

“Circle of Secrecy”

Children, Sexual Abuse, and the Catholic Church in Africa

*Thus, when others impose the image of their deity upon you while you abandon your Gods, and accept theirs, you inevitably become their spiritual prisoner —
Dr. John Henrik Clarke*

From the desk of Dr. Bamidele Adeoye, November/December 2020.

In every culture, there is a belief in a supernatural being (Almighty), and the relationship between humans and God requires worship and sacrifice. And, in any recorded human history, humans practiced some form of cultural religion — spirituality, so, culture cannot occur without education, while education is impossible without some form of societal culture.

From the time in antiquity, religion comprised of regular ceremonies centered on a belief in a higher supernatural power (God — *the unknown*) that created and maintained the order of things in the universe. Over a period, religions focus on the spiritual aspect of God, creation, human, life after death, eternity, and how to escape suffering or to be adjudicated afterlife. That is the reason why every culture made Gods in its image, similarity, and representation in their cultural space.

There is nothing more important in any culture or life than the worship of something. The only question is whether the worship is the right One, done in the right way. However, every religion believes that they are the right One, worship the right way, and their God is best in their cultural space.

Hence, the essence of worship is to establish and maintain a relationship between human beings and their God within their cultural space. Thus, worship can be defined as an extreme form of love, unthinking devotion and adulation for a God. When God is an exaggerated worship of the cultural self. And, God is as the wind, which touches anything and everything. For that reason, religion can be restrictive, repetitious, show regard for something sacred within an organized system of beliefs and practices, leading to a supernatural spiritual experience.

Therefore, the concept of God is an attempt to forge an identity in confrontation with a limited understanding of the unknown universe. That is why Leeming, David Adams attested that the existence of God fulfills a significant human needs. While Gods are symbols of ultimate reality, and their existence provides a sense of significance in an otherwise random universe. So, religion or worshipping is not a European invention introduced to Africa.

Are human traditions and practices hypothesis or scientific, and how can one discover the reality of religion instead of the true religion?

In consequence, the term religion is a nineteenth-century experience and derived from within the history of Christian thought itself, rendering the use of the word to describe other forms of thinking, practice, and ritual performance outside the known Christian West. And these rankings have their roots in a history of European interaction with non-European "others" that stretches back to late antiquity — *Encyclopedia.com*

Religion is the most potent binding force possible that encompasses a people's outlook, traditions, culture, and philosophy of life. In other words, a moral and ethical compass of people in their cultural space.

Subsequently, there is no right or wrong culture nor religion because every culture or religion has a logic of philosophy guiding it. That is why, Critias, an ancient Athenian political figure and author, claimed that religion was created by men to control other men. So what makes one religion superior and another inferior is not vital to the religious practices or beliefs themselves. Instead, such designations are a reflection of the ranking of different religious practices in the world was conjured in a way that met the social needs of Europeans preoccupied with managing a rapidly expanding colonial enterprise. For example (Quirke, 1992:162):

Egyptian Book of the Dead: "I have not committed adultery; I have not lain with men."

Exodus 20:14: "Thou shalt not commit adultery."

Book of the Dead: "I have not stolen."

Exodus 20:15: "Thou shalt not steal."

Europeans think they have a monopoly of culture, history, intelligence, religion, such that they refuse to acknowledge otherwise and arrogantly label others as inferior. Yet, every race or tribe of people in the world has its spirituality and religions, except for Africa, which gradually dissipated in shame during and after the foreigner's intrusion on the continent.

Every religion is true when thought of metaphorically and less flexible, while you do not have to believe in anything, yet Christianity requires that you believe there was a Christ. When conferring to Hindu philosophy, no one can worship a God but a God. You have to see in yourself some element of the God and what the God represents to you to worship the God. Similarly, to see the goodness in things, we must see God in things. To see the God in things, we must see goodness — *Egyptian Book of the Dead*.

According to the 2020 Census; *Annuario Pontificio* (Pontifical Yearbook), the number of baptized Catholics in the world was about 1.33 billion at the end of 2018. The global Catholic population is projected to grow to 1.63 billion in 2050.

As such, it is the largest Christian ecclesiastical body in the world. Based on this, it is important to have some understanding of the Roman Catholic Church's brief historical philosophies. The Church was split in two by the Great Schism of 1054, dividing Christians between the western, Latin-speaking Roman Catholic Church and the eastern, Greek-speaking Eastern Orthodox Church.

This break gave rise to two fundamental doctrinal contradictions. One was the role and authority of the Pope, while the other was the filioque clause ("*and from the Son*") of the Nicene Creed.

The western Catholics believe that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son while the Eastern Orthodox believe that the Holy Spirit proceeds only from the Father.

The Roman Catholic Bible contains 66 books, the Eastern Orthodox Bible 78 books, while the Protestant Bible has 77 books, and the Slave Bible contains only 14 books. Yet, one Christian God, varied books. The Bible did not arrive by fax from heaven. The Bible is a creation of man. Man, not God, writes history, and history is always from the perspective of the conqueror, not the conquered — Dr. Martyn Percy.

What happened to the lost books of the bible and the forgotten books of the Eden?

In Christianity, worship is the act of attributing reverent honor and homage to God, meaning to bow down to God with total submission.

“O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker” Psalm 95:6.

Christianity key points are; (a) Belief in God the Father, Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and the Holy Spirit, (b) The death, descent into hell, resurrection and ascension of Christ, (c) The holiness of the Church and the communion of saints and (d) Christ's second coming, the Day of Judgement and salvation of the faithful.

The Christian theology is to abide by the holiness of the church, and preach the gospel of “TRUTH”, yet the Catholic church did not preach the gospel of truth when it comes to the sexual abuse of children across the world, until forced to do so. They resisted at all levels. Rev. Barton Gingerich noted that, notwithstanding, it is appropriate for any Christian to know the Roman Catholic beliefs and history, if for no other explanation than the church’s size and influence. Is the Catholic church about the gospel of Christ (*truth*) or the gospel of reputation and finance at the expense of children?

What happened to the gospel of truth in the children’s sexual abuses by Catholic priests?

A Gospel of Shame, by Frank Bruni and Elinor Burkett, documented sexual abuse in the Catholic church, which was initially published in 1993 and proved that the church hierarchy knew about child molesters for at least a decade. It documents the failure of prosecutors, judges, psychologists, and reporters to monitor bishops, who spend millions of dollars, to protect the Church's image rather than its believers.

Without indicting the Church, Burkett and Bruni argued that the demands of the priesthood and the hierarchical structure decreed by Rome foster a climate perilous to the young. They explained clearly such matters as how obedience to clergy prevented the congregation from going public with accusations earlier; why cops, newspapers, and mental-health professionals haven't pursued priest-molesters as vigorously as other pedophiles; and the loss of faith felt by parishioners who have been reportedly lied to by the Church.

According to Jeremiah 8:8, “How can you say, “We are wise, we have the law of the LORD,” See, that has been changed into falsehood by the lying pen of the scribes?”

The 2014 U.N. human rights panel concluded and issued a report stating that the Vatican aided and abetted priests to sexually abuse tens of thousands of children worldwide over the decades. An investigation reveals that thousands of Catholic priests accused of sexual abuse, most have become the priest next door. That is the modus operandi of the Catholic church in covering up these atrocities.

Father Greeley estimated that at least 2,500 Catholic priests in the United States have victimized 100,000 children in the last two decades, and author Jason Berry opined that, between 1982 and 1992, sexual abuse cases cost the Catholic Church \$400 million in settlements, legal expenses, and medical treatment of clergy. A more conservative figure of 2,600 (CBS News 2019) priests molested and abused children in America. In just 20 years, the scandal had cost the church \$1.3 billion. However, according to Jay Report (2004), commissioned by the US Bishop, says more than 4,000 US Roman Catholic faced sexual abuse allegations in the last 50 years, in cases involving more than 10,000 children – mostly boys.

“They have acted shamefully; they have done abominable things, yet they are not at all ashamed, they do not know how to blush. Hence they shall be among those who fall; in their time of punishment, they shall stumble, says the LORD.” Jeremiah 8:12.

Information published by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) as of May 31, 2019, indicated that 7,002 (5.9%) of the 118,184 priests who worked from 1950 through June 30, 2018, were accused of sexual abuse of minors. The American church alone has paid out an estimated \$3 billion in awards and settlements.

What is the scale or scope in Africa?

In 2018, Sheehan, Andy exposed part of the 884-page document: *“All victims brushed aside, in every part of the state (US), by the church leaders who preferred to protect the abusers and their institution above all. The main thing was not to help children, but to avoid the scandal.” Priests were raping little boys and girls and the men of God who were responsible for them not only did nothing: they hid it all.*”

“They have treated lightly the injury to the daughter of my people. “Peace, peace!” they say, though there is no peace.” Jeremiah 8:11.

Bishops and other leaders of the Roman Catholic Church in Pennsylvania covered up child sexual abuse by more than 300 priests over a period of 70 years, persuading victims not to report the abuse and law enforcement not to investigate it, according to a searing report issued by a grand jury.

John 8:32: “An you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free”.

A delegate of the Roman Catholic Church at the Stockholm congress declared that exploitation of children is the “most heinous of crimes” and a “result of profound distortion and the breakdowns of values.” “A United Nations representative said it “is an assault on children on all fronts . . . , is totally vile and is the most contemptible violation of human rights imaginable.” Yet, the Catholic Church has been severely affected by such practices among its own clergy — Awake! 1997

Child abuse can significantly deteriorate the children's sense of dignity, identity, and self-esteem is demoralized, and their ability for trust is withdrawn. Their physical and emotional health is at risk, their rights violated, and their futures are jeopardized.

How many Catholic priests victimized children in Africa, or were they swept under the rug?

Betrayal, a book by a team of Boston Globe reporters revealed how the Boston Archdiocese of the Catholic Church re-assigned a pedophile priest to different parishes for over a decade, despite knowing he had abused children. The explosion of the scandal led to 176 priests over 28 states of the US to resign or be removed from their post. And John J. Geoghan, a former priest was accused of molesting an estimated two hundred Boston-area children, he was later sentenced to 9 – 10 years in prison.

How many priests have been brought to justice, and found guilty in Africa?

Nearly 1,700 priests and other clergy members that the Roman Catholic Church considers credibly accused of child sexual abuse are living under the radar with little to no oversight from religious authorities or law enforcement, decades after the first wave of the church abuse scandal roiled U.S. dioceses, an Associated Press investigation reported.

Marci Hamilton, who runs the Philadelphia-based think tank CHILD USA, a nonprofit working to end child abuse, said the church clearly knew the consequences of letting former priests move on quietly after abuses were reported but did so to shield the church and protect its image. *“They cover it up, they run the statute of limitations, and then they wash their hands of them. It’s like they had a firecracker and they threw it into the public square.”*

Jason Berry’s book, “Lead us not into Temptation”, posited that the Catholic church is a haven for homosexual, and in one particular archdiocese, forty percent were gay, forty percent straight, and twenty percent nonsexual. The system of law operated by the Vatican has allowed serious sex offenders to escape punishment and must be abandoned, says a prominent US lawyer.

What is the case in Africa?

So far, 29 U.S. Catholic dioceses and religious orders have filed for bankruptcy protection during the ongoing sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic church, 26 dioceses, and 3 religious orders according to BishopAccountability.org (2020), which tracks sexual abuse cases in the church.

How many Catholic churches went out of service or commission in Africa?

That is the state of Africa’s religiosity, spiritual prisoners to foreign gods. Hence these abuses were muted by Africans and African States due the false benefits from the Catholic missions. While countries all over the world challenged the children sexual abuses in their countries, Africa muted because Africa is a beggar state, thus, Africa has become an abused state of people sexual, spiritually and physically. Even though we are defined by courage and redeemed by character rather than religion, when God is an exaggerated worship of the cultural self. Africa still holds on to this foreign religion to the detriment of her children.

When will Africa stand up to the reality of these abuses?

Archbishop Abel Gaba of Durban in South Africa vied that sexual abuse is taking place in African families is “one of the best kept secrets” and not talked about. Archbishop Abel Gaba emphatically stated that there should be a willingness to do away with cover-ups, and let go of the silence, confront perpetrators, while serious steps taken to eradicate such an abuser from the priesthood.

In line with Sister Hermenegild Makoro, the secretary-general of the South African Catholic Bishops’ Conference (SACBC), 35 cases of clerical abuse of minors have been reported in South Africa since 2003, but only seven were being investigated by the police.

What happened in the early days, from the dawn of the intervention of the Catholic mission in Africa?

As far back as the mid-60’s, a priest in a secondary school in Ijebu Ode, Nigeria, sexually abused boys under his care as the principal of the school. There are several Catholic schools and missions in Nigeria, how many other children were victimized in those institutions by their priests?

What happened to the Catholic priests, the boys, and justice for the priests' crimes in Nigeria?

Agreeing with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., justice delayed is justice denied. Your silence will not free you. Africa became the dumping ground for rogue priests from the West, since Africans are spiritual prisoners without voice and respect for their people, couple with the enclosure of the mind syndrome, in other words, spiritual inferiority complex, and mental deficiencies. Yet, Africa has diversities of superior religions unharnessed.

Is there any tracking done in Africa to monitor the Catholic priest's raping little boys and girls? If not, why not?

These are the pertinent questions to be asked by Africa and the Catholic church. What provisions and implementations are in place to combat and discourage abuse by these rogue priests? What support systems and compensations are available to the abused and their families? How is the church monitoring their system of records to know if any newly posted priest is not an abuser from their previous locations? Are there any comprehensive background checks on newly posted priests to Africa? Is there an international and national system of records (database) for rouge priests?

When did Pope Francis abolished the highest level of secrecy used to protect pedophiles within the Catholic Church and changes to what the Vatican considers child pornography?. In accordance with the pope's ruling, information on abuse cases must be protected by church leaders to ensure its security and integrity. But the high degree of confidentiality imposed by pontifical secrecy no longer applies.

In another ruling, Pope Francis raised from 14 to 18 the age that pictures of individuals can be considered child pornography for purposes of sexual gratification by whatever means or using whatever technology.

The Vatican told bishops around the world to report cases of clerical sex abuse to civil authorities even where local laws don’t require it — a step that abuse victims and their advocates have

demanded over the decades in which the scandal has roiled the Roman Catholic Church. But the new instructions are not binding and were not enshrined in the church's canon law, prompting criticism that the Vatican still gives bishops too much leeway in judging the conduct of their priests.

“An you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free”. John 8:32

Christopher White of Crux publication posited that as the number of African Catholics continues to soar, one Kenyan nun warns African Catholics that they must first ***“clean house on abuse”*** when it comes to the issue of clergy sexual abuse before exhibiting greater leadership in the global Church. She argued that personal trauma begets institutional trauma, the self-woundedness, must be acknowledged so that the cycle of abuse does not continue.

Are the bishops willing to expose these abusers, particularly in Africa, in light of Africa's religiosity, culture of silence and respect for foreign religions?

What a questionable and disturbing comment by Archbishop Abel Gaba of Durban in South Africa, who admitted that it is not easy for a bishop to denounce one's priest who engages in such behavior? What are the challenges of reporting the truth, when the truth is its own defense?

For the past thirty years, it has been an uphill battle both from Africans and the secrecy of the Catholic institutions (churches and schools) educating Nigeria and Africa about these atrocities. However, according to Jim Rohn, the more you tell your story, sooner or later, it will fall on the right ears.

Yet, these issues persist in the country and on the continent at large. And who would rise up for those invisible voices?

The answer is blowing in the wind, to borrow the lyrics of Bob Dylan. Likewise, the answer is in the womb of time.

Thus, the goal of the “circle of secrecy” is a wakeup call for Africa on the issue of Catholic sexual abuses and the atrocities on Africa's children by the priests who were supposed to protect them.

However, until Africa raises her voice against children's sexual abuse, Africa will always be victimized by the Catholic Church.

In conclusion, the greatest sin (tragedy and atrocity) Africa perpetuated on the African States was the acceptance of foreign languages and religions. It has devastating effects on Africa's psyche and caused irreparable effects on what makes Africa and her Africanness. Therefore, Africa must repent and ask for forgiveness, be-re-introduced to her Gods, and languages for redemption. If not regained soon, it will cause irreversible damage for generations to come, and Africa will eventually cease to exist as we know her today.

To know is to understand. To praise Gods, we must praise life. To honor Gods we must make of the world something good. To be Gods, we must hold goodness in each pore — *The confession, Egyptian Book of the Dead.*

Being decent, orderly, religious is helpful to others and pleasing to one's God, and to worship with excellence, however, it must be undistracting excellence. People go to worship to give God glory, meet with God, and to receive blessings from God, instead of being brutalized, abused, and deceived, under the veil of the "Man of God" banner.

How long can Africa remain in denial and hold the Catholic church accountable for these atrocities?

Are human customs and practices hypothesis or scientific, and how does one find the truth of religion, rather than the true religion should be the fundamental question? And, Africa must learn to unlock the potentials of her Gods.

God bless Africa!



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