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ROLE OF THE AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION IN THE PROMOTION OF JUSTICE, RECONCILIATION AND PEACE IN AFRICA: A KENYAN EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

Although Africa is today a home to many religious organizations and many people have viewed this as a positive development in the continent, the situation is otherwise different. The entire continent is bleeding from the pain of tribal animosity, ethnic tension, hatred, violence, poverty, political instability, injustices etc. Religions are basically meant to help people in their tribulations but religious pluralism in Africa has brought conflict, tension and confusion in families and communities. Religions in Africa have also not brought forth justice, reconciliation and peace in Africa. This has, however, not always been the case. Prior to the coming of new religions and foreign cultures, human life was relatively stable with the African Traditional Religion (ATR) greatly influencing lives of people where it gave meaning and purpose to all aspects of thought and action. Africans were notoriously religious and this religiosity helped create an atmosphere where justice, reconciliation and peace prevailed at all costs. Drawing examples from various communities in Kenya, this paper will show that ATR is still alive in Africa where it continues to influence all aspects of life whether social, economic, religious or political and is responsible for shaping the character and culture of Africans to date. It suggests that rather than regarding African religion and culture as primitive or old fashioned, they should be employed in the promotion of justice, reconciliation and peace in the troubled African continent. ATR being a living religion in Africa cannot be ignored as Africa struggles with challenges facing it today.

Keywords: *Africa, Kenyan experience, Character shaping, Cultural beliefs*

INTRODUCTION

Africa today suffers from what Kiogora (1993:80) refers to as the 'Phenomenon of religious pluralism'. Although some people see this as a positive development with both Twinomugisha (1993:80) and Kiogora (1993:97) alleging that religious pluralism is the Africa's very soul, responsible for the shaping of the continent's destiny, we need to be leery of such arguments as the actual situation in Africa paints a different picture. It is true that Africa South of Sahara is a home to many religions, religious brands, religious organizations and sects (Mugambiand Getui, 2004), and this can easily create an impression that Africa is a continent of perpetual peace but conversely the entire continent is bleeding from the pain of tribal animosity, ethnic tension, racism, hatred, conflicts, inter-tribal wars, violence, poverty, corruption, injustice, political instability, unequal distribution of resources, hunger, diseases, illiteracy, terrorism and

et cetera. This is confirmed by Nkonge (2012: 236), in his article 'Developing Church Leaders in Africa for Reliable Leadership: A Kenyan Perspective' where he asserts that:

Kenya and the rest of Africa face numerous crises today. Authoritarianism, ethnic clashes, environmental degradation, poverty, hunger, corruption, diseases, internally displaced persons (IDPS) and refugees have created a very desperate situation in Africa.

Gladys Mwititi and Al Dueck lament that Africa hobbled into the twenty-first century covered with wounds from genocide in Rwanda, war in Sierra Leone, ethnic cleansing in Darfur and HIV/AIDS which was killing even more people than war putting the whole continent in a very devastating situation (2007:13). It is possibly this poignant African situation that makes Desmond Tutu, the former Anglican Archbishop of South Africa to lament that:

The picture is bleak and the prospect one of seemingly unmitigated gloom. It is as if the entire continent was groaning under the curse of Ham and was indeed in all aspects of the Dark Continent of antiquity. Africans may well ask: "Are we God's step children? Why has disaster picked on us so conspicuously?" We appear to be tragically unique in this respect (Ngara 2004:1).

It is important to note that all this is happening in a religious pluralistic African society and in intended or unintended ways religions may have contributed to the miseries facing Africa today. If all religions especially those that are found in Africa preach 'Salvation' then why have they failed to save Africa? This is a serious issue that requires our reflection as the author does in this paper. Should we be very happy that our continent houses lots of religions yet it is whimpering under the anguish of injustice, conflicts, hatred, poverty etc? Mugambi (1995:196) tends to concur with me that religious pluralism in Africa has brought conflict, confusion and tension in families and communities in Africa.

We shall discuss this in detail in the next section, but it is vital to say here that this has not always been the situation in Africa. Traditionally, Africa had a cultural and religious system that significantly developed, nurtured and shaped the aspirations and lives of its peoples. African religiosity otherwise referred to as the African Traditional Religion (ATR) or African Religion in this paper gave meaning and a sense of purpose to all aspects of thought and action (cf. Mugambi, 1995: 141). This is what made scholars such as Mbiti (1969:1), Parrinder (1954:9) and Mugambi (1995: 141) conclude that Africans are notoriously, incurably and reputedly religious respectively. J.S. Mbiti explains this further by denoting that traditional religion permeates all departments of life to the extent that there is no formal distinction between the sacred and the secular, between the religious and non-religious, between the spiritual and the material areas of life (1969:2). One can thus say that Africans and their religion are inextricably linked. Africans are inexorably religious. It is this religious atmosphere that helped Africans in their creation of a just society where peace and reconciliation prevailed at all costs (Magesa, 2011).

Today the situation is otherwise different. From the seventh-century AD, Africa has been invaded by new religions which have greatly changed the lives of the Africans. Religions such as Christianity, Islam and others have invaded Africa claiming to save it from its distressful situation and with little regard to the African religiosity. As we have said above this has done more harm than good to Africa and its peoples. They have taken away the African peace and have caused tension, confusion, hatred, conflicts e.t.c in a continent where people lived together in harmony. Several scholars including Mugambi (1995), Magesa (2011), Gatu (1989), John Paul (2000), Carr (2011) and Adamo (2011) propose ecumenical and interfaith dialogue as the most ideal method of peace building in Africa, but Adamo (2011) is quick to note that in most cases this dialogue has not worked since some religions regard other religions as inferior to them. For example, Magesa (2011:26) informs that dialogue between Christianity and African Traditional Religion (ATR) has always been thwarted by former's treatment of the latter as inferior to it.

I therefore think that rather than just emphasizing on ecumenism and religious dialogue which have not significantly changed the situation in Africa today, we need to think of our roots: Traditional African culture

and religion. Although those who came to spread other religions, particularly Christianity in Africa as noted by Mugambi (1989:40) were negative to the African cultural and religious heritage whereby they applied such terms as 'primitive', 'heathen', and pagan to describe the African culture and religion, we need to not take traditional African life for granted as we wrestle with problems facing our continent today. Mbiti (1969:211) says that in the traditional African society, life was relatively stable with religion essentially influencing all aspects of life. In this paper, I want to explore how ATR can thus be employed in the promotion of justice, reconciliation and peace in a continent jam-packed with tension, hatred, conflicts, injustice, violence and et cetera.

Traditional verses Current Situation in Africa

Traditional African society knew only one religion, ATR which greatly shaped the lives of the African people. According to Mbiti (1969:211) human life was relatively stable and almost static. Murianki (2015) elucidates that people in the community and family lived together in unity and peace was safeguarded by all. The true nature of ATR is displayed by Jose Chipenda in his assertion that:

African Traditional Religions were by nature tolerant in the extreme. Indeed, the African continent never experienced a religiously inspired war prior to the advent of colonialism. It was under western religious and secular influences that tensions and conflicts, particularly between Christians and Muslims began to emerge (1993: 25).

In other words, what Chipenda is arguing is that ATR is by nature a peaceful religion, a clear indication that if we are thinking about our troubled African continent we can not disregard it in any peace, justice, or reconciliation initiatives. Nthamburi (1991 a:27) regards ATR as a unique religion which met and continues to meet the spiritual needs and realities of the African people. It is capable of integrating with other systems and religions, a unique feature that makes it distinct from other religions which are always in competition with each, hence causing a lot of tension and conflicts. Mbiti (2010) says that ATR is deeply integrated into the total life and worldview of the people, without delineating life into religious and secular components. Religion is part and parcel of traditional life.

The situation in Africa is however different today. The advent of new religions has made Africa a religious pluralistic society, which of course has not come without challenges. For example, Chipenda (1993:24) claims that prior to the dawn of new religions coupled with Western and Arabic influences in Africa, the continent had never experienced a religiously inspired war. It was under foreign religious and secular influences that tensions and conflicts, particularly between Muslims and Christians began to emerge. Today such conflicts and tensions are witnessed in many African nations including Nigeria, Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, S. Sudan, Uganda, e. t. c. The situation is aggravated by the fact that where the fight is not between religions, it is between religious groups or outfits in a particular religion. For instance, Mugambi (1995:196) informs that Christian denominationalism has often brought conflict, confusion, and tension in Africa, where each denomination markets itself as the 'The Church' without emphasizing that it an ecclesiastical brand. In some African nations like Egypt, Somalia, Nigeria, Libya e.t.c, Islamic militant groups are fighting their fellow Muslims (BBC 2013).

Therefore the seed of discord and hostility present in Africa today was planted by the foreigners. For example, the 1884/5 Berlin Conference in which European powers, namely Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, Portugal and Italy 'scrambled for Africa' (Ogutu and Kenyanchui, 1991: 151) divided Africa not only socially, politically and economically, but also religiously. The conference without consulting African rulers (Ogutu and Kenyanchui 1991: 157) prepared the way for the newcomers to the African scene by requiring that claims to colonies or protectorates on any part of the African coastline should be formally notified to the other powers taking part in the conference, and by insisting that such claims must be backed by the establishment of an effective degree of authority in the areas concerned (Oliver and Atmore 1994:107). This implied that even the missionaries coming to Africa had to focus on the 'spheres of influence' of their mother countries. Mugambi (1995:205) explicates this by asserting that during the Berlin

Conference, European powers based their claims for 'spheres of influence' mainly on the presence of their missionaries in particular regions. Therefore, although the Berlin Conference allowed missionary activities to operate without regard to imperial spheres of influence, in practice, each missionary society tended to concentrate on the territory protected by the government in which it was chartered.

The result of this was disastrous. Bishop Nthamburi truly describes the scenario. He says:

After the arrival of European missionaries our people accepted the gospel and churches emerged. Before long these young churches began to experience divisions among themselves. Alas, they confessed one Christ but they were different confessionally. Many of them could not explain the essence of their divisions. They had been told to despise those who were different from themselves. Africans began to see such divisions and rivalry as a shameful contradiction of the nature of the Church of Christ (Nthamburi 1995 a:100).

Thus one sad fact that came with the missionary expansion was the denominational divisions. It was quite common to witness explosive situations where missionaries openly attacked one another. There are times when listeners wondered whether these people who seemed opposed to one another really belonged to the same religion. How could they claim to be Christians while they did not appreciate each others efforts? (Mugambi 1995). As Nthamburi (1991 a:100) asks, "How could divided Christians convincingly proclaim the message of peace, love and reconciliation?" The spirit of competition and rivalry among different European missionary societies made many Africans doubt their message. It was a divided Church claiming to preach one Christ.

During 1960s which signaled the end of missions with the juridical autonomy of the local Church being established hand in hand with Kenyanisation of the highest positions of leadership (Nthamburi 1991 b: 24), and as mission societies transited to autonomous national churches, the missionaries left without solving the problem they themselves had created. By emphasizing differences rather than similarities, the missionaries and the colonial agents through Christian denominationalism, stereotyping and ideological propaganda had divided African peoples by teaching them that there is a difference between a Catholic, an Anglican, a Presbyterian, a Methodist, e.t.c and to make the matter worse a Luo, Kikuyu, Luhya, Kalenjin and others (Cf. Mugambi 1995). While the word 'tribe' has no equivalent in African languages (Mugambi 1995:195) and Africans do not basically discriminate against any religion, they were made to believe that they were of different tribes and those that who belonged to different religions or denominations were also different. This seed of hatred and dissonance is what the missionaries planted in the African soil before they left. I remember growing up in a village where members of different denominations find it hard to even greet each other. According to Mugambi (1995:196) Christian denomination and religious pluralism has often brought conflict, confusion, and tension in the African communities. It is sad that in the name of 'civilization' the Europeans and Americans have extended their personal, ethnic and religious rivalries to Africa. Mugambi (1995: 80) elucidates that:

When Christian missionaries talked of tribalism in Africa, their point of reference was their own experience of tribalism in Europe and North America, among the communities to which they themselves belonged. The denominational competition and rivalry which they promoted in Africa was a projection to this continent, of the antagonism to which they were accustomed back at home.

Unfortunately this is what we have adopted as our way of life. We need however to note that this is not only the problem of Christianity but of all religions that have come to Africa. Santayana (1982:5) observes that:

Each religion, so dear to those whose life it sanctifies, and fulfilling so necessary a function in the society that has adopted it, necessarily contradicts every other religion, and probably contradicts itself. What religion man shall have is a historical accident, quite as much as the language we speak.

Without consulting Africans as to what religion they would prefer, new religions including Christianity, Islam and others have been introduced from without under the circumstances of cultural and religious invasion. In most cases the invaders have regarded themselves somehow inherently superior, or more precisely as the bearers of superior cultures and religions (Mugambi 1995:80). With little regard to Africa's cultural and religious heritage each religion markets itself as the sole carrier of the truth. The cultural-racial prejudices prevailing in their home countries have so much influenced the way they have introduced their religions in Africa, where Africa South of Sahara has for a long time been viewed as a 'Dark Continent' whose people are primitive, irreligious, animists, pagans, fetishists and barbaric (Kibicho 1990: 46-47). The most interesting thing is however how these invaders fight for followers and survival in Africa while discrediting each other, thus causing unwarranted conflicts, tensions and confusion among communities and individuals. By emphasizing their differences than similarities the invaders tend to convince their African converts that they are different. It is in view of this that Chipenda (1993:25) laments that it was under foreign religious and secular influences that conflicts, particularly between Christians and Muslims, began to emerge. Moore (2014) contends that religion is the spark of disputes throughout the world, but especially Africa. He says that 'Although conflicts are often caused by a variety of other factors, such as ethnicity and race, religion has been at the heart of much of today's atrocities on the continent'. For example, the conflicts in Nigeria, Egypt, Ethiopia, Sudan, Central African Republic, Mali, Kenya e.t.c are in one way or another linked to religion.

Where these conflicts are not directly linked to religion, it is expected that religion as the 'conscience of the society'¹ will help resolve them but unfortunately this has not been the case in Africa. Religion is the greatest of all means for the establishment of order in the world and for the peaceful contentment of all that dwell therein (Bahai International Community, 1994), but as Wa Kasonga (1994) confirms Africa has experienced perpetual conflicts and crises as religious leaders and their adherents watch. For example, many people believe that the 2007/2008 post-election violence in Kenya was a result of religions' failure to address the situation in advance.² Kipkemboi (2013) for instance is doubtful whether Kenya's post-election violence would have escalated to the level it did had the main religions such as Christianity³ not taken sides on the political divide. Just like many Kenyans, he believes that the violence that rocked Kenya was in part exacerbated by the silence of the religious leaders and also by the fact that some of these leaders openly supported political parties fronted by their tribesmen. When violence broke it became very tricky for religions to handle the situation as they were viewed as 'traitors' by the people (Mutembei, 2015).

The 1994 Rwanda genocide in which 800,000 people perished (BBC News, 2014) is another example of the religions' failure to address conflicts. I stopped over Kigali, Rwanda in 2013 on my way to South Africa and visited its Genocide Memorial Center. Perturbed by the memories of what might have led to the mass killing of innocent lives and wondering where Christianity which claims 95% of the country's population was during this ordeal, I engaged two young ladies who served us. They first of all sought to know about my religious affiliation and job. When I mentioned 'a Christian and a religious teacher', you could clearly see their indignation. Whatever they had in mind, one could not fail to see their disappointment at the mention of the dominant religion in their country. One could not elude the reality of a failed religion.

Lloyd and Nyamutera (2010) explain this even better. Although they assert that religions play a significant role in healing, forgiveness and reconciliation, they are quick to note that religions in Africa have failed to heal the wounds of ethnic conflict. They speak specifically about Christianity, the dominant religion in

¹ It was Emile Durkheim who first defined religion as the conscience of the society.

² This was the worst violence to have hit Kenya since Independence where about 1200 people were killed and more than 600,000 Kenyans displaced (UNDP Kenya Report 2011).

³ Christianity is the biggest religion in Kenya with 82.6% of Kenyans being its adherents followed by Islam commanding 11% of Kenya's population (2009 Kenya Census Results, 2010).

Africa South of Sahara⁴ and say that “Though all commend the African Church for the growth in numbers, many are puzzled by its lack of effectiveness in the war against tribalism” (:14). What Lloyd and Nyamutera (2010) are raising does not only concern Christianity but all new religions in Africa. For example, Healy and Bradbury (2014) inform that since 2009 there has been civil war in Somalia, yet Islam which is the dominant religion has failed to stop it. Instead of searching for amicable solution to this conflict, Islamic movements are catalyzing the situation by their effort to establish an Islamic state in Somalia. One wonders, what is the need having a religious state which is not beneficial to the citizens?

It is in view of the new religions’ failure to resolve conflicts and address other challenges facing the African continent today that the paper suggests African spirituality or rather African Traditional religion as the ideal solution. Although I am not suggesting that the new religions in Africa such as Christianity, Islam and others should be discarded, I strongly feel that the way they were introduced in Africa was wrong and as such they have not been able to meet the needs of the Africans. The fact that they are closely associated with the conflicts and tensions facing the African people and communities is a clear indication that they cannot be relied on to bring forth justice, peace and reconciliation in the troubled continent. So then, this being the case why can’t we think of our rich tradition which is more reliable? Rather than just hiding our head in the sand pretending that all is well we need to reflect on the issues raised by Chipenda (1993) in his observation that:

Religions are in principle intended to solve people’s problems. But when they are co-opted or become ‘fundamentalist’ they have the potential to inflict new, and at times, worse evils into the world. Thus Africans, now passing through the darkest period of their history, face the agonizing question: ‘If we were less religious, would we be better qualified to solve our present problems?’

Chipenda’s lamentation represents the agony of many Africans in today’s religious pluralistic African society where Africans follow religions which do not seem to help them.

African Traditional Religion Today

The African cosmology is basically religious. According to Kibicho (1990:45), ATR is the title given to the religion which Africans had and practiced long before the introduction into the continent of new religions. Nkonge and Gchiko (2014:30) refer to it as the aggregate of indigenous belief systems and practices which existed in Africa prior to the coming of the new religions such as Christianity and Islam, and to which millions of Africans still adhere covertly and overtly. An important point to be emphasized is that although ATR is no longer the only religion of Africa, and although there are some parts of Africa where it is no longer being directly or regularly practiced, the religion does continue to the modern times in different ways and forms where it greatly influences the lives of the African people (Kibicho, 1990). Therefore the term ‘traditional’ as Opoku (1978:9) contends does not imply that ATR is a dead religion. It rather refers to the cultural transmission, that is, oral tradition-stories, songs, legends, riddles and proverbs- that are used in passing this religion from generation to generation. Many scholars who have attempted to define ATR have been very careful not to detach it from the present as this would be ignorant of the immense influence it continues to exert in Africa. For example, Adamo (2011) defines it as the inborn and aboriginal religion of Africans, embraced by the forefathers of the present generations. It is described as the religion that emerged from the sustaining faith of the forebears of the present generation of Africans passed from generation to generations and still practiced today by the present generation of Africans.

The significance of ATR in Africa South of Sahara remains due to the fact that it is still the religion followed by the majority of the African people many years since the introduction of the new religions. Gehman (2005:11) informs that today, more than one hundred years since the first Christian convert, ATR persists and shapes the attitudes and actions of large numbers of people. To Nkonge (2014), although new

⁴ According to Nkonge (2013), Christianity is the largest religion in Africa South of Sahara with more than 380 million adherents which represents over 46.5% of the Africa’s population. Jenkins (2002) argues that the Christian’s world centre of gravity is currently shifting southwards to Africa, Asia and Latin America.

religions like Christianity and Islam seem to be doing well in Africa where they claim to have many followers, Africans always resort to ATR in the time of crisis. Africans superficially follow other religions but remain deeply rooted in ATR. A survey by Pew Forum on Religion and Public life conducted in 19 African countries in 2010 found that whilst Africans overwhelmingly practice Christianity or Islam, they extensively incorporate elements of ATR in their daily lives, a clear indication that Africans are followers of ATR before they are followers of other religions.

The incessant influence of ATR in Africa is emphasized by Mulago (1991: 128) in his observation that:

A superficial observer might make a mistake of believing that ATR is disappearing, but for anyone who lives in real contact with the Africans, the question does not arise. . . . The future of ATR is not at all problematic for our generation. It has its place and plays its role at every level of our societies.

This is further clarified by Idowu (1967) by his assertion that ‘ATR is living religion . . . It is a contemporary living reality’. ATR is found in all aspects of the Africa people including social, political and economic, and it has been largely responsible for shaping the character and culture of the Africans through out the centuries (Mbiti, 1991). On his part, Nthamburi (1991 a:27) denotes that religion in Africa is a way of life, a culture that permeates all spheres and levels of living. To date, ATR remains the base of Africans’ religious feelings and reverence whether they are followers of Islam, Christianity or any other religion. In fact as Nthamburi (1991 a), puts it, it touches some ‘soft spots’ in an African way that no other religion is able to do so.

This demonstrates why ATR is very crucial when it comes to addressing the challenges facing Africa today. Nkonge (2010) regards religion as a remedy helping individuals and communities in their social and psychological desperations, but I think Christianity and Islam have failed in this role because of the way they were introduced in Africa. The European and Arabic missionaries assumed that Africans were operating under cultural and religious vacuums hence needed to accept the cultures and religions transmitted from Europe and Arabia without questioning (Mugambi, 1989). As a result the new religions failed to have any meaningful impact to the Africans. That is why conflicts, tensions, hatred e.t.c continue to destabilize Africa as the teachers, leaders and adherents of these religions hopelessly watch.

JUSTICE, RECONCILIATION AND PEACE IN ATR: EXAMPLES FROM KENYAN COMMUNITIES

In this section I intend to explore some aspects of ATR which can be employed in the promotion of justice, peace and reconciliation in Africa today.

The African Conception of God

I will start this section with a Kikuyu prayer,

Thaii!

Thathaiya Ngai!

Thai!

Peace we beseech you God, Peace! (Kago, 2015, OI)

Last week I listened to another prayer from the Tharaka people of Tharaka Nithi County,

Murungu wa thiiri, ii

Tue ukiri, ii

Turetere mbura, ii

God of peace, give us grace, give us rain (Baite TV News, 2015)

These two prayers are examples of how Africans take God. In Africa God is believed to be the creator of all life and peace (Shenk, 1983, p.6). The Kikuyu believe that God is the life giver, divider of land and he

is also God of peace and justice (Kibicho, 1972). They call him *Ngai gihoti* (Victorious God) (Kago, 2015). Kibicho (1972) explains that the Kikuyu term for justice is *gihoto* which means truth, reason or right judgment. Interestingly, the Kikuyu term, *hota* means 'be able', 'be capable', win or 'be victorious'. According to Shenk (1983), this means that justice wins and God can never be defeated. In Africa, God's justice lasts forever. Whenever the Mwimbi people of Meru are taking oath, they say 'Ngai mburaga ndathaana!' (If I do not say the truth, may God kill me) (Kang'ori, 2015, OI). By this, they are invoking the justice and impartiality of God. The Maasai say that 'A man says that this is good and that is bad, but he knows nothing of the two'. This is to say that only God can rightly judge between the good and bad (Mbiti, 2012, p. 74). Among the Ameru, *Murungu* is the God of justice. He sided with the oppressed, exploited and downtrodden people of Meru and liberated them from the injustices of 'Red people' (Nthamburi, 1991 a). Even today, the *Agwe* (clans' heads) are expected to be men of absolute justice, integrity and peace for they are the link between God, the deliverer and society as a whole (Shenk 1983, p. 9).

God also establishes peace (Shenk, 1983). Thus the God of justice is pre-eminently the God of peace. The Ameru name of God, *Murungu* or the Akamba, *Mulungu* means 'the Righteous one' (Mbiti, 2012, p.75). It suggests power, mercy and goodness. Since justice is normally touched with mercy, it is basically concerned with peace (Shenk, 1983). The Borana use the two terms peace and justice to describe the nature of God. They say that 'There is no one who is as just and peaceful as God (Qampicha, 2015, OI). The elderly people among the Akamba often exclaim, *Mulungu wa tei* 'Oh God of mercy' or '*Keka va Mulungu wa tei*' (Oh, were it not for the God of mercy) (Mbiti, 2012, p.79). Since mercy is tied with justice and peace they are acknowledging God to be just and author of peace.

An African man lives in a religious universe (Mbiti, 1969). The religiosity of Africa cuts across all spheres whether social, economic, political e.t.c. Mbiti (1969, p.1) asserts that religion in Africa permeates all the departments of life so fully that it is not easy or possible always to isolate it. In this religiosity, the belief in God is central and dominates all other beliefs (Mbiti, 2012). Thus God is the base of ATR, the reality through whom all other beliefs and practices are centered. An important thing to note is that whichever angle we look at the nature of God in Africa, He is portrayed as the God of justice, peace and reconciliation. For example, in many African communities God is regarded as ruler of the universe. The Ameru call him, *Murungu wa Njuuri*, (God of all nations). The uniqueness of God's Kingship over human kings or rulers is however because He rules with perfect justice and peace and reconciliation are main precepts of His Kingdom (Mbiti, 1975).

Since God in Africa is known to be the God of peace, justice and reconciliation, the African people have always endeavored to ensure that these principles prevail in every family and community (Kago, 2015). This possibly explains why Nkonge (2014) regards ATR as a peaceful religion, embracing even religions that are hostile to it. I strongly feel that this concept of ATR can today be used in addressing the problems of wars, conflicts, tensions, animosity e.t.c which threatens to disintegrate African continent today. Since the idea of God who is the author of justice, peace and reconciliation is not foreign to the Africans, we can apply in reconciling our warring communities and individuals and ensuring that they live in harmony.

The African Communal Nature

The religiosity of the Africans is centered upon their communities. Mbiti (1969) elucidates that traditional religions are not primarily for the individual, but for his/her community of which he/she is part. This is of course understandable because as Mugambi (1995, p.198) explains, the traditional African social engineering has evolved a system in which the individual defines himself only in terms of others. Mbiti (1969, p. 106) explains this corporate life of the African people by denoting that 'Only in terms of other people does the individual become conscious of his own being, his duties, his privileges and responsibilities towards himself and other people. The individual can thus only say, 'I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am'. According to Nkonge (2004), the Ameru say, 'I am related therefore I exist'. The

Swahili people say that 'Mtu ni Watu' (A person is people) to show the importance of communal life in Africa.

This philosophy of togetherness is sacred. Mbiti (1969), supports this view by asserting that just as God made the first man, as God's man, so now man himself makes the individual who becomes the corporate or social or social man. It is this divine realism that makes individuals in the community stick together. The corporate life in Africa helped create stable communities where justice, peace and reconciliation prevailed at all costs. It created harmonious African communities. For example, sharing of food is a profound experience in African communities and families. In Africa, commensality brings together the living and the dead. Traditional Africans washed their hands in the same bowl, ate from the same large dish and drunk from one pot. For instance, the Teso could sit around one beer pot and drink *Ajano* (a brew made of milk) with several straws and sometimes even these straws were passed from mouth to mouth (Lukwata, 2003). The Mwimbi people say *Kurijanira ni guturania* (Relationship is in eating together). Personal relationships are therefore deepened through sharing. Lukwata (2003) says that for traditional African, a meal brings together the past, present and the future together in the actual moment.

This togetherness is what brought unity in the African families and communities. There is a lot we can learn from it as we promote unity among Africans today. The spirit of togetherness is what can save Africa today. The Swahili people say *Umoja ni nguvu* (Unity is strength). Our success as a continent lies behind our ability to share together our resources. Why should we wait for some one from Europe, America or China to help us resolve our conflicts while in fact by our very nature we believe in living together in harmony? It is clear from the Kenyan communities that community disharmony is the violation of God's will. ATR which is still followed by many Africans is pre-occupied with the establishment of harmony among people. According to Shenk (1983) reconciliation, peace and justice constitute good religion, a clear indication as that we cannot disregard ATR today.

The Value of life in Africa

In Africa, God is the source of life. The Aembu call him 'Life-Giver' (Njeru, 2015). Life is thus pre-eminently sacred and inviolable. It is only God who can take life and so murder for whatever reason is a flagrant violation of life (Kago, 2015). When blood is shed, the Nandi exclaim 'The ground is polluted'. They then sacrifice ritually for the purification of the polluted land. The sacrifice is concluded by eating together, a sign that through the slaying of the sacrificial animal, harmony has been restored and the community can now eat together again (Shenk, 1983, p. 16). The African phrase ' God will judge me, not you' reflects the African understanding that only God has right to take life (Kibicho, 1972). People in the community are therefore expected to work harmoniously towards the enhancement of life (Shenk, 1983). So, ATR affirms and celebrates life. According to Mbiti (1975), the rituals, festivals and ceremonies which are carried out in ATR add up to celebration of life. People know that they are alive and they want to celebrate the joy of living. No one can take away this joy from the people.

It is difficult to comprehend what has happened in Africa. Today there is no value of life. As Kunhiyop (2008) observes, Africa is racked by ethnic and religious conflicts which have sometimes led to a grave loss of lives. Examples of such include the 1994 Rwanda genocide, the 2007/8 post election violence in Kenya, the current conflicts in Burundi and South Sudan, and many others.

What I am suggesting is that we go back to our 'African ness' where life was extremely valued. Instead of resolving our conflicts through war and violence, we should learn from our traditional religion which advocated peace, justice and reconciliation at all cost.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, ATR is to date a living religion in Africa where it remains inscribed in the hearts of people. In spite of the new religions, ATR has remained the way of life and is largely responsible for shaping the

character and culture of the African people. Since religious pluralism has not helped Africa, where conflicts, tensions, violence, inter-tribal wars, injustices etc have continued to prevail in the midst of a religious environment, we need to think of our traditions as we wrestle with this problem. ATR can be relied upon by Africans as they seek to promote justice, reconciliation and reconciliation in the troubled continent. ATR is itself a religion of peace, hence very instrumental as we build a peaceful continent.

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