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PREAMBLE

One of the pre-occupations of all cultures is the attempt to provide an account of the origin, and destiny of human life and that of the universe. In such accountings an attempt is made to explain the puzzle of human existence and also to explain how such things as evil and illness, death and suffering came to be and what purposes they serve in the ordering of life and the universe.

Myths are usually employed to account for how and why human beings and things came to be. Such myths are referred to as creation myths, for example, as we have in the first three chapters of the book of Genesis in the Hebrew Scripture. It must be pointed out that myth as such is not a documented historical event and so does not contain historical truth, but it is best used to teach some existential truths about human life and about what is considered to be the purpose in the creation of the universe and of human beings.

We shall make use of the Hebrew creation myth referred to above, and the African Ewe creation myth found among the Ewe of West Africa to account for the creation of humankind and the universe and to provide frames of orientation and comprehension for our understanding of and orienting of ourselves faithfully to our existential problems.

I have chosen the creation stories from the two religious traditions because, as African Christians we have inherited two religious traditions, the Christian and African traditional religious heritages and so to be culturally faithful we must make use of the insights into and understanding of life of our fore-bearers and equally use that of the Christian tradition to direct and guide our life in our today's sort of world. We shall first examine the biblical creation myth with reference to the insights and the understanding of ourselves and our existential problems that will lead to the promotion of the welfare of humanity and the total integrity of creation.

A. The Biblical Creation Myth:

According to the Genesis account of creation, as found in the first three chapters of the Bible, the first two human beings made up of a man and a woman were created out of clay which is perishable and in the image of God who is spirit and thus imperishable uncreated first Creation.

Human beings received the breath of God in whose image they are made and began to live or became living souls. Human beings were therefore created as perfect human beings i.e., as sinless human beings and placed in the Farm/Garden of Eden to start living a sinless human life.

It must be made clear that, to be sinless means to live our human existence according to the will of God, that is, to live this human life in a way that will make it full of meaning, joy, and satisfaction. The first human beings started life as those who had not broken the will of God for our human existence but are capable of doing so because they are human as well as spiritual beings.

According to the Farm/Garden of Eden story the first created human beings disobeyed the command of God which was given to enable them to achieve a perfect human existence. The first two human beings thus vitiated the integrity of their perfect created beings and existence and thus became imperfect through sinning and Human Existence has been marked "imperfect" ever since.

The Biblical myth of creation has been interpreted to show how wrong doing and evil entered the human heart and our world. viz. through the disobedience of the first two human beings called Adam and Eve, who, however, started life as perfect human beings in an ideal living situation which is a Farm/Garden. The assumption is that whatever that might have gone wrong with our human existence and our world, might have started with the first two human beings in their existence as a man and a woman.

The Christian tradition maintains that the fallen humanity and creation, however, have been redeemed by the work, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth who became the sole redeemer of the fallen humanity and world. God's image in human beings can therefore be marked again as "perfect" by faith. The restoration of this primordial perfect and sinless state has therefore become the mission of Jesus to the world.

The existence of evil and human wrong-doing and death are still real facts of life, i. e. they are existential effects and they must start from somewhere and with some people. But to maintain that the first human beings were perfect and who became imperfect through disobedience and later on made perfect again in Jesus, the Redeemer, has left some very important questions unanswered:

How do we explain the continued existence of evil and human wrong-doing, the existence of conflict, suffering, and oppression still in our world? How do we explain the havoc caused by natural disasters like volcanoes earthquakes, tornadoes, and epidemics? How do we explain the fact that the Nazi Holocaust and interminable Arab-Israeli wars, the slave trade and the Rwanda genocide all happened in our current era?

We can historically compile a catalogue of the positive human achievements over the last two thousand years, and so the fair conclusion we can draw from all that has happened in the course of our human history is, that we cannot claim absolute perfection nor imperfection for human beings at any time in our human history, and that the natural world has dealt kindly and unkindly with our human interests and aspirations. We see then both good and evil as existential facts and both of them might have originated with our mythical first man and woman. Human existence is originally made to be cultivatable: that is to say it has the capacity for good and evil.

We must, however, look more closely at the Biblical creation myth for any further enlightenments before we turn to the African traditional myth of creation for any new insights and direction for our human existence.

2. God the Creator as a Farmer: The World His Farm

The complaint against Western theology in Africa is that its principle of interpretation of human existence is not relevant to our needs in Africa and its method is abstract and so Western Christian theology is not addressing the real problems of Africa faithfully as it should. African Christian theologians have therefore proposed new principles of interpretation by means of which we have first and foremost a new vision of the Good/God in us and in our human situations.

The new images of God and Jesus found in contemporary African theologies are many and thought-provoking. God and Jesus are imaged as "the integral healer", as "Chief", as "Elder Brother", as "Master of Initiation", as "Ancestor," as "Black Messiah", i.e. Liberator, as "Plenitude of Human Maturity". These images are culturally meaningful to us as means of need satisfaction. They open new avenues for understanding and perceiving our problems and our existence in Africa. One of these new images is that of God, Jesus and the Spirit of God as a Farmer and the world as their Farm. Let us look more closely at the Image of God as a Farmer and the created order of any kind e.g. the extended family as his/her farm.

Looking closely at the Biblical creation myth, especially as we find it in Genesis 2, we will see that God was not just a Creator, that is the "divine cause" of certain observable phenomena in the universe, he was a Farmer/Gardener and so made a Farm and grew fruit trees and animals in it. It was on this Farm called 'Eden' that he created the first man and woman and so Adam and Eve "were born on the Farm". God's first command to the first man and woman was to cultivate and take care of the Farm (Gen. 2:15). This means that God as the First Farmer made those he created into responsible farmers and overseers and thus entrusted the created work, God's Farm to their care and development.

The image of God as a Farmer and the created order as a Farm entrusted to human beings is a powerful and dynamic symbol which Africans will not have any difficulty in comprehending and conceptualizing. We can cite and discuss some accounts of creation as farming and with God as the Farmer from the Bible.

God the Careful Vine Farmer: In Isaiah 5 and Ps. 80:8-13, God was pictured as a careful Farmer who "... dug the soil and cleared it of stones; he planted the finest vines. He built a tower to guard them, dug a pit for treating the grapes (5:2). It is in the gospel of John that Jesus declared openly that God is a Farmer. He said: "I am the real vine and my Father is the Farmer". He pictures God again as a responsible and careful Farmer who "..... breaks off every branch in me that does not bear fruit, he prunes every branch that does bear fruit, so that it will be clean and bear more fruit". (15: 1,2).

According to Jesus the Kingdom of God is like a vineyard/farm and God is the owner of the vine-farm and he lets out the vine-farm to human being as his tenants who are accountable to him for the management of the vine-farm. Human beings then are responsible co-creators/farmers in the cultivation of the world of human community as God's farm. (Matt. 20: 1-6; Mk. 12: 1-12; Lk. 20: 9-19).

3. God as The Sheep Farmer

In both the Hebrew and Christian scriptures God is pictured as the good sheep-farmer and the rulers of the people of Israel are his co-sheep-farmers who failed to care for the people. Thus God spoke through the prophet Ezekiel and said: "I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep and I will find them a place to rest". (Ezek. 34: 15).

In John's gospel Jesus declared himself as the good sheep-farmer (Jn. 10:11) and charged Peter to take care of his sheep-farm, i.e. the community of the young followers of Jesus.

4. God as the Fish-Farmer

At the very beginning of his farming ministry Jesus called four fish-farmers:- Simon, Andrew, James and John to be his followers and he said to them: "Come with me, and I will teach you to catch men" (Mk. 1:14-20) i.e. how to farm human beings into a faithful community of Christ's followers.

5. God as the Wheat-Farmer

In the parable of the Sower Jesus pictured God as a Farmer who went to sow human beings as seeds in his Human Farm. According to the parable some of the seeds did not fare well, they were destroyed by all kinds of unfavourable soil and environmental conditions e.g. choking weeds, and crop-destroying pests of all kinds; seed eating birds, rocky grounds, hot sun, thorns of bushes (Matt. 13:1-9) but all was not lost, some bore fruits at all cost.

In the parable of God as a Wheat-Farmer we encounter the doctrine of the origin of good and evil. Good and evil are facts of life and they are given at one and the same time as we are sown as human seeds in the world. Evil, suffering and death are not strange invaders of our human existence. The presence of evil pictured as choking-weeds has made human beings responsible co-workers with God, the Chief Farmer. (I Cor. 3:5-9).

6. Jesus as a Teacher-Farmer of People

Jesus as a Teacher - rabbi, became a farmer of human beings par excellence. He came out to farm our humanity and human community, that is, to bring out the best in our humanity (Eva be yeanyo agbe) and he was killed for doing so. But all was not lost but as he himself said: "I am telling you the truth: a grain of wheat remains no more than a single grain unless it is dropped into the ground and dies. If it does die, then it produces many grains". (John 12:24). We farm our humanity for life to come out of it.

7. God as a Farmer-Healer

If God is a Farmer then one serious implication is that he/she is a Healer. The Ewe expression for "to heal" is "da gbe le nunye" which literally means: "pull the weeds around me"; as we pull weeds around a plant so that it will have the chance to grow and so cultivation of a human being is getting rid of the weeds of illness and sin, of poverty and oppression, of evils and injustice, of ignorance and complacency in the life of a person so that he/she will grow. Thus Hezekiah prayed when he was sick: "Heal me and let me live". (Is. 38:16b). God then is a Farmer-Healer and we should perceive

the Church of God as a Farm and a Healing Shrine and this is exactly what the Christian sects have turned the church to be now in Africa. Healing is a strong affirmation of life and so Hezekiah again declared, "Heal me and let me live" and cultivation of our life implies not only promoting growth but liberating our human existence and resources from choking weeds and crop-destroying pests.

8. God as the Farmer-Midwife

Another powerful image that is implied in the image of God as a Farmer is that, God is a Midwife; God is the person who helps the Earth of our Existence to bring forth the young plants of our being and grows them from seeds to fruiting trees.

The seed state of our life is referred to as our 'Christhood', and our Christhood is the ground of our unity with one another and with God, and so Jesus-Christi said; "that they may all be one; even as thou, Father art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us" (Jn. 17-21). The important thing about the image of God as the Farmer-Midwife is that it provides us with a clear picture of our essential being. Our essential being i.e., our Christhood is not loaned to us from outside but it is an essential aspect of our being which with the help of God as the Farmer-Midwife is brought out into visibility. God then exists our Christhood, as the field exists the lilies of the field in spring time.

This is the process of our spiritual unfoldment and it is like the opening the door of our Mother Earth - Bomeno/Nyame Obatan Pa for the imprisoned power to exist. For this reason our elders say that 'life is like our anthill, it is built from inside out and never from outside.'

The poverty and the shamness of our present cultural life in Africa is largely due to the fact that we think we can live our life from outside inside and this has led to senseless and rootless copying of the ways of living of other peoples and so we are finding it difficult to be original and creative contributors to human progress. To some extent Missionary Christianity has been responsible for our cultural stuntedness, because Africans have been presented with dry Christianity that has killed our cultural originality and creativity and overstressed life lived according to Christian moral rubrics. We have come round, as a result of all this, to have a moralizing type of Christianity and so we do not have a total devotion and commitment to the total development and evolution and cultivation of the dignity and greatness and the grandeur in us as Africans. Our true spiritual development and transformation is in the cultivation of our true African humanity and human existence.

B. 1. The African Ewe Creation Myth

According to the popular Ewe creation myth the foundation of creation is the existence of the Creator Mother/Father Spirit and a Human Farm. The Creator Mother Spirit is called Bomeno meaning "the Mother of Human Farm" which is called Bome or Bofe. Bomeno moulds human beings from clay and breathes into their nostrils the spirit/the breath of her life. The molded human clay becomes amegbeto, meaning literally "the living molded clay" as over against "the dead or spiritless molded clay". Life then is the unity of the Spirit of Mother God and matter and a human being is thus the unity of spirit and matter.

This unity, however, is a unity conceived in terms of duality. The relationship between the opposites in the duality - spirit and matter - is like the relationship between man and woman, between husband and wife. The opposites in the duality are therefore not antithetical but rather complementary and equilibrrious and contrasting.

It is a general belief in the indigenous African religious tradition that each individual's pattern and content of life is a choice that he/she makes in the other world of human farm, Bome.

The unique pattern and content of life that each individual human being chooses is called gbetsi or dzogbese. (This concept of life is what is implied in Jesus' parable of the talents). Gbetsi then is the possible life that lies within the power of an individual to realize this life. This possible life is the potential state of being thus a seed, or an egg/possibility out of which the individual has to strive/struggle to realize his/her humanity (amenyenye - Ewe) in time and space. Human beings are therefore created as seeds of eggs, that is, they are created as potential beings and therefore have the power (capacity) of becoming. Each human seed (potential) has the capability of becoming a human being. The process of becoming the being inherent in the seed/eggs is referred to as human existence or in Ewe - amenyenye, or agbenono, ametoto or amezuzu. As the goal of the human potential (seed) is to become, all things being equal, a true humanity (Ewe, ame ghagbe).

The seed and oak tree analogies should not, however, be taken literally to mean that the human seed is bound willy-nilly to grow into true humanity like the mango seed becoming the mango tree. It is possible for the human seed to become a true humanity or a false humanity. To the Ewe, life therefore is possibility, it has the power to be and to do anything that is possible within its power. It is within the power of an individual human being to be a saint or a villain, to choose to exist or not to exist. Freedom of choice is thus an essential dimension of our human existence. Again refer to the parable of the talents.

2. Human Existence

The vital question in the Ewe creation story, as far as the origin of human existence is concerned is "what does it mean to exist?". We shall examine the English word "to exist" and its Latin root "existere" and the Ewe word "nye" and "to" for an answer to this question. The verb "to exist": the basic English understanding of the verb "to exist" comes from the Latin verb "existere" which means "to stand out or forth".

The Ewe words "nye" and "to" have the same meaning as ex-sistere. Nye means "to push something out, to thrust out into the domain of reality or from the domain of potential to the domain of the actual" and so anything that emerges from its potential state to its actual state is described in Ewe as eto e.g. "to cut tooth" the Ewe say "eto adu" - "the tooth has stood out" - "to grow hair on the head" they say "eto da" - she/he has caused hair to stand out on his/her head". The verb "nye" is likewise used to express the coming into being of something which has not been there before, e.g. "a mother brings forth a new baby" - "enye vi": the Ewe way of saying, "he has a good personality" i.e. "enye ame", literally it means - "he/she has brought forth a moral person and not a an animal".

According to the Ewe way of thinking we can say "a mother has existed" (nye, to - Ewe) a baby; "the university "exists" scholars and graduates and God "exists" human beings. It is in this sense that we can say that God is a Mother.

"To exist" (nye or to - Ewe) then means to emerge or come out from the background of human possibility into the domain of human reality. According to the Ewe version of creation of human beings, creation is a process which starts as possibility and evolves into actuality, and this process is a struggle and so "to exist" is to be engaged in a struggle to come out of human possibility. Our human nature has, therefore, more than one possibility. It has the possibility of realizing creative humanity or destructive humanity, of realizing a peaceful existence or warlike existence, of loving or hating, of obeying the will of God or disobeying him. The human struggle, therefore, is not only an existential struggle, it is a moral struggle to choose to be or not to be, to choose life or death, to choose to do good or evil. The individual human being has to choose between the contrasting dualities of human existence. Every moment of our life is a moment of decision and this makes life unavoidably a struggle.

The essence of our humanity then is not an a priori idea of humanity, but it is the power of the human being to exist, the power to achieve the goal of human existence. It is in the power of becoming, and to translate our being from its potential state into its actual state that we see as our humanity.

The individual human being fulfills his/her being precisely by existing (nyenye), by standing out as a true humanity and as the individual self-hood that he/she is and refusing to be absorbed into a system and the social collectivity. Again look at the fingers of the hand. They represent the the unique individuals that exist out of the collective whole. Individual human beings can be said then to exist out of God, the Spirit Mother as beings.

3. Human Existence: As a Dynamic Process

It is then only a human being who stands or can stand out (exist, nye to) and is aware of his/her being out to be who or what he/she may become. The human being, therefore, keeps on emerging from where he/she is at any given moment, and so is always going out of himself/herself, he is always becoming, moving out, and going beyond where he/she is at any given time. Thus, one Ewe proverb says, "Dzudzo mele alifo o" meaning, "there is no stopping to rest for those on the journey of life", St. Paul expresses beautifully this conception of life this way: "I do not claim that I have already succeeded or have already become perfect. I keep striving to win the prize for which Christ Jesus has already won me to himself. Of course, my brothers, I really do not think that I have already won it; one thing I do, however, is to forget what is behind me and do my best to reach what is ahead. So I run straight towards the goal in order to win the prize, which is God's call through Christ Jesus to the life above". (Phil. 3:12-14).

4. As continuous renewal of Life

One of the Ewe basic conceptions of life is that, it is made up of continuous rejuvenation and renewal, symbolized by a circle of serpent drawn with its tail back into its mouth. This circle of rejuvenation and renewal of life is not just a mechanical repetition of events. It is used to express the importance of and continuous rejuvenation and renewal of becoming or existing/nyenye in which we have the essence of human existence. We become as we die to the old and resurrect to a newness of life. We live then by dying and existing into a newness of life.

According to the African conception of life the essence of being is in the power of becoming. To be is to continue to become and to transcend one's being. Human being is a transcendent existent in his/her being, he/she is ecstatic, used in its original sense - ecstatis and so he/she is at any moment going beyond himself/herself. And so the human 'I-am-ness', 'nye' is in the being that is in its becoming, that goes beyond himself/herself and knows it. To live then is to keep thrusting yourself into new possibilities of existence. The major characteristics of existence then are emergence or nyenye, self-transcendence, and not-yet-ness.

We emerge from our animality into rationality, from rationality into creative humanity/spirituality. The individual, however, does not emerge from his/her given situation in terms of laws operating from outside because as our elders say 'Living is like the building of an anthill, it is built from inside and never from outside'. Robert Browning puts it this way, living is like "..... opening out a way whence the imprisoned splendor may escape than effecting entry for a light supposed to be without" (Eric Nutterworth, 1968).

CONCLUSION

The Hebrew Biblical creation myth as found in Genesis 1,2,3 and the Ewe creation myth share some common elements but they differ in some vital respects. The two creation stories posit the primary existence of God the Creator confronted with creative raw materials namely chaos, soil from the ground and water and the Spirit of God as the deciding factor in the creation of, especially, human beings.

The next postulate of the two creation stories is the existence of the world as one big farm/garden of God who is the Chief Farmer. The Farm of God is called the Garden of Eden in the Bible and in the Ewe creation myth the Farm is called Bome - a word for farm in the Ewe language and God the Farmer is a mother called Bomeno - the mother of Bome.

We may call "the seed state of our existence" as the unconscious state of being. Thus we can refer to the period of time when Adam and Eve were in the Garden before the fall as the seed stage of their lives; for the Ewe the seed state of existence is a state of all kinds of potentialities and it stays with human beings throughout their earthly existence. In other words, as a seed and plant on God's Farm the individual always has a growing edge and so capable of growth and development.

One very important purpose of a creation myth is to give an account of how evil and wrong doing, sinning and hate came to be present in creation, and how to overcome, if not them completely then, their harmful effects.

According to the Hebrew creation story evil and sinning came into the world through the disobedience of the first man and woman and from there evil and sinning have spread like an epidemic to engulf the whole creation. The rest of Hebrew and Christian scriptures have been given to account for how to overcome evil and wrong doing in the world.

The Ewe doctrine of evil and good and of how to overcome the harmful effects of evil and sin can only be understood by examining the Ewe traditional theory of being and the theory of the seed-like origin of human beings.

The Ewe believe that any thing that has "a front" has also "a back" and so even though reality is one (monism) yet it has two phenomena and is like a door which has an exist and entrance but remains as one entity called a door.

Likewise the created order is one but it has two phenomena morally speaking and we call the dual phenomena as good and evil. Good and evil are therefore fundamental phenomena of reality and so we cannot understand reality in terms of a single phenomenon because contrasting twoness is a fundamental aspect of being.

The question, however, is how do we overcome the destructive effects of evil of all kinds on our lives and in our world? The Biblical answer to these questions is in the command that God gave to Adam and Eve but which unfortunately we do not apply seriously to our existence.

God ordered Adam and Eve "to cultivate and guard it"; this is the solution that Jesus and Paul gave for the solution of the problem of evil in human existence: cultivation and guarding - education of our humanity and our communality. We need special education not the traditional education to grow our humanity and to understand and cope with our troublesome world. Such education as cultivation has not been devised yet. We have education for children and we have adult education but not education to grow our humanity and our human community. Such education will target the creative development of the creative humanity of the individual and of the sociality and communality of his/her community.

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