African Metaphysics and Theocracy: A Case Study of Theocratic Politics in Ogba Land, Rivers State, Nigeria

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Received September 11th, 2012; revised October 12th, 2012; accepted October 26th, 2012

The modus operandi of this paper is centered on governance and the metaphysical forces in Ogba Land. In other words the main focus of the article is that theocracy is concomitant with Ogba metaphysics. The salient points discussed include Maduabuchi Dukor’s reflection on African cosmic environment as posited in Dukor’s four great works on African philosophy. Others include Jewish theocratic tradition, Islamic theocratic tradition and Ogba theocracy and metaphysics in the light of Dukor’s philosophy. The researcher adopted the literature approach to achieve the aforementioned objectives.

Keywords: Metaphysics; Ogbaland; Africa; Theocracy

Introduction

Democratic principles were widespread in Ogba traditional political systems. Kingships, where they existed embodied also democratic ideals. Such an overbearing democratic attitude prevented the development of full-blown monarchies and theocracies. This allowed the apparent harmonious co-existence of forms of republicanism, monarchism and theocracy and democracy. The development of theocracy or even the mere presence of theocratic impulses is explained by the presence of dominant religious fervor in the Ogba traditional society and the Oba Sacred Kingship represented the highest developed democratic theocracy. The comparative analysis made in this chapter is intended to expose to what extent the development of theocracy was realized among the Ogbas. The choice of the Jewish and the Islamic traditions as normative is based on the fact that the two have been among the most elaborate traditions and have had tremendous influences on world history. Even today the theocratic ideology is a strong force in the international forum as well as in several national political discussions. This paper goes beyond the mere appreciation of the complexity of the Ogba political tradition of multi-systems seen to exist sometimes in comfortable opposition. But while proposals for the revival and development of the Ogba theocratic structures and principles are not envisaged, the study nevertheless, strongly suggests that its particular insight could be of assistance in confronting the present Ogba political predicament.

Maduabuchi Dukor’s Reflection on African Cosmic Environment

Here I want to briefly recall the thought of the above eminent philosopher on Africa cosmic world particularly that of the Ogba people. An understanding of it is of immense importance to the readers of my paper. The African theocratic King or the Oba of Ogba Land Dukor (2010: p. 104) has stated is the traditional paramount authority, he is the central and Supreme authority because in the Ogba people cosmological hierarchy of forces the Oba of Ogba land is the nearest to the ancestors. On that note the Oba of Ogba land is the living intermediary between the sacred and the profane world. It follows as a corollary that any pronouncement from the Oba is supported and backed by the spiritual authorities.

One of the most important issues in Ogba theocracy Dukor (2010: p. 2) has informed us is the overriding role of ethics. Ethical and social conception of justice is concomitant with Ogba people theocracy. That is, to say that, the Oga must obey the ethical laws of the land if further civilization is desired on the land. For Dukor (2010: p. 24) everything has a spiritual cause. Hence all physical and metaphysical laws have their offshoots from the spirit world. The Ogbas are religious, in every day affairs, be it economic or political they permeate the thought of God and yearn to commune with him. One of these thoughts (Dukor, 2010; also see Dukor, 2009) is the Ogba concept of polynomotheism which dominates African or Ogba belief in the Supreme Being and the lesser gods, who were created by the same Supreme Being. This is why Ogba religion could be said to be polynomotheism (Supreme Being in diversity). The Ogba people religion or her theocratic government could also be said to be “theistic panpsychic” because according to Dukor the Ogbas personify nature in form of gods or spirits. These forces as we are going to see pervade Ogba theocratic government.

What Is Theocracy

Theocracy is a term invented by the Hellenistic Jew Josephus Flavius (against Apion 2: p. 16) to describe the Hebrew political system by which God is acknowledged as ruler over Israel. It is therefore understood as a political organization in which God himself is recognized as head of state. Such government or state is believed to be under the immediate direction of God. Generally, the divine will is mediated through some charismatic or constituted leadership, or through an authoritative priesthood by which the system becomes a hierocracy. This was the case in the hierocratic government set up in Israel after the exile when the monarchy had disappeared. The theocratic form of government existed among many ancient peoples. In Mesopotamia it
was accepted that “Kingship was a divine institution and that it came down from heaven (Mackenzie, 1976: p. 475). In Sumeria, the god ruled the city through his viceroy, the ensi. The city itself was regarded as a temple community and as the estate of the god of the city (Ibii). Babylonian dynasty was believed to have come down from heaven at the beginning (Von Rad, 1975: p. 308). In Egypt the idea of divine choice was carried to extremes. This tradition affirmed the divinity of the king because he was the son of Re and Osiris. As Mackenzie (1976: p. 475) pointed out, “The divine power of kingship reached the Egyptian state directly through the person of the monarch. Hence the King was not a cultic officer but an object of cult”. The king was physically begotten by deity and was therefore the incarnation of the deity. The Pharaoh without any qualification was called “god” or “the good god” for he is the son of Re the creator god (De Vaux, 1961: p. 101).

The history of Christianity reveals quite a widespread theocratic impulses, ideas and indeed situations that were in essence theocratic. The influential church of the Middle Ages embodied the theme conspicuously. The papal title of Vacarius filii dei or the papal right of ex cathedra pronouncements which were considered as proper mediations of divine will is clear examples. Medieval hierarchies reacting against orthodox teachings often entertained theocratic ideals that were given expressions in millenial overtones. The theocratic idea even gained prominence when the Pope possessed also territorial sovereignty as was the case before the Italian unification in the 19th century.

In British protestant traditions and also in American religious history, theocratic loyalties are known to have flourished (of Bruner S. V. theocracy). In modern times and outside Christianity, theocratic ideas have been conspicuously exemplified in Tibetan Lamaism and in Islam. While some forms of theocracy have become extinct, others have survived to the present and even with reinforced intensity such that the subject dominates any discussion in modern political theology. While theocratic formulations have may varied in time and among people, a common affirmation—the rulership of some deity pervasion of other sectors of culture is obtained theocracy all the more flourishes.

**Jewish Theocratic Tradition**

Pre-monarchical Israel already was possessed by the theocratic vision. It saw itself as a people chosen by God. As Eichrodt (1961: p. 225) said, “God as king of Israel is not an idea born during the period the monarchy … but on the contrary, is one of the most genuine and most ancient doctrines in Israel. In the period of the judges the tribes resisted an early kingship because of the prevailing belief that God is the real king of Israel and that the proclamation of an earthly king would constitute betrayal”. The God-centred origin of Israel, her dependence on Him for the realization of her identity is the essential basis of God’s rule. Therefore “Jehovah was the supreme ruler of the Hebrews whose laws constituted at the same time religious and civil obligations” (Peters, 2012: p. 15). At this period God’s rule was accomplished through the patriarchs, through charismatic people, such as Moses and the judges, through the pentateuchal legislation and through the priesthood institution. These were persons or institutions whose actions were considered inspired and mediations of the divine will.

Israel’s monarchical institution was truly theocratic in spite of opposed currents in favour or against its institution. As De Vaux (1961: p. 99) pointed out, “Israel is Yahweh’s people and has no other master but him. That is why from the beginning to the end of its history Israel remained a religious community”. Digressions by individual kings notwithstanding, Israel’s monarchy remained essentially theocratic. Kings were regarded as God’s vicegerents. The king was an adopted son of God. He is not God’s son as in the sense the Pharaoh is the son of Re. if the king is God’s son per adoptionem it only means that “he is commissioned to rule by God himself, he governs with perfect justice and wisdom, he is the great benefactor and shepherd of his people which flourishes under his rule; yes, even the natural fertility of man, beast, and field increase through the blissful effort of this rule” (Von Rad, 1975: p. 41). Israel’s faith in Yahweh was that of a personal and transcendent God, making impossible the conception of the king as god. The making of a king in Israel was not mythically accomplished but by process of an historical legal act, “in view of which the king was summoned into a quite special relationship vis-à-vis Yahweh” (Von Rad, 1975: p. 320). He owes his election to God’s grace proclaimed through a prophetic oracle. The king just as the judges was a charismatic person, this means that he was endowed with the spirit of Yahweh. He fulfilled his mission by the impulses of Yahweh. Through anointing he was ritually conferred with the spirit and by this very rite the king was made a sacred person. Anointing conferred grace—the spirit of God took hold of Saul after he was anointed (1 Samuel 10: 10). The king a consecrated person, shares in the holiness of God, he is inviolable and this is why David refused to kill Saul because he is Yahweh’s anointed (1 Samuel 26: 9). The election of the king was purely Yahweh’s initiative. The case of David is a clear example (2 Samuel 16) which recounts the election of David as king over all Israel. His legitimating as a ruler commissioned by God was affected at the coronation ceremony in the sanctuary where he receives the royal protocol which contains the mandate to rule as given by the deity, as well as a new throne name (of Von Rad, 1975: p. 319). The king exercised authority as Yahweh’s viceroy. Von Rad (1975: p. 320) has pointed out that “the supreme privilege was that of ruling in God’s stead … if the anointed is the son, then he is also the heir; and Yahweh makes over the nations to him as a heritage. The king in Zion is thus the mandatory of Yahweh himself … The anointed sits as viceroy side by side with Yahweh himself; he does not sit upon his own throne but upon that of Yahweh”. The king does not act alone in his official duties. He does so in the presence of Yahweh and with his help.

In foreign politics the office of the anointed was a military one; he goes into battle against the foes of his people, battle for which Yahweh himself girds him (Ps, 18: 40), and with Yahweh’s help he vanquishes and destroys every enemy. In internal affairs he acts as the guardian and guarantor of law and justice. The presupposition of this is his own relationship to Yahweh—he knows himself to be completely subordinated to Yahweh’s will … he is in a right relationship with God… (Von Rad, 1975: p. 322).

**Islamic Theocratic Tradition**

Theocracy has remained essentially the Islamic tradition of politics. It seems very natural to it. The fundamental dogmas in Islam affirm it and uphold it. Theocracy has therefore, received
outstanding emphasis in the social and theological configurations of Islam. Islamic empires and nations have in the main the same tales of theocratic loyalties. The revelation granted Muhammad inter alia, is the affirmation of God who is creator and judge. From nothing, he created the universe and man and He will summon humanity before Him at the last day in order to judge them with perfect justice. He is sustainer of all creation and nothing else and nobody else is to be worshipped beside Him. Khrishna (1976: p. 37) thus explained the nature of Islam:

Islam is not a religion in the common, distorted meaning of the word, confining itself to the private life of man. It is a complete way of life, catering for all the fields of human existence. Islam provides guidance for all walks of life—individual and social, material and moral, economic and political, legal and cultural, national and international.

The famous Shahada or profession of faith states: “There is but one God and Muhammed is the apostle of God”. Muhammed made no claims to divinity, nor have several miracles posthumously attributed to him changed the view for most adherents. He is the prophet of Allah and is such a messenger that to obey him meant to obey Allah (Schimmel, 1971: p. 133). The fundamental concept in the structure of the Islamic community is faith and not kinship or tribal affinities. With this basic ecclesiastical principle Muhammed moulded “the different groups in Madina into a single community of faith, no longer clinging to the inherited Arab ideals of tribal honour but declaring Allah, the one God, the real ruler of His community (Umma) and himself as the organ of His Supreme Will” (Schimmel, 1971: p. 129). This is the theocratic essence in Islam. God rules his community, indeed his family equals and he does so through Muhammed who mediates His divine will.

The five pillars of Islam, namely, Shahada or the affirmation of the faith, the Zakat or obligatory alms tax, salat or the five daily prayers, the month of fasting—Ramadam—and the annual pilgrimage to Mecca known as the Haj were effective instruments which Muhammed employed “to hold together his community of simple and often rather savage Bedouins” (Jansen, 1976: p. 21). The Koran is central in Islam. It is the word of God spoken to Muhammed by Gabriel, the angel of God. Popular tradition maintains that “the book is not a new revelation but exists in archetype in heaven; fixed in the very essence of God and delivered piecemeal to the prophet” (Hordon, 1963: p. 343). Rubman (1966: p. 33) has thus described the conception of the divine quality of the Koran. “The Koran is purely divine … Divine Word … equally intimately related to the inmost personality of the prophet’s heart … but Muhammed was not himself divine, wholly or partly”. The centrality of the Koran is evidenced in the fact that “both the inner values of life personal piety and the external rules of behaviour—socio-political questions, legal decisions are regulated essentially by the same God—given laws which have been revealed in the Quran” (Schimmel, 1971: p. 126).

When a solution to a problem is not found in the Koran, the prophet’s example becomes normative and there has arisen several traditions (hadith) of his customary behaviour. Islamic jurisprudence, the sharia is a detailed articulation of God’s injunctions taken from the Koran and tradition and covering the areas of ritual, cult, politics, social relations and legal precepts. The Sharia is a prominent organ in the realization of Islamic theocracy. Since the Islamic community is under the direct supervision of Allah, the existence of other divinely authorized institutions within the community is not provided. The learned Ulama who are interpreters of divine teaching are laymen. Orthodox Islam does not in any way envisage a hierocracy. Rather, as Horden (1963: p. 360) has pointed out, “in place of sacerdotal hierarchy, orthodox Islam has ever looked to the political sovereign for the direction of Moslem affairs, not excluding impositions of sanctions for breach of koranic precepts and interpreting these precepts by civil decree”.

In Iran for example where the Ulama has assumed clergy status and become a ruling class, they have tended to experiment on extreme theocratic forms. Extracts from Khomeni’s book, Islamic Government, a collection of lectures given in Iraq in 1970 reveal the tendency.

In our day … the government, authority and management over the people, as well as the collection and expenditure of revenues has been entrusted to the religious experts. God will punish anyone who disputes their authority.

Government in Islam … is constitutional … in the sense that those in power are bound by a group of conditions and principles made clear in the Koran and by the example of the Prophet Muhammed … thus Islamic government is a government of divine law … the actual authority to legislate belongs exclusively to God.

Since Islamic government is a government of law, it is the religious expert and no one else who should occupy himself with the affairs of government. It is he who should function in all these areas in which the prophet functioned … There is no room for opinions or feelings in the system of Islamic Government: rather the prophet and the Imams and the people all follows the wish of God and his laws (Laffin, 1979: p. 162).

In a comparison of Islamic and Western democracies Mawdudi (Laffin, 1979: p. 91) thereby offers the synopsis of the Islamic theocratic principles. What distinguishes Islamic democracy from Western democracy is that while the latter is based on the concept of popular sovereignty the former rests on the principle of popular Khalifa (leadership). In Western democracy, the people are sovereign, in Islam sovereignty is vested in God and the people are His caliphs or representatives. In the former the people make their own laws; in the latter they have to follow and obey the laws given by God through His prophet. In one the government undertakes to fulfil the will of the people; in the other the government and the people who form it have all to fulfil the purpose of God … Islamic democracy is subservient to the Divine law and exercises its authority in accordance with the injunction of God and within the limits prescribed by Him.

Whether, indeed, Islam of such qualifications merits the democratic attribute may remain a matter of relative interpretation. What is worthy of note is the affirmation of the theocratic principles which the comparison very poignantly expresses. Islamic theocratic tradition centralizes the Koran and the Prophet Muhammed and from the two are derived the legislations and all the necessary injunctions by which the divine purpose of rulership is realized.

Ogba Theocracy and Metaphysics

If anything the Ogba traditional political systems are essentially democratic with the segmentary lineage as the basic prin-
principle of socio-political organization in all the variations. Even
where title system, secret societies, kingships both secular and
sacred obtained, the basic principles of lineage representations
and consensus remained. The tradition of politics incorporates
the Supreme Being, the ancestors and the deities in their system
of governance (Dukor, 2010: pp. 103-104), thus the metaphysical
principles or laws of these sacred beings must be
strictly obeyed, hence there is no compartmentalization be-
metaphysical laws demands ritual reparation, the metaphysical
laws are therefore the divine will to which the people must
submit or risk the deity’s displeasure. Such is a dominant con-
ception even in the well elaborated theocratic systems, where
law is regarded as divine will.

Conclusion

The semitic-originated theocratic paradigms arising from
concrete event or a dramatic revelation have endured to the
present in the Jewish and Islamic traditions respectively. While
the Arab model has enjoyed conspicuous continuity in its re-
ligio-political ebbs and flows, Jewish theocratic tradition has
had its dark ages but has risen to monumental heights as Jewish
nationhood regained its existence.

The Exodus engendered Jewish theocratic concept. Referring
to the event Pinchas Lapide (1987: p. 48) explained: “It was
neither Moses nor Aaron who are the heroes of this drama but
God…” On this basis, a complex linkage has been fashioned in
modern Israel. According to Mazuri (1990: p. 150) the very
notion of “returning to Israel, the fanatical commitment to the
retention of Jerusalem as the capital, and the choice of the name
Israel for a twentieth century nation-state are all symptoms of
an underlying merger between biblical nostalgia and Jewish
nationalism within the ethos of Zionism”. In the centre of world
and regional politics, at least the Jewish and Islamic theocratic
ideas are very much alive and active. In the attempt to articulate
the more or less theocratic forms, we noted the complexity of
institutional interactions and interdependence in the Ogba tradi-
tion of politics. It is amazing how the traditional mind so in-
genuously propelled the humanistic ideas of democracy and
“dictatorship” of theocracy such that each made vital contribu-
tions according to the needs of the society. Compared to the
Jewish and the Islamic, the Ogba theocratic tradition was un-
dominating. As constituent element Ogba tradition of politics,
confirms perhaps to an evolutionary trend—the common stage
in socio-political and religious development. This may be the
pre-humanistic stage, before man through his abilities began to
assert his authority in several of human and mundane affairs.
To some extent this interpretation may be valid given that ex-
isting theocratic systems, especially the undiluted types, en-
gender dangerous tensions in regional and global political or-
ders in modern times.

Perhaps for such reason as the fundamental Ogba democratic
culture, even where theocratic forms achieved significant height
in articulation, none of its elements became a system that
claimed an overall acceptability. Otherwise, a more politically
unified society organized and furthered on dominant theocratic
principles could have emerged. Yet what was religious contri-
bution served the model role guiding the many variations of
Ogba political organization. It is however recommended that
other African tribes should inculturate the good aspects of Ogba
theocratic culture. Such inter cultural inculturation would en-
able African tribes to meet up the cumbersome of modern soci-
ety.
As Dukor (2010: p. 12) has stated:

Culture is not static but dynamic; there have been emergence of values consequent upon the complexity of modern society. Society that fails to meet up the challenges of modern time would degenerate and asphyxiate in the competitive environment of scientific world order.

Religious and secular acculturation has endangered religion’s function in politics of modern Ogba society. The contributions to the value structure arising from the more or less forms of theocracy became marginalized. Some other ethnic groups in Nigeria who are participants in the national politics are fundamentally impelled either by traditional cultural model or by a purely religious one. The Ogbas are essentially guided by ultra-democratism which following many opinions is responsible for individual and sub-group conflicts that have dangerous implications for the tradition of politics in the contemporary Nigerian socio-political context. The question which arises touches on a certain pre-disposition that determines for a people, reactive patterns in the multi-ethnic society. As the influences of religion have been suppressed, a vacuum exists which a guide for the politics of the future must fill. The Hausa-Fulani have the theocratic paradigm, and the Yoruba have the cultural model. For the Ogba two options exist: one may be based on the historical event that made crucial demands on all Ogba, directly or indirectly; the other on the irritation of a certain personality, a leader that commands trust and respect, and who is perceived as a powerful symbol of unity and strength. Both of these could serve without compromising Ogba democratic attitude and they could serve as good as the theocratic or cultural paradigm.

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