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Research Paper

THE CONCEPTION OF MORALITY IN INDIGENOUS AFRICAN CULTURE

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There has been a divergent view regarding the concept and philosophy of African morality. Some aliens tend to cogitate Africa as devoid of morality, moral consciousness and perceive Africa ''as they do not distinguish between good and evil …."(Temple, 1952). This led them into giving all forms of derogatory names to Africans and African morality. With a special focus on Africa, this paper deals with discourses being made on morality in African thought. These discourses displays the ambivalence existed among those scholars seeking to define the foundation of morality in Africa within the parameter of religious episteme, community based, ancestral worship and tabooed verdict. Therefore, this paper will be of great benefit and afford the opportunity of preserving moral values and beliefs of the people not only for future generation but also as a source of wisdom from which the younger generations will benefit. Africans gallant traditions and creative energies need to be rediscovered, promoted and celebrated. It is momentous that Africa must be candidly studied on its own terms and to mollify its people's needs through indigenous knowledge. In nutshell, this paper deliberates and ascertains what African people *actually* know, *actually believe*, and think about the foundations of morality.

Key terms: Africa, Culture, African morality, Morality, Religion

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INTRODUCTION

In Africa, the study of earlier features of moral understanding is exceedingly important. Knowledge of morality, in addition to satisfying our curiosity regarding the past, gives us a clear understanding of the nature of morality. This is because people who have evolved a culture would be expected to have a distinguishable epistemological or conceptual knowledge of the basic components of their culture, including their ethics (Claude, Sumner, 2002).

It is a matter of fact that morality is universal to humanity. This means that morality is essential to all human being no matter where they live or no matter what kind of life they lead. Morality is what makes man a man. In this case, Wiredu (1998) said that "any society without medium of morality must collapse." This being the case, however, many foreigners have erroneous understanding of African morality. Some even tend to regard Africans as devoid of morality and moral consciousness. For instance, they asserted that "Africans do not distinguish between good and evil…they are devoid of moral content

or of universally accepted ethical norms" (Temple, 1952).

Morality in African Thought

The central theme in moral philosophy are the nature of principles, how people can learn, internalize, and use moral principles to guide their conduct, action, or the entire life style. Thus, morality has to do with some sort of standard that can guide human action. In Africa, we can understand morality simply as synthesis of social values, norms, mores, and their authenticity in community from which they arise. African ethics is the conceptualization, appropriation, contextualization and analysis of African values within the African cultural experience. (Goodman, 2006). Wiredu (1998) also defined African ethics as the observance of rules for the harmonious adjustment of the interest the individual to those of others in society. It covers the entire range of human behavior that is evolved in our relationship with oneself, other person and with other world as well.

   According to Kwame Gyekye (1997), African traditional ethics has dual connotation: first, it refers to set of social rules, values, and norms that that guide the conduct of the people in a society; second it refers to the attitude and responses to such norms and rules…embedded in the whole society and aiming at directing the way of life as bad or good in order to live the communal and harmonious life. The rationale for moral rules then is to ensure the harmonious co-existence of members of the society through the systematic adjustment of their discordant interest (Wiredu, 1998).

   The concept of ethics in the African traditional society is based on the notion that man is never alone. Thus, society according to Opoku (1978) is a series of interrelationships in which each one contributes to the welfare and the stability of the community, and avoids that which is disruptive or harmful to the community's life African ethics is based on communal living in the sense that it fuses the society into one big whole. "In African Traditional Society, there is no 'me' but 'us'; not 'my' but ours." It is within these perspective and context of no 'me' but 'us' no 'my' but 'ours' in a given traditional African society that African ethics has been formulated (Mbiti,1969).

Foundations of Morality in Africa

There are two dichotomous views, says James Kikongo (2002), among the scholars of African concerning the African traditional concept of the basis of foundation of morality. The first, and which seems to be most predominant and shared by majority of the critics, is that African morality is founded on African concept of the spiritual reality (religion). The second is that African

morality is fundamentally determined by the conception of human well fare. In addition Africans devotions to their ancestor and taboo have taken as the characteristics of African moral awareness. Reverence for their ancestors regarded as so typical of the indigenous African culture that some African morality as "ancestor worship". Relevantly, taboos are cultural and religious phenomena that maintain order, cohesion, and integration in traditional African society (Ibid, 2002).

African Traditional Religion as Foundation of Morality

Nature of African Traditional Religion

There has been a divergent view regarding the concept and philosophy of African traditional Religion. Some have seen Africans as not having the capacity to reason on the concept or the philosophy of God. This led them into giving all forms of derogatory names to African traditional religion. The fact that Africans are notoriously religious is no longer an issue for debate among scholars today. This is because various peoples of Africa own a religious system and a set of beliefs and practices which bind them together to their ultimate. This is why A. C. Leonard (1966) argues that "the religion of these natives [Africans] is their existence and their existence is their religion". It supplies the principle on which their law is dispensed and morality adjudicated. The entire organization of their common life is so interwoven with it that they cannot get away from it. Like the Hindus they eat religiously, drink religiously and sing religiously.

   When we speak of African traditional religion we mean the indigenous religion of the Africans. It is the religion that has been handed down from generation to generation by the forbears of the present generation of Africans. It is not a fossil religion (a thing of the past) but a religion that Africans today have made theirs by living it and practicing it. This is a religion that has no written literature, yet it is "written" everywhere for those who care to see and read. It is a religion whose historical founder is neither known nor worshipped; it is a religion that has no zeal for membership drive, yet it offers persistent fascination for Africans, young and old.

   This religion has no founder like Zoroastrianism, Confucianism, Buddhism, Judaism and Christianity; rather it evolved slowly through a long period of time, and experienced a situation of continuities and discontinuities (Awolalu and Dopamu, 1979). According to Mbiti (1969) "God made the heavenly part of the universe first, and then, standing on it, he created the earth". Some myths believe that "God created the earth first, and then, standing on it, he created the heaven." The Africans see man as the center of the universe. This concept of man as the center of the universe may be found in other religions too.

Bolaji Idowu (1973) asserted that when we use the word traditional in reference to African religion, we are not stressing its primitive nature as some opine nor are we stressing that it is a fossil religion – a religion that is incapable of adapting to changes. This religion has no written scripture like other religions but is orally transmitted from one generation to another through songs, liturgies, proverbs, short sayings, myths, and others. This makes it prone to experience exaggerations, modifications and distortions yet the kernel of the religious beliefs and practices remain intact. Sources of studying this religion are through oral tradition. Idowu (1973) explains that these oral traditions which serve as the vehicle for studying African traditional religion: constitute the scriptures as well as the breviaries of African Traditional religion: therefore, no one can expect to see the religion from the inside unless he proceeds through him. They are, in fact, probably of more value to the student than some printed scriptures and common orders, because they are indeed living and active.

Mbiti (1969) has this to say about African culture intertwining with religion.Africans are notoriously religious, and each people have their own religious system, with a set of beliefs and practices. Religion permeates into all the department of life so fully that it is not easy or possible always to isolate it. A study of these religious systems is therefore ultimately a study of the people themselves in all complexities of both traditional and modern life… Religion is the strongest element in traditional background, and exerts probably the greatest influence upon the thinking and living of the people concerned. In corroboration with Mbiti, Ezeanya (1980) agrees that in Africa "life is religion, and religion is life". This means that religion could not be explained away from morality in Africa. Whoever tries it will be seen as a stranger to Africa.

Characteristics of African Traditional Religion

Bolaji Idowu 1973) has enunciated five component elements of African traditional religion. These five elements he called the structures of African traditional religion, while Awolalu and Dopamu 1979) see them as the features of African traditional religion (In this work we shall look at these five elements as the philosophical foundation of African traditional religion. These five features or foundation are, belief in God, belief in divinities, belief in spirits, belief in the ancestors and belief in the practice of magic and medicine.

Belief in God: The concept of belief in God in Africa forms the bedrock of every religious worship and ceremony. It is an idea that is fundamental to African religion. Africans believe in the existence of a supreme primordial being, the Lord of the universe (Idowu,1973)

Belief in divinities: These are divine beings that derive their being from the Supreme Being. They are created to serve God's will and sometimes manifest his attributes. They also serve as intermediaries between God and man (Awolalu and Dopamu, 1979).

Belief in spirits: Spirits usually make natural phenomena their place of habitation though these things may be destroyed without destroying the spirits. This is because they have the power to incarnate into anything at will. They are separate and separable entities and the material objects they inhabit are but channels through which the spirits are approached. These spirits are ubiquitous and so are feared by people. So many channels can be used to appease them such as sacrifices, offerings, and others.

Belief in the ancestors: Ancestors are spirits of dead Africans especially those who died at ripe good old age and who lived a worthy life while on earth and left a legacy before their death. Mbiti calls them the "living dead." (Mbiti,1969).

Belief in the practice of magic and medicine: The practice of magic and medicine enables an African to procure what cannot be obtained in the ordinary way. Among those who use their magical powers for harm include such people as the sorcerers and witchcrafts, while those who use their power for good include medicine people who treat people for various ailments and those who exercise spirits out from those who were possessed.

Harmony of African Traditional Religion and Morality

The relation between religion and morality has attracted the attention of philosophers since the inception of philosophy and the act of philosophizing. Theists argued that the link between morality and religion is indubitable. Some scholars are arguing that religion is foundational with respect to African traditional morality and others denying it (J.N. Kudadjie, 1976 and Kwame Gyekye, 1987). For many philosophers, African ethical system is based on religion since both the former and latter are concerned with the values of human life. In the same way, Wiredu (1998) asserts that "in traditional Africa what is morally good is conceived to be what is decent for man-what brings dignity, respect, contentment, prosperity and joy to man and his community. And what is morally bad is what brings misery and misfortune and disgrace."

Furthermore, as Udeani (2008) figures out, within the traditional African societies there is no differentiation between life, religion and, morality rather, an intrinsic unity between them. In similar vein, Heidi Verhoef and Claudine M. (1997) precisely state that in African

vantage point: the relationship between philosophy, religion and morality as lived by the people is one of unity .there is no distinction between these disciplines as they are not perceived as entities in themselves but as dynamic elements which cannot be separated from life processes. Philosophy is life; religion is life; morality is life; community is life. There is no room for separation within the African worldview, but only complex interdependence.

Moreover, from the African tradition, morality or ethics are merged with religion. This confirms John Mbiti' (1969) and other scholars' view of religious foundation of African morality. This clearly implies that the moral beliefs and principles of the African people are derived from their religion and that religion provides the necessary justification for moral values and beliefs. Moral concepts, such as good, bad right and wrong, are defined in terms of religious prescriptions or commands James Kikongo (2002). To these scholars religion is surely a foundational theory of morals in African societies. Accordingly, Africans lives and practice their religion, as one and the same and morality within Africa is that which evolves from the process of living and is grounded in the context of communal life in which religion can be considered as the presupposition of the moral life Heidi Verhoef and Claudine M. (1997).

As Mbiti (1969) argues, there is no separation between concerns of a religious and philosophical nature, but complex interdependence. Everything within the universe is interconnected, existing within a unified whole experiencing certain supernatural force from which life and moral character emerges Benezet Bujo (2001). Accordingly, African traditional ethics entails a supernatural dimension. According to Ekwenife (1990) African traditional religion refers to: those institutionalized beliefs and practices of indigenous religion of Africa which are rooted in the past African religious culture, transmitted to the present rotaries by successive African forbears mainly through oral traditions… sacred specialists and persons, sacred places and objects and religious work of art, a religion which is slowly but constantly updates by each generation in the light of new experiences through the dialectical process of continuities and discontinuities."

The Communal Foundation Theory

In traditional Africa, the action or behavior of individuals is judged as moral or amoral based on the interaction in the society. A person is not simply good or bad; instead he or she may act in a good or bad way depending on the consequences of his or her action viewed in the community Udeani (2008). According to John Mbiti (1969), one act may be good in certain circumstances, while it is evil (sinful) in others, depending on its impact

upon the relation of the parties involved. From the African viewpoint, moral principles are primarily concerned with the maintenance of good relationship with others as opposed to the maintenance of justice and individual rights in the West. In Africa what is right is what connects people together; what separate people are wrong.

In Africa, as Ikuenobe strongly argues, the communalistic ethos, the existences and needs of the community, are logically prior to those of the individual. In this perspective a person is constituted and defined by community. Furthermore, African morality is naturalistic and humanistic, in that moral principles are addressed to the social and natural conditions and features of human beings, their needs and interests in the context of their communal existences. Thus, African morality can be understood in terms of communalism and social welfare. The African moral life does not concede with the Western liberal, autonomous, solipsistic, atomistic, and individualistic self that is exemplified Kantian ethics and metaphysics (Samuel E. Stumpf, 1994).Basically, the African morality is concerned with the goodness of all human being. Consequently, the essence of goodness and good life in African traditional thought has to do with doing well and not to harm other. To this extent, the African traditional morality or ethics is essentially social oriented and anchored on the well-being of social being. Moreover, African in their traditional ethics place some sort of emphasis on goodness of character that promotes the good life of the community. The promotion of good life therefore is the determinant principle of African traditional morality and this promotion is guaranteed only in the community (Benezet Bujo2001).

As Omoregbe (1998) clearly illustrates, in African tradition, goodness of character consists of virtues such as kindness, generosity, hospitality, justice, and respect for elders. From the African viewpoint, moral principles are primarily concerned with maintenance of good relationship with others as opposed to the maintenance of justice and individual rights. In Africa what is right is what connect people together; what separate people is wrong (John Mbiti, 1969). In the same vein, Idowu (1973), elaborating on the concept of immorality in African traditional religions, posit that since the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately, every member of the community is expected to act in such a way as to promote always the good of the whole society. It is held that whatever happens to the individual is believed to happen also to the whole group and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual.

Ethics in African traditional society-what a person does in accordance with the established norms-contributes to the welfare of the whole community. At the same time, his misdeeds, however, can bring calamity to his immediate family, extended family, his lineage and the entire community (Opoku, 1978). As we have said earlier

African humanism is quite different from western notion of humanism. Richar Bell (2002) clearly asserted that: African humanism is rooted in traditional African values of natural; respect. It is rooted in lived dependences where individual person must depend on his or her large community. The existence of social structure is a necessary feature of every human society. Nkrumah(1964) says "our philosophy must find its weapon in the environment and living condition of the African people." The communal or communitarian aspects of African socio-ethnical thought are reflected in the communitarian feature of the social structure of African society.

Africans see human person as inherently communal being. The fact that a person is born in to an existing community must suggest a conception of the he person as a communitarian being by natural though some people insist individuality. Therefore, Africans do not think of themselves as discrete individuals, but rather as part of the community. An often quoted line from John Mbiti's book "African Religion and Philosophy" supporting this view is: "I am because we are; and since we are therefore I am." This is the cardinal point in the understanding African concept of man. More importantly, John Mbiti betrays the relevance of I think therefore I am' and draw the African communalist axiom I am because we are and since we are, therefore I am." we believe that Mbiti share the views of Fichte, who say "the I posit itself if and only if it recognize the self-posting of other." According to Heinz Kimmerles(1997)' interpretation of Mbiti; Descartes cogito has already acquired quite a place in African philosophy, dielectrically speaking .Mbiti has commented , by implication that I think therefore I am betrays an individualistic outlook, to which he has counter posed what he takes to be the African communalist axiom: I am because we are and since we are, therefore I am.

Ancestors as Watchdogs of Moral Behavior in Africa

As Benezet Bujo puts, the members of African community include the living and the living dead, the ancestors. Mbiti(1969) write everything including God, ancestors, humans, animals, plants, and inanimate objects are connected. In this section, we will discuss the role that the ancestors play as the characteristics of African morality. The African sees a manifestation of the past generation with the present generation, where the west a new generation replacing an old generation. For African the ideal take the form of exemplary past which realized in the present (Dime,C.A, 1986). In the African cosmology, life is grounded in the past, but experienced in the present. Continuity oriented towards the past is apparent in the statement: I do this because my father did. And they did it because our ancestors did it.

Offiong,,E.A(1978) contends that "the past ancestors do were indispensable in giving meaning to one's present existence." Whatever the ancestors do must therefore be, and is accepted as just, and people have no choice, but to submit.

Ancestor's belief has often been considered as the most distinctive features of African community. The ancestors described as the "living dead" or the "revered dead", are believed to be the moral agents in their immediate families they have physically left behind. They oversee and superintend over the family ethical code. However, the manner in which ancestors belief are concertized may vary from culture to culture or from community to community. For instance, Bantu people have special reverence towards the ancestors the laws of community life have been instituted and sanctioned by them (Gyekye, and Wiredu, 1992). Ancestors do punish with all severity any violation of laws and custom which were established, in the beginning for the wellbeing of the community (Temples,1952).

Similarly, in Akan community according to Wiredu(1998) the ancestors are conceived to be the departed spirits of erstwhile elders of our societies who live in the world analogous and contiguous to our and work for good life of the living by watching over their morals. In this regard, they both like and unlike the living. Like the living, they have interest in morality of which they are, indeed recognized as, in some ways, guardians. But unlike person, they are not normally perceived by naked eye, which means they can affect human life for good in the superhuman ways. In the same way, the Oromo society pay tribute to the spirit of the dead, the ancestor they commonly called 'ekeraa.'[**] For instance when they faced serious problems in their lives and unable to find solution to the problem, they consult dead spirit through intermediary known as "ekeraadubiftu"[††] so as to get away out of their problem. Every important activity and social relationship among society believed to express and sanction of the ancestors. The ancestors spirits are continually involved in the affairs the living, but they manifest their power and interest characteristically in the unforeseeable occurrences (Workineh,2005).

The underlying reasons why African community worships the ancestor fall into two. On the one hand, worshipping of ancestor spirit is derived from belief in the immortality of the soul coupled with fear of death, which is virtually intrinsic among humankind. On the other, African worship their ancestor not because of fear of

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[**]The term ekeraa according to Oromo people is the spirit or soul of the dead person

[††]Ekeraa dubiftu according to Oromo people is the intermediaries between the living and the spirit of the dead that that facilitate the communication between the two in giving solution or advice in in time of he/she faced problem.

death or not because they believe in the immortality of the soul, but because their social structure demand it (Mbon,F.M, 1990). The important thing about ancestor is that they are moral archetypes. In the other word, the significance of the ancestor consists in that they watch over the affairs of the living member of the family; helping, and punishing the delinquent ((Gyekye and Wiredu, 1992). Africans believe that the soul of people retain functional roles after death. The functional role of ancestor's soul is believed to affect people who are still living. Ancestors are the intermediaries between living human being and others force in the universe, which watch over their descendants (Mbiti, 1969). To put shortly, ancestors are not perceived to be ghosts or terrible spirit, but living dead they are portrayed as departed family members. Not only family members, they are also identifiable family members. It is however; true that only specific member of other living dead, not all deceased that occupy the position of ancestors. The characteristics of individual within African community determine their position of living and the living dead. Accordingly, no one can attain ancestor status without having led a morally good life (Mbiti, 1969). For an ancestor is a model or exemplary of conduct in the community; they are regarded as a source of social and moral stability.

The Nature of Traditional African Morality

Traditional African morality can be described in the following terms: communalistic; humanistic or anthropocentric; this-worldly; religious; tabooed and ancestral.

Communalistic: If we carry out a duty to help someone in distress, we would not be doing so because we think a person has a right against us, a right we should help to fulfill. We would be carrying out that duty because we consider that person worthy of some moral consideration by us. Wiredu (1998) is also of the opinion that African traditional morality is "quintessentially social". Further, he adds; the communalistic orientation … means that an individual's image will depend rather crucially upon the extent to which his/her actions benefit others rather than him/herself, not of course, by coincidence, but by design … an individual who remained content with self-regarding success would be viewed as so circumscribed in outlook as not to merit the title of a real person.

Humanistic or anthropocentric: According to Wiredu (1998) African concepts of morals are generally of a humanistic orientation: … at all stages … morality is grounded in conceptual and empirical considerations about human well-being … this is why the term 'humanistic' is so very apt as a characterization of African

moral thinking.… A human person is essentially the center of the thick set of concentric circles of obligations and responsibilities matched by rights and privileges revolving round levels of relationships irradiating from the consanguinity of household kith and kin, through the 'blood' ties of lineage and clan, to the wider circumference of human family hood.

A this-worldly morality: This last characteristic of African traditional morality indicates the fact that it does not believe in any judgment of our moral behavior in life after death. Beyond death there are only the ancestors who continue to live as they used to live in this world. There is no final judgment by God which can encourage one to live a morally good life here on earth Bujo (1990).

Religious: Moreover, from the African tradition, morality or ethics are merged with religion. This confirms John Mbiti (1969) and other scholars' view of religious foundation of African morality. This clearly implies that the moral beliefs and principles of the African people are derived from their religion and that religion provides the necessary justification for moral values and beliefs. Moral concepts, such as good, bad right and wrong, are defined in terms of religious prescriptions or commands (James Kikongo, 2002).

Tabooed: According to Mbiti (1969), in every African indigenous society, there exists many laws, customs, set forms of behavior, regulations, rules observances and taboos which constitute the moral code and ethics of a given community or society. There are many things held to be morally wrong and taboo, such as: robbery, murder, rape, telling lies, stealing, being cruel, saying bad words, showing disrespect, practicing sorcery or witchcraft, interfering with public rights, backbiting, greedy or selfishness, breaking promises and so on. Whoever does them is considered to be a bad or evil person (Mbiti, 1969). Taboos may, however, be religious, social, economic or political, or a combination of one or two or even all of these classifications at once.

Ancestral: Kwame Appiah(1992) argue in his very popular and influential book In My Father's House "Most Africans, now, whether converted to Islam or Christianity or not, still share the beliefs of their ancestors in an ontology of visible beings," and at the same time absolutely deny "a metaphysical unity to African conceptions" or "an African worldview?

The Role of Taboos in African Societies

According to Mbiti (1969) the word taboo originated from the Polynesian term "tabu" meaning forbidden thing or person or place. It implies certain kind of prohibitions.

Action can be classified in to right and wrong, in which right actions are allowed to be accomplished, whereas wrong actions and behaviors are prohibited or tabooed. In this case one is not free to do his or her wish always. A person is expected to exercise some restraints in order to conform to the laws of the land. Many taboos are associated with the divinities, religious functionaries, ancestors, and many other departments of life.

Taboos play very significant roles in many African societies since they can be religious and cultural tools for social integration. Ogujiofor.J (2001) depicts African morality as tabooed morality. It strengthens the values and moral beliefs which form the basis of social life. By terming them as sacred or divine injunctions, taboos have the greater power to direct human actions and sayings. Taboos are cultural and religious phenomena which help in maintaining order, cohesion and integration in traditional African society. They consist of morality which is difficult to separates from religion. A person maintains a harmonious relationship with all creatures of deity guaranteed by taboos in the society. They are obeyed because apart from being sanctioned by Supreme Being, and the deities, they are guarded by the society as well. The failure to obey such a tabooed action is believed to result in certain kind of physical or psychological punishment. This is because; it violates what is prohibited by the society in question.

In other words, taboos, according to Kudadjie.J.N (1987) are cultural phenomena which help in maintaining moral canons in traditional societies. Since the deities are the guardian of morality in traditional societies, taboos are obeyed. To keep away from sin, most Africans do not deviate from these taboos. Among the African societies there are different taboos concerning sex, food, death and so on. In African traditional society and culture, taboos are prohibitions and expressed in everyday life and activities of people. Some of these taboos regulate how we eat, what pregnant women should do and should not do, prohibitions about sex and so on. Cultural taboos emanates from particular peoples, world view which through mysticism or deity imposes preventions to regulate life according to these peoples' beliefs. It is a kind of superstition, yet at the same time it is beneficial to recognize their role than not.

Yet another role of taboos in African traditional culture is that, they help in maintaining law and order in traditional African societies.). In the same manner, Gyeke.K (1997) opined that taboos help in maintaining law and order in traditional African societies. Taboos are societal un-codified laws in traditional African because they perform the function of the constitution in today's society. Punitive measures in traditional African societies were applied to check offenders of social laws or taboos. They are called social laws because a man like elsewhere in Africa is a social being. Thus, any violation of the divine laws would automatically affect the society as a whole. In any case, the wrath of God will befall the whole society.

It is obvious that African morality laid a great emphasis on social conduct. Basic moral principles and practices in the form of taboos (the dos and don'ts) guide people's action and help them to choose between right and wrong. For instance, children in African societies are taught basic principles of morality embedded in taboos. A system of taboos and sanctions held in honor of the ancestor or ancestress (in the case of women), divinities and spirits are used in the African societies to enforce morality; because they are agents of morality in traditional African thought.

In pre-colonial African society, and even in some contemporary African societies, taboos play a significant role and served as moral commandments. They held in the maintenance of laws and order in the community and achieved such a paramount relevance due to the fact that, since African traditional religion has no written scriptures. Based on oral traditions, taboos come in handy for the provision of moral law to escort the steps of person. These have been handed down from generation to generation, in different African societies through oral means.

CONCLUSION

In nut shell, the moral beliefs and principles of the African people are derived from their religion and that religion provides the necessary justification for moral values and beliefs. From the African viewpoint, moral principles are primarily concerned with the maintenance of good relationship with others. Traditional African morality can be described in the following terms as communalistic; humanistic or anthropocentric; this-worldly; religious; tabooed and ancestral. Virtues and taboos found in our society should be accepted applied to our day to day life experience, so that it strengthens the values and moral beliefs which form the basis of social life. In general, African morality is determined by the injunctions of an ancestors and other extra human and superhuman power. A search for and protection of our cultural heritage is the starting point of any meaningful attempt for African cultural liberation and development.

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