

THE AFRICANITY OF AUGUSTINE'S PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

Prof. KANU Ikechukwu Anthony, O.S.A.
Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies
Tansian University, Umunya
Anambra State
ikee_mario@yahoo.com

Abstract

In this piece focussed on the contribution that Augustine's African background, that is, his Afro-cosmo-vision of reality, made to the development of his philosophy of education. This piece is very important, first, because we have found ourselves at a time when some scholars, against evident historical evidence, argue that Saint Augustine is not an African. Second, we have also found ourselves at a time when many scholars believe that nothing good can come from Africa. This piece would, therefore, serve as a pointer to the Africanity of Augustine and the Africanness of his philosophy and theology. The hermeneutic method of inquiry would be employed.

Keywords: Africanity, Augustine, Philosophy, Education.

Introduction

In 2016, I published a paper titled “The Concept of 'Family' as the Contribution of Africa to the Consecrated Life”. The reason was to point out the contribution that Augustine's African background made to the evolution of the Consecrated Life. In the 4th century, when Constantine legalized Christianity in the Empire of Rome, Christianity became the popular religion in Rome, it gradually lost the self-sacrificing spirit which it possessed during the era of Roman persecution. In reaction, many holy men and women went into the desert, propagating a new kind of martyrdom for the kingdom of God. Those who lived this kind of life were referred to as hermits (200AD-350AD). Because of the role which the desert played as the locus for the expression of this kind of life, this period is also referred to as the age of the desert. The pioneer of this kind of life who symbolized this new ideal in a way no one else had done was Saint Anthony of the Desert. In the desert they prayed and fasted, doing battle with the devil in the wilderness as Christ had done long ago. However, they did all these as individual hermits (Kanu 2016).

With the passage of time, the eremitic life gave birth to the cenobitic style of life (350-1200), that is, a communal asceticism. St Pachomius was the father of the cenobitic life. He adopted the idea of communal patterns and established a monastery where monks lived in common between 318 and 323. After Saint Basil visited the monks of Egypt, Palestine and Syria, he founded a monastic community in Asia Minor. In Palestine, Melania the Elder, a friend of Saint Jerome, promoted communal asceticism and founded a monasteries Jerusalem. Gradually, from the Eastern half of the Roman empire, Cada et al (1979) aver that this way of religious life spread to the Western half of the Roman empire, especially in Spain and Gaul. As these different persons moved beyond the shores of Africa, Egypt, they took with them the African value of community which was at the heart of monasteries of the time.

In Algeria, Africa, an African, Saint Augustine began a community of monks also referred to as Canon Regulars in 397. They lived according to the rule of Saint Augustine in monasteries, sharing their goods in common. Their main purpose of coming together, according to the Rule and Constitution of the Order of Saint Augustine (2010), is to live harmoniously in one house intent upon God and in oneness of heart and mind. Thus, in 529 Saint Benedict founded a monastic community in Monte Cassino in 529 along the same spirit of community living. Gradually, the importance of the presence of community spirit spread across Europe.

This Afrio-cosmo-vision soon spread from Africa to other parts of the world. It shaped not just the future of the consecrated life, but also the philosophies and theologies of these great men of African descent and in fact that of the world civilization. In this piece, I would focus on the contribution that Augustine's African background, that is, his Afro-cosmo-vision of reality, made to the development of his philosophy of education. This piece is very important, first, because we have found ourselves at a time when some scholars, against evident historical evidence, argue that Saint Augustine is not an African. Second, we have also found ourselves at a time when many scholars believe that nothing good can come from Africa (Hegel 1956, Kanu 2015a, Kanu 2015b). This piece would, therefore, serve as a pointer to the Africanity of Augustine and the Africanness of his philosophy and theology.

The Nature of African Traditional Education

African traditional education generally means the type of education that was obtainable in Africa before the advent of the West as colonial masters and missionaries. Boateng (1983) avers that it prepared them for their responsibilities as adults in their communities. It was a method of education that was based on the African cultural heritage, and the family is the first school of every child and the mother the first teacher of the child, gradually into the

hands of the uncles, father and community at large. Just as we have Greek education, Western education etc., Africans also had a method of education defined by the African worldview. It was a native, locally developed lifelong process of learning, with well defined goals, structures, content and methods, through which cultural values, skills, norms and heritage were transmitted by the older and more experienced members of society from one generation to another to help individuals be integrated into the society. At the end of such an education, it is true that graduants never wrote final year exams or were not awarded certificates; however, they graduated ceremoniously and were considered graduates by the society, not because they had papers to show, but because they are able to do what they have graduated in.

African traditional education is heavily anthropocentric. That is, the human person is at the centre of education. Mbiti (1969), therefore, asserts that “Man is at the very centre of existence and African people see everything else in its relation to this central position of man... it is as if God exists for the sake of man” (p. 92). Corroborating with Mbiti, Metuh (1985), avers that “Everything else in African worldview seems to get its bearing and significance from the position, meaning and end of man” (p. 109). The idea of God, divinities, ancestors, rituals, sacrifices etc., are only useful to the extent that they serve the needs of the human person. It is in this regard that Udechukwu (2012) avers that man, in African cosmology, has been given a high and prestigious position.

The Objectives of African Traditional Education

The aim of education in traditional African society is multilateral. These aims could be articulated as follows:

1. To prepare the young for life. Education in Africa is always for a particular purpose. There is nothing like a purposeless education.
2. To help people to realize themselves. Self-realization is at the heart of African indigenous education. The first thing a child is taught is who he or she is, where he or she has come from, the heroes that have come from his clan, etc. self-realization helps him or her to know how to comport the self.
3. To help people to relate with others in an atmosphere of mutual understanding. Life in African traditional society is relationship. To be is to relate, to cease to relate is to move towards annihilation. It is in this regard that individuals are taught to relate with one another.
4. To inculcate the spirit of self-reliance, industry, versatility and self-disciplined. In African traditional society, people are trained to be self-reliant. They do not wait for the government to give them employment. They rather work hard to contribute to the general society.

5. To make the educated aware of his or her responsibilities and privileges. These responsibilities and privileges go with status. There is no status in traditional African societies without responsibilities and privileges. Thus, before a person attains that status- married, etc, the person in question is taught the responsibilities and privileges that go with them.
6. To develop a person's latent physical skills.
7. To develop the character of a person.
8. To help a person to understand, appreciate and promote the cultural heritage of the community or society.

The Afro-Cosmo-Vision of Education in Augustine

A cursory glance at Saint Augustine's philosophy reveals a thought system that, in all its multiplicity and varied projections, responds globally to an overall vision, which can be referred to as a cosmo-vision of reality. It is a vision that is all-embracing and confers connectiveness and consistency to the most variant manifestations of reality. His philosophy of education is not in variant with this overall vision. Augustine developed a philosophy of education in which the role of the teacher is to open the learner to question, arouse curiosity and create a moment for learning that is characterized by dialogue between the teacher and student (Morahan 2006). This philosophy of education is based on Augustine's concept of the human person, first, as a being that is essentially integrated in the cosmos and the human community. Thus, a person cannot save himself by himself or live in solitude to himself. If a person wishes to reach plenitude, then, he must be in communion with others. Second, he understands the human person as a being that is radically contingent and changeable. That is, a being that is in the act of being. It is this natural disposition of the human person that opens the door for learning and thus, growth and development.

Table 1: Relationship between African traditional education and Augustine's philosophy of education

SN	African Traditional Philosophy of Education	Augustine's Philosophy of Education	Relationship
1	The concept of education in Africa is heavily anthropocentric. This is based on the African cosmology that is anthropocentric.	Augustine's philosophy of education is based on his concept of the human person, first, as a being that is essentially integrated in the cosmos and the human community(Bienzobas 2006)	Anthropocentric
2	To develop a person's talents and physical skills.	To achieve a certain balance among these three things: talent, education and experience (De Civitate Dei, 11. 25)	Skill development

SN	African Traditional Philosophy of Education	Augustine's Philosophy of Education	Relationship
3	To help people to relate with others in an atmosphere of mutual understanding. Life in African traditional society is relationship. To be is to relate, to cease to relate is to move towards annihilation. It is in this regard that individuals are taught to relate with one another.	Make use of knowledge like scaffolding that is used to help build the building of love; that building will last forever, even when knowledge has been dismantled (Letter 55, 21, 39). Augustine sees love as the key of true humanity. "Love and do what you will" (Letter VII. 8).	Fosters Relationship
4	The Family is the first school and the parents the first teachers	Augustine emphasized the importance of the education received from his home, with his mother as his first teacher.	Family
5	To make the educated aware of his or her responsibilities and privileges.	It is not so much to introduce contents to the human soul, but to dynamize and help what is latent in the pupil to emerge.	Awareness and Self-discovery
6	African Traditional education is multilateral. It is religious, political, social, economic, etc.	Education for Augustine is also multilateral. It involves not just the acquisition of knowledge, but improving our relationship with God.	Multilateral
7	Education in Africa takes into consideration the needs of the students. They are taught skills necessary for their survival and which reflects their environment	They must always start from the perceived needs of the students. This is to avoid a situation where the teacher operates from an ivory tower, far away from the students who are supposed to be his pupils.	Contextual
8	To develop the character of a person	Education serves for the nourishment of the soul, that the human person might be more human (Disc. Chr. XI. 12)	Character Development
9	To help a person to understand, appreciate and promote the cultural heritage of the community or society	Education in Augustine is community oriented. It understands education as a community of inquiry.	Community oriented
10	Education in Africa is dialogical, participatory and which promotes the humanness of the student	Education for Augustine is also dialogical and participatory.	Dialogical and participatory

Conclusion

There are basically five canons or foundations of African traditional philosophy of education. They include: preparationism, functionalism, communalism, perennialism and holism. A cursory glance at Augustine's philosophy of education reveals all these principles of African traditional philosophy of education have evident reflections in the philosophy of education of Augustine. Preparationism is a principle that asserts that people were trained for the purpose of equipping them with a particular skill for the fulfilment of their particular roles in the family or society. Knowledge conferred was always for a particular purpose- skill for an awaited responsibility. Functionalism sees education as practical and participatory in nature (Kanu 2018). Thus, the pupil learns through working with or observing the master. Communalism emphasizes that the responsibility of teaching was not solely the responsibility of the parents of the child. This is based on the fact that the child is not individually owned. There is an Igbo adage that says: "Nwa bu nwa oha" (A child is for everyone). The parents, family, the community and society are all involved in the training of a child. Perennialism Generally, perennialism as a principle believes that in our world of upheavals, and uncertainty, it is beneficial to stick to certain absolute principles (Kanu 2017). It, therefore, sees education as a way of preparing the child to become acquainted with the finest achievements of his cultural heritage, to become aware of the values of his heritage. Holism implies that, although people were trained to specialize in a thing, they also got other trainings alongside- people were productive in all areas. It was a multiple kind of education. A comparative study of Augustine's philosophy of education reveals his strong African background. It does not only provide a footing for the argument of his African origin but stands for the fact that his thoughts were well incensed by his African identity.

References

- Augustine, Saint, (2010). *The rule and constitution of the Order of Saint Augustine*. Augustinian Curia: Rome.
- Augustine, St. (1952). *The First Catechetical Instruction* (400), trans. Joseph P. Christopher. Westminster, MD: Newman Press. V. 9.
- Augustine, St. *De Civitate Dei* is translated in *The City of God Against the Pagans*, translated by R.W. Dyson, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought, Cambridge University Press 1998. 11, 25
- Augustine, St. *Epistulae* are translated by W. Parsons in the Fathers of the Church series: Letters, 55, 21, 39.
- Augustine, St. *Epistulae* are translated by W. Parsons in the Fathers of the Church series: Letters VII. 8.

- Boateng, F. (1983). African traditional education: A method of disseminating cultural values. *Journal of Black Studies*. 13. 3. 321-336.
- Cada, L. et al (1979). *The shaping of the coming age of the religious life*. New York: Cross Road Book.
- Hegel, G. W. F. (1956). *The philosophy of history*. New York: Dover.
- Kanu I. A. (2016). The Concept of 'Family' as the Contribution of Africa to the Consecrated Life. *Catholic Voyage*. 12. 33-39
- Kanu I. A. (2018). *African traditional philosophy of education: Essays in Igwebuike philosophy*. Germany: Lambert Publication.
- Kanu, A. I. (2015a). *A hermeneutic approach to African Traditional Religion, theology and philosophy*. Nigeria: Augustinian.
- Kanu, A. I. (2015b). *African philosophy: An ontologico-Existential hermeneutic approach to classical and contemporary issues*. Nigeria: Augustinian.
- Kanu, I. A. (2015). A History of the Consecrated Life. In I. A., Kanu (Ed.). *Consecrated Life: The past, the present, the future and the constant demand for renewal* (pp. 15-26). St Paul's Publications: Ibadan.
- Kanu, I. A. (2017). The Philosophical Canons of Africa Indigenous Education. *Hummingbird: Journal of African Sustainable Development*. 9. 8. 78-90.
- Mbiti, J. (1969). *African religions and philosophy*. Nairobi: East African Educational.
- Metuh, E. I. (1985) *African religions in Western conceptual schemes: The problem of interpretation*. Jos: Imco.
- Morahan, M. (2006). Climate in the Augustinian school. In Eusebio B. Berdon (Ed.). *Basic elements of Augustinian pedagogy* (pp. 170-182). Augustinian publications, Rome.
- Udechukwu, G. (2012). Igbo traditional education and good governance. In A. B. C. Chiegboka et al (Eds.). *The humanities and good government* (pp. 812-819). Anambra: Rex Charles and Patrick.