

# FREEDOM OF RELIGION: A PANACEA FOR PEACE AND HARMONY IN NIGERIA: AN ANCESTRAL BELIEF PERSPECTIVE

## BEING

Theme of a paper presented at a 2 – day conference 26<sup>th</sup>/ 27<sup>th</sup> June 2019 organized by 'TAKING ALL MEN BROTHER (TAMEB)' at Institute for Church and Society, Samonda, Ibadan, Nigeria.

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Eriwo o ya a! Eriwo o yaa!! Eriwo o yaa !!!

Whoever says 'Eriwo yaa' seeks utter silence and attention.

O ni k' a sin-mi ni o, enja t' o pe 'eriwo-ya' l' o ni k' a sinmi.....

**2.0 Homage:** I pay homage to Olodumare Grandmaster of the Universe, Creator and Controller of all things in the firmament, the seas and on/in earth. He, whose mystery is a challenge and unresolved puzzle to all (wo)men. The one yesterday, today and everlasting. The omnipotent, omniscient and omnipotent.

I pay homage to all manifestations of the Energies (Forces) of Olodumare ie. The Irunmole, who are the anatomy of Olodumare, whom He deploys for a purpose or another. So do I, to earthly Oriṣa who continue to manifest on a daily basis.

I pay homage to my Ancestors; as ordained by Olodumare in Ogund' erin (Owonnrin) thus

'Okun sù' nàrè /òsà kún lègbe .....

"The sea rises in turbulent waves/ The lagoon is filled to the brim in quietude/when Alasan journeys to Asan/The water on the rock does not yield/Sacred message revealed to Iṣeṣe (Ancestor)/The head of all Pantheons at Ife/Ones father is Iṣeṣe/Ones mother is Iṣeṣe/Ones destiny (Ori) is Iṣeṣe/Ones ikin is Iṣeṣe. We first pay reverence to Iṣeṣe before all other Deities.

May they harken to our supplications. Aṣẹ.

My homage is paid to all Oba Alaye here present; and all distinguished ladies and gentlemen. All protocol observed.

**3. RELIGION:** Religion is defined as 'a belief or acceptance of the existence of God or gods with the emotion and morality connected therewith; rites or worship, and system of such belief or worship....'

- Oxford Advance Learners Dictionary; and Webster's Dictionary and Thesaurus.

There are about 4,300 world religions.

Nigeria has a fair share of these world religions, such as:- Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Confucianism, Hinduism, Ba-hai faith, Eckanka, Taoism, Krishna Consciousness, Ancestral (Indigenous beliefs – (ATR), Buddhism, Guru Mahrajji, Grail message etc. etc. *Godianism*

Some ethnic or Africa names for God are:-

- Olodumare, Olorun (Yoruba); Chukwu or Chineke (Igbo); Abasi (Efik or Ibibio);
- Mulungu, Nyanbe (Zambia and Tanzani); Osanobua (Edo); Suku or Kalunga (Angola)
- Mawu, Nyame (Ghana); Imama (Burundi); (O)Ubangiji (Hausa); Oritshe (Itsekiri); Oghene (Delta, Nigeria)



All religions, including the Ancestral (Traditional), profess the pre-eminence and existence of one Supreme Being, whose likeness is still a mystery and whose works are yet to be comprehended by man. All religions also explore access to this SUPREME through diverse intermediaries. The Ancestral (ATR) religion seek to communicate with Olodumare through the Deities, who are the manifestation of the Energies (Forces) of Olodumare.

In Yoruba belief, there are 401 of these Energies. Some of these Energies of Olodumare who were/are

- His emissaries are wonders in themselves. The SUN, like some of these creations, can be seen and felt on earth. No one dares approach it. At its peak we on earth, seek for shelter from its scorch. The Irunmole (Energies of Olodumare) complement each other to satisfy His wishes. Olodumare is much concerned about harmony among His creations that He sends various delegates to different parts of the world at various times to relieve them of one travail or another.

In Ose tura – He implored His messengers, the Irunmole, to rever and cooperate with each other – Dasa awo ori ota/ ojiji o beru ofin awo ale odo/Ori sin ori wa j' aye.....

Story ----- Olodumare sent eight delegates to the world one time to resolve some problems. Try as they did, they did not succeed. So they went back to Olodumare to report their helplessness. Having listened and knowing their problems He asked whether they paid obeisance to their two siblings, Sun and Moon on earth. They were asked to return to earth and pay reverence to them. *They did and succeeded.*

Paying reverence is an element of love, which portends peace and harmony.

Promotion of love is captured in the 'GOLDEN RULE' which enjoins that 'we do unto others what we expect them to do to us'.

Rotary Club 4-rule Test requires all to try the other's pinching shoes asking –

- Is it the Truth?
- Will it be fair to all concerned?
- Will it build goodwill and better friendship?
- Will it be beneficial to all concerned?

Ifa Corpus, Obara ka states this succinctly thus-

Bí mo şe fẹ́ẹ́ rí/Ní mo fẹ́ kí ẹ́nikẹ́jì mǐ rí/.....

"What I wish myself/ Is what I wish my fellow-men/ The sacred message revealed for Obara/When Obara strove to assist Ika to progress/When Obara helped Ika to glory/We all breathed a blissful air|But Obara is not the architect/Ifa is the pathfinder".

In the same vein, Ifa Corpus Ogbé Sa enjoins everyone to enthuse good-ness always –

Ogbè káre 'lé /Qsá ká r'oko/Difa fun Ẹni-aye-kan.....

Ogbe lets proceed home/Qsa lets go to the farm-stead/Sacred message cast for Ẹni-aye – kan (who assumes responsibility) / Same message was revealed for Ẹeere (perform creditably)/ Ẹeere, Ẹeere, you, required to serve/serve well.

The relationships among the 401 Irunmole is guided by Olodumare injunction for cooperation among each other. This is exemplified in the Ifa Corpus Otura bara

Ọwọ́ Ọmọ́dẹ́ ọ́ tó pẹ́pẹ́/T' agbàlagbà kò wọ́ akẹ̀rẹ̀gbẹ.....

An infant's hand cannot reach the attic (rack) / Neither can an adult's own enter a gourd/ Whatever request demanded of an elder by an infant/Let's not refuse/For we all owe



ourselves some obligations/The parents owe their children some responsibilities/Sacred message revealed for Otura and Obara/When embarking on a working sojourn to Kisi.”

Although Ifa, and by extension ATR is widely associated with divination; It is a way of life. Fela Sowande in his book, Ifa: Guide, counsellor and friend of our fore-fathers, surmised that

Ifa was/is not exclusively religion, not exclusively philosophy, not exclusively divination not exclusively Hi-Story, or natural science or medical therapeutics, but embraced/all these and much more. Many Ifa Corpus teach the virtues of Hardwork, Honesty, Patience, Cooperation, Kindness, Appreciation, Love etc etc. Whoever sows goodness reaps harmony, contentment and peace of mind. One needs to abhor and stay away from any abominative acts or taboo. Oloдумаре warns of this in Irosun Meji –

Bi eniyan ba nse Ohun ti ko toṣo/Ti won so fun un / Ti ko gbọ o /E jọ ó rẹ.....

When someone indulges in obstinacy/And ignores all entreaties/leave him/her to the indiscretion/When the time comes /Abomination will come to judge/Sacred Message cast for the son/Who insolently inherited his own mother/After the death of his father/Ah!/ What a taboo!/It is never done/At long last, Eewo came to judge /And the aberrant son, his mother (wife) and three children perished.

All religions claim to preach love.

#### **CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISION**

Section 42 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution, as amended, guarantees all citizens fundamental rights to freedom of or against any form of discrimination on the basis of place of birth or origin, sex, religion, association, personal opinion, property ownership etc. etc.

Article 3 of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights as domesticated by the Ratification and enforcement Cap 10 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 1990 also guarantees same.

The United Nation Fundamental Human Rights Charter unequivocally guarantees same.

#### **TRAMPLING ON THE ATR DEVOTEES RIGHTS**

Despite these constitutional guarantees, Nigerian Governments at all levels have flagrantly trampled on the rights of Ancestral religion practitioners. They have adopted Christianity and Islam to the utter exclusion of other religions, particularly Ancestral belief.

National Reform Conferences and Seminars were organized without any reference for representation of Ancestral devotees, while Christians and Muslims were duly invited, despite spirited protests by Ancestral believers.

Laws are enacted without any consideration for the infringement of such laws on freedom of worship.

Boards or Commissions/Departments are established for the advancement and promotion of the two religions.

In-depth studies have revealed that most books written on ATR were done to denigrate it and promote majorly Christianity even their holy books are replete with derogatory words against ATR.

Teaching of ATR in Institutions are basically half-hearted as they are taught by non-devotees.

We are the whipping child of the religion family.



The practice of religion nowadays is predicated on competition rather compliments. They have been tainted with personal, <sup>political,</sup> ethnic, economic and other selfish mundane indices thus defeating the essence of religion to promote love, harmony and development.

Condoling and encouraging errant Traditional Rulers (Obas) who try to impose their acquired religions on ATR devotees. They keep Jihad teams to desecrate and destroy our shrines and temples. They often vigorously campaign against traditional norms.

Denying devotees right of competition and enjoyment of International offerings; despite the recognition accorded ATR by foreign countries like Germany and Japan.

Selfishness is frowned at by Olodumare as shown in Ologbon meji (Oturupon)

Ologbon kan o ta omi si koko eti aso .....

No wise person can knot water at the tip of a cloth /No intellect can count the sand grains at a beach /No traveller can transverse to the end of the earth/Sacred message for the tortoise/When he attempted to hang all wisdoms on a palm tree/No matter how wise the tortoise is/The snail is wiser.

### SOLACE

These have prompted our representations to NASS for rejection and Non-Implementation of reports arising from such fora on the basis of our exclusion.

Despite these shenanigans and absence of much support for ATR, the concept continues to grow. The various festivals attract our brothers and sisters from The Diaspora thus contributing positively to national GDP.

The governments are therefore advised to eschew religion partisanship and allow ATR to blossom. For our consolation is in the Ifa Corpus – Ogbe 'sa which says

Bi awon abinu eni ba nbinu eni/Ti won ngbe nkan eni ju sinu igbo/Eleda eni a maa gbe 'ni leke won .....

When disgruntled ones persist in their treacherous ways/One's guiding spirit (Eleda) will always thwart their plans/Sacred message revealed for Awero/The beloved wife of Olofin .....

Aborul

Aboye!!

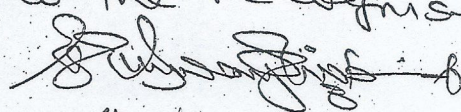


Olakunle Oligbinde.

### POST SCRIPT.

The Federal Government should form a stabilising force in world religion politics, and avoid aligning with factional sects of various religions, which may polarise her citizens.

Likewise, our governments should promote an all-embracing religious organisation that include all shades of religion instead of the present cloudy relation in an independent Nigeria Inter-faith Religious Council (NIREC) constituted of only Christians and Muslims, and being bandied as the recognised religions in Nigeria.



Attached are vituperative 4-line rags called Obas.