SCIENCE, RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AND THE AFRICAN EXPERIENCE

J Teffo[1]

University of the North

1. Introduction

South African history has largely been shaped on the premise of white supremacy. Political and religious pluralism began to be conceptualised and articulated within the context of the political struggle for liberation and human dignity. The new dispensation has created a space within which all experiences of life can be articulated and practised within given parameters. In contemporary South Africa exist the African experience, the so-called coloured experience, and the white experience with corresponding cultures and ideas. In this essay we shall endeavour to advocate a course towards the scientific explanation of African religions, and call for more space for the expression and practice of African religions. Religious pluralism is and will remain a cliché if African religions are to be fashioned and practised within the context and *modus operandi* of foreign expansionist and imperialist religions like Christianity and Islam. African religions should retain their African gods. Those embracing foreign religions should try to indigenise them, if indeed they are to have meaning and appeal to them. Afrocentric religious practice that is consistent with the universal principles of natural justice should be our aim. This essay is rooted in the South African experience.

2. An africanist perspective of religion

Aristotle in his first philosophy explained metaphysics as the science without equal. In his *magnum opus*, the *corpus Aristotelicum*, he sought to give a rational basis for the existence of God. His contention was that metaphysics was the science of the ultimate why or what of the whole of things, of the supreme cause of reality, so it is the science without equal, superior to all other sciences. He calls it the divine science for two reasons: In the first place, it is the science of God - God is, in fact, the supreme principle and the first cause. In the second place, if anyone were to possess this science in its entirety and perfection that individual would be God.

Aristotle's views influenced religious practice and theological development in the West and in particular in the Roman Catholic Church. His contribution is evident in the shaping of the Western *Weltanschauung*, the specific vision of world, matter and the Supreme Being - a vision which is well documented, which is simultaneously philosophical and theological, and contains the rules of logic and the results of experiments. There is an absence of such a documented vision in the African world. Thorpe (1991:3) alludes to this when she says that, since traditional religions are oral and their concepts passed on from generation to generation by word of mouth, there are no written records by which the historical developments of the groups can be traced. What should, however, be beyond dispute is the axiom that Africans have their own *Weltanschauung* (Houtondji 1977:14). Even though it is not documented, Africans - by virtue of being part of *homo sapiens* - have their own religions and practices. Of the many characteristics considered to be relevant in the definition of a human being, rationality has been singled out, especially by Western

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1   Deputy Dean and Professor, Department of Philosophy, University of the North.

tradition, as the one quality that is decisive for the inclusion or exclusion of others from the membership of *homo sapiens* (Winch 1986:78-111). There have been efforts in the past at disproving the humanity of African people (Ramose 1995:7). But Andre Mercier states that:

> [m]an is fundamentally both a religious and philosophic being, which can be said by using the Latin words *homo religius* and *homo philosophicus*. He is also a being endowed with other determinants, like *homo faber*, i e a working being and *homo ludens*, i e a playful being, and so on.
>
> (Oruka & Masola 1983:72)

It is important to stress that every community, every social class, and every society gives birth to its own culture. What is important, though, is the recognition of the fact that truly every culture has a notion of a Supreme Being, whatever his name, or mode of worship. Hence our submission that religion encompasses people's sets of beliefs and encapsulates their self-definition. Through religion, humanity seeks to find the cause for its existence and how it relates to the divine world inhabited by spirits, God, ancestors and other celestial bodies that have control over the universe. Religious beliefs give humanity a sense of security and hope.

As intimated earlier on, the notions of ultimacy and omnipotence presuppose the existence of an absolute power or Supreme Being, as form, as matter, or as both. It presupposes a transcendental power that is above all creation. An uncaused cause, as Aristotle would put it. Christians believe in the existence of only one God and the path to him is through his only begotten son, Jesus Christ. While the ultimate is the same in all religions, Africans take a different route towards his conceptualisation and worship. Various routes in African religions are taken in the search for a metaphysical explanation of the universe. Religious experiences are reflected in their myths of origin, their proverbs and their conception of the world. They believe in the existence of God, ancestors, divinities and spirits. God manifests himself in all reality, he is omnipresent, omniscient, and permeates and coexists with the living (subjects and objects) and even the living-dead.

I shall refrain from delving into the distortions and blasphemies of the past which were bent on promoting European culture at the expense of the African one (Parrinder 1981:45). The lack of, inter alia, religious icons, church buildings, priests and sacred scriptures, was ample evidence to the prejudiced mind that Africans had no religion (Booth 1977:1). In my mother tongue *Modimo* is acknowledged as the one who appeared first - that is, before all humanity and creation, and this presupposes that all humanity descends from him. Even if such a view is self-evident in all cultures, Europeans continue to claim that Africans have no reverence for God. Although Christians dispute God as an ancestor, they harp on addressing him as 'Our Father' which, in a biological sense, is a primogeniture. They mistake theological differences for irreligiousness. It should, however, be noted that these differences signify different modes of epistemological and ontological existence. In logical pursuance of Hegel's dialectics, one would concur with Agazzi (1983:3-4) that

> the intrinsic ideals, conceptual frameworks, existential attitudes which inspire a culture are not at all one-sided and mono-chromatic: variety and tension are among them no less frequent than unity and harmony. This is why one and the same culture usually expresses a variety of philosophical doctrines also within the same historical context: this happens because different components of its spiritual core are brought to consciousness, are made explicit and are stressed with special attention and vigour.

Traditional African religions share certain traits. In the main, traditional religions are not primarily for the individual, but for the community of which he is part. They do not have sacred scriptures. They are not universalist or imperialist. Rather, they are tribal or national. Similarly, there is no conversion from one traditional religion to another. They have neither founders nor reformers (Mbiti 1969:2-4). Perhaps a lengthy quotation can help capture the essence of traditional religions.

> Because traditional religions permeate all the departments of life, there is no formal distinction between sacred and the secular, between the religious and non religious, between the spiritual and the material areas of life. Wherever the African is, there is his religion: he carries it to the fields where he is sowing feeds or harvesting a new crop; he takes it with him to the beer party or to attend a funeral ceremony; and if he is educated, he takes religion with him to the examination room at school or in the university, if he is a politician he takes it to the house of parliament. Although many African languages do not have a word for religion as such, it nevertheless accompanies the individual from long before his birth to long after his physical death. Through modern change these traditional religions cannot remain intact, but they are by no means extinct. In times of crisis they often come to the surface, or people revert to them in secret.
>
> (Mbiti 1969:2)

To those who will still perpetuate the myth of the nonexistence of honourable traditional religions, I recommend a sojourn in purgatory. Their assertions are fraught with racist, expansionist, and imperialist diction which deliberately inflicts spiritual insult on the Africans and their beliefs. They want to render the African spiritually bankrupt by 'capturing' his mind and soul and make him believe that he is spiritually 'hollow', and that he thus has to seek redemption from the Europeans and Asians and their systems of beliefs, values and norms. This total onslaught attitude marked the beginning of genocide against traditional cultures. The establishment and enforcement of foreign educational systems controlled and run by the state and/or church brought about the deliberate and largely unnecessary destruction of traditional cultures.

3. The historical religious disorientation

Cultures in general are dynamic. Their dynamism is mainly attributable to their interaction with other cultures. Cultures also develop themselves from within - that is, without necessarily interacting with others. They do this through, inter alia, education, urbanisation and industrialisation. Africa as a continent enjoys the legacy of three religions - namely, traditional religions, Christianity and Islam. Christianity has spread faster in a single century through Africa than it did through several other continents. This came as a result of colonialism and imperialism. Mazrui alludes to this view when he writes on Africa's alienation from herself and cultural receptivity. This is just the first of the three factors he alludes to, and these embrace both Christianity and Islam. The second factor refers to family and lineage systems. The third factor refers to the spread of the languages of the conquerors (Mazrui 1995:71).

The upshot of the disorientation of African cultures is encapsulated in the following quotation:

> The Arab conquest of Africa in the seventh and eighth centuries initiated two processes: Arabization (through language) and Islamization (through religion). The spread of Arabic as a native language created new semites (the Arabs of North Africa).

Meanwhile, the diffusion of Islam created new monotheists but not necessarily new semites. The copts of Egypt are linguistically Arabized, but they are not, of course, Muslims. On the other hand, the Wolof and Hausa are preponderantly Islamized, but they are not Arabs.

(Mazrui 1995:71)

As is true of the theory of conquest that the conquered adopts the culture of the conqueror, so it was for the African continent. For example, the Egyptians were not Arabs when the Muslim conquest occurred in the seventh century AD. 'The process of Islamization in the sense of an actual change of religion took place fairly rapidly after the Arab conquerors had consolidated their hold on the country' (Mazrui 1995:72). In the same vein Mazrui (1995:72) continues:

The Egyptians changed their religious garment from Christianity to Islam more quickly than they changed their linguistic garment from ancient Egyptian and ancient Greek to Arabic. However, when Arabic became the mother tongue of the majority of Egyptians, it took centuries before Egyptians began to call themselves Arabs.

The aforesaid scenario, though sketchy, sets a basis for the understanding of the religious disorientation of the African continent. The scramble for the colonisation of Africa converted it into a battlefield for political and religious ideologies. Indeed, evidence abounds that Africa 'colluded' in the process of her 'cultural denudation'.

This was partly because of the exuberance of the new religion, partly because of the rising prestige of the Arabic language, and partly because of the rewards of belonging to a conquering civilization. Religious, political, and psychological factors transformed Arabism into an expansionist culture that absorbed the conquered into the body politic of the conquerors. In the beginning, there was an 'island' or a peninsula called Arabia. But in time, there were far more Arabs outside Arabia than within. At the end of it all, there was an 'Arab world'.

(Mazrui 1995:72)

This pattern of Islamisation and Arabisation proceeded from North Africa to Central Africa. The same pattern in terms of form, not substance, applies to Christianity. Accordingly, I shall refrain from making in-depth analogies between Christianity and Islam. The objectives of the Islamic and Roman empires differ mainly in terms of substance rather than form. Under the cloak of civilisation, which is presumably the consequence of science, they came, they saw, and they conquered the so-called primitive and barbaric cultures. Yet, today, 'history has once again played its cyclic boomerang game in the interaction between Africa and its conquerors. And as a result, the ancestral home of the Arabs in Asia is now heavily dependent, culturally and militarily, on the African side of the Arab nation' (Mazrui 1995:75). Predictions are that by the turn of the century there will be more Arabs on the African continent than in Asia. Mazrui (1995:73) found compelling evidence in this connection:

Southern Sudanese are the only sub-Saharan Africans who are being Arabized faster than they are being Islamized: They are acquiring the Arabic language faster than they are acquiring Islam. This is in sharp contrast to the experience of such sub-Saharan peoples as the Wolof, the Yoruba, the Hausa, or even the Somalia - among all of whom the religion of Islam has been more triumphant than the language of the Arabs.

Mbiti (1969:2) decries this trend and he submits that individuals became detached from their traditional environment. Individuals, nations and the whole continent disown their own heritage and embrace obsequious foreign cultures.

> This leaves them in a vacuum devoid of a solid religious foundation. They are torn between the life of their forefathers which, whatever else might be said about it, has historical roots and firm traditions, and the life of our technological age which, as yet, for many Africans has no concrete form or depth.
>
> (Mbiti 1969:3)

Religion is one cultural trait that truly assists in defining a human person. Cultural 'dry-cleaning' leads to spiritual bankruptcy. A person is defined in terms of his culture and he is respected to the extent that he proudly, yet within the limits of reason, practises his culture. Similarly, Mbiti (1969:3) says,

> Christianity and Islam do not seem to remove the sense of frustration and uprootedness. It is not enough to learn and embrace a faith which is active once a week, either on Sunday or Friday, while the rest of the week is virtually empty. It is not enough to embrace a faith which is confined to a church building or mosque, which is locked up six days and opened only once or twice a week. Unless Christianity and Islam fully occupy the whole person as much as, if not more than, traditional religions do, most converts to these faiths will continue to revert to their old beliefs and practices for perhaps six days a week, and certainly in times of emergency and crisis. The whole environment and the whole time must be occupied by religious meaning, so that at any moment and in any place, a person feels secure enough to act in a meaningful and religious consciousness. Since traditional religions occupy the whole person and the whole of his life, conversion to new religions like Christianity and Islam must embrace his language, thought patterns, fears, social relationships, attitudes and philosophical dispositions if that conversion is to make a lasting impact upon the individual and his community.

The religious disorientation we have explored above was further promoted through an abundance of characterisations of African thought in terms of inappropriate or, at best, only half-appropriate concepts. Wiredu (1996:178) puts it as follows:

> On all, or virtually all, hands it seems to be assumed that it speaks well of the mental capabilities of a people if they can be shown to have a belief in God, especially a God of Christian likeness. Accordingly the literature on African religions is replete with generalizations about African beliefs in the Almighty.

Traditional religion as practised in the Northern Province, especially among the North Sotho-speaking people, attempts to establish appropriate relationships between man and the supernatural. It is a religion that puts less emphasis on the hereafter. In the main it influences and determines the attitude of the individual towards the supernatural, which makes for a happy, harmonious, and prosperous life on earth. Accordingly, life hereafter is not promoted at the expense of life on earth. Perhaps Albert Camus wanted to underscore this view in *The Myth of Sisyphus*: 'O my soul, do not aspire to immortal life, but exhaust the limits of the possible.' We have no right to long for a second world or life on the other side before we have really exhausted the beauty of the first. Camus contends that there must be a destiny which does not have to wait for death. One must not let this life pass unlived. Besides, if you are a Christian, your entry into heaven is contingent on baptism, for the gates of heaven shall be opened for you upon baptism.

O K Matsepe, a leading writer in North Sotho, refers to religion in his numerous works. According to him it is in the nature of God (*Modimo*) not to be known. This conception of God is informed by his cultural environment in which religion displays a hierarchy identical with the social structure of the clan. What is clear for Matsepe is that what exists is an impersonal supreme Divinity that created and ordered the whole universe. It is this Divinity that created the world and all animal and plant life upon it. This Divinity works in concert with the ancestral spirits or gods (*badimo*). Contact with God is made through ancestral spirits. On the other hand, contact with the ancestral spirits could be achieved directly through dreams and visions, or through messages, whispered or said aloud, by unseen forces, or indirectly through media (*malopo/maphale*) or medicine-men (Mashabela 1979:220).

I referred earlier to the fact that it is characteristic of the traditional religions not to have churches, chapels or shrines in traditional life.

> Incidental functions were all concentrated on the ancestral graves. Some few other places, however, were endowed with an aura of sacrosanctity, e g where the legwame (an onion like plant) is planted, some special tree, or some special rock. Even selected livestock may be singled out for sacrosanctity. Sometimes mounds were made to commemorate those who fell in the battles and could not, according to custom, be given a decent burial. On passing by such a mound one had to cast a pebble on to the heap and say 'Makgolo, ke a feta': (Granny, I am passing by!) as a sign of reverence. Certain articles were also regarded as imbued with supernatural powers and assumed the status of gods or idols (medimo). The idols were not ancestral spirits, but merely symbols of the presence of ancestral spirits in or about them. This sort of *mana* element in objects was induced either by the ancestral spirits themselves or by the medicinemen through magic, on behalf of the badimo.

(Mashabela 1979:221)

An observation that one may glean from Matsepe's works is that he definitely advocates sincerity in religion. 'One must not say one thing and do the other. It is better to worship according to one's own convictions, rather than be led along the garden path by fraudulent churchmen like these' (Mashabela 1979:254). Matsepe deplores dishonest churchmen and medicinemen. He contends that everyone would like to be a leader with a substantial following. Hence the proliferation of churches. He is violently against religious fraud and exploitation of gullibility by Christian charlatans. Matsepe's God is the Creator, the Maintainer, and the Dispensor. The

> traditional faith is thus shorn of its objectionableness by this grand conceptualization. [Matsepe] is a Christian who tries to infuse into Christianity what is not objectionable in traditional religion, not unlike the African Theologians, who believe that Christianity without the cultural base of the people becomes to them an empty display of awe and reverence, a candle wax emotionalism that goes not to stand the litmus test of genuine Christian living.

(Mashabela 1979:263)

4.   Positivism and religious discourse

The advent of positivism ushered in an era in which asking fundamental and eschatological questions was no longer taboo. Preceding discourses in theology were found to be wanting or inadequate in their endeavour to answer questions relating to talk about God. Logical positivism sought to address similar questions and provide answers on the

basis of mathematics. To some extent logical positivism was influenced by Cartesian 'Mathematism'. In his philosophy, especially the *Meditations*, René Descartes sought to establish indubitable and incontrovertible truths. On the other hand, 'philosophy of religion' sought to reflect upon religious experience. Effectively, therefore, 'philosophical reflection' will mean rational, radical, autonomous, ultimate and critical reflection on religious experience. Man undergoes various experiences, including religious experience. The question of a fundamental option concerning human experience entails 'belief in' - that is to say, it must point to the object of religious belief, also to the character of the religious object of religious belief. The character of the religious object must also reveal the religious attitude. Finally, the question of a fundamental option concerning human existence demands the kind of free choice that will entail a practice or a way of life compatible with the fundamental option (Ramose 1978:4).

Several names are associated with the philosophical trend called logical positivism. However, Bertrand Russell is closely related with logical atomism, and in some quarters he is regarded as its founder and most important exponent. In general, positivism refers to the belief that knowledge is limited to observable and verifiable facts and their interrelations and, hence, that empirical science provides the only reliable knowledge. On this basis it therefore asserts that speculations about the ultimate nature of things are meaningless (Honer & Hunt 1978:247). Logical atomism in the main concerns itself with atomic propositions and atomic facts. Essentially, it studies the relations between the two. Russell believed that natural language did not truly and fully reflect the structure of reality and was therefore misleading. For Russell the world had the structure of his grammatically perfect logic. Again, as in Descartes, the influence of mathematics on Russell's philosophy is evident. In effect, each atomic proposition must have a corresponding atomic fact.

> Therefore the world must consist of an indefinitely large number of atomic facts to which the true atomic propositions will correspond, and as the atomic propositions are conceived as being logically independent, so these facts must be conceived as being metaphysically independent.
>
> (Urmson 1967:14-15)

This is, in a way, a qua-empiricist view that might lead to agnosticism or atheism. We will return to this view later.

Two other theories that also influenced religious discourse are the 'picture theory' and the 'verification principle'. The thrust of the picture theory is that language is static and inflexible, that language is the expression of correspondence between the presumably concrete atomic propositions and atomic facts. Similarly, the meaning of a language is to be found in its referents. If this view is scrutinised one should not find it difficult to see how it can lead to scepticism about the existence of God. God corresponds to no entity in the existential and empirical world. Philosophy of religion can help us in this connection to understand religious talk and what it really means to say God exists. To the community of believers the existence of God cannot be proved with mathematical certitude. Yet he exists, and his existence to them is not a probability, but a certainty. To be able to appreciate what it means to say that God exists, the notion of existence should be read within the context of Wittgenstein's meaning-is-use theory.

The verification principle asserts that the meaning of a proposition is the method of its verification. Verification is 'confirmation or authentication by means of some evidence, checking or testimony to determine the truth of a statement or condition' (Honer & Hunt 1978:254). On this reading it can be inferred that a proposition is meaningless if it cannot

be verified. Again we are led into a situation where intelligible talk about God becomes preposterous and superfluous. Thus, in the light of the aforesaid theories, other uses of language which do not provide logical or empirical criteria for truth are rendered cognitively meaningless - that is to say, they are nonsensical. Accordingly, 'because it purports to discuss and describe a reality that is beyond experience, theological discourse is beyond verification, and is therefore to be classified as cognitively meaningless' (Ayer 1974:56). Indeed, on close reading one of the most important consequences of the verification principle is the rejection of theological discourse in general, and in particular the rejection of religious language. In the same vein, Flew contends that religious language is not falsifiable and therefore meaningless (Flew & MacIntyre 1955:98-106).

The picture drawn in this section is intended to show that religions of the world have always been grappling with fundamental questions and critical thinkers and philosophers throughout the ages have always sought to provide the right answers or explanations. Similarly, traditional religions were subjected to such excruciating interrogations and they could not remain intact against the massive tide of intellectual onslaught. Acculturation and enculteration also played their part. There is indeed, on this showing, no historically pure religion. Hence the rise of Islamic fundamentalism. Hence, African or contextual theology. Hence the theology of the empty stomach is not the same as that of the full stomach. Hence the West is turning to the mystic East for a spiritual sustenance it could not find in its own backyard. Hence the rise and the proliferation of the religious sects.

5.   The role religion can play in South Africa today

An authentic religious commitment is a very strong motivational force. It has enabled, and still enables believers to meet the most demanding challenges - like those facing us in South Africa today. The role religion - or, at least the religious believer - should or can play in South Africa today, is threefold.

*   First, the religious believer (and institutionalised religion or organised religion) should be actively involved in the struggle against poverty and oppression, and against ignorance, apathy, intolerance, pessimism, vandalism, crime, or anything else that could eradicate the dreams for which many have fought and died. Of course, our history provides many examples of precisely such an involvement (Kretzshmar 1986:83, 95-97; Lubbe 1986:16-17). These are examples of which believers may rightly be proud. Unfortunately, at times religion has also enhanced forces of destruction - lest we forget (Kinghorn 1986; Schoffeleers 1989:117-119). Many of those who dare to call themselves religious believers (Christians/Protestants) have not yet come to terms with this fact.

*   Second, religious believers must be part and parcel of the process of healing and reconciliation. We are happy to observe that this involvement is as evident as the purple robe of the chairperson of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission! However, there can be no reconciliation without truth and justice. And who else can lead us better in the practice called 'confession' than religious believers? And who else can lead us better in embracing a truth that will set us free?

*   Third, religious believers are - almost by definition - 'perpetual revolutionaries' (Degenaar 1994:12-13). That is, they never abide by existing orders/dispensations, but they are continually expecting and working towards a liberating future. We therefore expect them to lead us forward - not into temptation, but into a future that empowers,

and in which we grant others what we grant ourselves. Thus the Christian can teach us how to do to another 'as we would that they do to us'. The Jew can teach us not to do to our fellow man 'what is hateful to ourselves'. The Muslim can teach us to 'desire for our brothers that which we desire for ourselves'. The Hindu can remind us never to 'do that to another which one regards injurious to one's own self'. And the Buddhist can show us that 'life is dear to all', and that one should therefore 'neither strike nor cause to strike' (Hick 1989:313).

- Finally, the plurality of religious traditions constitutes an important part of the diversity which is South Africa. None of the roles which religion or religious believers can play in South Africa today - be they resisting the forces of destruction, healing and reconciliation, or pointing the way forward - will be realised without peace in our country. However, there will be no peace without peace among the religions (Küng 1990:22). The adherents of religions therefore need to respect and tolerate the beliefs and practices of other religions, without abandoning their continuing commitment to liberation and justice. Respect for otherness needs to be supplemented by a deliberate and ongoing struggle for liberation. Our tolerance needs a critical edge (Degenaar 1995:8; 1994:13, 17; Louw 1995; 1994:63). So help us God.

6.   Conclusion

In the world we live in there is evidently no religious unity. One is not even sure if one should ever aspire for it. Although it is alleged that the world is moving towards becoming one global village, people are clearly experiencing a loss of religious unity in their lives, a clash of values, a tension between different world-views. I am for religious pluralism. I am vehemently opposed to religious monopoly, hegemony, and religious imperialism. I continue to be terrified by what was done by the Inquisition to Christian dissenters in the Middle Ages. I am averse to religious chauvinism implied by Van der Walt (1994:4) when he writes:

The basic need ... is for an integral, encompassing and powerful Christian worldview, a Christian perspective on all facets of man's life. Without such a vision Africa will perish. Because without it we will not be able to offer really sound responses to these voices calling out of Africa, or to all the hundreds of others who have not been mentioned.

Could there be another religious panacea for Africa? Is not the spiritual bankruptcy of the Africans the result of alienation or 'Christianisation'? Like a typical Western medical practitioner, Van der Walt has diagnosed the disease of the African and the medication prescribed is Christianity. In this connection he writes:

However, before we can develop what we regard as a solution for Africa (in the form of a radical Christian world view), we should have a clear idea of the problem: What exactly has happened to this continent that has resulted in the fact that many African Christians are uncertain, without direction and even have 'divided souls'.

(Van der Walt 1994:4)

As indicated elsewhere in the essay, several factors have influenced the development, obliteration and disintegration of indigenous traditional religions. It is not only science but political and religious ideologies that wreaked havoc on traditional religions. Horton, a typical cultural chauvinist, regards traditional thought as noncritical or nonreflective. He suggests that Africans cannot give rational and scientific explanations for their beliefs. Africans when called to justify their ideas and beliefs, according to him, tend to say: 'This is

what the old-time people told us' (Horton 1967:177). Without disputing Horton's concept of science, one becomes uncomfortable with it when its influence begins to overshadow an area such as philosophy which represents open-mindedness with reference to methods of verification as well as speculative possibilities. Wiredu (1995:183) in this connection writes: 'one of the best entrenched orthodoxies in the literature is the idea that Africans believe in a whole host of ' 'lesser gods' or 'lesser deities' '. Whose god is less than whose? By whose criteria are we judging these gods? Can one culture be judged in terms of the yardstick of another culture? The seeds of religious intolerance, religious conquest, and religious colonisation are sown when such questions are not candidly and critically addressed.

> Disentangling African frameworks of thought from colonial impositions, such as this, is an urgent task facing African thinkers, especially philosophers, at this historical juncture. Clarifying African concepts should be high on the agenda of this kind of decolonisation.
>
> (Wiredu 1996:193)

The African does not have to look for God above, outside or beyond his creation. He sees God's finger, and His presence manifested in rudimentary elements of matter. Every created thing reveals the presence of God, and the indivisible unity between God, human being and the cosmos. The cosmos becomes a unified spiritual totality that is fused together with the human species and shares the commonness of existence with the Creator.

To the traditional African community, God exists in all things and everywhere. He is both with (internal) and without (external) his creation. There is an evident all-pervading energy or life force which is inherent in everything. The African attributes this to the presence of causative force, which is God. In the image and likeness of God we were all created and bestowed with intellect, intelligence, reason, love and *ubuntu*. *Ubuntu* is one of the modalities of the spirit pertaining to human beings, which manifests a people's humanness, understanding and existential peace. *Ubuntu* makes us accept each other as brothers and sisters in humanity, and embrace the whole world and the universe as sharing a common Ancestor, who is God, the Creator of all things and who lives within and among us. In my view, traditional religions and science will have to play a complementary role and avoid an attitude of exclusivism. They can teach and learn from one other.

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