

Unpopular Essays

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"EVERY human group has their mythology, but what makes that of the Jews particularly important is that at a particular point in time, there was an attempt (by Jesus Christ) to turn their tribal God to a universal God. Today, there are said to be about 500 million people who take him seriously. Jesus Christ was one of their numbers, but the bulk of the Jews still maintain that Jehovah is God of Israel."

THE picture painted by Eleazu is still relevant today, but some Nigerians are out to indigenise the loot. As members of the Apostolic and Brotherhood churches slugged it out in Calabar, the business sides of the two organisations continued undisturbed. If the violence overspreads to the transport empire of the "Brotherhood", the matter shall be decided in court! It does not matter that Jehovah has warned that "vengeance is Mine!"

Nigerians And The Jewish God

THE headlines have been particularly dramatic. First, a woman preferred death to blood transfusion because her religious sect, the Jehovah's Witnesses takes a stern view of such matters.

Second, some two little children in a school near Ibadan were convinced that allowing little children to follow Christ did not include reciting the national pledge, and so they conscientiously objected.

There was fire on the mountain!

The Anglican Bishop of Ibadan, the Right Reverend Timothy Olu-fosoye was incensed! And he went to town on the entire Jehovah's Witnesses sect. "Their books and papers are full of hate, destructive criticisms, attacks on christians and muslims alike and denials of the plain teaching and the love of God," the holy man raged in righteous indignation!

But is all this noise necessary? Can we not spare ourselves these pitched battles on behalf of Jehovah? It is our view, carefully considered, that the genealogy of the God Jehovah is such as does not merit all the passions being expended on him by Nigerians, and indeed, by any person who is not a Jew.

The history of the human species is replete with stories of ethnic and racial

groups that have at one time or the other, held themselves above the rest of the clan. The remedial feature of such stupidity has always been that when the imperatives of history catch up with the groups concerned, they have quickly come to their senses and championed the cause of human equality the world over.

So was it that when the conquering Romans descended on the City States of the Greeks and annexed them to the sprawling Roman Empire, the Greeks quickly abandoned their insistence that only Greeks were capable of higher values. And other people, because they were barbarians, were so close to nature that all those fancy talks of democracy, justice and ability to reason in the abstract were totally outside the realm of their capabilities.

There has unfortunately been one exception to this rule. The Jews still hold themselves as a special race despite the overwhelming verdicts of history.

That entire attitude has been built around a tribal God, invisible even to the Jews themselves who, according to their mythology, once entered into a covenant with them: "I will take you for my people, and I will be your God."

In fact, their rela-

tionship to this God has been basically contractual, complete with laws of association as revealed by Jehovah himself to those leaders who, according to the mythology, have done business for the tribe. Leaders by the names of Noa, Abraham and Moses.

Every human group has their mythology, but what makes that of the Jews particularly important is that at a particular point in time, there was an attempt (by Jesus Christ) to turn their tribal God into a universal God. Today, there are said to be about 500 million people who take him seriously.

Jesus Christ was one of their numbers, but the bulk of the Jews still maintain that Jehovah is God of Israel. At best, their attitude has been patronising, irritatingly conceited. "For you are a people holy to your God. The Lord your God chose you out of all nations on earth to be his special possession. It was not because you were more numerous than any other nation that the Lord cared for you and chose you, for you were the smallest of all the nations. It was because the Lord loved you and stood by his oath to your forefathers."

This tribal connection of Jehovah has put non-Jewish theologians in an extremely

difficult position explaining his universal relevance. In the main, they have short-circuited this impossible responsibility by stressing the sanctimonious spirit of the Jews.

The Jehovah's Witnesses branch in Nigeria explains apologetically that everybody is "a spiritual Jew" and so should consider God's promise to the tribe. There is no effort to justify those instances in the old Testament of the Bible where, as "the Lord of Hosts," Jehovah has led Israel in battle against other tribes and in the process, slaughtered a lot of people who were not Jews.

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Theologian G. W. Anderson employs one of these diversionary tactics. "In the midst of a polytheistic and pantheistic world, the Jews professed faith in the living one God."

The statement, we have already said, is an intelligent method generally employed by theologians to beg the case, but it also exposes the preference theology has for half

Anderson praises the unflagging loyalty of the Jews to Jehovah without admitting that their concept of him as one God was restricted to the tribe, and that it was affirmed in their various contracts with him in tacit recognition of the fact that there were other Gods for other tribes.

The Yorubas, for example, had their Oduduwa, just as provident as Jehovah. But the idea is no longer current because the tribe has since realised that being the chosen group of Oduduwa is totally irrelevant to their contemporary needs. And because the Yorubas were not part

of the encompassing Roman Empire with all its facilities for the spread of ideas and transmission of literary records.

The result is that Oduduwa and all the other Gods that are indigenous to Nigeria have since been consigned to the dustbins of history.

On the other hand, the introduction of Jehovah into Nigeria has always respected

one principle, the principle of business. On the apex of the leadership, you have a small group of unfeeling, astute businessmen who carefully manipulate the inability of the broad masses of the people to come to grips with the unsettling side of their environment to their business benefits.

The first to employ this tactic were the white trading/colonial Britons in Nigeria. In his new book, Dr Uma Eleazu, director of the Think Tank, explains how they did it:

"The missionary, the trader and the administrator, all were in the same business of promoting the commerce of the fledgling empire. Indeed, missionaries preached Christ, they baptised, they built schools and hospitals, but all these were practical aspects of 'cleanliness is next to godliness' (which) required women to appear in church in Victorian gowns, usually made from as many as eight yards of cloth. Men had to wear suits, complete with pig-tails to church. Cleanliness also meant buying a bar of soap made from Nigerian palm oil at a price which was equivalent to the price of half a gallon of that same oil (enough to make six bars). If cleanliness is not next to godliness, what would happen to Lancashire haberdashers or the soap makers of Unilever?"

The picture painted by Eleazu is still relevant today, but some Nigerians are out to indigenise the loot. As members of the Apostolic and Brotherhood churches slugged it out in Calabar, the business sides of the two organisations continued undisturbed. If the violence ever spreads to the transport empire of the "Brotherhood," the matter shall be decided in court! It does not matter that Jehovah has warned that "vengeance is Mine!"