THE GOD THAT ANSWERS WITH FIRE: RELIGIOUS TRANSFORMATION AND PUBLIC MORALITY IN AFRICA

I. B. Ikpe

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on public morality in Africa and examines the contributions of Christian theology to moral decline in Africa. The paper points out the disparity between the theology of punishment in African religions and the theology of punishment in Christianity and suggests that this disparity may be the underlying cause of the decline in public morality in Africa. It explores the function of fear as an instrument of moral preservation in both traditional religion and Christianity and agues that the transition from traditional religion to Christianity diminished the efficacy of this instrument and thus affected attitude of Africans to public morality. In conclusion, the paper recommends a re-engineering of the Christian theology to stem this crisis.

1. Introduction

The last hundred years has been a period of great change in Africa. Starting with resistance to colonialism and down to the fight for independence and beyond, life in Africa has been changing at a very fast pace. The change, however, has not always been without problems. There have been wars, famine, poverty, genocide and many other maladies that paint an uncomplimentary picture of the continent. Most scholars agree that much of the problems of Africa are human and could be solved if public office holders uphold the values of justice and equity in addition to a little honesty and prudence in the management of public resources. It is the shortcomings of African leaders in this areas that lead to civil strife and other social maladies that have impoverish African nations.

The irony in all this is that it is happening at a time of great religious revival in Africa when public morality ought to be very strong. Current statistics show that while Christianity is declining in the west, it is strengthening its already substantial foothold in Africa. Not only are new converts flocking to the old and established churches, more and more new-breed churches with Pentecostal theologies and often fundamentalist flavour are sprouting up all over the continent. Islam is also winning lots of converts in Africa and there is no doubt that this contributes towards it being regarded as the fastest growing religion in the world. It is indeed very contradictory that while Africans embrace Christianity and Islam in their numbers, the level of moral decay among public office holders seems to suggest that such underlying values of these religions as honesty, justice, equity, love and mercy have been completely disregarded by the elite.

The growth of Pentecostalism and its fundamentalist interpretation of moral rules ought to provide a great boost to morality. This, however, has not been the case, as Pentecostalism sometimes appears to be selective in its prosecution of moral rules. This occurs in laying emphasis only on such rules that do not affect its fortunes and, sometimes, looking the other way when the infringement furthers the cause of Pentecostalism. Pentecostal preachers, for instance, regularly hobnob with corrupt leaders and openly welcome them and their tainted funds into positions of prominence in the church while pious workers with less financial clout are overlooked. Even in a generally impoverished congregation, Pentecostal preachers regularly imitate the flamboyance and vanities of celebrities making the poverty of John the Baptist and the humility of Christ appear to be features of a different faith. Television evangelists regularly flaunt their materialism and boast of their wealth seemingly in a bid to portray the goodness of God. The religious revival notwithstanding, we sometimes find the older generations looking back with nostalgia at the more moral days of old as they condemn current moral decadence.

Although the maintenance of public morality is of paramount importance in Africa because of its intrinsic value, it is its instrumental

value as the precursor of development that has elevated its value in the public's consciousness. Not only have Africans been routinely informed that their continued confinement to the league of perpetually developing nations is due to corruption by the ruling elite, they are increasingly aware that in this era of globalisation, where the pursuit of economic development by African nations takes place in a highly competitive turf, the fortunes of business organisations and even the state depends on a strict prosecution of public morality. The need to inject new capital into the economy through Foreign Direct Investment and the need to maximise the value of internally generated capital makes it imperative to place public morality on a high pedestal. Again the need by African nations to continue receiving economic aid requires that they satisfy the donor community on the prudent and efficient administration of aid funds and this can only be done through the objectification of public morality in African societies.

I have examined the problem of development elsewhere[1] and in both cases have identified the problem of African development with the culture and proposed a cultural engineering as a solution to the problem. Recognizing that religion, as an aspect of culture, has an enormous influence on public morality, and given the laxity in public morality within the contemporary period, I argue that the decline in public morality in contemporary Africa is primarily due to the predominance of the received religions and their marketing of God. Drawing examples from various traditional cultures of Africa and using the Christian religion as an example, I argue that the decline in public morality in colonial and post-colonial Africa is traceable to the transition from traditional religion to Christianity and the different mechanisms for control that attend the doctrines of both religions. I contend that, whereas the control mechanisms of traditional religion had been adequate for social control, the mechanisms of Christianity have not been very effective. The problem therefore lies not in the traditional culture but in cultural transformation and the perceived difference in the level of consequences for the breach of moral codes that attend the two religious doctrines. The perceived lack of consequences for the breach of moral codes that attend the Christian doctrine changed the social milieu significantly and has

contributed immensely to the decline of public morality. Since religion is a defining aspect of the African culture, I argue in conclusion that for public morality in Africa to improve, the new faith has to learn from traditional religion and that our religious advocacy needs a re-engineering in order to stem the crisis.

2. Understanding culture

Culture could be defined as "the complex whole, which includes knowledge, belief, arts, moral, law, custom and other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."[2] The reference to society here is significant and serves to portray culture as relating to those experiences that individuals gain in their interaction with their environment and with one another. Understanding culture therefore entails understanding the significant aspects of the lives of the people behind the culture and not merely the artefacts and other visible representations of the culture. This is because every aspect of the person's existence illustrates his culture whether or not such behaviour is purposively projected. This concept of culture could be said to be descriptive, in the sense that it purports to give a holistic picture of individuals in their interaction with society.

There is a sense, however, in which culture is not merely descriptive but also prescriptive. Culture is defined prescriptively where there is emphasis on the capacity in culture to dictate the behaviour of people. It is this view that Namenwirth and Weber subscribe to when they refer to culture as a design for living. The design in this case serves as a structure, which regulates the lives of people. But Namenwirth and Weber[3] are quick to point out that the design, though serving as a structure, does not completely regulate the lives of the people concerned. According to them:

> Culture as a design has no designer but emerges
> from and interacts with, society. We could define
> culture as the conception of the good life and
> society, but those terms do not equally stress the

opposition between design or plan and its
realization, or between culture and society.[4]

What this entails is that, though culture could be said to be a design, the design is not external to the society, neither is it sacrosanct but rather is open to dissent by elements within society who may find aspects of the culture unpalatable. It is this built in dissention within the society that provides the catalyst for change by injecting a certain dynamism into culture. In view of the above, we can define culture as,

> Learned, adaptable symbolic behaviour, based on
> a full fledged language, associated with technical
> inventiveness, a complex of skills that in turn
> depends on a capacity to organize exchange
> relationships between communities.[5]

The above definition points to certain features that could be said to be integral to culture. The concept of culture as a learned behaviour points to its persistence and sustainability. What this means is that though through contact with others, a culture could be influenced, modified, mutated and bastardised, it can never be completely eradicated. No matter the overwhelming odds against the survival of a culture, aspects of it will persist, so long as the people exist. Also, the concept of culture as adaptable behaviour points to its capacity for diffusion and transmission. This is to say that, since behaviour is adaptable, the aspect of culture that mirrors the adaptable behaviour is also adaptable thus permitting the diffusion of foreign cultures into the dominant culture and also, the transmission of the culture across the boundaries of other cultures. This also explains the relativity and the resultant diversity of culture. Again the view that culture is associated with technical inventiveness points to the reflexivity of culture. This makes it possible for elements within the culture to continuously evaluate, and thereby update, aspects of the culture, which by their reckoning has lost its value or is otherwise unaligned with the times.

The above analysis of culture clearly portrays culture as dynamic and diverse. This diversity is not only evident in the multiplicity of perceivable cultures but also in the diversity of elements that make up a particular culture. These two features of culture need to be understood and appreciated if the need and procedure for the transformation of public morality in Africa is to be appreciated.

3. Culture, religion and Africa

Religion could be said to be a characteristic feature of all cultures. According to Momen, "religion is found in some degree in every culture that has been studied. Along with marriage, the family, incest prohibitions and some form of social organization, it is one of the few cultural universals among human beings."[6] It is this universality that makes it difficult to adequately characterize the relationship between culture and religion thus making it difficult to say whether religion is an aspect of culture or their co-occurrence is merely accidental. But even if we assume that religion is separate from culture, we cannot help but recognize their characteristic affinity. As Malefijt observes;

> Religion, like culture itself consists of systematic patterns of beliefs, values and behaviours, acquired by man as a member of his society. These patterns are systematic because their manifestations are regular in occurrence and expression; they are shared by members of the group.[7]

It is the identical features between religion and culture referred to above that portrays culture and religion as playing complimentary roles in society such that it is sometimes difficult to demarcate the boundaries between purely religious roles and cultural roles. Again, it is significant to note that like culture, religion is a social phenomenon and can only find expression in a community rather than an individual.

Although religion is usually regarded as an aspect of culture, in Africa, it appears to be *the* culture. This is because the African culture and, indeed, every aspect of the day-to-day lives of Africans appear to be

perpetually wrapped up in a religious aura. This phenomenon has not been lost to scholars as evident in this comment of Monica Wilson who, drawing from the work of anthropologists before her, observed that:

> A series of African societies which have been studied by anthropologist – the Neur, the Dinka, the Bemba, the Ndembu, the Nyakyusa and many others – show a clear connection between religious forms and the whole society.[8]

Brathwaite makes the same point when he says,

> A study of the African culture reveals that it is based upon religion ... that, in fact, it is within the religious framework that the entire culture resides.[9]

Other commentators on the relationship between African religion and culture have echoes the above views. In his study of the religious traditions of the Akan of Ghana, Fisher[10], for instance, observed that, "religion and its ritual overflow into other areas of life". To show that this observation is not only true of the Akan but also of other African nationalities, Fisher undertakes a comparative study of the Akan religious traditions and those of other African nationalities. This study leads him to the realisation that, "from prehistoric times, religion has been inextricably woven into the fabric of sub-Saharan African life".[11] This, however, is not merely an observation about the African past as evidence abound that shows that religion completely permeates the everyday lives of Africans. Thus, whereas Christianity is loosing congregation in Europe and the Americas, it is growing and recording significant numbers in Africa even in the face of stiff competition with Islam, which is also recording very high growth in Africa.

It could, however, be argued that, just as the ranks of Christians and Moslems are growing in Africa, so also is the rank of the non-religious. For instance, one might suggest that, just like elsewhere, the younger

generation and the educated elites of Africa, are withdrawing from their professed faith and pursuing more secular interests. But even if this were true, such withdrawal is not necessarily an indication of the abandonment of religiosity or an anti-religious stance. This is because even when openly scorning religious affiliation, the African continues to be religious and often finds comfort and succour in religiosity. It is important here to note that being religious does not entail maintaining a passionate life of prayer or identifying with a particular religion. On the contrary, it could actually be argues that religious affiliation is only a manifestation of a religious nature and that a person can be religious even without these outer ornaments of religiosity.

> A person is not religious solely when he worships a divinity but when he puts all the resources of his mind, the complete submission of his will and the whole-souled ardour of fanaticism at the service of a course or an individual who becomes the goal and guide of his thoughts and action.[12]

This is only one of the possible ways that one can be religious without a religion and can thus assume a religious attitude even when he does not profess one, but there are others. Another such possibility is outlined of the Akan by Fisher who points out to the ritualistic observance of the rules of social etiquette and strict adherence to Robert's Rule of Parliamentary Order as indications of the continued influence of African religious traditions on contemporary life. What this suggests is that despite the swelling ranks of Africans who claim to be free thinkers, or otherwise non-religious, religiosity is very much with the African and the features of the dominant religious culture affect them much more than they are willing to admit.

4. Religion, morality, and social control

Religiosity for the African, whether focused on a divinity or an individual or a cause, had in the traditional culture been guided by rules, the flouting of which attracted specific and definite consequences. Several commentators have observed that the African religious

traditions of the past were not only governed by very strict rules but also responsible for the rules that regulated the lives of Africans in the more mundane realm of everyday life. Although the whole of the African culture is said to be based on a religious framework, it is in the realm of morality that this interplay of religion and culture has been severally documented. In traditional Africa, religion appears to be the sole agent for social control and by extension, the sole guardian of public morality. Among the *Bhaca*, for instance,

> ...indigenous religion is a powerful sanction for moral control ... the well-being and prosperity of the living depends on the continues goodwill of the dead, the seniors who had passed on. Fear of annoying the *amathfongo* is a powerful sanction against neglect and disobedience, not only of the dead but of one's elders. Disobedience towards a father or an elder relative may be punished by sickness and perhaps death to man and beast.[13]

This influence of religion on morality, especially as it relates to moral sanctions attributable to the ancestors, is not only true of the *Bhaca* but has also been recorded of the *Swazi*. According to Kuper,

> The ancestors (*Emadloti*) are believed to wield extensive powers; they may send bad dreams, scarcity, difficult birth (but not barrenness), sickness of various kinds (but not death). They are concerned with the well being and prosperity of the kinship group and react against family disputes and the shrinking of family obligations. For such crimes as incest within the immediate family or murder of a close kinsman (crimes beyond the ordinary range of law) they inflict the "bite of the dead" and debar the guilty sprit from entering the spirit world.[14]

The importance of the ancestors, and therefore religion, as an agent of social control is also recorded of the *Nyakyusa* by the Ottenbergs. In discussing the force of religious sanctions on the moral lives of the *Nyakyusa*, they maintain that,

> The stability of the group is further reinforced by the religious beliefs concerning crimes and moral offences – such as that the wrongdoer and other members of the group may be subject to bad luck, sickness, or other misfortunes as a result of such behaviour. These mishaps are believed to follow more or less automatically through the agency of the wrongdoer's ancestors or other spirits associated with him or his group. Religious ideology, so closely tied to the group with which the individual is associated, is thus a deterrent to crime and other inadmissible actions *as long as the belief system is maintained.*[15]

But it is not only the ancestors who lend a mystical force to social control and moral sanctions. Other metaphysical forces like witchcraft and magic also play a role. This is the view of Godfrey Wilson who in his overview of cultures and societies in Africa observed that,

> If a man is mean, inhospitable, quarrelsome, rude, sullen, disloyal, disrespectful to elders and careless of unfortunates beyond a certain point, then frequently he is believed to be punished by ancestors, witchcraft, or magic. …The specifically religious or moral sanctions of custom are believed to be punishments. These sanctions are actual misfortunes interpreted by the light of faith as the effects of sin; a sin being the breach of a rule of morality.[16]

In some African cultures, the ancestors need not function directly as agents of moral control but still exert considerable influence on the population through other religious functionaries. Such functionaries as

diviners, traditional healers and spirit mediums influence public morality in much the same way as the ancestors themselves. Among the *Korekore*, for instance,

> The medium becomes the mouthpiece of the community, as it were, and emphasises the moral values, which all men ought to uphold. He is able to do this in a way that no ordinary person, or even a chief, can, for he speaks as only one of a whole hierarchy of remote but powerful ancestors who are ever watchful of the behaviour of men upon the earth.[17]

The influence of traditional religion on morality can sometimes apply even when neither the ancestors nor their recognised agents are involved. In some cases it is the individual desire to assume some level of religious rectitude and the perceived religious consequence of the loss of such a religious standing due to immoral action that serves as a guarantee of morality. For instance, it is reported of the *Nandi* of Kenya that it is the need by an individual to maintain an appropriate ritual status that guarantees public morality and not the direct intervention by the ancestors or their agents.

> Ritual status is the relationship between a person and his tribe and the world of the spirits and it includes also his relationship with himself. By doing certain things like shedding human blood or breaking a taboo, the person damages his ritual status – becomes ritually unclean – and is, in consequence, a source of danger to those who come in contact with him (the rest of the tribe) and to himself.[18]

Unlike in other African societies where the wrath of the ancestors comes in an offensive manner, for the *Nandis* it is the omission by the ancestral spirits to act that ensures morality. It is believed that immorality separates the perpetrator from the spirit world thus rendering him or her ritually unclean. It is need to avoid this uncleanness and the attendant

indifference of the spirits towards the individual, the tribe and everything else that is associated with him that ensures morality. But sanctions by the omission of the ancestors to act is not restricted to the Nandi but has also reported of the Nyakyusa. For them, the efficacy of witchcraft as agents of punishment is only realisable when the ancestors omit to blunt the potency of such agents in relation to the person and thereby fail to protect the offender from their powers. It is this withdrawal of protection and the resultant susceptibility of the individual to the powers of witchcraft and magic that the Nyakyusa dreads and thus tries to avoid by observing the moral and social conventions that are required of him by the society. Thus morality is not maintained by the fear of what would happen but rather by the fear of what might not happen. Here, it is the fear of being cut loose from the guiding spirits that ensures moral uprightness and not the more common wrath of the ancestors.

5. Religion, morality and fear

The above position seems to portray Africans as engaging in religious activities and consequently maintaining the proper moral behaviour as a result of the fear of the ancestors and other spirits who may either act to cause them harm or refuse to act and save them from harm. Indeed, in most indigenous ethnic nationalities of Africa, there are religious consequences for secular transgressions as there are secular consequences for religious offences. What, however, is significant about them is the use of fear as an instrument of social and moral control. This feature of African religion has been observed by a number of scholars. Among the *Bhaca* for instance,

> There is another agent, which, although fulfilling other functions in the society is also an important means of social control – and here, too, the ultimate sanction is fear, although not the fear of a temporal power. This sanction may be termed supernatural and owes its efficacy to the fear of the death, the *amathfongo*, the ancestral shades, who, although dead and passed to

another plane, are yet intensely interested in the welfare of their descendants and become angry and revengeful at any departure from culture and tradition. The *Bhaca* are very conscious of the presence of the *amathfongo*, certain types of misfortune are attributed to them and they are a potent force for conservatism. To offend the ancestors might mean misfortune and possibly sickness and death. We thus find religion as an agent of social control.[19]

The efficacy of a theology of fear as an instrument of social and moral control is also observed by Tom Brown to be true of the Motswana. In analysing the relationship between the living and the ancestors Brown observes,

> Fear of the dead, whether one's own relatives or others, does, however, play an important part in the life of the living Mochuana, who believes that the dead have power over the lives of the living to bless or to curse, to send prosperity or the reverse to their relations and members of their clan; especially is this fear potent when the living are conscious of any reason why the deceased should bear ill-will.[20]

Here the object of fear is the ancestor but whereas in most African religions it is the relatives of the offender who constitutes the ancestors, in this case other ancestral spirits also have a free hand to punish even where the offender is unaware of the nature of the transgression.

The importance of fear as an instrument of control and its prominence in the religious traditions of Africa has sometimes led to certain misunderstandings concerning African religions. A case in point is that of Robert Milligan who in his evaluation of the African impulse to worship observes,

The African believes in God who made all things – I don't know that they ever worship him. Their worships are directed at the innumerable spirits about them who infest the air, among them are their ancestors. The spirits are generally disposed to do them harm, but they may be placated and their own dead may even be rendered favourable by certain ceremonies. But an incomparable number of spirits are always hostile and the impulse of the African worship is fear.[21]

The source of this error is not far fetched, as it is common for students of a foreign culture to impute their understanding into the phenomenon that they study. There is no doubt that Milligan has been aware of role of fear in religions in general and that it was not difficult for him to immediately identify this role with African religions. To this end Milligan may be forgiven for his inability to observe such impulse to worship as duty, communion, fellowship and holiness, which also attend the African worship.

6. Christianity, morality and fear

Although fear is sometimes identified as the impulse of African worship and also as an agent for social and moral control, the efficacy of fear in this regard is not limited to African societies but could be said to be a feature of all religions and all societies. Christianity and Islam, for instance, use the fear of hell and the desire by their adherents to gain the kingdom of heaven (paradise) as an instrument of moral and social control. Also, western societies use various scare tactics, viz., banishment, imprisonment, death and other forms of punishment as instruments of control. It is this element of fear that encouraged Christians at some time in history to pay the church fathers for the forgiveness of sins and is currently responsible for the gullibility of many educated Christians who have fallen prey to religious charlatans. But despite the fact that the concept of fear as an instrument religious control exists in all religions, the situation in African religions is unique in the sense that object of fear is more vivid. Whereas the fear in

Christianity is focused on what happens in the after-life, the fear in African religions relates to the here and now and is therefore more effective as an instrument of control.

The concepts of the Supreme Being in Christianity and in African religions are radically different. Whereas the Christian God is intimately involved in the day-to-day activities of people, the Supreme Being of the African cultural past is a disinterested creator who maintains a safe distance from the world. Also whereas the Christian God exercises his powers by himself and is prepared to "let all grow together until the day of harvest", the African God hardly exercise his power of punishment by himself but rather does so through a variety of spirits who have no patience with sin but metes out punishment immediately whether or not the offender is aware of the nature of the transgressions. Also, whereas the Christian God is always "faithful and just to forgive" transgressions if we confess our sins, the African God, through His agents, does not forgive but demand retribution and restitution for every episode of sin. Thus while sin and punishment are, to some extent, disconnected in Christianity, the two are intimately related in African religions. Wilson, for instance, observes that,

> The specifically religious or moral sanctions of custom are believed to be punishments. These sanctions are actual punishments. These sanctions are actual misfortunes, interpreted by the light of faith as the effects of sin; a sin being the breach of a rule of morality.[22]

What this means is that in African religions, one is not in doubt as to the source of his misfortunes, neither is there any doubt as to what needs to be done to rid oneself of current misfortunes and ward off further misfortunes.

The disparity in the consequences for sin, as evident in the theologies of both religions, could be said to be at the heart of the current moral crisis in Africa. Coming from a religion where the consequences for sin are immediate, vivid and severe, where also punishment straddles both the present and the afterlife, the idea of waiting for punishment in the afterlife trivialises God and the whole concept of punishment. This is not to say that Africans are full of criminal intent and are only held back by the fear of punishment, but it is to say that there is sufficient cause for desperation within the African social environment to compromise a saint. A theology that makes provision for a last minute repentance and full restoration of salvation after a lifetime of crime, as evident in the Christian myth of the robber on the cross, appears to encourage sin. This is made worse by the complete absence of retribution and restitution in the salvation process. Even in a continent that is ravaged by wars, diseases and poverty, the offender can always hope for an opportunity for last minute repentance after a lifetime of crime.

Although much of this is conjecture, there is no doubt that in an environment that is fraught with poverty and where the thrust of hitherto isolated communities into the global economy have created economic and social uncertainties, the consequences promised by the Christian God in the afterlife appears distant and unreal compared to the economic necessities of the present. This situation makes the African more susceptible to gamble with the wrath of a benevolent God in the afterlife, rather than restrict his advantages in an economic and social environment where the laws of the jungle (the survival of the fittest) prevail. The uncertainties of the future, coupled with a lax theology of punishment could be responsible for the need in public officers to accumulate resources in readiness for a rainy day, even when the accumulated resources are stolen public funds. The other vices that are identifiable with public officers, like the deliberate punishment of the innocent, subversion of democratic procedures, nepotism, and self-aggrandisement are traceable to this lax theology.

The damage done by the lax theology of the Christian faith extends beyond the theology itself to general image of the church. Such fall-outs of this lax theology include the advent of paedophile priests, whoring evangelists, suicidal bishops and legions of charlatans masquerading as religious leaders. This shows that even the functionaries of the church do not take this threat of afterlife damnation seriously and therefore cannot convince their congregation of its reality. Other fallouts of this lax theology such as the changing attitude of the church towards such practices as abortion, usury, sodomy, and other forms of sexual experimentation gives the impression that Christian morality is in a state of perpetual flux and that sooner or later what is immoral will become moral. Such a religious climate does not offer any incentive for religious asceticism and neither does it promote a culture of public morality. Instead, what it does is to subvert the moral authority of the church and debilitate its ability to serve as an agent of morality.

The Christian theology of fear which has served the church well in medieval Europe fares very badly when compared to the African theology of fear. For instance, the ancestors in Christianity, the saints, have no defined powers of punishment as compared to the ancestors in African religion who are the custodians of punishment. The African need not fear a Christian God who gives a wide and long road to the criminal and restricts the righteous to the straight and narrow way; who gives the wicked ample time to continue in his wickedness in the hope that he will repent while going into dialogue with Satan on how best Job, the faithful, could be tormented to test his faith; who heaps the sins of the world on the shoulders of his righteous son when he could easily has wished them to disappear without causing harm to anyone; who in his omnipotence and omniscience could have created a world devoid of sin and humans that are immune to temptation.

To the offender, the regime of grace in Christianity represents a freedom to sin. This is a freedom that is not checked by the dull memory of eternal damnation, especially when the wages of sin are embellished with such attractive rewards. Also, given a theology that promises

salvation through grace, people continue to sin because grace abound and in a world that has turned into a global village where the public is no longer the clan, the individual fails to recognise his duty to the public. Thus the transition from the strict theology of African religions to the lax theology of the Christian faith could be said to have removed the cultural taboos that legislated public morality without replacing with an effective substitute.

The commercialisation of God and the monetisation of religious patronage have not helped the situation. The new theology of prosperity, which has widened the eye of the needle to let through, not only a single camel but also a whole caravan, encourages people to donate to the vineyard of God and reap abundantly from any field in recompense. Public officers who steal public funds or otherwise subvert the cause of public good are no longer sanctioned by the church but a given special blessings by the priest in proportion to their offering. The love of money, which used to be the root of all evil, now becomes an enduring vehicles of salvation. The functionaries of government who regularly subject the citizenry to draconian legislations and life threatening economic regulations and deregulations are often prayed for by priest under the lame excuse that God is the source of all authority. The rich of questionable means are often used as examples of piety and are, by the orders of the church, those who have special titles and are thereby seated in the respectable pews of the church. Despite the biblical statement that there is no slave nor freeborn in heaven, the church often segregates its membership according to class, social standing and sometimes race. By so doing, the church encourages the citizenry to fleece or otherwise outsmart one another in the race for the special pews of the church and in the stampede, public morality gets trampled.

From the above, it is evident that the current theology of our received religions as represented by Christian theology has contributed to the decline of public spiritedness in Africa and if religion is to play a positive role in Africa, the marketing of God has to change. It is clear that the African social milieu does not require a God of grace with a fatalistic view of the world. The God we need to promote should not be

the passive God of the New Testament but the God that visits the sins of the father on the children and punish them for seven generations. It should be a God of consequences. The God that answers with fire.

NOTES

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