

AFRICAN SENSIBILITY: THE CONCEPT OF HUMANISM IN BLACKS

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Abstract

African humanism is a philosophical enquiry in the significance of African sense of respect for the human person. The traditional values of hospitality, primacy of person, respect for life, sense of the sacred, family hood, brotherhood, solidarity and other characteristic features of the communalistic life of an African person are brought into cognizance. Which applies the descriptive analytic and phenomenological methods of enquiry and spreading forth the scope of our coverage to include not only black negroes within the confines of the geographical configuration of Africa but also diasporas and those of any race and color within the continent, practical examples are sourced in order to illumine our subject matter salient questions are raised with respect to the essence of the centrality of the human person, his/her dignity right and the need for fair-play and sense of responsibility on the part of the citizenry and general leadership.

Key Words: African sensibility, Humanism

Introduction

African humanism is a philosophical enquiry in the significance of African sense of respect for the human person. The traditional values of hospitality, primacy of person, respect for life, sense of the sacred, family hood, brotherhood, solidarity and other characteristic features of the communalistic life of an African person are brought into cognizance. Which applies the descriptive analytic and phenomenological methods of enquiry and spreading forth the scope of our coverage to include not only black negroes within the confines of the geographical configuration of Africa but also diasporas and those of any race and color within the continent, practical examples are sourced in order to illumine our subject matter salient questions are raised

with respect to the essence of the centrality of the human person, his/her dignity right and the need for fair-play and sense of responsibility on the part of the citizenry and general leadership.

The notoriety of Africa and Africans in relation to their being religions in all aspects of life is being latched upon as a launch-pad for this all important task. By and large, Africans are called upon not only to be more conscious of the latent potentials in this essentially humanistic light, but lessen and promote them assiduously and to give it a more cosmopolitan out looks as they anchor their lives on this rich cuter heritage. This, as it were, is expected to yield immense decidedness of not only curbing violence, terrorism, genocide and all forms of social ills associated with our contemporary world, but it is also hoped that it will bring about much needed peace, harmony and progress in its entire ramifications the world over.

African Humanism like any of the other forms of humanism has the welfare or wellbeing of the human person as its key attribute. Nevertheless, in considering this, we should bear in mind that it is not all humanists that are atheistic, iconoclastic and religious. This precautionary measure becomes very crucial because since the 16th century, the term Humanism has been commonly applied to persons with a set of entirely on unreligious beliefs and values” (Hinnells 225) and here we are making reference to Africans who are acclaimed worldwide as being “notoriously religious” and whose “traditional religions permeate all the departments” of their lives (Mbiti 2; Idowu 5). Among the attributes of African Humanism, it is most apparent that human persons who could be described as being “incurably religious” beings are found at its center. As a matter of fact, the major tapestry which runs through African Humanism in any part of Africa is quite discernible through their religion which informs their basic worldviews and/or ontology. This is in turn principally anthropocentric. That is, virtually everything is weighed from the viewpoint of the human persons’ central position. Even God is said to exist for the sake of man (Awolalu and Dopamu 160). Booth harps on “how African Religion is centered more on man than God or nature” (6). For the Baluba of Zaire, for instance, religion is best understood as a form of Religious Humanism (Booth 34). For them, religion is focused on the enhancement of human existence rather than on the natural world or the divine.

The human person is seen as the center of the universe and the entire creation is seen as being there to serve human purpose, whether it is to good ends or evil. This idea of the human person as the center-piece of creation is buttressed by Mbiti when he observed that, “it is as if the whole world exists for the sake of mankind” (38). This shows thereby that African people look for the usefulness or otherwise of the universe in relation to humanity. It has to do with both what the world can do for the human person and how he/she can use the world for his/her own good. Mbiti (39) went further to posit that some parts of creation are used for building, others for fire; some for physical uses, others for religious uses and some for magical purposes. Thus, according to Ikenga-Metuh the human person in the African worldview is considered the “crown of God’s creation” (167). The story of the human person is often repeatedly told and forms the central theme of African creation myths.

Conclusion:

The cardinal idea of African humanism basically throws greater light on the human person’s life. In it a high value is placed on the life of a human being, high premium on dignity, compassion, humaneness and respect for humanity of another. African humanism stands against anti-social, disgraceful, inhuman and criminal behavior and encourages social justice.

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