ON THE CONCEPT OF CREATION IN AFRICAN ONTOLOGY

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Abstract
There is a general belief among the African people that the world was created by God. In fact, the creation of the universe is understood as being part of the natural attributes of God. Thus, he cannot be God and not be able to create. This explains why the African, during prayers, in songs and proverbs, refers to God as the maker or creator of the universe. This is also evident in the different titles that the African people give to God. The Akan call him as the Excavator who created all things; the Akamba speak of him as the Maker of all things; the Banyarwanda speak of him as the Potter of Life; the Tiv refer to him as the Great Carpenter; the Kiga call him the fashioner; the Yoruba and Igbo refer to him as the Maker and Owner of Life. For the purpose of this research, this piece would study five African myths bordering on creation to bring out the different dimensions of creation in African ontology. These dimensions would include: creation by delegation, creation ex nihilo, the enduring nature of divine creation and the sustenance of creation. The phenomenological approach would be employed in the collection and analysis of data on the African concept of creation. Contrary to the absence of the belief in the creation of the world by God in some western thoughts, this work argues that within the African parameter of belief, the world was created by God.

Keywords: African, Creation, Sustenance, Worldview, God, Phenomenology.

Introduction
In simple terms, the concept of creation naturally attainable through reason or the mind's interpretation of the world points to the action of creating and that which has been created. The first, which is the action of creating, stands for the productive activity of creation by a creator and the latter, which is the created, stands for the reality that

has been created in so far as it was created by a creator. However, in its theological and philosophical senses, creation focusses on the activity of God or First Cause who brings another reality into existence, that is, the entire substance (*totius substantiæ*) from a state of non-existence (*ex nihilo sui*). The implications of the idea of creation is that the creator, who is the first cause has, within himself, an infinite power, wisdom, etc., who now becomes the source of the fecundity that creatures possess.

Before the advent of Christian writers, the idea of creation had perdued in various forms. In Aristotle's theory of cause and effect, he provided a singular philosophical basis for further argumentations in favour of the theory of creation in his Five Ways, which is obvious in the works of Albert the Great, Saint Thomas Aquinas and Saint Bonaventure. These theologians, taking advantage of the Aristotelian philosophical disposition embraced the relation of the world to God as its efficient cause. With the advent of modern thought, the idea of creation changed substantially. Although Descartes (1983), Malebranche (1997), Leibniz (2004), etc., maintained its theistic brand, this was challenged by Spinoza (2004), and later gave way to realistic Pantheism, and the perspectives of Fichte (1988), Schelling (1801), and Hegel (1956) who introduced varying idealistic Pantheism (Catholic Encyclopedia).

Notwithstanding these perspectives, this paper focuses on the understanding of creation within the context of the African worldview. It raises question such as: How does the African understand creation? Was the world created by a supreme being? And if yes, was it created out of nothing or from already existing matter? To respond to these fundamental questions, the paper studies African myths of creation to draw from them the responses to these questions.

Methodology

This piece is an explanatory and analytical research on the concept of creation in African traditional religion in terms of their worldview which is inescapably connected to their lifestyle. Given the very nature and concerns of this research, it would focus on the theological dimension of African religion as it would be studying different myths from different African religious backgrounds on the

creation of the universe by God; it would also touch on the African people's expression of this understanding of their relationship with God in terms of creation, especially in their names. This work would rely mainly on secondary sources, namely, books, journals, internet sources, etc. The phenomenological approach would be employed in the collection and analysis of data on the African concept of creation. In addition, this piece provides a deeper analysis to the concept of creation in African ontology.

African Myths on Creation

African myths are simple stories that tell of the origin and destiny of the human person (Kanu 2015). The myths below are myths about the creation of the human person. The purpose of studying these myths is to understand from them the dimensions of the African concept of creation.

1. Ife Creation Myth

Very interesting is the Yoruba mythology of creation. The myth holds that Olodumare, the Supreme God, originally lived in the lower part of heaven, overlooking endless stretches of water. One day, Olodumare decided to create Earth. He sent an emissary, the Orisha Obatalá to perform this task, giving him what he needed to create the world: a bag of loose earth, a gold chain, and a five-toed hen (Vega 2001).

These different elements had their purposes. Obatalá was instructed to use the chain to descend from heaven to the water below. When he got to the last link of the chain, he poured the loose earth on top of the water and placed the hen on the pile of earth, and ordered it to scatter the earth with her toes across the surface of the water. When the hen was done, Obatalá climbed the chain to heaven to report his success to Olodumare, who then sent his trusted assistant, the chameleon, to verify that the earth was dry, after which Olodumare gave the earth a name: *Ile Ife*, the sacred house.

After the creation of the earth, Olodumare returned to the uppermost part of heaven. However, before his retirement, he distributed his sacred powers to Obatalá, the Orisha of creation, and Yemayá, the orisha of the ocean, who gave birth to a pantheon of orishas, each possessing a share of Olodumare's sacred power.

Olodumare gave Obatalá the sacred power to create human life. Obatalá was the divinity that created our ancestors, endowing them with his own divine power (Vega 2001).

2. Efe Creation Myth - Congo

The Efe creation myth has it that God created the first human being with the help of the moon and kneaded the body of the human person out of clay. After this, God covered the body with skin and poured blood into the body. The name given to first human person by God was Baatsi. After the act of creation, God whispered into his ear to beget many children, but to ensure that he impresses upon the children the following rule: from all trees you may eat, but not from the Tahu tree.

Baatsi had many children and he made them obey the rule. When he became old he retired to heaven. His children obeyed the rule and when they grew old they too retired to heaven. However, one day a pregnant woman was seized with an irresistible desire to eat the fruit of the Tahu tree. She asked her husband to break some for her, but he refused. However, when she persisted, the husband crept into the forest at night, picked the Tahu fruit, peeled it, and hid the peel in the bush. While he did all these, the moon saw him and told God what the husband of the pregnant woman had done. This made God very angry with human beings, and so he sent death as a punishment among human beings.

3. Nyamwezi (Tanzania) Creation Myth

The Nyamwezi creation myth has it that Shida Matunda created all things. After making the earth and water and plants and animals, he created two women and took them as his wives. His favorite wife, however, died. Then Shida Matunda buried her in her house and remained at her grave watering it every day. After some time, a little plant began to grow from the grave. Then he was glad, because he knew that the dead woman would rise again. He did not allow his other wife to come near the grave.

But one day when Shida Matunda had gone out, the wife was overcome with curiosity and she stole into the house. When she

saw the plant, she was jealous and cut it down with a hoe. The blood of the dead woman poured out of the grave and filled the house. When Shida Matunda returned and saw the blood, he was much afraid and said: "You have killed your co-wife and thereby caused all men, animals, and plants to die." It was from Shida Matunda and the surviving woman descended all other humans.

4. Wassa Myth of Creation

The Wassa people of Ghana have a myth of creation that traces creation back to Onyankopon- the great God of fullness and satisfaction who, before creation, was the only being in existence. He created the world to become a companion to him, a wife. Added to the world which he created were also spirits who would also keep him company. He ensured that the world was beautiful and he asked the spirits to visit his wife from time to time. They will make their journey to the world using a long chain that springs from his throne. He also gave the spirits permission to inhabit realities that are on the earth. Their major responsibility was to run errands for him (Abanuka 1999).

5. Basare Myth of Creation

The Basare are of the Upper Region of Ghana. They believe that God created the world in several stages. The first stage was the creation of heaven supported with several pillars. This was followed by the creation of the world which was in the form of lightening and from which the moon and sun were made. However, the sun and the moon quarreled and the sun threw the moon into the mud. This explains why the moon is less bright than the sun and shines only at night for thieves and witches. The third stage was the creation of the clouds and a red cockerel that crows whenever it thunders. This was followed by the creation of the rain and a male and female rainbow. The last stage was the miraculous creation of two assistants by God to whom he gave the earth as a place to work. This came into being before the creation of mountains and valleys and the sending of rain to form rivers and lakes. Then he created human beings and animals.

Creation as an Ordered Event

The African does not think that creation by the supreme being was a haphazard event. It is generally believed that it followed specific order. God first began with the creation of the spiritual world where he lives and then the material world where man lives. For instance, the Ife and Efe creation myths presupposes that the spiritual world was already in existence before God began the creation of human world, just to make clear that he had already created the spiritual world and all that dwell in it before he embarked on the creation of the physical world. In the Basare myth of creation, God created the world in four stages; also in the Fon myth of creation, God carried out the activities of creation using a four-day programme which he marked out. In myths where days are not mentioned, the orderliness of the creating process is not lost. For instance, among the Vugusu, God created the spiritual world and the moon and stars and sun first, before he began the creation of the earth and the human person. Among the Akan, God created the world in the order of the heavenly universe, the earth, rivers, waters, plants, animals, man. The order that we find in creation affirms that man is at the center of the African universe, because we see that God creates every other thing in preparation for man's wellbeing in the world. Comparatively, this relates to the Christian understanding of creation as an event that took place in six days.

Creation *Ex nihilo*

Most creation accounts among the African people is *ex nihilo* (out of nothing), meaning that there was nothing except God before he created the universe. For instance, the Banyanwanda, Nuer and Shona peoples hold that there was nothing before God created the universe in the original act of creation, however, after creating some realities he now uses what exists to create other things (Mbiti 1969). And the beauty of the understanding of creation out of nothing in African ontology is based on the African understanding of the nature of God who is all powerful and the first cause of all that there is. God is, therefore, the first subject matter. The understanding of the concept: *ex nihilo* within the African context does not in any way

imply that 'nothing' is the source of 'something' that has been brought into existence. Rather than this, it only holds that:

a. creation came into existence not from any pre-existing material that was already in existence that was not created by God;
b. the implications of this, therefore, is that creation is not a change or transformation, since the latter process includes an actual underlying pre-existent subject that passes from one real state to another real state;
c. creation is not a procession within a supreme being as in the case of the Trinity;
d. creation is not an emanation from the substance of the Creator, since the creator is utterly indivisible;
e. creation is an act, which although has its emergence from the Creator and is an instantaneous operation;
f. the consequence is that the creation is dependent on the creator.

Creation as the Prerogative of a Supreme Being

In the African world, the prerogative of creating and organizing the world belongs to the supreme being. The names that the African people give to him affirm that he is creator because they believe that creating belongs only to his nature as God. This is evident in African names, proverbs, songs, myths, etc. In fact, it is from the acknowledgment of his power of creation that many other titles or names of God emerge; names such as: first cause, omniscience, omnipotence, eternal, judge, pre-eminent, self-existent, transcendent, etc. In a Gikuyu hymn in Mbiti (1969) they say that God has:

> No father, nor mother, nor wife, nor children
> He is all alone
> He is neither a child nor an old man
> He is the same today as he was yesterday (p. 34)

In a pygmy hymn in Young (1944), it is said of God that:

> In the beginning was God
> Today is God
> Tomorrow will be God
> Who can make an image of God?

He has no body
He is a word which comes out of your mouth
That word! It is no more
It is past and still it lives
So is God (p. 146)

In the Gikuyu hymn, the idea that God has no father or mother or wife or children and that he is all alone points to the fact that every other thing that is in existence came to be through him through the act of creation. In the Pygmy hymn, there is an emphasis on the fact of his being in existence in the beginning. Being in the beginning without any other, he is, therefore, the first cause of all that there is. The table below shows that names that Africans give to their God based on who he is to them, and these names point to the fact that he is the creator.

NO	NAME	PEOPLE	MEANING
1	*Borebore*	Akan	The First, the Creator of all things
2	*Nwatuangi*	Akamba	Carver, inventor, originator
3	*Eleda*	Yoruba	The creator
4	*Elemi*	Yoruba	The Owner of the spirit
5	*Chineke*	Igbo	The providential creator
6	*Opu-Tamuno*	Kalabari	Great Creator
7	*Osanobua/Osanobwa*	Edo	Creator and sustainer of the universe
8	*Temearau*	Ijo	Creator of all things
9	*Aondo*	Tiv	The power above that

			creates and rules all things
10	*Chukwu*	Igbo	The Great God, the First Force that is the source of other forces
11	*Ekenweuwa*	Igbo	The creator that owns the world
12	*Onyeokike*	Igbo	The one that creates
13	*Ekejindu/Ekenwendu*	Igbo	The creator that owns life
14	*Ekekerummadu*	Igbo	The creator that created the human person
15	*Ekejiuba*	Igbo	The creator that is responsible for all wealth

The table below shows that the names that Africans give to their children is based on their belief that God is the creator of the universe.

NO	**NAME**	**PEOPLE**	**MEANING**
1	*Madueke*	Igbo	Human beings do not create or human beings are not creators
2	*Onyebueke*	Igbo	No one creates
3	*Chinwendu*	Igbo	God owns life
4	*Chikere*	Igbo	God created
5	*Chikeremma*	Igbo	God created the good
6	*Chijindu*	Igbo	God holds life

Creation by Delegation

Even though that creation is God's prerogative in African ontology, he can also create through delegation. He delegates his deans, that is, his deities who are subordinate to him but superior to human beings. There are particular deities that are associated with creation. God picks a particular deity from the college of deities and gives the responsibility of creation. While the deity carries out the task of creation, he does it within the limits of the commands of the supreme being and thus, does only what the supreme being has ordained to be.

The fact that he creates through delegation does not in any way mean that he has lost his place as creator. For instance, in the Yoruba creation myth, creation began with Olodumare's decision to create the world then he sends his emissary the Orisha Obatalá to perform this task, giving him what he needed to create the world. Also in the Bambara myth, it was Faro, the god of water and master of the earth that created the world at the authority of Amma the supreme being. There are narrations that speak of God's word as creating the world as in the case of the Fon myth. It was through the *Fa* (the word of God) that he brought reality into existence. In this case, *Fa* is not just a word, it is a manifestation of the will of God, an agent of creation.

Creation as a Process: Divine Providence

The African does not believe that after the days of creation or the order in which creation is described that creation ended. There is a strong belief in the continuous presence of God in the things that he has created. This is evident in the prayers that the African people say to God. The Nuer tribe pray to God in these words:

> Our Father, it is thy universe, it is thy will.
> Let us be at peace and let the souls of thy people be cool
> Thou art our father, remove all evil from our path (Evans-Pritchard 1956, p. 7)

The Galla tribe address God in these words:

> O God, thou hast given me a good day
> Give me a good night
> Thou hast given me a good night
> Give me a good day (Huntingford 1953, p. 74)

A common prayer among the Nandi tribe recited at least twice a day say:

> God guard for me the children and the cattle
> God guard for us the cattle
> God give us health (Huntingford 1953, p. 135)

In the Nuer prayer, the person saying the prayer reminds God that the universe is owned by him and that our peace as his creatures is determined by him. He did not just create it and handed it over to his deans or creatures. The Galla see God present in his day and night, and the result of every day and night is the gift of God, and so he prays for a good day and a blessed night. In the prayer of the Nandi, the precious gifts of children and cattle that have come from God can only be safeguarded by him. This is why the Nandi prays to him for the protection. The African believes that creation is a continuous process as God continues to create the world through his divine providence. For instance, the Twi people hold that "God never ceases to create things" (Westermann p. 197), and among the Yoruba, when every new day emerges, they say that it is God's offspring (Idowu 1973). After creation, God established laws and customs that would govern all that he has made and direct their purpose towards his end. For instance, he created day and night and ordered their continuous manifestation in spite of the end of the days of creation. African proverbs such as "All things are done by God"; "God makes the new day when he wishes" and "People make plans but God makes decisions" point to the fact that God is still part of the daily evolution of his creation.

Conclusion

The African idea of creation is a reflection of the diverse religious traditions in Africa. There are more than fifty myths describing the

same act of creation by God in Africa. However, as is always the case, in spite of the diversity, there is always a connecting line that links all the diverse narrations of the story of creation in Africa. An obvious reality is the tracing of creation back to God the supreme being. In fact, creation is an attribute that is considered natural to him; he cannot be God and not create, and if he did not create then he is not God. The next connecting line is the idea of order in creation. Although different religious traditions speak of different days, for some the universe was created in four days and for some it was created in six days; for some the heavens were created first which was followed by the creation of the physical universe. In whichever narration, it is clear that there was order in the act of creation by God.

An idea we get from the order in which God created the African universe is the presence of hierarchy in creation. First, the spiritual world is brought into existence and it is followed by the creation of the physical world. In the hierarchy of beings, spiritual beings that were first created with the creation of the spiritual world are endowed with more force than the physical beings created. It is, therefore, not surprising that in the hierarchy of beings in Africa, God takes the first place, followed by the deities, spirits before the human person and other physical realities. And the order in creation is further manifested in the relationship that exists between the different levels of being: man relates with God, the deities and spirits in an order that has been set by the creator. It is in this relationship that continuousness of creation is realized through divine providence.

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