

## THE HIDDEN QUALITIES OF AN AFRICAN WORLDVIEW

An essay about the Dogon

"Africans were creatures of light, emanating from the fullness of the sun; Europeans were creatures of the moonlight: hence their immature appearance".<sup>1</sup>

My interest in the worldview of the Dogon in Mali has been raised both by studies about their culture and by a journey to the Dogon during the winter of 1976-1977. Their daily behaviour, their mutual relations, their rhythm and dancing and their educational methods have made such a deep impression on me that this journey not only inspired me to develop an experimental housing project in my hometown of Amsterdam, but their culture also taught me the virtue of patience. Patience is, according to the Dogon, the most important virtue. In our culture it is regarded as probably the least important one. Anyhow, it seems that I needed to learn a lot about patience because my experimental housing project, inspired by this journey and called "The House of the Four Winds", took thirteen and a half years before it was realized.

And this is the way the Dogon greeted us:

Poi,poi, a good day, a good day  
oh, the same to you  
oudjamo? everything alright with you? Oh djamo!  
oomanan djamo? Your family too?  
oh djamo, yes!  
ooba djamo?  
oona djamo?  
poi,poi."  
father healthy, mother healthy  
djamo, yes  
oodelebe djamo?  
big brother healthy?  
djamo djamo  
poi poi  
oosoongono djamo?  
little brothers healthy?  
djamo  
poi poi  
guiniwopoe djamo?  
whole family healthy?  
djamo!  
poi, poi  
poi, we are greeting you  
emme gana ebe jinne viaj  
we have come to see your country (land)  
poi, poi, welcome, welcome  
dagau, it is good  
kinewo ama ali?  
are you content?  
kinema ah, we are content  
poi, poi  
oeba ginnih gue guongolo

it is your country, you can do what you like  
poi, poi. 2.

The anthropologists who have contributed more than anyone else to the knowledge about and the respect for the Dogon, are Marcel Griaule and Germaine Dieterlen, former professors in anthropology at the Sorbonne. From the blind hunter Ogotemmel, Marcel Griaule received the secret information that the elderly initiates of the Dogon must communicate to a younger person.

Ogotemmel had been designated by a council of elders to instruct Griaule. The council of elders had probably decided that the time had come to deliver their special knowledge to an outsider who was able to understand this knowledge and be helpful in preserving it, at least partially. "The project resulted in a wealth of documentation of rich philosophical tradition. For Griaule, Dogon society is a tightly woven fabric of symbol and myth; every object, ritual, and sacred site reflects the creation myths and the cosmology described by Ogotemmel. Today, Griaule's reading of Dogon culture is contested. Since the 1960s, scholars have reported that they cannot corroborate his assertions (see e.g. Van Beek 1991, Ezra 1988). Has Dogon society changed so much since the 1930s? Or did Griaule misinterpret the data? Did Dogon informants fabricate stories to tell him? Do Dogon individuals understand their culture's knowledge in different ways? Or does secrecy infuse Dogon practice and thought, revealing certain things to certain people while concealing them from others?" 3.

### Secrecy

Personally, I am convinced that this last option is the case, although it does not exclude any of the other possibilities. The Western hermetic tradition has also wrestled since ancient times with the question whether one can reveal every possible meaning and truth to everyone. The answer is usually 'no'. Why would it be different for the Dogon, especially in the light of their tradition of the Sigi ceremonies, held once every sixty years? During the Sigi ceremonies in 1967 in Koundou Ando, the village where we stayed for one month, there were three boys selected for the initiation into the secret knowledge of the men who were selected sixty years before. Why would one break with such a tradition, if one can use the secrecy not only as a protection and safeguard for special knowledge and power, but also as diplomacy, or commerce via the well-known plays and games with the tourists? SECRECY, mentioned in footnotes 3 and 4, is full of positive and negative examples of the art of concealing and revealing.

However, it is not only the secrecy, practised throughout the Dogon tradition, but also the structuralist framework of Griaule's studies that makes his work not easily accessible.

"Levi-Straussian Structuralism, adopted by the Griaule school, is a method of analysis founded on the construction of a series of opposing compartmentalized phenomena. From the interrelationship of these individual phenomena, universal experience is deduced. In the early literature on the Dogon, researchers explained their social, psychological, religious, and artistic existence within a structuralist framework".4.

It is not my intention within the scope of this article to discuss the different interpretations about the Dogon. After his death, Marcel Griaule received a ceremonial funeral by the Dogon. This funeral testifies to their respect for him. And as Wilfred Cantwell Smith remarks: "No statement about a religion is valid unless it can be acknowledged by that religion's believers".5.

### Underestimation of oral culture

The African philosophy of life has been systematically underestimated both by progressive humanists with a solely scientific-oriented worldview, and by christian missionaries

with a belief in the superiority of their religion of one transcendent God and his messiah Jezus. The christian belief has been seen as a higher phase in the development of religious consciousness than the ancient, 'dark', 'animistic' beliefs of Sub-Saharan Africa. Also the fact that many African peoples, such as the Dogon, had only and still have an oral tradition, made them inferior in the eyes of the Westerners. " However, by lack of 'écriture', the ethical principles of the whole of Sub-Saharan Africa, find themselves implicitly integrated in a vague system of oral traditions working with conventional epic images: the stories of the old cycle present themselves in general without a single moralising intention, but they have therefore not less as mission to provide, to the smallest detail, models of behaviour for the social individual.<sup>6</sup> .

'High' culture is largely identified with written culture. An oral culture, however, derives its strength from the active, living memories of tens of generations. In an oral tradition the collective past is identical with the present: the people, and the people alone, are the embodiment of the past which implies the orientation for the future. A society with a strong oral culture can resist a top-down control much easier than a society provided with a written culture and a well trained bureaucracy. But the apparent weakness of an oral culture lies in its confrontation with foreign cultures which have developed a high degree of systematization of their cultural and juridical systems, and which derive their power from a far-reaching division of knowledge and labor. I found it painful to notice how strong and self-conscious Dogon men were afraid to stand up for their rights vis-à-vis some bureaucrats of the government of Bamako, the capital of Mali. The 'language' games of both parties stem from different worlds. The same is true for the language games of Western visitors. The fact that the Western interpretations about the Dogon are based only on oral and visual sources without any possibility for comparison with written documents from the past, must also lead to many misunderstandings and misconceptions. The question remains what is wrong about this fact from the point of view of the Dogon themselves. Fundamentally speaking, nothing. Their culture and daily life are not separated into a 'high' culture at one hand and a mass culture at the other hand, but rather, form a living entity. The Dogon do not have historians, but they have initiated men who preserve the secret knowledge and confer it upon a new generation every sixty years. For the Dogon, past, present and future are not three different time-levels but are interconnected by the ongoing life force, by many rituals and by the time concept itself, which is based on the continuity of life and life forms. Westerners cannot compete with people like the Dogon in terms of knowledge of their past, and their capacity to memorize. Our youth knows significantly less about our past than the Dogon youth about theirs. In their drawings I discovered the extent of the knowledge of children and young men. For instance, the story about the journey of the Dogon from Mandé, where they lived in the period from about 600 to 500 hundred years ago, to their actual homestead in Mali. It tells about Lébé, the first man and father. Leaving Mandé, they opened the grave and found a snake. This snake appears in their drawings, as did the crane and crocodile who accompanied the Dogon during their journey. The snake became their symbol for new life on earth.

During our stay in Koundou Andò, on many evenings the men told stories about the Tellem, the people who used to live in the places where the Dogon are living now. The Dogon still believe in their invisible presence, high up in the mountain-cliffs. They have a respectful fear of the spirits of the Tellem. Those Tellem stories are difficult to check or validate. But a question about a very old tree in a neighbouring village was answered with a response that this tree was there already before they arrived. This tree was probably more than 500 years old. Generation upon generation continues to tell about the past in such a way that it feels like a living presence, without the registration of any name or age. There is no bureaucratic reality versus the concrete one.

'HIDDEN' QUALITIES OF AN AFRICAN WORLDVIEW

## Spirituality

What do I mean by 'hidden' qualities of an African worldview?

Before commenting on this thesis, I want to introduce some remarks of authors deeply involved in the search for basic values and guiding ideas of Sub-Saharan African culture. The first striking feature is a profound spirituality, a characteristic which is difficult to grasp by our secularist, profane outlook on reality, and by our individualistic life experience. In her study on *African religion, Spirituality and Thought*, Dominique Zahan writes that, on the one hand, the African spirituality constitutes the soul itself of its religion. It resides first of all in the mystic emotion of this belief and in the dialogue between man and the Invisible. On the other hand, the same spirituality is perhaps the feeling that the human being has to realize, without the help of the godhead, as we would be inclined to think, but rather by a sometimes conscious, often unconscious effort, the humanity which he carries in himself: "...for us, the essence of the African spirituality consists in the feeling with regard to the human being to consider itself at the same time as image, model and integrating part of the world to whose cyclic life he feels himself deeply and necessarily connected." 7. This relationship, which testifies to a deep ecological insight, does not know "the idea of a finality outside the human being. This one has not been made for God, or for the universe. It exists for himself; it carries the justification of his existence and of his religious and moral perfection within himself. It is not to 'please' God, or out of love for him that the African 'prays', implores and accomplishes sacrifices, but to become himself and to realize the order in which he finds himself implicated".8. Zahan concludes that one has to do here with a kind of humanism that departs from the human being to return back to him, meanwhile grasping everything on his journey that doesn't belong to him: "This humanism is at the basis of an individual and social ethics, of which the normal blossoming realizes itself in the mystic life. Moral life and mystic life, these two aspects of the African spirituality give it its real dimensions".9. They are the animating principle of life.

## Humanism and ecology

Recently, the term 'ubuntu' is used again in South Africa to refer to a new black identity without self-glorification or political intentions. Ubuntu has been described by the Dutch journalist Peter ter Horst as an untranslatable term for an African humanism with a strong accent on the community: a human being can only exist by other human beings. Ter Horst writes that the black intelligentsia promotes a revival of 'ubuntu' to heal the society.

The remark of Zahan about the humanity which, according to the traditional African worldview, every human being carries within him- or herself, reminds me about an answer of Dolo Asegrama, one of our guides, to the question of how one can recognize an animist. Dolo smiled when he heard the question and answered: "An animist is a human being like everybody else. But one can recognize an animist by his willingness to sacrifice". It struck me right away that the notion of humanity came first in his answer, before continuing with a specific feature, i.e. the willingness to sacrifice. If a Dogon would ask an American how one can recognize a christian, and she would answer: "A christian is a human being like everybody else, but one can recognize a christian by the way she loves everyone else as she loves herself", then we would have a symmetrical, and equally beautiful answer.

The notion of spirituality and humanism in the description of Zahan can be related to the notions of 'vital force' by P.Tempels and 'dynamism' by B.W.Smith, and by the notion of 'power' by Geoffrey Parrinder: "It is the importance of power, its increase or diminution, which is a constant concern in prayers and invocations, in spells and magic. All beings have their power, and the most fortunate are those who have the greatest amount,

whereas misfortune, disease and witchcraft are held to diminish power. Fundamental to the notion of power is the dynamic nature of the universe and human life. Beings are not fixed in an unchanging nature, or condemned in a fatalist manner to stay always in a predestined lot...Powers act upon one another, for man is a social being and he also lives in a vital relationship with the natural world. African natural science is based upon observation of the world, its powers, its possibilities and effects upon human life".<sup>10</sup>. These ideas about the dynamic nature both of the universe and of human life, and the interconnectedness of all phenomena show the deep ecological insight of African philosophy of life.

## AMMA

A central notion in the worldview of the Dogon is AMMA. AMMA, a sound and a word that shows a perfect symmetry from right to left and from left to right, is usually translated with God, and subsequently interpreted as the closest analogy of the Dogon religion with the Christian or Moslim notion of God. The question remains whether this notion can be interpreted as an analogon to the notion of a transcendent god or principle, or whether it has to be understood as an unifying, more immanent idea. During a dialogue with our guide Amadinge who cooperated with Griaule for his *Dictionnaire de Dogon*, we asked him about Amma. Referring to Amma as God, as Marcel Griaule happens to do, Amadinge answered my question positively about Amma as God. However, when I quoted the same Griaule who writes that Amma is also defined as air, water, fire and earth, he answered that this is right. When I then asked him if we, human beings, are also air, water, fire and earth, he confirmed this statement. On the question if we are also Amma, if both can be described as air, water, fire and earth, he said literally: "We also are Amma".<sup>11</sup>.

From this explication, I am inclined to deduce that hypothesis that a unifying concept such as Amma has to be understood as an immanent reality, perhaps not so different from Spinoza's *Natura naturans, natura naturata* - nature being its own subject and object. This interpretation fits into the description of the African spirituality in which the polarity of *give and take* is so strikingly present.

The notion of Amma as the embodiment of air, water, fire and earth, and the notion of man or woman as air, water, fire and earth seems also to have a certain analogy with the "enfolded and unfolding plenitude of infinity", about which David Bohm reflects in his *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*.<sup>12</sup> Further there is an interesting similarity to the description of the dying person in *The Tibetan Book of the Living and the Dead*, in which the dying person goes through the process of losing respectively the 'earth'-, 'water'-, 'fire'- and finally the 'air'-dimension after which she or he may enter infinite space.

Dominique Zahan suggests in the conclusion of her above-mentioned study, that Africa's contribution to the human culture, if exploited according to well-established rules, could help us to develop a more profound insight into hellenistic philosophy and science before Plato and Aristotle: "Because the 'taste' for 'matter' makes the African sage into a thraumaturg of the elements, a role which he still fulfills during our days in numerous populations, according to a millenaristic knowledge of nature...the sage commands the water and the wind, acts upon fire and manipulates the earth as if it had to do with a part of himself." <sup>13</sup>.

The unity of Amma and of the human person as being both water, fire, air and earth is the hidden assumption in this formulation of Zahan. Her suggestion about the ancient roots of African culture as being helpful in the understanding of the roots of our own culture, is interesting. However, it presupposes that we are able and willing to study both cultures from a different angle than we are used to.<sup>14</sup> In fact, such an enterprise asks for a different epistemology and ontology than the prevailing ones.

## An immanent and undivisible whole

The African theologian Elungu Pene Elungu approaches the question of African religions from a more philosophical viewpoint. He formulates the hypothesis that "the sacredness of our traditional wisdoms, their central certainty is neither man or nature nor even God, but all that is understood from the point of view of the concrete, individual life which is also essentially the life of the tribe, *in immediate relation with the visible and invisible*."

Commenting on the discourse of P.Tempels, who describes the Bantu-philosophy of being as a Bantu-metaphysics of 'force', of vital power, he writes: "...life, understood on the level of personal experience, is *perceived, experienced, imagined* rather as being a 'materiality' (a body), a force (an effective action), *a line of connection*, unifying and communicating the beings mutually." 15. Within a worldview which centers on the concrete, individual life, there is no place for a conceptualisation of life. In contrast to the Western theological, philosophical and scientific tradition, Elungu states that the African interpretation is rather sensuous, imaginative and mythic. I am inclined to add the term 'intuitive'. The apparent lack in our recent philosophical tradition of dealing seriously with the domain of human intuition, makes the gap between the western way of perceiving and understanding, and the traditional African one, so difficult to bridge. The above-mentioned characteristics of 'materiality', a 'force', a 'line of connection' can be understood as specific traits of the experience of the visible and invisible reality being an immanent and indivisible whole.

I am stressing the notion of immanence so heavily, because of the fact that even the christian African communities have a tendency, according to Elungu Pene Elungu, "to reduce considerably the transcendent dimension of the revelation." The kingdom of God has to take form on earth, even if it takes some generations. "The very precise tendency exists to bring the heaven back on earth, to realize, already here-down-there, the kingdom of God, to make of eschatology a problem of the future of which the terrestrial hope of some generations separates us from the solution. That's the triumph of the myth over the rational conception of time which presupposes the christian conception of the kingdom of God within an eternity outside time by trespassing that rational conception." 16.

Sometimes I wonder why the African attitude about time is related to the triumph of myth, and the notion of christian eternity is related to a rational conception. It is a description in which the traditional African point of view never can win. "Throughout the long history of Western scholarship African religions have never been the object of study in their own right. African deities were used as mercenaries in foreign battles, not one of which was in the interest of African peoples." 17.

This 'Diesseits'-attitude in the African worldview also explains the important role of patience, which is the virtue *par excellence* for the Dogon as I mentioned in my introduction.

## Five unifying concepts of Newell S.Booth, Jr

In a carefully written introduction Newell S. Booth, Jr. formulates five unifying concepts "which underlie specific beliefs, myths, symbols, and rituals. These are intended, not as conclusions, but as suggestions of areas in which further investigation may be fruitful." 18.

After having noticed that the description of religion in terms of "sacred" reality which is opposed to the "profane" is based on non-African ways of thinking, Booth mentions as a first concept the one of vitality or *life-power*. "In African thought true being is dynamic; "to be" is to possess the power which makes "being" possible."

The second basic concept is *humanism*: "African religion is centered more in man than in God or in nature." As the above-mentioned term 'ubuntu' also suggests, African humanism is not a individualistic, but communal humanism. This leads, according to Booth, to

the third central concept, that of *wholeness*. "In Africa the sacred is manifested not so much by separation as by unity. It is appropriate to recall that even the English word "holy" is related to the word "whole"...the whole is the holy. Thus man finds his fulfillment not as a separate individual but as a participant in a family and a community. Relationships with other people are of utmost significance."

This leads us organically to the fourth concept, that of *continuity*. It "unites the present with the past and also the future....thinking of past and future as two opposite "directions" from the present is probably alien to African thought. In Kiluba, for instance, the same word, *keshya*, can be translated either "yesterday" or "tomorrow". The present is the center of time but it has meaning only in the context of a larger reality which extends outward from it, in whatever "direction". The living community is the link which unites the ancestors and the unborn generations."

The notion of continuity leads us to Booth's fifth concept of *health*. "Healing, in Africa, has to do with preservation or restoration of human vitality in the context of the community as a whole. The English word "heal," it may be noted, is also related to the words "whole" and "holy."

Booth concludes its introduction by stating that African religion can only be understood properly through a "wholistic" approach, involving the cooperation of several disciplines. 19.

### Whole and holy

It seems superfluous to indicate the analogies between e.g. Zahan's accent on spirituality and Booth's analysis of the terms 'whole' and 'holy', or the lack of opposition between the sacred and the profane, as the three monotheistic religions have to believe, because of the notion of ONE transcendent God.

The priest Henri Gravand speaks about the "cultural genius" of the African, defending the thesis that one must start from a fundamental observation: the spiritualist conception of the universe: " His "ultimate horizon" does not stop in the visible world, but plunges into the sacred universe, in the unity and the dynamics of a great All, of which certain parts are visible and the most important ones invisible." 20.

Not only the spiritual orientation, but also the central position for the concrete individual and the use of the word *humanism* by various authors refer to a specific polarity between the individual and the community. I have often been struck by the combination of pride of self and a positive social attitude in, for instance, a city as Mopti: both women and men often show a beautiful balance between individual consciousness and group-consciousness. It is a balance of complementary poles, not of opposite poles.

This respect for human life, the understanding of the interconnectedness of all phenomena, the spiritual experience of a whole, and a deep insight into the dynamic structure of reality gives the African worldview its hidden qualities.

### Sigi festivities of the Dogon

If we relate the five concepts of Booth to the Dogon culture, then the Sigi festivities illustrate at one stroke all these concepts simultaneously: the experience of continuity; the vitality and regeneration of the life of the tribe which contributes to the health of its members and the people as a whole. As mentioned before, during the Sigi festivities, in each village three boys are chosen to become initiates in the secret knowledge of the ancestors. The Sigi festivities start in Yougoudougourou, the most sacred place for the Dogon, situated on a high, difficult to climb mountain. It is not far from the *falaïse* where we were staying. The Sigi festivities last seven years: after one year in Yougoudougourou, the Sigi festivities continue in the next area, and so on, until after seven years, the whole Dogon-territory has gone through these renewing rituals. 'Seven' is the combination of

'three' and 'four', which respectively indicate the male and female genitals, together being the number of fertility. It is seductive to compare this symbolic meaning of 'seven' with the seven sacraments in the Catholic religion. As soon as the first year of festivities in Yougoudougourou has passed, one starts to put a knot in a rope until there are sixty knots. There are a few men and women who 'participate' three times in the Sigi festivities. That is the way people know that they are older than 120 years.

#### Internal coherence and secret wisdom

Griaule describes the internal coherence and secret wisdom of the Dogon-worldview: "...esoteric myths, parallel to these (exoteric myths FE), present other identifications and much wider connections. Finally, within and beyond this totality of beliefs appears a logical scheme of symbols expressing a system of thought which cannot be described simply as myth. For this conceptual structure, when studied, reveals an internal coherence, a secret wisdom, and an apprehension of ultimate realities equal to that which we Europeans conceive ourselves to have attained. The Dogon, in this system of myths and symbols, are able to express a correspondence between their social organization and the world order as they conceive it. For them social life reflects the working of the universe and, conversely, the world order depends on the proper ordering of society. Furthermore, the social order is projected in the individual, the indivisible cell which, on the one hand, is

a microcosm of the whole, and, on the other, has a circumscribed function, like a cog in a machine; not only is a person the product of his institutions, he is also their motive power. Lacking any special power in himself, but because he is the representative of the whole, the individual affects the cosmic order which he also displays." 21.

A simple, but striking example of the relationship between the individual, the social order and the cosmic one, is the way older people educate young children. A girl Gaia, two years old, was eating a mango, early in the morning. An old woman with naked breasts approached her, stretched her hands towards her, called her name and asked Gaia to give her the mango. Gaia did not react, notwithstanding the fact that the woman often mentioned her name softly. Gaia continued to eat the flesh of the mango. After only a wet pit was left, she dropped this pit into the stretched-out hands of the woman. The woman smiled, lifted her hands with the pit up to the sky, murmured something, and handed back the pit to the child, thanking her. I saw an old man doing something similar with one of their young children. Without any self-interest of their part, the old ones teach the children to give. To give and to take, and in this sequence, is their educational philosophy. It is the practical aspect of the remark of Dolo Asegrama that one can recognize an animist by her willingness to offer.

The cosmogony of the Dogon is the story of Amma: "Amma is Dogon language, like Allah is Peuhl language."

Amma is originally the cosmic Egg that started to turn around its axis in spiraling movements. By these spiraling movements Amma became the creator, because the four primal elements within the Egg - air, water, fire and earth - were strewn in the four directions: north, south, east and west. By this spiraling movement, Amma, the cosmic Egg, created the four primal elements, and also man. Both Amma and man can be understood as being composed out of these elements. This cosmogony testifies to the knowledge of the Dogon that the earth is turning around its axis. The movement of the earth becomes visible in the Kanaga-mask. The *Kanaga*-mask that has become the national symbol of Mali, consists of a vertical stick or plank with two horizontal cross connections, of which the ends usually stand upwards. The dancer with the *Kanaga*-mask turns around his axis to a special rhythm of the tom-tom, by which he symbolizes the turning of the cosmic egg around its axis. The four ends of the cross connections represent the four directions and the four elements. The dancer joins the cosmic movement of the earth:



microcosm becomes macrocosm, and macrocosm becomes microcosm.

### Nature and man: a comparison

The difference between the Dogon attitude on nature and man and the common Western attitude on man and nature, is a deeply rooted, cultural difference. We have separated our emotional lives from the inherent dynamics of nature. Our human world has become a world in itself and for itself, internally farguing divided into nations, groups and individuals. The mainstream of Western ontology is still deterministic and mechanically oriented, notwithstanding the many theoretical and philosophical indications for an opposite, indeterministic point of view. The great humanist Immanuel Kant has left us in his writings with several dichotomies which are still actively present. First of all, the dichotomy between a deterministic cosmic order, and a human person who is free, and bound to act ethically, following the golden rule: do not do anything to anybody else that you do not want done to yourself. This quite egocentric ethical statement is, in its turn, the result of another dichotomy, viz. the transcendental categories of the human mind by which we are able to organize the world into laws and patterns. For this Kantian epistemology leads to the impossibility of reaching reality as such, because one never knows, if the mind really reaches reality in its deepest layers: 'Das Ding an-sich' (The Thing in itself) becomes the blind spot of modern man. The third dichotomy is between mind and body, belonging to different domains. The Kantian dichotomy between a world out there which is structured according to physical laws, independent of our will and active knowledge, and the human mind as a moral and aesthetic free universe, has led to a deep alienation between men and nature. And this is one of the motives, if not the motive for a Conference on Religious Experience and Ecological Responsibility. The problem is not primarily an ethical one, one of irresponsible behaviour towards nature, although this is also true, but an epistemological and ontological one. The basic notions and unifying concepts of the traditional African worldview(s) start from assumptions which stand perpendicular to the Kantian dichotomies. These African assumptions show a far-reaching internal consistency: the dynamic character of nature and life manifests itself in the concrete life of a human person. Nature and men communicate with each other within the visible and invisible order. Each person embodies the whole, and the whole carries each individual. The continuity of life orders the mutual relations, and makes the African humanism more social than Marxian philosophy on the so-called social nature of man. The African disbelief in independent substances implies the possibility of studying modern sciences with less prejudice than Western christian tradition has ever made possible.

### Conclusion

If this presentation of deeply rooted ideas and values in Sub-Saharan Africa is more or less adequate, why is there such a disregard for the outstanding qualities of the traditional African worldview(s)?

Can the impact of the Western world and the increasing impact of islam and christianity on Africa today, only be explained by their superior power and wealth? Are the children of the sun doomed to undergo a transformation of their belief-systems into a world of dichotomies of which we know that they do not work?

It would be of great value if African scholars and ecologists would start to develop common research, together with their colleagues on the other continents, with the aim of contributing to a revival of this ancient knowledge about nature and man, slowly transforming the gap between man and nature into an ecological consciousness with ancient Africa in its spiraling center.

1. Marcel Griaule, *Conversations with Ogotemmeli*, an introduction to Dogon religious ideas. Oxford 1965, p.17. Original French edition in 1948.
2. Notation Bert Schierbeek. Translation by the author.
3. Cesare Poppi, IV CODA: secrecy and the other, in *SECRECY African Art That Conceals and Reveals*, edited by Mary H.Nooter. The Museum for African Art, New York - Prestel Munchen 1993, p.206.
4. Idem, Rachel Hoffman, *Seduction, Surrender, and Portable Paradise: Dogon Art in Modern Mali*, p.233.
5. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Comparative Religion: Whither and Why?* p.55.
6. B. Holas, *Les Dieux d'Afrique Noire..* Librairie Paris 1968, p.9. Translation by the author.
7. Dominique Zahan, *Religion, Spiritualité et Pensée Africaines*. Payot Paris 1970, p.7. Transl. by the author.
8. Id., p.13.
9. Id., pp.13-14.
10. Geoffrey Parrinder, *Religion in Africa*. Penguin Books 1969, p.26.
11. His answer in French: "Nous sommes Amma aussi".
12. Id., Routledge, and Kegan Paul. London 1980, p.XV.
13. D.Zahan, Id., p.237. Translation by the author.
14. Walter Burkert has recently published a study on Greek culture in the early archaic age in which he focusses on the orientaling century 750-650 BC, demonstrating that eastern models significantly affected Greek religion and literature.  
Walter Burkert, *The Orientalizing Revolution: Near Eastern Influence on Greek Culture in the Early Archaic Age*. Cambridge MA, 1993.
15. Elungu Pene Elungu, *Religions Africaines et Philosophie*, in: *Cahiers des religions Africains* 11, 21-22; 91-103. Translation by the author.
16. Id., p.101.
17. Okot p'Bitek, *African Religions in Western Scholarship*. Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1971, p.102.
18. Newell S. Booth, Jr. Ed. *African Religions*. NOK Publishers International. New York London Lagos 1977, p.5.
19. Id., pp.5-10.
20. R.P. Henri Gravand, *Les religions africaines traditionnelles comme source de civilisation spirituelle*, in: *Cahiers des Religions africaines* 4,8: 1970, p.154. Translation by the author.
21. Marcel Griaule and Germaine Dieterlen, *The DOGON*, in Daryl Forde, ed. *African Worlds - Studies in the cosmological ideas and social values of African Peoples*. Oxford University Press 1954, pp.83-84.