Part 3

West African Worldviews

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(Editor's note: this is the 3rd of a 4-part series on worldview in West Africa)

I had argued strongly in a previous work that West Africans are culturally different from African Americans, and therefore require a different missiological approach in regard to presenting the gospel to those that have migrated to the United States and other parts of North America.[1] In this article, I wish to share some the West African worldviews in general which most of their immigrants to the United States and Canada share in common.

Complementary Dualism

Complementary dualism, according to Kalu Ogbaa, is defined as the "belief that opposite beings, including humans, complement each other in order to become whole and effective."[2] Ogbaa, writing about the Igbo, states that this complementary dualism underscores the Igbo constant reference to *elu na ala* (the sky and the earth), *nwoke na nwany*i (man and woman), and *udu miri na okochi* (wet and dry season). Moreover, the Igbo world is generally categorized into two parts—physical and metaphysical, which comprise the three levels: the spirit world, which consists of the spiritual beings and the living dead ancestors (*Ala mmuo*); the living people on Earth (*elu uwa*), or the physical world; and the unborn babies in the womb (akpa nnwa).[3]

[1] For more on West African immigrants' relationship with African Americans see Emetuche, Okwudiri Damian. "An Analysis of Worldviews of West African Immigrants to Greater Cincinnati and their Missiological Implications." Ph.D. diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville KY, 2007.

[2] Kalu Ogbaa, *Igbo* (New York: Rosen, 1995), 14.

[3] Ibid.

Other scholars, especially in the West, refer to the same system of thought as "animism," a term made popular by Edward B. Tylor in his book, *Religion in Primitive Culture*, but has been rejected by most African writers. E. Bolaji Idowu is one of these scholars. He argues that, while it is true that there are some animistic practices and beliefs in African traditional religions, animism by its nature is not peculiar to Africans alone.[4]

John Mbiti is another African scholar who rejects the designation of African traditional religions as animism. He contends that the term "animism," as used by Tylor in 1871, has evolutionary meaning, which has been discredited and must be abandoned.[5] The evolutionary idea, to which Mbiti refers, places the African traditional religions at the bottom of the supposed line of religious evolution, while Judaism, Christianity, and Islam occupy the top because of their monotheistic beliefs.[6] The term "animism" nonetheless never ceased; rather, it is more in use today among evangelical scholars like David Hesselgrave and Gailyn Van Rheenen. Van Rheenen defines animism as the

> belief that personal spiritual beings and impersonal spiritual forces have power over human affairs and, consequently, that human beings must discover what beings and forces are influencing them in order to determine future action and, frequently, to manipulate their power.[7]

Even if one disagrees with the animistic terminology, the characteristics in Van Rheenen's definition need to be noted because they best describe West African complementary dualism. (1) It is a system of belief that assumes that the unseen world relates to—and interacts with—the seen world. The divine and the human, secular and sacred, spiritual and impersonal forces all participate in and shape the happenings of the seen world. (2) These beings may include God, gods, ancestors, ghosts, angels, and demons, and how they are relate to—and interact with—one another. (3) The essence of animism is power. The struggle is to control the affairs and destiny of those living in the physical realm of life, and the power can be used either

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[4] E Bolaji Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition* (London: SCM Press, 1973), 134
[5] John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* 2nd ed. (London: Heinemann, 1969), 6-10.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Gailyn Van Rheenen, *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 20.

for good or ill. (4) Most animists live in fear and seek to understand the forces influencing them and, by the means of sacrifice, to appease or manipulate those forces for their benefit.[8]

In their book, *Understanding Folk Religion*, Paul Hiebert, Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tiénou generally agreed with Van Rheenen in the assessment of an animistic worldview. However, they note that folk religion or animism is "particularistic in nature," meaning the practice differs from one place or one group to another. Furthermore, the authors argue that folk religionists are primarily concerned with existential questions, which have to do with the here and now. Moreover, many of their practices and information are transmitted orally. They are "highly immediate, personal, and relational. Words are spoken in the context of specific relationships, and they die as soon as they have been said."[9]

In another work, Paul Hiebert calls this complementary dualism an organic worldview system. The world is seen in terms of "living beings in relationship to one another. Like humans and animals, objects may initiate actions and respond to the actions of others. They may be thought to have feelings, thoughts, and wills of their own."[10] In West African understanding, the universe is perceived "as a multidimensional entity inhabited by hierarchical cadres of spiritual beings and forces. The earth is seen as an arena where those spiritual beings and forces interact with people for either good or ill, depending upon the circumstances."[11]

Therefore, in the West African cosmos, "There is the world of man peopled by all created beings and things, both animate and inanimate. The spirit world is the abode of the creator, the deities, the disembodied and malignant spirits, and the ancestral spirits. It is also the future abode of the living after their death."[12] Furthermore, in the West African thought pattern, for example

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[8] Ibid., 21-23

[9] Paul Hiebert, R. Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tienou, *Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 83-86.

[10] Paul Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker,1994), 195.

[11] Osadolar Imasogie, *Guidelines for Theology in Africa* (Ibadan, Nigeria: University Press,1986), 66.

[12] Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria*, 11.

among the Igbo, "the world as a natural order which inexorably goes on its ordained way according to a 'master plan' is foreign to Igbo conceptions."[13]

The world to the West Africans "is a dynamic one-a world of moving equilibrium. It is an equilibrium that is constantly threatened, and sometimes actually disturbed by natural and social calamities," and sometimes occasioned by cosmic forces.[14] These forces are to be controlled or manipulated for the purpose of humanity. Sacrifice, the practice of divination, and ancestral worship are some of the West African means of manipulating the cosmic forces, maintaining equilibrium, and keeping at bay the malignant spirits that threaten the world.[15]

West Africans do not only strive for equilibrium or balance, but everything is contractual in character. One has to bargain and negotiate to obtain what he or she needs. In this negotiation, it should be remembered that "there is always the fear that the terms of the contract might not be fully honored by either party: the spirits often change their mind as do men. Each tries to get the better part of the other, a source of uncertainty"[16] among African social relations. For instance, among the Igbo, the world is a marketplace, and it is subject to bargaining. Both the spiritual and the physical worlds are "peopled with interested individuals and groups and much buying and selling go on in each."[17] Moreover, the motivating factor is gain, the making of profit, Uchendu declared.

Consequently, in view of this complementary dualism, even West African believers of the Christian and Muslim faiths have been affected and influenced in the practice of their confessions. For instance, Fatou Sow observed that Islamic and Christian practices have been mingled with traditional practices in Senegal. For instance, "Good luck charms are made from soaked paper inscribed with Koranic chapters."[18]

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[13] Ibid., 12.
[14] Ibid., 12-13.
[15] Ibid., 13. See also John Anenechukwu Umeh, *After God Is Dibia: Igbo Cosmology, Healing,Divination, and Sacred Science In Nigeria*, vol. 1 (London: Karnak, 1999).
[16] Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria*, 14.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Fatou Sow, "Fundamentalisms, Globalization, and Women's Human Rights in Senegal,"*Gender and Development* 11, no. 1 (May 2003): 70.

Furthermore, Sow argues, "Whether they are popular or not, they are never considered fetishist or pagan. It does not matter to the people who practice this behavior what traditional healers or priests think of it. To the majority of believers . . . these practices represent a call to the spirit world, to enlist the ancestors' protection."[19]

Gailyn Van Rheenen confirms these practices to be true among people with animistic worldviews. He insists:

> Animists assume that the seen world is related to the unseen world. An interaction exists between the divine and the human, the sacred and the profane, the holy and the secular. The influences of God, gods, spirits, and ancestors affect the living. Humans are thought to be controlled by spiritual forces, whether they are ancestors or ghosts, gods or spirits, witchcraft or sorcery, and curses or the evil eye. They in turn seek to appease the powers through sacrifices and libations, to access power to cope with evil through ritual, and to protect themselves through charms and amulets.[20]

Van Rheenen's assertion is accurate among some of the West African immigrants in the United States. For instance, it is common practice among the immigrant Senegalese to send money home to request special prayers, charms, and amulets, which they believe will help protect them or prosper their businesses. The pictures of Senegalese Islamic holy men, especially the Mouride brotherhood, adorn all the restaurants, stores, and boutiques in Cincinnati and other cities, symbolizing their commitment and attachment to their ancestral spiritual powers.

Communalism

The term communalism is derived from the word "communal," that which is shared, commonly, or collectively owned. The etymological root is French, which in itself is derived from the Latin words, *communalis, communis,* meaning that which is related to one or more communes, or community. Its main characteristics are: (1) collective ownership; (2) reciprocal use of property (participated in, shared, or used in common by members of a group or community); (3) relating to, or based on, racial or cultural groups in collective ownership.

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[19] Ibid.

[20] Gailyn Van Rheenen, "Defining an Animistic Worldview" paper presented at thesymposium, "Distinctively Christian, Distinctly Mongolian," in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, 11 March 2003;[on-line]; accessed 15 April 2005;availablefromhttp://www.missiology.com/mongolianlectures /Animisticworldview.htm; /; Internet.

Furthermore, loyalty is often based on a sociopolitical grouping affiliated with religious or ethnic groups.[21]

Concerning pre-colonial West Africa, Adongo Aidan Avugma writes:

> The predominant principle of social relations was that of the family and kinship associated with communalism. Among the Gur social groups in the Upper East Region of Ghana, for example, every member of the society had their position defined in terms of their relationship with their mother's or father's family. Leadership was based on religious ties to the *Tindana*, or custodian of the land, who ran the affairs of the people with a committee of elders chosen from all the families and clans of the territory. This committee administered land, the major means of production not as its personal property, but as the property of all the people in Gurum-Tinga (Gur land) who had the right to till it. Hunting, fishing and grazing grounds for animals were organized in a similar manner. No one starved whilst others stuffed themselves with food and threw the excess away or sold it for profit. The basic economic law was that of providing the members of society with the necessary means of subsistence through communal ownership of the means of production. The absence of private property in the means of production, of the division into classes and the exploitation of man by man excluded the need for a state. Production was essentially of use values; and there was no alienation of the producer from his means of production.[22]

With the passage of time, West Africans philosophically developed a communal worldview, in which "individuals may become successful or distinguished in their activities or occupations, but their success is measured by how much others benefit from it."[23] Even in postcolonial Africa, the sense of community is still a major theme in the African worldview. Laurenti Magesa notes,

> The African view of the universe contains the following major themes: the sacrality of life, respect for the spiritual and mystical nature of creation, and especially of the human person; the sense of family, community, solidarity and participation; and an emphasis on fecundity and sharing in life, friendship, healing and hospitality.[24]

The community is considered as an individual, and, [like the] "individual, is not made up of only flesh and blood; it is a complete and self-sufficient whole, animated by diffused life. In a way,

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[21] *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary* , S.V. "Communal," "Communalism," [on-line]; accessed 16 April 2006; available from http://www.m-w.com/cgi-bin/dictionary?va =communalism; Internet.

[22] Adongo Aidan Avugma, "State and Class in Pre-colonial West Africa" [on-line]; accessed 5 February 2007; available from http://www.worldsocialism.org/ spgb/may99/afromarx.html; Internet.

[23] Ogbaa, *Igbo*, 26.

[24] Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Maryknoll, NY:Orbis, 1997), 52-53.

the group, like the individual, is the microcosm of the universe. The whole universe subsists, so to speak, in it."[25]

The West African collectivistic worldview in this sense is better understood when placed in a synthetic culture profile. Gert Jan Hofstede, Paul B. Pedersen, and Geert Hofstede in the book, *Exploring Culture: Exercises, Stories, and Synthetic Cultures*, explored the concept of synthetic culture. It should, however, be noted that synthetic culture by its nature is an extreme manifestation of a single value and, therefore, an oversimplification of a complex cultural matrix.

As the authors argue, synthetic cultures do not exist in the real world, but "the tendencies they demonstrate do exist."[26] Generally, synthetic cultures can be classified into five categories: (1) Identity; extreme individualism stands in contrast with extreme collectivism. (2) Hierarchy; a context in which extreme large power distance is at odds with lower power distance. (3) Gender; in this context, extreme masculinity is set in opposition with extreme femininity; (4) Truth; the ideas of certainty and tolerance are in contrast. In addition, (5) Virtue; issues are judged either in long-term benefits or short term benefits. Each of these synthetic cultures has issues with which it is obsessed.[27]

For example, while individualistic cultures value personal freedom, in collective cultures, group harmony is the most cherished value. In hierarchical cultures, respect for status is the core value, while in nonhierarchical culture, it is equality between peoples that matters most. In masculine cultures, winning is the highest goal, while in feminine-dominated cultures, caring for the weak is of the uppermost importance. In truth cultures, to be certain—knowing the facts—is the goal of all inquiries, while on the contrary, in tolerant relational cultures, relationship is the most valued virtue. In long term cultures, long-term benefits are more important but, in short-term cultures, emphasis is placed on quick results or on instant gratifications.[28]

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[25] Ibid., 60.

[26] Gert Jan Hofstede, Paul B. Pedersen, and Geert Hofstede, *Exploring Culture: Exercises,Stories, and Synthetic Cultures* (Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural, 2002), 91.

[27] Ibid., 91-92.

[28] Ibid., 91-113.

From the foregoing synthetic culture profile, West Africa falls within collectivistic and hierarchal cultural categories. An example of collectivity can be identified in the concept of *teranga*, the concept of openness and sharing all things together. The core value of collectivity will be group harmony, and the core distinction will be ingroup and outgroup. Group harmony is often played out in the building of consensus. LaNette W. Thompson captures this notion in these words:

> Typical African leadership is interesting. In Western thought, we see a leader as Moses, innovative, leading the people to a new land. The leader tries the new thing first, and teaches the others to use it. Not so, here. A good chief is one who gives his people what they want or already have. If there is a problem, the elders will sit in a circle and politely discuss the issue, even if sometimes heatedly, giving opinions, telling stories. The chief will be silent. He may ask a question to guide the discussion. When everyone has finished speaking, if the chief feels a consensus has been reached, he will put into words the consensus of the group—saying it is his decision. The people go away happy. It's kind of like group therapy. If there is not a consensus or the consensus is not in the best interest of the group or tempers are too heated, the chief says he must take some time to think about the issue, and call another meeting. In this way, the chief is not questioned and he always saves face.[29]

Here are the seven key elements in a collectivistic worldview:

1. Members of one's ingroup (organization, extended family) are very close, whereas other outgroup people are very distant.
2. Harmony should be maintained and direct confrontation avoided.
3. Relationships are more important than the task at hand. Much time is spent on greeting and farewell rituals.
4. Laws, rights, and opinions differ by group.
5. Trespassing leads to shame and loss of face for the entire ingroup.
6. The relationship between employer and employee is perceived in moral terms, like family link.
7. Spoken communication uses imprecise style. Discreet non-verbal clues, such as tone and pauses, are crucial. The speaker adapts to the listener.[30]

From this perspective, life is shared, and relationships are tighter and have an element of moral obligation. Collective cultures are also event-oriented, which demands that "an activity be completed regardless of the length of time required, and emphasizes unscheduled participation

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[29] LaNette W. Thompson, "Thoughts on African leadership," seminar on African leadership_worldview_LWT_March05. Thompson is a missionary among the Jula people of West Africa and writes often about their worldviews. Some of her works can be accessed on-line at http://www.newwway.org/strategy_network; Internet.

[30] Hofstede, Pedersen, and Hofstede, *Exploring Culture*, 96.

rather than carefully structured activities."[31] This can be recognized in the Senegalese *megal* celebration and Igbo New Yam Festival, or even in West African-oriented churches. In the *megal* celebration, people were present from 9:00 A. M until 10:00 P.M. Amazingly, everybody was relaxed and nobody was in a hurry to go. In the West African stores, shoppers spend time exchanging greetings and inquiring about one another's' welfare. Sherwood G. Lingenfelter and Marvin K. Mayers observed,

> For event-oriented people it is more important to complete the activity than to observe arbitrary constraints of time. Baseball is one activity in American culture which still follows event-oriented rules. A ball game has no fixed time limit, but will continue through as many extra innings as necessary. Church services among some ethnic groups (Black, Hispanic, Korean) also operate on an event-oriented schedule. They rarely begin on time and frequently last for two, three, or more hours. Event orientation produces a "let come what may" outlook unbound by schedules. Event-oriented persons will often be late to time-structured meetings because the event in which they are previously engaged is not completed on time. For them, meetings begin when the last person arrives and end when the last person leaves. Participation and completion are more central goals. For event-oriented people, playing the game is indeed more important than winning. They also differ in their style of managing problems or crises. Whereas time-oriented people will quickly grow weary of discussion and call for a vote, event-oriented people will exhaustively consider a problem, hearing all issues and deliberating until they reach unanimous agreement.[32]

In regard to hierarchical culture, the seven key elements according to synthetic culture profile would include:

1. Might makes right; power is good.
2. Power, status, and privileges go together.
3. Less powerful people are dependent on those who are more powerful.
4. Centralization is popular.
5. Subordinates and children expect direction. They do not speak without being asked.
6. The ideal boss is a benevolent autocrat or "good father."
7. Style of speech is formal and acknowledges hierarchal positions.[33]

Furthermore, in hierarchical cultures, words with positive connotations may include: respect, father (as a title), master, servant, older brother, younger brother, wisdom, favor, protect,

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[31] Sherwood G. Lingenfelter and Marvin K. Mayers, *Ministering Cross-Culturally: Incarnational Model for Personal Relationships* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 39.

[32] Ibid., 42-42.

[33] Hofstede, Pedersen, and Hofstede, *Exploring Culture*, 98.

in obedience, orders, and pleasing. On the contrary, words with negative connotations may include: rights, complaint, negotiation, fairness, objection, question, and criticism.[34]

Evidence from West African cultural rites suggests that their worldview is not only communal (as has been demonstrated) but, when triangulated with the synthetic culture profile, their worldview also leans toward hierarchical culture. For an example, in many of the old traditional institutions—like the Oyo Empire, and the Benin Kingdom, the Mali and Songhai empires—successions is based on blood. The law of inheritance even today is either matrilineal for the Akan group, or patrilineal for the rest of the West African people.

With the exception of the Igbos, a person is respected based on one's class, status, and family. Respect is accorded to father, mother, or the person in authority. Many of the West African cultures abhor questioning people in authority. In the political arenas, presidents are often fated as kings and wish to rule for life. Even in retirement, a woman is solely respected on the basis of her ability to reproduce children.

Caroline H. Bledsoe states,

> Having sacrificed her youth for children, a woman faces one question with increasing intensity: When can she retire from child bearing? That is, when can she stop bearing children and begin to replete physically? Again, there is no age boundary. All depends on how she has conducted her life. If she has succeeded in converting her youth to blessings through her reproductive labors, she should have earned a secure place to spend her elderhood and earned the right to begin a wholly new phase of life, a permanent rest, from those to whom she brought life: her children and her husband's family. In fact, she should be surrounded by people eager to take care of her. Irrespective of her age in years or menopausal status, she should be allowed to retire, and the beneficiaries of her reproductive struggles should hasten to replace her (*joosayo*, replacement) with someone younger.[35]

Materialism

The term "materialism," from the philosophical perspective, refers to the notion that "whatever exists is either matter, or entirely dependent on matter for its existence."[36] However,

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[34] Ibid., 98-99.

[35] Caroline H. Bledsoe, *Contingent Lives: Fertility, Time, and Aging in West Africa* (Chicago:The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 261.

[36] "Materialism," in *A Dictionary of Philosophy*, rev. 2nd ed., ed. Anthony Flew (New York:St.Martin's Griffin, 1979), 222.

philosophers disagree on the precise meaning and status of matter. Some of the questions philosophers debate in respect to matter include:

> Is matter to be regarded simply as that which is extended both in space and time (so that rainbows and shadows are examples of matter as well as trees and stones)? Or if not, what further properties are essential to it? Is there a relevant distinction to be drawn here between existence or occurrence and being, or reality? And how exactly are the space and time in which matter extends, the forces moving it, and the consciousness perceiving it, dependent on it?[37]

While not attempting to answer the questions raised, it should be noted that the questions by themselves render the concept of materialism an ambitious one. But, generally, materialistic philosophers deny the existence of "non-extended," "thinking substance," or mind, and the reality of spirits, angels, or deities in most traditional senses other than what they positively assert.[38] One of the early philosophers to articulate what became known as materialism was Epicurus (341-270 BC), who lived in the city of Athens.

Dennis P. Hollinger argues that Epicurus

> was a materialist who believed that all knowledge comes from the senses, which portray the world as it really is. He did not deny the existence of the gods, but he believed they had nothing to do with realities of everyday life. From this framework he concluded that in regard to morals we naturally pursue personal pleasure and therein is goodness.[39]

Personal pleasure became the highest good and ultimate objective of life. but it should never be an unbridled pleasure. "Rather, for Epicurus, hedonism (the pleasure principle) must always be pursued through self-restraint, moderation, and detachment."[40]

Other Western philosophers who developed various kinds of materialism as a philosophical idea—in spite of religious oppositions—are Galileo, through his new physics, in the seventeenth century, and later Newton and Hobbs. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Marxist thinkers attempted to replace such "mechanistic materialism"—and resolve some of its difficulties by their "dialectical materialism." They considered matter, not as something static on

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[37] Ibid. There may be other relevant philosophical questions, but they and their possible answers are beyond the scope of this article.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Dennis P. Hollinger, *Choosing the Good: Christian Ethics in a Complex World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 29.

[40] Ibid.

which development has to be imposed *ab extra*, but as containing within its own nature those tensions or contradictions that provide the motive, and the force, for change.[41]

Adam Smith, a Scottish philosopher and economist, expanded materialism as an economic concept. He argues,

> Self-interest (not selfishness) was the highest good in economics because the world was structured in such a way that from it everyone would benefit. In economics, 'we are led by an invisible hand to promote an end which has no part of his [a human being's] interest. . . . By pursuing his own interest, he frequently promotes that of society more effectively than he really intends to promote it I have never known much good done by those who affected to trade for the public good'.[42]

Smith became known as "the father of modern capitalism." However, it is in Ayn Rand's novel, *Atlas Shrugged*, that excessive capitalism in a materialistic worldview is illustrated. In *Atlas Shrugged*, Rand contends that it is the rational independent mind that empowers the world. The protagonist of the book, John Galt, lived a materialistic lifestyle as the only way life is meant to be lived.[43]

West African materialism follows the pattern in *Atlas Shrugged*—not in rejection of fascism, socialism, and communism, or even the philosophical debate of the existence of God. The reason, as has been demonstrated, is that West Africans believe in a complementary dualism that recognizes spiritual beings who are ever-present and interact with the living. But West African materialism is about the best of life regardless of the cost, and living a capitalist, laissez-faire lifestyle. The number of immigrants seeking greener pastures demonstrates this materialistic worldview. An observant journalist in New York reports, "Perhaps 30,000 French-speaking Africans have settled in New York since 1990, the majority arriving from Senegal."[44] These Senegalese immigrants, encouraged by the teachings of their spiritual leaders, the

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[41] "Materialism," in *A Dictionary of Philosophy*, 223.

[42] Hollinger, *Choosing the Good: Christian Ethics in a Complex World*, 29-30. See also Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2006); and idem, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (New York: Modern Library Classics, 2000).

[43] Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged* (New York: Plume, 1999).

[44] Joel Millman, "Profiting from One's Prayers" [on-line]; accessed 7 February 2005; availablefrom http://www.aliciapatterson.org/APF1702/Millman/Millman.html; Internet.

Mourides, now control almost all street commerce in Dakar. When Dakar became saturated, they moved to Europe. However, "In the mid-1980s, with France tightening immigration from its former colonies, Mourides targeted New York."[45]

Joel Millman states that this "new migration has both enriched the *marabouts* and liberated their disciples."[46] It is fundamentally this desire for material gain that has brought many Senegalese from Dakar to New York, Ohio, and other parts of the United States. In the course of this research, a good number of West Africans noted that it was when they began to have problems with the security and immigration officials in New York, Houston, and other cities that they started moving inland to Atlanta, Cincinnati, and Louisville, among other places.

For many of the immigrants, their reason for coming to the United States is to make money and be able to establish something back in West Africa. For this reason, some who are married (mainly Senegalese and Ghanaians), like Omar Thiowe, prefer sending their children back home to Africa partly to enable their parents to have time for more work and money, and partly for cultural reasons.[47] The immigrants also wish to train their children to be in their home culture. Some of those interviewed never want their children in the United States until they are about eighteen years old. It is uncommon for Senegalese children to live with their families in the United States.

Those within the age bracket of six to eighteen years of age are most likely born in the United States; they may have come for a brief vacation; or the parents do not have the money to send them back to Africa. Alternatively, they would have a grandmother or a nanny from West Africa living with them. The young ones usually are sent back home to learn the language, culture, and religion of their parents before returning to the United States for college. Concerning the root of materialism in West Africa, it is often suggested that the simple African lifestyle was corrupted by the introduction of colonialism and materialism by the West. While there may be

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[45] Ibid., 4.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Omar Thiowe, interview by author, 27 February 2005, in Louisville, Kentucky.

some element of truth in the charge, some West African cultures promote materialism. For example, the Igbo culture encourages high competitiveness and material successes.

Tony Momoh, a former Nigerian minister, buttressed this Igbo worldview when he wrote in an article in 2003, "The Igbo are the most mobile people in Nigeria driven by a desire to make it, come rain or come shine. And making it is defined a hundred percent in material terms."[48] In addition, Momoh observed, "Many would do anything to make it, and the making it has meaning more in how much money you have, and how loudly you can tell people that you have it."[49] In one word, the Igbo world is materialistic; success is measured in material possessions; and Igbos will crown the achiever with an honorary chieftaincy.[50]

What Momoh said of the Igbos is now true of all West African people. It is materialistic desire that has brought civil conflicts in Liberia, Sierra Lone, and Cote d'Ivoire, among other places in West Africa. When President Obasanjo of Nigeria was elected to power in 1999, Nigeria was considered one of the most corrupt nations of the world. In the year 2000, Eniwoke Ibagere penned these words,

> The anti-corruption group Transparency International last year (1999) rated Nigeria as the 27th most corrupt country in the world. Even patriotic Nigerians will tell you their country should have been among the top 10. Corruption and cronyism have long haunted Nigeria. The society is an emblem of crass materialism, the leaders famous for financial excesses, and the public service a symbol of graft.[51]

Concerning the immigrants: unfortunately, while many West Africans are industrious, innovative, hard-working, and family-oriented, a few criminal elements—motivated by unquenchable materialism—have been implicated in financial scams. The Cable News Network (CNN) and American Broadcasting Company (ABC) have both aired documentaries on West African immigrant criminal gangs in general, and Nigerians in particular. These criminal gangs,

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[48] Tony Momoh, "Threat to Igbo Solidarity" [on-line]; accessed 17 April 2004; available fromhttp://www.nigerdeltacongress.com/tarticles/threat_to_igbo_ solidarity.htm; Internet, 1.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Ogbaa, *Igbo*, 22-26. See Richard N. Henderson, *The King in Every Man* (New Haven, CT:Yale University Press, 1972), 245-64. See also G. T. Basden, *Niger Ibos* (London: Butler & Tanner, 1938), 130-46.

[51] Eniwoke Ibagere, "Corruption: Obasanjo's Toughest Challenge," BBC World News [online]; accessed 12 February 2007; available from http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/766035.stm; Internet.

known as 419—named after the Nigerian criminal code specialize in identity theft and financial fraud.[52] More recently, the Nollywood, the West African equivalent of Hollywood, has been highlighting this materialistic worldview in its multimillion-dollar film industry.

Some of the best-known African movies that portray the growing trend of materialism include *The Master*—used in an ABC documentary—a story of financial swindlers who employ all manner of tactics to defraud unsuspecting business partners. *Abuja Boys* is another film that illustrates what desperate young men are willing to do in the name of becoming rich. *Angel in Hell* seeks to teach that one must engage in one dirty business, or occultism, in order to be a successful person. *Bed of Roses* and *Paradise to Hell* both depict the deceit in modern marriage—that more people seek to marry, not because of love, but for financial gain. *Power Brokers* is a sad commentary on the political class. The list goes on and on.[53]

As Brian Godawa states, "From the funniest comedy to the saddest tragedy, movies capture the imagination, but they also convey the values and worldviews that we hold dear (as well as some we detest)."[54] Again, Michael Medved, in his book *Hollywood Versus America: Popular Culture and the War on Traditional Values* "argues that filmmakers *intend* to influence the public through the values and characters they portray in television and film."[55] Commenting further on Medved's book (*Hollywood Versus America: Popular Culture and the War on Traditional Values*), Godawa noted, "His thoroughly documented opus concludes that entertainment reinforces certain values over others, namely those that reflect the current fashion

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[52] To read more on the documentary concerning Nigerian and other West African criminalities,see "ABC News' Unfair Attack on Nigeria," *Nigerian Guardian*, 20 December 2006. See also "CNN Presents How to Rob a Bank," 20 May 2006; and ABC 20/20, "Spotlight on Nigerian 419 Scam" [on-line]; accessed 26 January 2007; available from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q0e-pPfITts; Internet.

[53] Any of these movies, or other African movies, can be obtained from African stores in any major city in the United States, or order from [on-line]; http://www. allafricanmovies.com; Internet,http://www.africamovies.com/; Internet, and http://www.nigeriamovies.net/; Internet.

[54] Brian Godawa, *Hollywood Worldviews: Watching Films with Wisdom & Discernment* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 11.

[55] Ibid., 17. See also Michael Medved, *Hollywood Versus America: Popular Culture and theWar on Traditional Values* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992).

of the creative community."[56] Directly or indirectly, Nollywood films have been reinforcing materialism in West Africa today more than any other single factor.

Religious Beliefs

In this section on religious beliefs we will review the concept of God, the role of deities and ancestors and the concept of humans.

The Concept of God

West Africans believe in God as the Creator of heaven and earth. This concept of God was rooted in traditional religion even before the introduction of the Muslim and the Christian faiths. Each ethno-linguistic group in West Africa has traditional names for God, which reveals its understanding and concept of Him. For an example, among the Sierra Leone Mende, God is called *Leve* (Supreme Creator, the One who is high or up), and *Maada* (Grandfather). In Ghana, among the Akan group, God is known and addressed as *Onyame*, signifying the Supreme Being; God, the Creator of all things; the Deity. The Bini of Nigeria refer to God as *Osanobua*, which means Creator of the world, of sky and earth, and of life and death. Among the Yoruba, He is called *Olodumare,* the Almighty, and the Supreme Being.[57]

Everywhere in West Africa, God is known and addressed by similar names or their acronyms. Bolaji Idowu notes,

> In Africa, each people has a local name for God. Invariably there are other names besides the principal name. God's principal name may be the generic name for deity in general; in which case, there is a qualifying suffix or qualifying word to distinguish between the Supreme Deity and the divinities; and then the generic name plus the suffix or qualifying word belong uniquely to God.[58]

The Igbo of Nigeria provide an excellent understanding of West African names for God and His nature.

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[56] Godawa, Hollywood Worldviews: Watching Films with Wisdom & Discernment, 17.
[57] Kofi Asare Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion* (Jurong, Singapore: FEP, 1978), 14-18.
[58] Idowu, *African Traditional Religion*, 149.

According to E. M. Uka, the "Igbos believe that God is so great that he has no comparison. While they acknowledge the existence of other deities, yet they cannot be compared to the Great God. A conviction that is further explained in a situation where other deities have altars erected for them but none is built for the Supreme Being."[59] He is known by different names, which underscore their understanding of Him.

Some of these names are *Chukwu* (*Chi-ukwu*, meaning Great Spirit) and *Chineke* (the Creator). Edmund Ilogu states; "In Onitsha area where this variant *Chineke* is used, the emphasis is placed on the creative activity of the Supreme Being simply by the use of one word."[60] Asare Opoku presents the same understanding of God among other West African ethno-linguistic groups. He notes,

> God is essentially a spirit, a being without concrete form or body. He is therefore never represented in the form of images or worshipped through them. God is also thought of as different from all the other spirits and divinities. His powers transcend theirs and He has the unique attribute of immanence.[61]

Chineke is referred to not only as Creator, but also as the source of all life, for spirit beings as well as humans. The Igbos believed that at conception, "He gives to each man at the time of birth that man's particular portion of the divine being called *Chi.*"[62] The *Chi* (Spirit) becomes the personal god, or a guidance from the Great Spirit, *Chukwu*. The *Chi* directs the destiny of the individual; however, the Igbo believe a man can struggle with his *Chi,* and even manipulate his *Chi* to do his bidding. Tokunboh Adeyemo in his book, *Salvation in African Tradition,* agreed to this notion. He argues,

> The assertion of the traditions is that only Deity has the eternal prerogative of putting the essence of being into man. In Igbo as well as in Yoruba, the designations of the essence of being, *chi* and *ori*, derive directly from the name Deity: *Chukwu*, *Orise*; this by implication means that the essence of man's being derives directly from Deity.[63]

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[59] E. M. Uka, "The Traditional Igbo Society: An Appraisal of the Basic Beliefs and Practices"[on-line]; accessed 10 April 2004; available from http://www.shef. ac.uk~ bsp98coi/seminar.html 3; Internet.

[60] Edmund Ilogu, *Christianity and Ibo Culture* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), 34.

[61] Asare Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, 27.

[62] Ilogu, *Christianity and Ibo Culture*, 34.

[63] Tokunboh Adeyemo, *Salvation in African Tradition* (Nairobi, Kenya: Evangel, 1997), 17.

Nevertheless, God in the African mind is essentially good. Magesa underlined this belief when he states, "The relationship between God and creation—specifically, humanity, is one of solicitude on the part of God. To associate God with anything that is not good, pure, and just and honorable is ridiculous."[64] West Africans, like most Africans, acknowledge, "Misfortune and suffering can and do happen, but they believe that it is always with the knowledge or permission of God. Yet . . . God is never blamed for this; instead the ultimate source of misfortune and suffering is to be found in created order."[65]

Role of Deities

In the West African classification of the spiritual beings, God stands alone; but on the second pedestal are the divinities, which are regarded either as children of God or His messengers. Idowu asserts, "West Africa may be said to be the home of divinities; but even here, we have variations from a very crowded pantheon to a very thinly populated one, and even to a situation where they appear to be scarcely in existence."[66]

However, the importance of the divinities is rooted in the fact that the Creator is a withdrawn God, at least from the daily affairs of men. Hence much attention is given to the divinities. They constitute ministers; the patron spirits; and, in Igbo traditional religious practices, the ordinary person is preoccupied with the activities of these divinities.[67] The same is true of other West African ethno-linguistic groups. J. D. Y. Peel writes, concerning the Yorubas:

> These (subordinate deities or *orisa*) might be conceived of as merely the agents of *Olodumare*, but for practical purposes they are the usual object of religion (worship). Their number is indeterminate, but very large (there are often said to be 401 *orisa*), and they are thought of as having special emblems and iconography, special ways of worship, places of habitation, and special sacrifice. Some are obscure and localized, some have currency all over Yoruba land and beyond. *Ogun* (worshipped as Gun in Benin Republic) was, by tradition, one of the earliest of the *orisa*, and is claimed by his priests to be most important. As the god of iron, he is worshipped by hunters, and formerly by warriors; all metal tools

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[64] Magesa, *African Religion*, 41.

[65] Ibid. See also E. Ikenga Metuh, *God and Man in African Religion: A Case Study of the Igbo of Nigeria* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1981), 43.

[66] Idowu, *African Traditional Religion*, 165.

[67] Onwu, "*Uzo Ndu Na Eziokwu*," 10.

> and equipment are associated with *Ogun*, and customs pertaining to his worship are continued today by mechanics and taxi drivers.[68]

Asare Opoku agrees with Peel but, he submits that in West Africa, the divinities are believed to be created by God to fulfill specific duties. "As creatures, the divinities share the limitations of all other creatures. Their power is limited to the performance of specific functions and none of them enjoys the unlimited powers ascribed to God."[69] Furthermore, the divinities may be male or female, good or evil, and could live in specific places, like hills, rivers, the sea, trees, rocks, and even in animals. Again, because they are spiritual entities, they are distinguishable from the objects they possess. Thus, Asare Opoku insists, "The trees, rivers or stones must not be confused with the spirits which dwell in them. The spirits have unlimited mobility and can come and go from their places of abode. They are therefore not confined to the palpable objects of the environment in which they reside."[70]

Adama and Naomi Doumbia summarize the West African belief and relationship with the divinities in these words:

> We pray to these sacred mediators who share in the Supreme power. Our spiritual well-being is dependent upon our relationship to them; everyone of us has the power to commune with these forces through prayer and sacrifice. Before we swim or fish, we make peace with the spirits of the water. Before we hunt or gather wood, we make peace with the spirit of the bush. Before we farm, we make peace with the spirits of the earth. They tell us what kind of sacrifice they desire; each divinity has its own special song, rhythm, color, and sacrificial animal.[71]

Again, the Doumbias insist that the divinities respond to petitions, although they may have their own agendas. But, it is through listening and appeasing the spirits that order, peace, and harmony are maintained in the community. Furthermore, the Doumbias state,

> If we are unaware of any spirits, they are better able to exercise their own will and roam about freely. The focus of our lives is how effectively to interact with the world of spirits. They are always communicating their wishes, demands, and prescriptions to us directly, or through our diviners and healers.[72]

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[68] J. D. Y. Peel, *Aladura: A Religious Movement among the Yoruba* (London: Oxford University Press for International African Institute, 1968), 30.

[69] Asare Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, 54.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Doumbia and Doumbia, *The Way of the Elders*, 4.

[72] Ibid.

In some West African ethno-linguistic groups—like the Bamana, Fulani, and Wolof peoples of Guinea-Conakry, Senegal, and Mali—spirit visitations are encouraged because it is believed that they provide prosperity, healing, and revelation to the community. They may visit uninvited, but often it is the communities that invite the divinities through special ceremonies. Altars or shrines may be constructed for those divinities who visit often and provide guidance to the community.[73]

Role of Ancestors

The third category of the West African spiritual beings is the dead ancestors, who are looked upon to act as mediators between the living and other spiritual forces. Birago Diop—a Senegalese poet—in a poem dedicated to ancestors, reflects on the veneration of West Africans toward their ancestral spirits. The first stanza of the poem reads:

> Those who are dead are never gone:
> they are there in the thickening shadow.
> The dead are not under the earth:
> they are in the tree that rustles,
> they are in the wood that groans,
> they are in the water that runs,
> they are in the hut, they are in the crowd,
> the dead are not dead.[74]

Peter Nlemadim DomNwachukwu agrees and calls the ancestors, "the living dead." According to him, in Igboland, they are

> looked upon for protection by those who are living in the visible world. Ancestors stand before the gods as intercessors for their living relatives. They intervene for the good of their living relatives, especially in a case where a deity seeks to inflict harm on the living.[75]

Asare Opoku further stresses the importance of ancestors in West African spirituality when he argues that they are second in importance only to God, who is considered the final authority in all matters. "All other spiritual beings may be spoken ill of or even ridiculed on

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[73] Ibid., 6-7.

[74] Asare Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, 35. See also Janheinz Jahn, *Muntu*:*An Outline of Neo-African Culture* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), 108.

[75] DomNwachukwu, *Authentic African Christianity*, 34.

occasion, but God and the ancestors are always held in awe."[76] Adama and Naomi Doumbia also note, "Our ancestors are the closest to us of all the intermediary spirits; they are our guardian spirits. Our ancestors maintain their role in our families and lives. They are always available to us, offering their guidance and protection."[77] Consequently, as Magesa observes,

> Subordination is owed to God by all creation on account of the rank God holds as the first of all existence, as Ancestor *par excellence*. All life, and the power that is life or existence, flows from God. It follows that by right of their primogeniture and proximity to God by death, God has granted the ancestors a qualitatively more powerful life force over their descendants.[78]

In West Africa, not all the dead individuals can join the ancestors. It is the quality of life lived on earth that will determine the status of a person after death.

Among the Akan of Ghana, it is only men who lived a life worthy of emulation, died at a ripe old age, and have had children who can join the ancestral spirits. The same is true among the Yorubas; a childless man will not be acknowledged as an ancestor.[79] The underlying reason why a childless person is not considered an ancestor is that by its nature and order of worship, ancestral cult is a family affair. Ancestors are the "pristine men and women who originated the lineage, clan or ethnic group and who provide the people their name(s)."[80]

Some African authors, like DomNwachukwu and Mbiti, contend that the Africans do not worship the ancestors. According to DomNwachukwu,

> Ancestors are respected and sometimes deified, but not worshipped. The fact that most Western anthropologists and even theologians, as well as some African ones, talk about ancestral worship does not mean that Africans, especially the Igbo, worship their ancestors.[81]

Mbiti also insisted that

> The departed, whether parents, brothers, sisters or children, form part of the family, and must therefore be kept in touch with their surviving relatives. Libation and giving of food to the departed are tokens of fellowship, hospitality and respect; the drink and food so given are symbols of family continuity and contact.

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[76] Asare Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, 36.
[77] Doumbia and Doumbia, *The Way of the Elders*, 9.
[78] Magesa, *African Religion*, 47.
[79] Asare Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, 36.
[80] Magesa, *African Religion*, 47.
[81] DomNwachukwu, *Authentic African Christianity*, 35.

> "Worship" is the wrong word to apply in this situation; and Africans themselves know very well that they are not "worshipping" the departed members of their family.[82]

But evidence from the ancestral cult practitioners themselves suggests that ancestors are not merely respected, as DomNwachukwu and Mbiti stated; they are truly worshipped. Even among the Igbo, early in the morning, the most senior members of the family pray and pour libations both to the creator God, as well as to the dead ancestors. Libation, offering of food, and sacrifice are all indigenous African ways of worship. Asare Opoku also notes, "The reality of their existence constitutes one of the most important features of West African traditional religion."[83] Adama and Naomi Doumbia, who are African traditional religionist practitioners, confessed,

> We pray for our ancestors and we perform sacrifice to honor their lives. We appreciate them for the life they gave us and the ways they continue to instruct and nurture us. They provide us with our names, our trades, and our knowledge. Every family receives its own set of rules and teachings from its ancestors.[84]

Therefore, it seems misleading to think that offering food, praying, and sacrificing are not part of worship, but mere respect. The traditional West Africans do not only venerate their departed; they have worshiped them and even today still do worship them.

The Concept of Human

N. K. Dzobo, in an article titled,"The Image of Man in Africa" contends that the African view of human beings is derived from the African view of reality as found in the indigenous religion, creation myths, personal names, symbols, and proverbs.[85] West Africans believe that God created all people and endowed them with gifts and personality, or a personal creative force (known as *se* or *kra* in Ewe, *okra* among the Akan group, *ori* according to the Yoruba, and *chi* to the Igbo). This creative force or principle is considered as part of the divine, and is thus a personal god to lead and guide the person through life.

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[82] Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 9.

[83] Asare Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, 36.

[84] Doumbia and Doumbia, *The Way of the Elders*, 9.

[85] N. K. Dzobo, "The image of Man in Africa," in *Person and Community: GhanaianPhilosophical Studies*, vol. 1, 128.

However, Emmanuel Onwu notes that among the Igbo, in spite of the concept of *Chukwu*, the Igbo world remains homo-eccentric. In other words, although *Chukwu* is the foundation of Igbo religion and philosophy, yet the Igbo world and philosophy are focused on man.[86] Among the Yoruba, Barry Hallen also observed the importance attached to the personal element arising from self-consciousness. For the Yoruba,

> When it comes to others I may have to rely upon verbal and nonverbal behavior. But for the self that I am, consciousness privileges me with introspective awareness. My behavior follows upon thought, and my thought originates in my conscious self, my inside or *inu.*[87]

What Hallen observed among the Yoruba is also true among other West Africans in particular, and Africans generally. John Mbiti insists that African ontology isbasically anthropocentric: "Man is at the very center of existence, and African peoples see everything else in its relation to the central position of man. God is the explanation of man's origin and sustenance: it is as if God exists for the sake of man."[88] According to Raphael Okechukwu Madu, life to the Igbo is the consciousness of being. The reason for this is that *mmadu* (human) for the Igbos "is the highest of all creatures. That is the meaning of the Igbo name *mmaduka* (human or man is greater)."[89]

Furthermore, the Igbo "conceive *mmadu* as integrally composed of a material element *Ahu* (body) and an immaterial spiritual element (*mmuo*[spirit], *nkpurobi*[soul], *obi* [heart]) often spoken as a tripartite."[90] Other West Africans like the Igbo believe in immortality, and traditional West Africans "emphasize that death is only a temporary separation (physical): men and women come, they stay for a while, they go, they fulfill some purpose in their day and generation, and then they pass on to the beyond and, later, reappear again in this world and so

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[86] Onwu, "*Uzo Ndu Na Eziokwu*," 11.

[87] Barry Hallen, *The Good, the Bad, and the Beautiful: Discourse about Values in YorubaCulture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 43.

[88] Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 90.

[89] Raphael Okechukwu Madu, *Studies in African and African-American Culture: African Symbols, Proverbs, and Myths* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992), 159.

[90] Ibid., 160.

complete the cycle."[91] This is the concept of reincarnation. "It is believed that only people who have lived well and died well are entitled to reincarnate or re-embody themselves in a beneficent manner."[92] Reincarnation is the reason that most West Africans place a great deal of emphasis on a proper or befitting burial, as it is considered a rite of passage into the spirit world, and the eventual return to earth. Improper burial could hinder a person from being reincarnated by the ancestors or by the gods.[93]

Another important element in the Igbo concept of humanity is that all men are equal. For this reason, the Igbo strive for equality or, as Uchendu puts it, near equality. "Equality ensures that no one person or group of persons acquires too much control over the life of others. This is an ideological obstacle to the development of a strong central authority."[94] Furthermore, Uchendu emphasize that what the Igbo mean by an egalitarian society is that which gives to its citizens an equal opportunity to achieve success. The stress is on achievement. The emphasis, Uchendu maintains, has two major effects. First, it makes the Igbo world "a highly competitive one in which the rules of competition may be manipulated by the status seeker in order to attain his goals. Secondly, it fosters a sociopolitical system, which is conciliar and democratic."[95] But it should be pointed out that other West African peoples are not as individualistic as the Igbo.

Nevertheless, they all agree with the Igbo that the goal of a man's life "is to achieve his *akara chi* (personal destiny) imprinted on his palms. This quest affects the social behavior or attitude of the Igbo."[96] The "underlying Igbo social organization is an individualistic principle clearly institutionalized in the concept of *chi*, which is a pronounced aspect of Igbo religion."[97] The implication, according to Dzobo, is that the human is

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[91] Ibid., 162.
[92] Onwu, "*Uzo Ndu Na Eziokwu*," 11.
[93] DomNwachukwu, *Authentic African Christianity*, 39.
[94] Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria*, 19.
[95] Ibid., 19-20.
[96] Uka, "The Traditional Igbo Society," 4.
[97] Ibid.

> free and self-determining and has a say in shaping his own history and destiny. Through his free action he releases forces which shape the world and society, and because of his dual nature he also can release forces which will destroy society and the world.[98]

However, even when the Igbo believes in predestination through *chi*, Uka notes that there is always an element of ambivalence. The *chi*'s role is not absolute. The Igbo proverb says, "When a man says yes, his *chi* echoes with him. In other words, *chi* determines a man's destiny and a man wills his destiny by manipulating his *chi*."[99] Uka concludes by contrasting the Igbo worldview from the Christian West on predestination by stating that, to the Igbo, predestination "does not imply that what is predestined by God must come to pass irrespective of whatever the individual does, rather, it is like an award by God to the individual and held in trust for him by his *chi*. The responsibility of obtaining the benefits of the award rests on him."[100] Therefore, human destiny to the Igbos or West Africans can be "unalterable and alterable. Viewed as a package sealed by God and given to man, it is unalterable. Viewed as a resource to be exploited, it is alterable."[101]

Sin and morality in Africa are generally societal. God is believed to have decreed morals, but it is the duty of the elders and community to enforce them. According to Mbiti,

> God is thought to be the ultimate guardian of human morality. But people do not believe that he punishes moral offenders, except very occasionally. It is up to society to deal with those who break its morals. If society fails to find out who may have committed certain crimes such as murder, then the community concerned may pray or perform rituals to ask God to punish the unknown murderer.[102]

The invisible world of the Deity, non-human or non-ancestral spirits, or any other spirit is considered amoral according to Megesa, in the sense that ethical judgments cannot be attributed to the actions of its inhabitants; but morality is for human beings who are agents of being ethically right or wrong.[103]

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[98] Dzobo, "The Image of Man in Africa," 131.
[99] Uka, "The Traditional Igbo Society," 5.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid.
[102] John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion* (London: Heinemann, 1975), 180.
[103] Magesa, *African Religion*, 71-72.

Conclusion

From the analysis of the West African worldviews, one may conclusively affirm that the West Africans are culturally complex. On the one hand, they have all the trappings of a traditional culture but, on the other hand, they possess the ingenious mindset of the modern capitalist West. Religiously, while the West Africans have the basic general revelation of God in nature, their knowledge of Him is riddled with contradictions. The distorted knowledge of God is buttressed by their veneration of other entities in their traditional religions, rather than the living God.