

## Monotheism and Metaphysics in the *Yorùbá* Thought System: A Process Alternative

By

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### Abstract

Traditional *Yorùbá* theology has been construed by some African scholars as monotheism albeit with slight but significant departures from the mainstream and dominant variety. Of these scholars, Bolaji Idowu [1962]; Omotade Adegbindin [2011]; and Akintola Adebowale [1999] are foremost. Their agenda derives from the attempt of circumventing the polytheism that is *seemingly suggestive* of the theology. But since metaphysics necessarily informs theology, these scholars have yet to provide a comprehensive metaphysical context that endorses monotheism in *Yorùbá* philosophy. As a consequence, there has been little or no reason to further explore this research gulf among scholars conversant with *Yorùbá* theology. Using the method of conversational philosophy, I make a concerted effort to propose that traditional *Yorùbá* theology is neither polytheistic nor monotheistic. When the study proposes that it is panentheistic, the process metaphysical groundwork upon which the theology and the entire thought system of the *Yorùbá* thrives is unpacked. The conclusion is therefore not far-fetched – traditional *Yorùbá* theology has a process metaphysical groundwork from which panentheism but not monotheism is discernable.

**Keywords:** Metaphysics, Monotheism, Panentheism, Theology, *Yorùbá*.

## **Introduction**

In this study, the thesis that traditional *Yorùbá* theology is panentheistic and an ancient stereotype of process metaphysics will be proposed. In the next section, the disparaging comments about the inability of traditional Africans to conceive a divine being and the spate of rejoinders that this charge generated will be given brief attention. In the third part, attention shifts to the traditional *Yorùbá* theology which has been interpreted as monotheism by Bolaji Idowu, Omotade Adegbindin, and Adebowale Akintola. Though these minds are the principal representatives of the monotheistic straitjacketing of *Yorùbá* theology, there has been little attention in recent times given to revising their assumptions. The section unearths the inadequacies and erroneous implications of their outlooks from the shades of monotheism. When I propose a panentheistic outlook, I disclose some parallels between *Yorùbá* theology and process theology – an extension of Alfred N Whitehead's process-relational philosophy. Afterward, the metaphysic that endorses my panentheistic perspective will be evinced, to be corroborated by some verses of the *Ifá* orature.

## **The Ethnocentric Charges against African Traditional Religions**

Ethnocentric comments that the traditional African lacks the capacity to conceive a divine entity led to a deluge of researches aimed at defending the traditional African and his/her religious beliefs. The conclusion of the missionary, Samuel Baker will always be remembered for his assertion as revealed by E.E. Evans-Pritchard [1965] that Africans are people without belief in a Supreme Being or any idea about celestial matters. Elsewhere, Godfrey Parrinder [1970] is circumspect about the type of religion and worship in traditional Africa. The contention is that paganism is the proper term for African traditional religions. To my mind, the ethnocentric charges are less of a worry. What causes more discomfort is the riposte to these charges by some African minds, including those who have misrepresented traditional *Yorùbá* theology. Prominent among these is John Mbiti who concludes that Africans are religious in everything. For him:

Because traditional religions permeate all departments of life, there is no formal distinction between the sacred and the secular, between the religious and the non-religious, between the spiritual and the material areas of life. Wherever the African is, there is his religion: he carries it to the fields where he is sowing seeds or harvesting a new

crop; he takes it with him to the beer party or to attend a funeral ceremony; and if he is educated, he takes religion with him to the examination room at school or in the university; if he is a politician he takes it to the house of parliament [Mbiti 1969: 2].

Mbiti seems to have done more harm than good as he exaggerates the view that the African is in all things a religious entity. The attempt to show that Africans are not lacking in religious knowledge and morality has led to scholarships which have tried to model the African idea of the divine parallel with the ones from Jerusalem and Mecca. It is precisely for this reasoning that 'Okot considers some African writers equally guilty of this kind of smuggling. K. A. Busia, L. S. Senghor, J. B. Danquah, J. S. Mbiti, B. Idowu, and Kenyatta are all led into sin by their methods of research and interpretation of African culture' [Imbo 2004: 370]. The case of Mbiti is not trivial as Okot dubs him 'Africa's chief intellectual smuggler. He earned this title because he smuggled enough Greek metaphysical material to Hellenize three hundred African deities' [P'Bitek 1972: 29]. This muddle necessarily extends to being one of the impediments to the unearthing of an authentic *Yorùbá* theology. And even when an African theology is attempted, the foregoing factor mitigates its originality. The question of originality will be further explored in the section that follows as traditional *Yorùbá* theology is used as a cue.

### **Traditional *Yorùbá* Theology as Monotheism: The Question of Originality**

Perhaps the starting point is to provide the general characterization of *Yorùbá* theology before the monotheistic interpretation enters the fray. In this regard, Bolaji Idowu [1973] lists the following in descending order of superiority: Belief in God, Belief in Divinities, Belief in Spirits, Belief in ancestors, and the practice of magic and medicine. None of these beliefs stands in isolation. In his rendition, John Ayo Bewaji insists that the reality of *Olódùmarè* is not a matter for argument or debate as replete in the Western tradition. On the contrary, the belief in *Olódùmarè*'s existence is held to be foundational. He amplifies:

The existence of Olodumare is not geotactic, nor is it dependent upon any human whim. This, perhaps, explains why no elaborate arguments or proofs are thought necessary for the existence of God in Yoruba religion. The starting point of wisdom among the Yoruba is the

acceptance of the *de facto* existence of Deity [Bewaji 2007: 369].

Furthermore, one must also note that belief in the existence of *Olódùmarè* is suggestive of the traditional *Yorùbá* belief in two planes of existence namely, *Òrun* ('spiritual abode') and *Ayé* ('physical world'). *Ayé* is believed to have been created by *Olódùmarè* with the assistance of the *Òrìṣàs* (subordinate deities) who reside with him in *Òrun* [Oyelakin 2013: 87]. It is in a similar spectrum that Margaret Drewal [1992: 14] explains:

The Yoruba conceive of the cosmos as consisting of two distinct yet inseparable realms—*ayé* (the visible, tangible world of the living) and *orun* (the invisible spiritual realms of the ancestors, gods, and spirits). Such a cosmic conception is visualized either as a spherical gourd [calabash], whose upper and lower hemispheres fit tightly together, or as a divination tray with a raised figured border enclosing a flat central surface.

It is therefore important to understand that *Olódùmarè* is not a *Deus remotus*, who is far off or like Aristotle's God who bears no relation or interaction with the world [Ofuasia 2017]. There are at least two facts that must not be wished away at this juncture.

Firstly, no one directly witnessed the whole creation process. Hence, instead of saying *Olódùmarè* created, this study will admit that the Higher God plays the role of guaranteeing order in the universe. Secondly, what is to be gleaned is that *Olódùmarè* had never been alone. The Higher God has always been with the primordial divinities, who have duties and responsibilities affixed to them for the smooth running of the universe. Some of these divinities are: *Òrúnmilà*, *Obàtálá*, *Àjàlá*, *Sàngó*, *Ògún*, *Esu*. It needs little elaboration that 'the divinities were the first creations of *Olodumare*; and that they were created by Him in His capacity as *Eleda*, for the primary purpose of assisting Him in the management of the planetary system' [Akintola 1999: 52]. In the words of Olarenwaju Shitta-Bey [2013: 79]: 'the divinities were created by *Olodumare* to assist...That they are to assist suggests that they are deputising *Olodumare*, which make them all the deputies of *Olodumare*.' Worship and ritual is directed toward *Olódùmarè* through the divinities. This relationship attests to the

cardinal truth in Process-relational philosophy that ‘God is not before all creation, but with all creation’ [Whitehead 1978: 521].

Another crucial point to be gleaned is that in traditional *Yorùbá* theology there is no entity equivalent of the Devil/Satan. This is an idea that scholars such as John Bewaji [1998] and Wole Soyinka [1990] have made laudable attempts at decolonizing but whose social awareness is still vegetative among contemporary *Yorùbá* peoples. The general public is still struggling with the understanding that *Olódùmarè* the Higher God is not perfectly adorned with superlatives of knowledge, love and power vis-à-vis the Abrahamic God and this is why the philosophical problem of evil does not infiltrate the thought system [Balogun 2009: 31]. It therefore does not strike one that ‘the Yoruba do not postulate an all evil being that is solely responsible for the occurrence of evil as we have in the West or in Judeo-Christian thought. Rather, the Yoruba conceive both evil and good as arising from the activities of Olodumare (God,) his ministers (divinities) and other theoretical entities’ [Balogun 2009: 31]. This underscores the persistence of relational and persuasive power in traditional *Yorùbá* theology. This is true because for the *Yorùbá*, ‘both *ire* (goodness) and *ibi* (evilness) are not separated as two distinct realities, but rather seen as one of two sides’ [Fayemi 2012: 324]. It is on this account that Sophie Bosede Oluwole [1995: 20] harps:

The Yoruba thinker recognizes evil as real, but he does not regard its existence as proof of God’s incompetence or His limited goodness, since He is not conceived as absolute in any of these senses in the first instance.

The foregoing rendition, though a synopsis, passes as the general understanding of the constitution of traditional *Yorùbá* theology. But because it is in stark contrast with how the Western mind perceives the divine and his *modus operandi* with the universe, traditional *Yorùbá* theology has suffered from the charge of polytheism and paganism. In a bid to rescue the theology from being branded as polytheism and paganism, torrents of literatures have served sharply to put matters in the right perspective. But in the process of rescue, an unfair and biased rendition soon infiltrated the schema. These points are notable in the works of Bolaji Idowu, Omotade Adegbindin, Adebowale Akintola, the trio that we contend with in this disquisition.

Reacting against the charges of polytheism, Idowu [1962: 204] postulates what he calls a ‘diffused monotheism.’ For him this ‘has the advantage of showing that the religion is monotheism in which the good Deity delegates certain portions of His authority to certain divine functionaries who work as they are commissioned by Him’ [Idowu 1962: 204].

Omotade Adegbindin too takes a monotheistic stance. For him: ‘In the *Ifá* system, *Olódùmarè* (God) is vividly presented as the Supreme Being, whose powers surpass those of the divinities. The monotheistic view that all created beings should worship *Olódùmarè* is found in a verse of *Òsèè-‘Túrá’* [Adegbindin 2011: 5]. The *Odu* in contention reads:

*Ifá advocates the worship of God;*  
*He says the bees will one day leave their hives;*  
*Ifá advocates the worship of God;*  
*For the mistletoe will one day leave the palm tree;*  
*He says the passing shadow will soon depart*  
*And return to God, the creator ...*

‘It is interesting to note,’ Adegbindin insists ‘that the theme of the above verse is presented as the voice of *Òrúnmilà* himself’ [Adegbindin 2011: 5]. Similarly, Adebawale Akintola reveals from the *Ifá* chapter, *Ìwòrì-Wòdín*, describing how human beings acknowledge God in such a monotheistic manner that often leads to unnecessary rivalry and confusion in the world. *Ìwòrì-Wòdín* rejects any exclusive claim to the knowledge of God and states how *Òrúnmilà* affirms that all religions in the world are avenues of reaching and venerating the one God (Akintola 1999: 45-6).

When Idowu on the one hand, and Adegbindin with Akintola on the other hand, have adduced the *Yorùbá* scheme as ‘diffused monotheism’ and monotheism respectively, this study differs from their positions. This research acquiesces that the *Yorùbá* ontological scheme is panentheistic. What then is panentheism?

Pantheism ‘is the view that God includes the world in his being (since he is affected by every event within it) and at the same that He is more than the events in the world (God has his own unique aims and actions)’ [Lawhead 2002: 495]. This implies that the world and God are forever locked in a continuous interaction. The fact that the world and God are interactive means that ‘it is true to say that God creates the world, as that the world creates God’ [Whitehead 1978: 528]. In pantheism, ‘there is no transcendence of God, above and beyond the world’ [OFUASIA 2015: 67]. Pantheism is present in several cult religions of the ancient periods which have now been castigated as paganism by monotheistic adherents whereas monotheism is a recent emergent as Sergei Tokarev [1989: 234] points out:

Judaism was thus the first religion in history to declare consistent and principled monotheism, and to put it into practice. The trend towards monotheism also existed in the Egyptian, Babylonian and Iranian religions, and this trend was always the reflection of political centralisation and the autocratic power of the king. Attempts to introduce monotheism were resisted each time by the priests of local cults and other centrifugal forces. This time the Jerusalem priesthood was able to establish strict monotheism because the priesthood of the Jerusalem Temple had a monopoly on power, had no strong rivals, and had the support of the kings, Persian and others.

From the foregoing claim it may be deduced that there is no way *Olódùmarè*'s interaction with all other entities both in *Òrun* and *Ayé* can be monotheism or diffused monotheism. These renditions from Idowu, Adegbindin, and Akintola reflect an uncharitable understanding of the *Yorùbá* ontological scheme.

Of all scholars conversant with traditional *Yorùbá* theology, Balogun may be credited for coming close to developing an ontological scheme for the theology. However, he did not see the need to further explore a process account even when he writes: ‘...the response of modern process theology, hinging upon the idea of God who is not all powerful and not in fact able to prevent the evil arising either in human beings or in the process of nature’ [Balogun 2009: 29]. Not only is this a poor rendition of process thought but an expression of the dearth of its

main thrust. Had Balogun been more patient and more intellectually meticulous, he would have seen the fit between traditional *Yorùbá* theology and process theology. Unsurprisingly, what Balogun sees is the connection between *Yorùbá* theology and Judeo-Christian theology. This is justified by his juxtaposing the concepts of ‘ase’ in traditional *Yorùbá* theology with ‘annointing’ in Pentecostal Christian theology.

Balogun’s [2004: 46] exploration of the deeper connection of ‘anointing’ and ‘ase’ in Judeo-Christian theology and traditional *Yorùbá* theology respectively, serves to show that though there are basic similarities in human endeavours irrespective of space-time location, there is the attempt to make these theologies appear similar. There are always bound to be loose ends with such contrasts. For instance, a critical exposition of the ontological schemes of these theologies (which Balogun fails to take cognizance of) implies otherwise. When Balogun is certain that: ‘God the father is source of anointing. He anoints whoever fulfils the requirements for receiving it’ [Balogun 2009: 49], there is no precise mention of the efficient cause of ‘ase’ in traditional *Yorùbá* theology. However, upon my critical engagement with his text, I find that traditional *Yorùbá* theology is panentheistic with a process-relational locus. Hence, it may share some rudiments with other theologies, yet it is a radically different but comprehensive ontological scheme. I now converse with Adegbindin.

In spite of Adegbindin’s (2014: xix) conviction that ‘*Ifá* is not a mere divination system but a literary compendium of the *Yorùbá* classical philosophy’ and his critique of Wande Abimbola, Bolaji Idowu and several other scholars who he thinks have not disinterred the philosophy latent in the *Ifá* corpus, he is guilty of similar misrepresentation, albeit from an ontological angle, as he deduces monotheism as autochthonous to the traditional *Yorùbá* theological scheme. In effect the *Odùs* (*Òyèkú Méjì*, *Òséè-‘Túrá*, and *Ìwòrì-Wòdín*) were merely interpreted to suit Adegbindin’s intent of classifying the theology as monotheism.

The panentheistic conception of *Olódùmarè*’s interaction with the universe is lucid enough. When the stories from the *Ifá* corpus reveal the interactive nature of *Olódùmarè* and his reliance on his ‘deputies’ when and where necessary, this entity is in stark contrast with a monotheistic agent who needs no world to be. This is an entity that necessarily transcends the



world and seems to be self-sufficient. The conclusion that the *Yorùbá* schema is monotheistic receives a vital blow given the continuum between *Òrun* ('spiritual abode') and *Ayé* ('physical world'). Speaking on the interaction between *Òrun* and *Ayé*, Mbiti corroborates the binary complementarity between these planes of existence when he asserts that the two 'dovetail and intermingle into each other so much that it is not easy, or even necessary, to draw the distinction or separate them' [Mbiti 1969: 97].

There are cases in the *Ifá* orature that strongly suggest a panentheistic approach wherein *Olódùmarè* interacts respectfully and in some cases with diplomatic tact, with the subordinate 'god-heads.' In other words, illustrations that reflect the persuasive and tactful character of *Olódùmarè* are replete in the *Ifá* corpus. One such instance is entrenched in a verse of *Odu Òyèkú Méjì* which is rendered thus:

*A child is not tall enough to stretch his hand to reach the high shelf  
An adult's hand cannot enter the mouth of a gourd  
The work an adult begs a child to do  
Let him not refuse to do.  
We all have to work to do for each other's good  
Ifá divination was performed for Òrúnmilà  
About whom his devotee  
Would make a complaint to Olódùmarè  
Olódùmarè then sent for Òrúnmilà  
To explain the reason why  
He did not support his devotee  
When Òrúnmilà got to the presence of Olódùmarè  
He explained that he had done all in his power for his devotee  
But that the destiny chosen by the devotee made his efforts fruitless  
It was then that the matter  
Became quite clear to Olódùmarè  
And he was happy  
That he did not pronounce his judgment on the evidence of only one of the two parties.*

Within *Odu Ìwòrì' Òsá*, another *Ifá* chapter, one finds a persuasive character of *Olódùmarè*:

*Atikaraṣeṭe, the Ifá priest of Heaven  
Divined and interpreted the teachings of Ifá unto Olódùmarè and the world  
Since the people of the world turn to Olódùmarè for everything,  
Crying out: "Baba, Baba, We have come! Save us!! Please save us!!!"  
Olódùmarè answered: "What could this mean?"*

*Those whom I have given power have refused to use it  
 Those whom I have given wisdom have refused to use it.”  
 It has been decreed that the children who do not see their parents will strive  
 with inner strength.*

The foregoing may be contrasted with the God of the Abrahamic monotheisms, a coercive agent that is expected to break the known laws of nature for the sake of adherents. This does not hold for *Olódùmarè* who seems to evince the process injunction that ‘God is not to be treated as an exception to all metaphysical principles, invoked to save them from collapse. He is their chief exemplification’ [Whitehead 1978, 343]. The metaphysical principle here is persuasive agency. It is this injunction that validates the panentheistic thesis which I disclose.

Regarding the abilities of *Olódùmarè*, and its stark departure from God among the Abrahamic monotheisms, Idowu [1962: 77] says: ‘There is a story which has it that Olodumare Himself was once perplexed over a very important matter. All the other divinities tried but failed to tell Him the reason for His perplexity; only Orunmila succeeded in putting his finger on the source of the trouble...’ This showing radically differs from the outlook of ‘the deeper idolatry...the fashioning of God in the image of the Egyptian, Persian and Roman imperial rulers...’ [Whitehead 1978: 343], which is rampant in classical theology but has no place in traditional *Yorùbá* theology. As a way of revealing the lack of superlative accidents in *Olódùmarè*, another verse from *Odù Òyèkú Méjì* captures:

*It was Olódùmarè’s forgetfulness  
 That accounts for the non-separation of the duck’s feet.*

Furthermore, the ability to reason with humans and non-humans to change its mind and trust in the judgments of subordinates is played out in the foregoing *Ifá* traditions. The same holds for *Yahweh* and *Allah* in classical theism. However, one point has prevented the exaggeration of these aspects of the divine in classical theology – the uncritical tendency to depreciate what cannot be understood. Hartshorne validates this outlook when he insists that ‘...in both Christianity and Islam, to a somewhat lesser extent in Judaism...there was a development of mysticism, which was different still and in some ways partially corrective of the all-too-Greek form taken by the official theologies’ [Hartshorne 1984: 1]. The mysticism implied in these Abrahamic monotheisms, could not be admitted into the substance metaphysical

framework imported from the Greek culture. Just as Moses convinced *Yahweh* not to destroy the Israelites, as Abraham pleaded for God to spare Sodom, so too does *Olódùmarè* reason and negotiate with his subordinates with whom It governs the universe in tandem. These illustrations find validation in the Old Testament book of Isaiah chapter 1 verse 18 wherein the prophet was inspired to chronicle: “‘Come now, let us reason together’” says the Lord. ‘Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.’ Instances and passages similar to these not only abound in the Bible but also reveal the panentheistic nature of *Yahweh/Jehovah* which is vitiated by most Western classical theologians and African theologians when espousing the religious cultures of traditional Africans. On the authority of David Ray Griffin [2010: 163]:

What exists necessarily is not simply God alone but God-and-a -world – not our particular world, with its contingent forms of order, but some world or other. This point can be expressed in terms of “creativity” which is the ultimate reality embodied in all actualities. Whereas traditional theism said that the power of creativity exists necessarily only as instantiated in God, for process theology it is necessarily instantiated in both God and a plurality of finite actualities.

Now that I have been able to show how panentheism is more fitting for traditional *Yorùbá* theology, the following questions still need attention: What is responsible for this push for a monotheistic religion for the traditional *Yorùbá*? Is it the case that any religious view which is not monotheistic is inferior to those that are? I concern with these shortly.

To understand the motivation which pushes scholars to brand traditional *Yorùbá* theology as monotheism, one needs to first realise that ‘it is the business of philosophical theology to provide a rational understanding of the rise of civilization, and of the tenderness of mere life itself, in a world which superficially is founded upon the clashings of senseless compulsion’ [Whitehead 1967: 170]. In the business of providing a rational understanding of religion, ‘...theology has failed’ [Whitehead 1967: 170), perhaps owing to the notion of the ‘absolute despot’ which has stood in the way [Whitehead 1967: 170]. This implies that the divine has been reasoned out as a coercive force rather than a persuasive agency [Whitehead

1967: 166]. This erroneous tendency goes as far as Aristotle, the codifier and foremost exponent of substance metaphysics, the most popular strand of metaphysics.

At this juncture, it is imperative to state here that there are two types of metaphysics that inform the conceptual articulation of any religion. These are: metaphysics of substance and metaphysics of event or process metaphysics. According to Whitehead, these two metaphysics are the deliverances of an integral experience. We all experience that some things change while others do not, some things move while others do not: being and becoming, substance and process. To a certain degree, substance metaphysics owes its success to the mode of thinking that cultivates such a mentality, that is to say, in ancient times, perfection was synonymous to changelessness [Masong 2013: 14]. This notion of perfection and its synonymy with changelessness served as the foundation for monotheistic theologies. Kenneth Masong [2013: 15] informs us that:

When this metaphysics entered the domain of religion, there was an almost perfect fit, especially with the rise of religious monotheism. As the ideas of Being, immutability, and impassibility suggest perfection, the concepts of movement, change, and becoming inversely suggest imperfection. The metaphysical search for the unchanging ground of changing reality became a religious search for an ultimate ground, which was found in the arms of an impassible, omniscient, and omnipotent God. When substance metaphysics found its ultimate category in the concept of Being, religion found its religious ultimate in the God that put on the attributes of Being itself.

The above reveals why and how monotheistic religions' presentation of a despotic God which was used to instil fear originated. But this fear no longer binds the modern mind. It is for this reason that Whitehead [1948: 188] reiterates that 'religion will not regain its old power until it can face change in the same spirit as does science. Its principles may be eternal, but the expression of those principles requires continual development.' The history of the Abrahamic monotheisms is replete with instances where repression and suppression of truth are commonplace even in the face of overwhelming counterevidence.

It is the case that leading scholars on African traditional religion have employed the popular and dominant metaphysics of the Abrahamic monotheisms in their studies. This approach not only compounds research problems for posterity but also presents an unfair and misrepresented chronicle of the African traditional thought system or metaphysics which lies in the domain of process metaphysics. What then is the inner kernel of process metaphysics? In this connection, the reflections of Alfred North Whitehead, the foremost scholar in the field will be used as cue.

I should start with the caveat that process metaphysics did not originate with Alfred North Whitehead. A survey of philosophy in the ancient periods reveals that ‘process-relational thinking has a long history stretching back at least to the Buddha and the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus in the sixth century BCE’ [Mesle 2008: 4]. This is ‘a view that not coincidentally finds much resonance within twentieth-century developments in physics and biology including quantum mechanics, ecology, chaos and complexity theories, and developmental systems theory’ [Ivakhiv 2018: 235]. Process metaphysics accentuates the ‘dynamism by which things are perpetually moving forward, interacting, and creating new conditions in the world...Process-relational thought rejects the Cartesian idea that there are *minds*, or things that think, and *bodies*, or matter that acts according to strict causal laws. Rather, the two are considered one and the same, or two aspects of an interactive and dynamically evolving reality’ [Ivakhiv 2018: 234].

In Whitehead’s version of process metaphysics, actual entities or occasions replace the notion of substance in traditional metaphysics. All things are actual entities or occasions – humans, cells, tissues, imaginations, rocks, thoughts, even God. However, there are gradations. For Whitehead [1978: 18], actual entities ‘differ among themselves: God is an actual entity, and so is the trivial puff of existence in far-off empty space. But, though there are gradations of importance, and diversities of function, yet in the principles which actuality exemplifies all are on the same level.’ All actual entities irrespective of their gradations are interdependent. They complement one another to the extent that the attempt to divide the reality into two (matter and idea) is frowned upon. This is what Whitehead [2004: 26] calls ‘the bifurcation of

nature.’ Given that God is also an actual entity how does It relate with all the entities since reality is a fusion of matter and idea?

Whitehead proposes that all actual entities have mental and physical poles, which makes them dipolar. Aside from this nature, God, being a higher grade entity, has primordial and consequent natures. In the former, God envisions all possibilities and their eventual actualization. Here, God provides possibilities from which all entities may or may not choose to conform to since all actual entities have subjective aims. In this regard, ‘...the subjective aim is constituted by the complete conceptual envisagement of all eternal objects laced with the urge toward their realization in the actualities of the world’ [Onwuegbusi 2013: 253]. These possibilities are provided by God for all other entities toprehend<sup>1</sup> for their subjective aims. It therefore implies that ‘God is the lure of feeling, the eternal urge of desire. His particular relevance to each creative act, as it arises from its own conditioned standpoint in the world, constitutes him the ‘initial object of desire’ establishing the initial phase of each subjective aim’ [Whitehead 1978: 522]. When actual entities fail to conform to these possibilities provided by God for their prehension, since they are free to or not to, evil enters the fray. These choices, in turn, affect God who continues to provide other possibilities for restitution.

The instances where other prehensions and agencies of other actual entities affect God’s actions correspond to God’s consequent nature. God’s consequent nature ‘...is the physical prehension by God of the actualities of the evolving universe’ [Whitehead 1979: 46]. This makes God in process metaphysics, imperfect, persuasive yet a guarantor for order. These features make God a necessary part of the grand plan of the actual world. Whitehead affirms this too when he relays: ‘There is an actual world because there is order in nature. If there were no order, there would be no world. Also, since there is a world, we know that there is an order. The ordering entity is a necessary element in the metaphysical situation presented by the actual world’ [Whitehead 1957: 104]. This idea of God being a necessary part of the world contrasts sharply with the starting point of wisdom among the Yoruba – the acceptance of the *de facto* existence of the *Olódùmarè* [Bewaji 2007: 369].

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<sup>1</sup>This is a highly technical term in process thought. Whitehead [1978] initiated it out of his conviction that it takes cognizance of other ways of knowing such as clairvoyance, extra sensory perceptions, telepathy, which the five sense organs may not ‘perceive’ and relay to the brain.

Much as the world depends on God, God also depends on the world. The foregoing clearly validates an earlier assertion that ‘God is not before all creation, but with all creation’ [Whitehead 1978: 521]. Since God depends on the world, and the world on God, the passage of the *Ifá* corpus, *Odù Òyèkú Méjì* cited hitherto wherein *Olódùmarè* relied on the judgment of both parties validates the idea of a God that is persuasive but not coercive; one that interrelates with the world.

Since God is not the highest hierarchy of the being in process ontology, what occupies this role, a critic is wont to demand. In other words, for every ‘philosophic theory, there is an ultimate which is actual in virtue of its accidents’ [Agyakwa 2002: 50]. For Whitehead, this ultimate is ‘Creativity.’ According to Whitehead [1978: 21] Creativity is the ‘universal of universals characterizing ultimate matter of fact.’ Creativity, in his word ‘lies in the nature of things that the many enter into one complex unity’ [Whitehead 1978, 31]. In the end, God ‘is at once a creature of Creativity and a condition for Creativity’ [Whitehead 1978: 47]. Like all other actual occasions, God exemplifies Creativity but also as ‘organ of novelty, aiming at intensification’ [Whitehead 1978: 104] and the ‘foundation of order...the goal towards novelty’ [Whitehead 1978: 135]. This role of order makes humans to walk on legs but not with their noses, for instance. It is responsible for the regularities that we observe in nature, where I have codified elsewhere as responsible for why ‘a goat does not give birth to a monkey’ [Ofuasia 2019, 67]. Creativity surfaces *Yorùbá* ontology and spirituality when there is serious turmoil in the land and *Ifá* divination is cast. Usually, one hears the priest chant: “may the rats sound like rats; may birds sound like birds.’ What is being appealed to here is the invocation of the conditions of Creativity through God to affirm regularities in the actual world. Irregularities are not misplaced since each actual entity has subjective aims to or not conform to the possibilities given by God. However, to save the situation, further possibilities are offered to correct and initiate the stable or desirable status quo.

From the brief exploration of the main thrust of process ontology, I now draw places of parallels with *Yorùbá* thought system. Firstly, nothing is life-less, as all things from simple cell, thoughts, volitions, rocks, right up to God fall under the notion of ‘actual occasions’ and

form an interconnected whole constantly and persistently prehending, knowing one another [Ofuasia 2017: 159]. It is important to note that traditional *Yorùbá* thought system also shares this perspective. The idea of cells, tissues and organs of the human body undergoing divination attests to this. For instance, in *Odù Èjì Ogbe*, *Ifá* divination was cast for actual occasions like the heart, brain and even the life-force thus:

*The day that the body was created from water  
 The day that water was created, so was blood  
 The day that blood was created, so was the whole body  
 Ifá divination was performed for heart (òkàn)  
 And likewise for the life-force (ẹ̀mí)  
 Ifá divination was performed for the inner head (orí inú)  
 And likewise for the brain (ọ̀pọ̀lọ̀)  
 When the four of them were coming from the unseen realm into the physical*

Secondly, and this outlook does not require further elaboration at this juncture – the absence of dualism in traditional *Yorùbá* thought system. Rather duality is underscored. This is implied in the dipolar structure of all actual occasions, which does not exclude God. Chidozie Okoro [2011: 124] reveals in this vein that the ‘...African thought system (be it in the area of metaphysics, epistemology, ethics or logic) operates on the law of duality, not dualism.’ Okoro [2011: 125] explains further that: ‘[t]he African metaphysical system is integrative on the ground that its dualistic nature allows for a plurality of views...Traditional Africans also conceived phenomenon in a cosmological double of ‘spirit force’ and a ‘material essence’.’ Okoro’s contention is amplified by Kenneth Anyanwu [1981: 95] who avers that when the African looks at a tree within the assumptions of his culture, he sees and imagines a life-force interacting with another life-force. He sees the colour of the object (tree), feels its beauty, imagines the life-force in it, intuitively grasps the interrelationships between the hierarchies of life-forces. This ‘communication’ between the African and trees may appear strange to the Westerner. However, there are contemporary findings that relay that plant may have up to eleven photoreceptors when humans only have three [Chamovitz 2012]. The implication is that plants can see, smell, hear and feel even much better than humans [Sheth 2019].

When we place the assertion of the foregoing scholars against the thrusts of process metaphysics, there is an almost perfect fit. Almost perfect because the consciousness that process metaphysics has been the metaphysical underpinning of African reality is still in a



vegetative state. It is the task of contemporary day African philosophers to try the process *goggle* and see if it makes any sense of every aspect of African life. This is in line with Whitehead's admonition that the goal of philosophy is '...the endeavour to frame a coherent, logical, necessary system of general ideas in terms of which every element of our experience can be interpreted' [Whitehead 1978: 3] This implies that the sole aim of philosophy is to interpret or understand our experiences. He adds: 'the elucidation of immediate experience is the sole justification for any thought' [Whitehead 1978: 3]

### **Conclusion**

The thrust of this study has been to show that traditional *Yorùbá* theology is panentheistic in nature. By providing its panentheistic grounding, the process ontology that endorses this outlook has also been unearthed. Previous attempts to pass the thought system as monotheism have led to the incursion of arrays of theological quagmires from mainstream Western theology into traditional *Yorùbá* theology. It also affirms the widespread but misleading stance that pre-colonial Africans had no idea of God. Hence, this study implores other African cultures to apply the process thesis to see if it provides an avenue for tapping into relevant and treasured values and ideas of their progenitors that can be brought to the fore of contemporary living.

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