightful. According to the belief of the Ila tradition, God can never be charged, since He is above the level of ‘fault’, ‘failure’, ‘wrong’ and ‘unrighteousness’. The Yoruba think in the same way that ‘God is the pure King . . . Who is without blemish’. So, African God is ever Holy to them.
After the above mentioned human comprehension about the true nature of African concept of God, several activities of God are going to be discussed in brief.

3.9 God as the Creator

The title ‘Creator’ is very much associated with the ‘Oneness’ of God. God as a creator appears to be so true through His activities over the African traditional believers. Two of the four popular Akamba names of God are ‘Maker’ and ‘Cleaver’, which are complementary to each other. God created this universe and thus supplied materials for its maintenance too. The Ovimbundu title for God is ‘He Who supplies the needs of His creation’.25 He provides life, health, rain and other things for our sustenance. The Akan consider God as ‘Borebore’, which means ‘Creator, Carver, Architect, Excavator, Hewer, Originator, Inventor, etc.’26

As a supporting example of God’s creation among the Banyarwanda, women believe that God shapes their babies in the wombs. Women leave water ready before going to bed, so that God may use it to create children for them. It is known as; God’s water’; and He is known as ‘the Giver of children’. During pregnancy period, the Bambuti women offer food to the God and say:

‘‘(God) from Whom I have received this child, 
Take thou and eat’! 27

The people believe that ‘there was nothing before God created the world’. The concept of ‘ex nihilo’ (‘ex nihilo’ stands that God created this every visible and invisible thing of this universe out of nothing) is very much known to the Nuer, the Banyarwanda and the Shona. The Lunda describe God as ‘the Father Creator’ and the Ila hold three designations of God as Creator, Moulder and Constructor.

Regarding the creation procedure, different tribes hold different views. The Vugusu believe that God created heaven at first with the sun, moon, stars and clouds; then He created the earth, followed by the creation of man; and lastly animals, plants and other earthly creatures. But the Nandi, the Lozi and the Mende consider human being as the last work of God’s creation. Some also believe that along with the creation God also established laws of nature and human behavior too.28

For example, The Yoruba hold that ‘God is the Author of day and night’ and regard each day as His offspring.29 On the other hand, the Zulu think that their marriage custom and circumcision are ordered by God. It is also held that God
continues with His creative work throughout the universe. The Twi say that ‘God never ceases to create things’. Creation needs necessary things to survive as well. That is why, for example, the Nuba pray for the cattle during their rituals that:

‘‘God, we are hungry
Give us cattle, give us sheep’’!

While making sacrifices, the officiating elder prays:

‘‘God, increase cattle,
Increase sheep, increase men!’’

Along with God’s own creation, He also determines human destiny as well. The Yoruba, for example, hold that a person faces God to choose his destiny before his birth and during creation time God fixes that person’s life span. According to the African traditional concept, everything of human life is determined by God. So, God creates us and protects us too. He is creator along with the provider or sustainer. As a result, the Ashanti, the Barundi, the Tonga, the Nandi and other people collectively think God as the Creator, Protector, Guardian and Preserver.

3.10 God as the Ruler

God governs all things in this cosmos. He is the prime judge (impartial) and ruler of everything. The concept of ‘God as the Ruler’ is found mainly among the tribes which traditionally have or have had kings or king like officials. For example,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Names of the Tribes</th>
<th>Designations of God</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barundi and Banyarwanda</td>
<td>Supreme Ruler and Governor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ila</td>
<td>Chief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zulu</td>
<td>King of kings or Chief of chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barotse and Baluba</td>
<td>The Great King</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akan</td>
<td>Ruler of the sky, earth and underwater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indem</td>
<td>Ruler of all tribes of the earth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banyarwanda</td>
<td>Master of all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bambuti</td>
<td>Lord of magic power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoruba</td>
<td>Lord of heaven</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. CONFLUENCE OF GOD AND HUMAN RACE

Human history and God are complementary to each other. God knows everything that has happened earlier and shall happen in the future too. African history is considered as moving from the Sasa to the Zamani period and the anchor lies in the Zamani. We have already observed God’s activities with the people by creating or even providing necessary things or in solving problems on earth, but there are some other acts of God linked up with the history of human beings.

According to the Chagga, God may take part in our daily lives but He intervened in the past destroying His people for their misdeeds and thus saved few of them. The Meru consider that God led them long ago, out of their own land of bondage through the agent of a religious leader. The Shilluk people believe that God is mystically linked with their king and reveals Himself through the king. Like them, the Bavenda think that from time to time, God reveals Himself to them especially by communicating with their chief by means of thunder. The Gikuyu usually say that although God lives in the sky, He comes to the earth from time to time to bestow blessings and to punish the evil doers.33

People of Africa see God with a wider dimension and in short it can be uttered as ‘anthropomorphism’. Sometimes traditional people consider God as ‘Father’ and sometimes as ‘Mother’. Here, the concept of ‘Father’ is derived from God’s supremacy over all things actually. In time of prayer, God’s fatherhood makes it possible for religious followers to communicate with Him. The Gikuyu, the Nuer, the Azande, the Bambuti and others address Him as ‘our Father’, ‘my Father’, ‘Father God’, etc. Apart from them, tribes like the Ovambo and the southern Nuba call God as ‘Mother’ which means same as ‘Father’. As a result human beings seem to be ‘His children’ or ‘the sons of God’, etc.

5. DIVERSE MANIFESTATIONS OF GOD

The traditional people of Africa think heaven or sky as the dwelling place of God and thus God cannot be separated from the heaven. Some consider sky as His chief manifestation. For example, the Bari and the Fajulu word for God is Nguno ki which means ‘God in the sky’; the Shona name Nyadenga means ‘the Great One of the sky’ and Wokumusoro means ‘the One Above’; the Tiv name Aondo means ‘Heavens, sky’; and the Turkana term for God, Akuj, means ‘(of) Up. Above’.34
Thunder is a common occurrence during the rainy season and is considered God in different forms to the religious adherents of Africa. For example,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tribe Names</th>
<th>Thunder as</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gikuyu</td>
<td>God’s weapon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abaluyia, Banyoro, Basoga, Tonga and Youba</td>
<td>Divinity, rooster, bird, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bambuti, Ewe and Ilá</td>
<td>God’s voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiv and Yoruba</td>
<td>Indication of God’s anger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shona and Nuer</td>
<td>God’s own revelation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachwa, Ilá, Babuti, Zulu, etc.</td>
<td>God’s instrument of punishment to the evil doers or an accomplishment of His intentions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Like thunder, wind or air also seems to be God’s manifestation. Even, natural calamities like earthquake to the Shona people appear to be caused by God’s walking. There are different explanations about other natural phenomenon of God to the people of Africa.

For example, the Langi and the Lugbara believe that rocks are manifestation of God too. The mountains are considered to be the dwelling place of God or His presence to many societies. Even colors get special significance in African tradition religions. The Abuluyia, the Baganda, the Watumbatu and the Gofa offer white animals during their rites and rituals as a sacred color. On the other hand, the Bavenda, the Shona, the Nandi, the Luo and the Ndebele sacrifice black animals in their ritual performances.

Number is also believed to be sacred. The number ‘4’ is sacred to the Nandi people; ‘6’ among the Shona and the Jie; ‘7’ is the lucky and holy number to the Akamba and the Vugusu; and the number ‘9’ seems to be sacred among the Baganda. Following individual sacred number, they offer different animals to satisfy God. These are the ways that how each and every thing is closely related to God. The thing is like; African religious followers cannot do or think anything without God any way or other.

6. DUTY TOWARDS GOD

6.1 Sacrifices and Offerings in African Societies

The attributes, activities, characteristics, control of ruling, significance in people’s life and eternity of African God deserve acts of worship from His creation. At the same time, people also do not make Him dishearten but always engage to satisfy this everlasting God. As we have already known that the African traditional religions have no sacred text in written form and thus proverbs have vital role in their lives.
Through proverb, people like to express their religious identities and feelings. It is also a significant tool of their wisdom and knowledge. For example, people of the Barundi society warn a person, saying, ‘The creature is not greater than its Creator’; and as a safeguard against worrying, they say, ‘God knows the things of tomorrow’. When a person of the Banyarwanda group falls into distress, he says, ‘The enemy prepares a grave, but God prepares you a way of escape’. Prayer to the Great God is the best possible way to show gratefulness toward the God.

The acts of worship mainly constitute with sacrifices and offering to African traditional religious followers. Here, ‘sacrifice’ refers to cases where animal life is destroyed in order to present the animal, in part or in whole, to God, supernatural beings, spirits or the living-dead. ‘Offering’ refers to the remaining cases which do not involve the killing of an animal, being chiefly the presentation of foodstuffs and other items. There are some differences between the items of sacrifices and offerings in Africa. The sacrifice items include human beings, cattle, dogs, chickens, goats, sheep, etc. On the other hand, offerings continue through water, wine, fruits, maize, millet, honey, eggs, nuts, cassava, vegetables, leaves, milk, beer, money, cloth, chalk, agricultural implements, ornaments, tobacco, etc.

The Yoruba, for example, make many sacrifices and offerings as ‘the essence of Yoruba religion’. They do sacrifice human beings as a gift to gain special blessings of God. Drink and meat are offered everyday at the shrines; gift offerings are especially done to the divinities in appreciation for children, good health and success in life. During serious illness, famine or drought, they make propitiation offerings and sacrifices. In term to alter any agreement, they do substitutionary offerings and sacrifices.

The Chagga only sacrifice to God for making a recovery from the great distress and at rare intervals. Kiranga is a ‘hero spirit’ to the Barundi people. The people of this society perform offerings to this spirit and they believe that, this spirit is the mediator between man and God. But as alternative, they also depend on God as their last and certain hope. As an everyday offering, particularly the oldest member of the Barotse tries to satisfy God with a wooden plate full of water in the cattle shed and he kneels down facing east as a salutation invocation.

The Akan and the Ashanti offer foods, eggs and wine to God for well-being. Animal hunting and food gathering are the main professions of the Bambuti and the Bachwa societies. They do not forget to offer a portion of their animal meat, fruits, honey, etc. to God. As they believe that these offerings will grant them healthy lives and more killing in the future.
The Akamba and the Gikuyu do sacrifices at the time of drought or delay of rain, after an epidemic for the recovery and at the harvest of the first fruits. The Gikuyu make sacrifice a particular colored sheep and the Akamba take oxen, sheep or goat of one color. But they categorically sacrifice a child (bury it alive) for severe drought. The Abuluyia believe that ‘God is the One to Whom sacred rites and sacrifices are made or paid’. They perform sacrifices during the time of newborn baby, it’s naming, circumcising any person, at wedding ceremony, funerals and harvest time, etc. They express their gratitude to God through prayer during those occasions.

The Ila society has varieties of sacrifices in their lives. Four main offerings are depicted below:

a. To heal from the illness, the family head prays through offering food and water by placing them on the right threshold of his house.

b. Travelers offer to God at the time of passing by a river. They take water from the river, squirting on the ground and pray to God so that He would lead, shepherd and prosper them as well.

c. As a hunting society, they make sacrifices after killing an animal and also at the time of their poor days of hunting.

d. Even during smoking, a person offers some of the smoke to the God by blowing it and asks for good health and a prosperous day.

Animal sacrifice is the central religious act of Dinka society and is considered as valuable as human sacrifice toward their God. They think that every ox or bull is destined for sacrifice. They used to give personal names to the cattle, before one is killed they announce to it ‘the important and necessary purpose for which it is victimized’, and compensate it for its death ‘by naming the next child after it’, thus ‘preserving its memory’.

6.2 Prayer or Worship in African Societies

Sacrifice and offering items and procedures are very much clear from the earlier discussions but the way of praying or simply prayer is needed to be cleared in details. African prayer is usually short and to the point, except few examples of formal and long form of prayer. Prayers are mainly addressed to the God Himself. African people communicate with God through prayer, pouring out their hearts before Him, at any place and at any moment.

In short, through prayer people show gratitude to God, for their welfare and safety. Religious intermediaries have significant roles and position in African societies. Intermediaries include priests, prophets, oracles, seers, medicine-man,
diviners, etc. and they seem very near to God. For example, the Jie consider their intermediaries as revelation holders from God Himself. While the Turkana think their diviners as chief representatives of God. People believe that middle-men receive knowledge from God. That is why, among the Shilluk, people pray to God and diviners (national leaders) believing that the leader (Nyikang) will pray to God for their well-beings.

The Lozi people also pray before going to hunt, after dreaming and if they fall into illness. The sick people do not have to go for hunting but they have to pray to God until sunset. The Mende society prays directly to God but often depends on the intermediaries. The spirit and living-dead play a vital role in their political and social lives. When followers address through the intermediaries, they end up by saying: ‘God willing!’ The prayer format to them is like the following:

“O God, let it reach to (through?) Kenei Momo,
Let it reach to (through?) Nduawo,
Let it reach all our forefather who are in Thy hands”.

They pray for God’s blessings, retribution where injustice has been committed and deliverance from trouble.

As a customary duty, the Barotse old men pray every day in early morning and offer water to God. They address God as ‘the great King to Whom no man can be compared, and Who shows compassion and innumerable favors to His servants’. The Ila people pray to God especially in time of drought and they pray together and sing that:

“Come to us with a continued rain, O God, fall!”

They also pray at the time of hunting. During hunting if the hunters fail, all of them pray to God falling on the forest ground and say,

“O Chief, today let us kill!”

But the leader (oldest man) of the hunting group surrounding by all prays to God. He says:

“O Mutalabala, Eternal One . . . We pray Thee,
Let us kill today before sunset”.

Eventually, if they succeed in killing an animal, they cut up pieces of the meat which the oldest man offers to the God saying,

“I thank Thee for the meat which Thou givest me.
Today Thou hast stood by me”. 
During the thanksgiving prayer, everybody claps and then makes a distribution of that meat among all and return home.\textsuperscript{41} The Nuer on the other, pray addressing God as ‘Grandfather’, ‘Father’, or ‘Our Father’ and at this time they need to raise their hands and eyes towards heaven (sky). It is also necessary to move their hands up and down with the palms facing upwards. The people usually pray because they ‘like to speak to God when they are happy’ and in time they go for work. But in a peaceful society, people pray also to God for the protection from evil forces. One of their typical prayers is:

\begin{quote}
“Our Father, it is Thy universe, it is Thy will,  
let us be at peace, let the souls of Thy people be cool;  
Thou art our Father, remove all evil from our path”. \textsuperscript{42}
\end{quote}

In every morning, the Abaluyia men kneel facing east and pray to God, spitting and asking Him to let the day dawn well, to pour upon the people His medicine of health, and to make the evil away from men.

The Bambuti Pygmies normally pray in time of danger like thunderstorm, because it seems terrifying to them. They pray at this occasion like the following:

\begin{quote}
“Grandfather, Great Father, let matters go well with me, for I am going into the forest;”
\end{quote}

But when they go to the forest, they say:

\begin{quote}
“Father, Thy children are afraid; and behold, we shall die!”\textsuperscript{43}
\end{quote}

Barren women pray to God for a baby; and hunters ask for a deserving hunting and good food as well.

The Galla tribe prays every day morning and evening frequently for the protection of themselves, their cattle, crops and families. During these asking, they pray:

\begin{quote}
“O God, Thou hast given me a good day,  
Give me a good night;  
Thou hast given me a good night,  
Give me a good day!”\textsuperscript{44}
\end{quote}

Along with the oldest member, every adult Nandi must have to recite a common prayer twice a day. The prayer is as follows:

\begin{quote}
“God guard for me the children and the cattle,  
God guard for us the cattle,  
God give us health”! \textsuperscript{45}
\end{quote}
They pray for rain during drought and for the safety of their cattle and pregnant women. When they go for war, everybody at home and at the battle field pray for a successful fight and safe return at home as well.

Sometime greetings, salutation and farewell are also included into African prayer. If a Mende person asks anyone about his present life condition, the reply is like ‘No fault with the Chief (God)’; which means that ‘everything is all right’. Among the Barundi and the Banyarwanda, if two people move away from each other, one says, ‘Go with God’, and as a reply the other says, ‘Stay with God!’ Before sleeping, one says to the other that ‘Pass the night with God’. Among the Banyarwanda people, if a long termed barren woman receives a child, people congratulate them saying, ‘God has removed your shame!’ If a person makes himself safe from a danger is congratulated like ‘God shielded you’, or ‘He still stands upon you’.46

There is another form of worshipping the African God. Some people incorporate God’s name into children’s name. It is a kind of thanksgiving towards God from parental side. A particular child holds a unique attribute of God and throughout his/her life, the grown baby expresses that name’s significance among the individual society. The Barundi and the Banyarwanda name their children as Ndibokubgayo which means ‘I am alive because of Him’, or Ntirandekura which means ‘He has not let me drop yet’. Sometimes they designate them as Ntawuyankira which means ‘No one can refuse Him His way’, or Bizimana which means ‘God knows everything’. In order to show parents’ faith in God, children are named as Niyibizi which means ‘He knows all about it’, or Ndayiziga which means ‘I depend on Him’.47

Song is another way of worshipping God and full of knowledge to African traditional people. For strengthening group feeling and unity, everybody celebrates his or her religious rituals and gathering through singing songs. Praying through singing is traditional to them. For example, the Ngombe hunters sing for God to attribute their success to Him.

7. CONCLUSION

God’s oneness, supremacy, omnipotence, omniscience, everlasting nature, prime intellectuality, etc. are very core to the traditional people of Africa. In short, believing in ‘One God’ is their most significant aspect of knowledge and religion. There is no limitation of appreciating God to adherents and they worship or respect God in all ways of their lives in any form they wish. They only know that they just need to satisfy Him. They mention God while they are talking, walking, singing, praying, sleeping, working, dreaming, hoping good, wishing peace and anything they do. It is also for their personal benefits and as because they love, respect and
fear their God. There are millions of people and several well established religions in this world who believe in the ‘Oneness’ of God. African traditional religious followers and their belief systems can be a kind of standard for many of the monotheistic believers. The concept of ‘Monotheism’ is innate to the African religious followers and they can be called one of the good standards monotheistic practitioners as they follow this concept so cordially. There are several and in some extent many monotheistic religions in the world but the monotheistic adherents of the African people are really quite appreciable and inspiring for many followers aspiring to have a firm belief in the ‘Uniqueness of God’.

Endnotes:

2. Ibid, p. 2.
7. Mbiti, see above n 1, p. 33.
8. Matin, A., (2006), An Outline of Philosophy, Noorun Nahar Adhuna Prokashan, 38/2 Ka Banglabazar, Dhaka, p. 296. “Pantheism is the view according to which God and the world, the creator and the created, are identical. In pantheism God is wholly immanent. The word pantheism, literally means ‘all is God and God is all’ (pan = all+theos = God). Here, pantheism identifies that every object is part and parcel of God, and every event is a divine operation, an exercise of the divine will, or a manifestation of divine energy.
9. Hughes, Velsen, and Kuper, see above n 3, p. 104.
10. Smith, see above n 6, p. 167.
12. Smith, see above n 6, p. 109.
14. Mbiti, see above n 1, p. 32.
16. Mbiti, see above n 1, p. 34.
17. Smith, see above n 6, p. 109.
19. Smith, see above n 6, p. 127.
21. Idowu, see above n 11, pp. 36, 43.
22. Mbiti, see above n 1, p. 37.
24. Idowu, see above n 11, p. 47.
26. Danquah, see above n 5, pp. 28, 30.
28. Mbiti, see above n 1, p. 40.
29. Idowu, see above n 11, p. 39.
30. Westermann, see above n 23, p. 197
33. Mbiti, see above n 1, p. 47.
34. Ibid, p. 52.
35. Smith, see above n 6, p. 194.
36. Mbiti, see above n 1, p. 58.
37. Idowu, see above n 11, pp. 118-25, for details information.
38. Mbiti, see above n 1, pp. 59, 60.
43. Schebesta, see above n 18, p. 235.
45. Ibid, pp. 135, 144, 153.
46. Smith, see above n 6, p. 189.
47. Ibid, p. 194.
References:


Kok, B., (2005), Christianity and African Traditional Religion: Two Realities of a Different Kind, Kachere Series, Malawi.


