

Comparative Monotheism: Ancient Egypt and the Kongo Religion, the Bukôngo

by

Kiatezua Lubanzadio Luyaluka, Ph.D. (Hon.)

kiatezuall@yahoo.fr

Institut des Sciences Animiques

www.animic.wordpress.com

Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo

Key words: Egypt, monotheism, cosmology, argument, scholasticism, Akhenaton, Bukôngo

Abstract

This article shows that the scholastics concept of monotheism is not in line with the logic of their theistic philosophy, nor with the Christian idea of God as immutable and perfect. Hence, this concept cannot serve as a universal standard for the assessment of other religions. Thus, to assess the nature of the theism of the Osirian religion, a comparative study with the hierarchical monotheism of the Kongo religion is presented; this traditional African religion includes a monotheism that is more logical in its affirmation of the perfection and the ultimate nature of the Supreme God. Furthermore, this comparative study shows a clear convergence between the two religions that allows for a conclusion that the religion of ancient Egypt was a hierarchical monotheism and that the nature of Osirian religion is what explains the absence of proselytism and religious conflicts, as well as the claimed complementary nature of the different cosmogonies of ancient Egyptian theological schools of thought.

Introduction

One of the issues debated in the field of Egyptology is the nature of the theism of the religion of ancient Egypt. If the vast majority of scientists have so far leaned towards an affirmation of the polytheistic nature of the religion of ancient Egypt, there are also voices that are raised to oppose their perception.

In this article, after establishing the inappropriateness of postulating the scholastic concept of monotheism as an absolute standard for the appraisal of any claim of monotheism, I propose an appraisal of the theism of ancient Egypt based on a comparative study of this old religious theistic concept to the hierarchical monotheism of the people of the ancient Kingdom of the Kongo in central Africa.

Approach of Research

The main approach that is often used in the appraisal of the theism of ancient Egypt is a comparative study with the notion of monotheism as defined in the Western theistic philosophy. It is in this way that Massey (1881: 439), for example, speaks of Egyptologists who argue that the Egyptian religion 'was originally monotheistic in the modern sense of a conception and a worship of the one male divinity'.

Thus, the basic assumption for the assertion of the polytheistic nature of the religion of ancient Egypt is not necessarily the absence of texts affirming the belief in a single supreme God, but rather, the lack of agreement of any claim of monotheism with the prevailing conception of this notion in Western civilization.

The *Webster* dictionary (1977) defines monotheism as 'the belief that there is but one God'. To the same definition, the *Larousse* (1983) adds that Judaism, Christianity and Islam are the major monotheistic religions of the world. This addition points to the fact that the concept of monotheism is linked to the scholastic perception of these faiths.

The case obviously appears to be that the majority of Egyptologists sustains that if Egypt is monotheistic; it should be so according to the scholastic conception of this notion. This position is part of what can be called an autobiographical vision of the pharaonic civilization (Asante 2009: 4).

In this way, one seeks in ancient Egypt proofs of monotheism, proofs of the concept of a religion where people affirm the existence of only one God, creator of the universe, to whom all prayers are addressed. But what seems to appear in the study of ancient history is that the Egyptians addressed their prayers to a multitude of Gods who offer no unanimity in the naming of the creator of the universe, nor on doctrinal matters (Mackenzie 1907: IV).

Hence, the position of the majority of the Egyptologists calls in mind the following question: is the scholastic theistic paradigm sufficiently justified to be universally valid and to be an enforceable standard against any affirmation of monotheism? I intend to show that the answer to this question is negative; and this conviction will lead me to attempt an appraisal of the theism of the ancient Egypt via a comparative study with an African vision of monotheism.

So the approach I advocate in making a judgment about ancient Egyptian theism is to start from the examination of the monotheism of the Bukôngo, the Kongo religion. Thus, the claimed monotheism of the traditional faith of the Bakôngo (the Kongo people) and the demonstration of the existence of monotheistic features in the theism of this African religion will allow me to judge, by a comparative study, the existence or not of monotheism in ancient Egypt, later I will justify the consistency of my claims about the Osirian religion through their agreement with some historical evidences.

Objection to Scholastic Monotheism

Monotheism is defined by the scholastics philosophers and theologians as the doctrine of the uniqueness of God. Speaking of this uniqueness Luginbill (2006: 4) indicates that it involves God's 'natural authority and ability to order the universe however He chooses'. This scholastic notion implies the belief in one God who created the universe and who is the ultimate cause, including no contingency.

But it is also important to note that, in accordance with Holy Scriptures, in all the three major religions mentioned above, the concept of monotheism goes along with the idea of an unchanging and perfect God. The Bible affirms that God is immutable (Malachi 3: 6, Hebrew 13: 8), and that God is also presented as a perfect Being (Psalm 18: 31, Mathew 5: 48), and even the Muslim sacred book, the Koran, presents God as a perfect knower and the one who 'perfected all things' (sura 27: 88).

Since a Western theism is what is taken by most scientists as the standard for any reflection on the question of the theory of uniqueness of God, it is appropriate to analyze its validity in relation to logic and to the affirmation of the immutability and the perfection of the Most-high.

Given the argument that God, the Most-high, created our temporal universe at a particular point in eternity, the following question arises: was God obliged to create our cosmos? Or, to put it otherwise: is God a totally free agent not impelled by an outward or an inward agent, aside from self, into acting in a given way? To this last question, like Luginbill, the scholastic theologians can offer only a positive answer.

According to scholastic theism, a not totally free God can't be the ultimate cause of our universe, because His own actions need to be impelled by a higher cause. Thus I agree with the scholastic theology that: 'God's essence may have inclined him to create a certain kind of world, but nothing necessitated that He do so.' (Koons 2008: lecture #2).

But, since God wasn't obliged to create this contingent universe, it follows that there was not in Him an eternal necessity to have a thought of a universe to be created. Otherwise the Supreme Being would have had in the eternal past, a past without beginning, a thought that necessitated not a manifest existence.

The possession by the Most-high of such a thought implies the existence in God, during an endless time, of an essence which was only potential; this unfortunately brings the need of a cause to explain why a certain essence in the Ultimate Cause, namely God's creative nature, has been chosen to be potential and not another.

Thus, in this case, contrary to the scholastic notion of monotheism mentioned above, God would be a contingent agent and not a necessary one, in other words, in this case, God the Ultimate Cause of the universe, could or could not exist, so God would not be necessary, since this situation induces the need of a necessary ultimate cause higher than the Most-high!

This conclusion is contrary to the scholastic concept of a creator who is the Supreme Being. Thus scholastic theology is right in affirming that the Supreme Being must be a totally free agent. However, if God was not obliged to have the thought of a contingent universe to be created, and since every thought of God requires a manifest expression, otherwise God's essence is not equal to God's existence, which amounts to a contingency, we would be forced by logic to accept that there was a time when God conceived the idea of creating a universe, an idea which the Creator did never have in an endless past.

This unfortunately implies that at some point in the past, God decided to have the thought of creating a contingent universe in a given future, a thought never conceived before. But the consequence of this state of affairs is that it brings in the need of a higher cause to explain why after an endless time God changed thinking and decided to have the thought of creating a universe; moreover, in this case God, the Most-high, would be a mutable mind.

The logical conclusion to be drawn from this argument is that the act of creation is necessarily an act of contingency, because it implies the actualization of some potential in the creator or an unavoidable change. And both situations require a cause to be accounted for; therefore a creator can't be an ultimate cause of the universe.

Thus, by inducing a necessary need for a change in the essence of the Most-high or a change of mind in the person of the Creator, the scholastic conception of monotheism implies that God, the creative Most-high, is not a totally immutable entity. But a not absolutely immutable Supreme Being cannot be a totally perfect being; since there might be certain states of being that God does not yet express until now due to this mutability.

All this shows that the scholastic conception of monotheism is not consistent with logic, neither with the biblical and koranic vision of the perfection of the Supreme Being. Thus, there is no valid reason to require that the Egyptologists impose a scholastic vision of monotheism as an enforceable standard for the appraisal of the claim of the existence of monotheism in ancient Egypt.

The question henceforth arises: is there a more consistent concept of monotheism, a concept in which the contingent act of creation is in conformity with the existence of an immutable and perfect Supreme Being? To answer this question, I will examine the nature of the monotheism of the Bukôngo, the Kongo religion; since, starting from a concept of cosmology and ontology totally different from the Western conception (Mbiti 1972: 24-25, 68), the theism of this culture of central Africa offers a totally different view of the uniqueness of the Supreme Being.

Monotheism and Bukôngo: The Existence of a Supreme Being

Asked about the existence of one Supreme Being in their culture, the Besikôngo, the Kongo people, unequivocally answer in the affirmative: *Nzâmbi Ampûngu Tulêndo* is their unique transcendent divinity (Batshikama 1971: 187). This Kongo religion affirmation of the existence of a most-high God is also attested by Africanists who studied this African cultural practice of the old Kingdom of Kongo, as shown by Lemba–Masiala (2007: 155) who quotes Doutremoux as affirming that the Kongo religion, the Bukôngo, includes a belief in a Supreme Being who is transcendent.

The notion of a single Supreme Being is inseparable from the Bukôngo. The Kongo religion teaches that: ‘*Nzambi* is unique, apart from everything else, invisible and yet living, acting in sovereignty, independent, elusive and inaccessible, yet leading men and things closely and with absolute efficiency’ (Van Wing 1959: 305).

Though the Kongo culture is clearly and constantly depicted by the Kongo and Africanist authors as being attached to the notion of a single Supreme Being, some scholastics theologians do not consider this assertion as an affirmation of monotheism. If for van Wing (1959: 295-296), for example, the Kongo religion is not polytheistic, as *Nzâmbi Ampûngu Tulêndo* is the Supreme ultimate cause of all things, yet nowhere in his book about this culture of central Africa, entitled *Etudes Bakôngo*, does he mention that it is a monotheistic society.

Kongo Monotheism

The reluctance of the Africanists to affirm the monotheistic status of the Bukôngo is understandable, since, as in the case of the ancient Egypt, they used to make their appraisal of other cultures, even of any culture different from the Western, by a comparative study with the notion of theism developed in the theology of the three major religions acknowledged by the West: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Hence, what we actually learn from them is that: if there is a monotheistic religion in African traditional culture, it must be of a different kind from the scholastic conception of theistic faith.

The African in a holistic vision of reality perceives the universe in an unwavering unity of the visible and the invisible. Speaking of the African original philosophic conception, Mabika Nkata (2002: 8) in his book entitled *La Mystification Fondamentale* states: ‘the formal holistic object is fundamentally relational and dynamic: it doesn’t separate a thing from its principle of intelligibility.’

The African conception of the unity of the visible and the invisible is not theoretical but essential to daily life; essential to the mutual reinforcement of the living and the 'dead', of the living of this plan and the living of the beyond. In other words: 'the relationship between the living and the dead is like the equilibrium of communicating vessels and hence, one of the reciprocity of services, one of mutual helps' (Mbondji 2006, 170-171).

This vision implies an ontological hierarchy of the visible humanity, the invisible humanity, and the supreme God. Speaking about the invisible world in the concept of the Kongo culture, Lemba-Masiala (2007: 53) says it consists of 'the spiritual beings such as angels, *zimbas*, ancestors, *bakulu*, and of the Supreme Being [*Nzâmbi Ampûngu Tulêndo*]' . For the Besikôngo the universe of the ancestors is nothing but the universe of the Gods who, like the living, are progressing toward the universe of the Most-high. This fact can be deduced from their proverbial affirmation of the parental divinity: '*Se i Nzâmbi an'toto.*' (The father is a God on earth), but if one's father represents here on earth the authority of the Supreme Being, he can only do so the more better when in the beyond he acts as a holy ancestor.

Therefore any concept of monotheism among the Kongo people can only exist within the frame of this hierarchical ontology, and never otherwise. And since the Besikôngo invariably claim the existence of only one Supreme Being in their traditional religion, it must be concluded that the theism of the Bukôngo involves a hierarchical monotheism in which the Most-high thrones above all lower divinities and above the visible humanity.

It is therefore fitting that Bittremieux rejects any connotation of animism or polytheism in the notion of *Nzâmbi Ampûngu*. "*Nzâmbi* cannot have an equal, he is not even, I would say, the '*primus inter pares*' or the term of an animist evolution, a polytheist one, or another, but the One, the Inaccessible, the Great Chief, who from his empyrean dominates everything" (Bittremieux 1936: 133). Here, this affirmation of Bittremieux is akin to Luginbill's (2006: 4) assertion that monotheism involves God's 'natural authority and ability to order the universe however He chooses'. Thus Bittremieux, unwittingly, makes a clear proclamation of the monotheistic nature of the Bukôngo.

If Africanists are reluctant to speak of monotheism about the Bukôngo, seeing in it for the Besikôngo only as a forgotten aspect of their distant culture, it is not due to the absence of statements about the existence of a unique Supreme Being in their traditional religion, but it is because its monotheism is not in line with the scholastic worldview; since it is a hierarchical monotheism where the Supreme Being is not the one to whom the worship is directly destined, but rather ultimately. This is what led Van Wing (1959: 305) to affirm that for the Besikôngo *Nzâmbi Ampûngu Tulêndo* is 'elusive and inaccessible'. Moreover the consequence of this hierarchical view of monotheism is that *Nzâmbi Ampûngu Tulêndo*, the Most-high, is not the creator of this temporal universe!

Demiurgic Creation

Unlike scholastic monotheistic conception of theism, the Bukôngo says: *Nzâmbi Ampôngu Tulêndo* is the source of all existence, but this temporal plan is the work of *Mbûmba Lowa*, the solar creator God (Bandzouzi 2000: 92). Thus, in reality the Bukôngo teaches a demiurgic creation of the temporal universe. This conception is reflected in the fact that the Kongo initiate does not address his prayers directly to *Nzâmbi Ampôngu Tulêndo*, but to the intermediary Gods who act for Him (Bandzouzi 2000: 92).

The solar nature of the Creator is also within other African cultures, for example, the Luba-Kasai culture (Democratic Republic of Congo) call the Creator *Maweja Nangila*, who is honored by the expression '*Diba katangidi tshishiki*' (the sun which cannot be stared with bare eyes).

Being not the creator, *Nzâmbi Ampôngu Tulêndo* does not include any contingency in connection with the creation of any temporal plane. Moreover, the Supreme Being includes no contingency regarding the causation of the demiurgic Creator; because being the Source of all existence, He is coexistent and coeternal with the 'Suns', His eternal heavenly manifestations, one of whom is *Mbûmba Lowa*, the creator of our universe.

Therefore the hierarchical view of monotheism, unlike the logically non-relevant scholastics' one, is consistent with the notion of an unchanging and perfect Supreme Being, that is to say, a Most-high God not compelled by any contingency toward the temporal universe as a Supreme Being truly immutable and perfect. This vision alone offers a concept of monotheism where the Supreme Being is indeed the ultimate cause of the universe.

Political Analogy

In daily life, we agree with the existence of hierarchical structure in the political direction of modern states. The Head of State is represented by lower authorities who are not quantitative equals. And all the legitimate desires of the population are addressed ultimately by the Head of the State through the way of these lowers authorities. And no one in this case can speak of a 'poly-cephalic' regime; all lower authorities represent the Head of State, but only qualitatively.

This analogy explains why not a single Africanist could convince the Besikôngo that their religion, the Bukôngo, is polytheistic; the Kongo people clearly defines themselves as monotheists as far and their traditional religion is concerned, hence, *Nzâmbi Ampôngu Tulêndo* is the only being absolutely infinite; a Being quantitatively and qualitatively infinite. Thus all lower Gods are only relatively infinite, and thus, they are infinite only qualitatively.

The Logic of Hierarchical Monotheism

The logical nature of the hierarchical monotheism can be demonstrated through my cosmological argument; an argument based on the existence of individualities and particular circumstances in the universe and on the law of causality and the law of the impossibility of infinite regression.

First of all, in my cosmological argument, let's call A_1 the aggregate of all entities in our world, A_1 is an aggregate of individual beings and particulars circumstances, therefore A_1 must be itself an individual entity. The possession of a particular individuality by A_1 necessitates an explanation; therefore the individuality of our universe is a contingency.

Second, let's call C_1 the cause of A_1 ; C_1 must be an individual entity, because it is identified with an individual universe. Moreover C_1 must be a necessary being, otherwise its own individuality will need to be explained and an infinite regress of causation is impossible. And since A_1 is an individual universe, there are other universes $A_2, A_3, A_4\dots$ that exist at least potentially. Thus, to be accounted for the cause of the exhaustive *multiverse*, C_1 must be the ultimate cause of all potential and manifest universes $A_1, A_2, A_3, A_4\dots$, or C_1 must be only one of the individual necessary causes.

C_1 is One of the Many Necessary Causes

A single individual necessary being C_1 can't exhaust all the possibilities of necessary infinity, because it can be accounted only for the causation of A_1 . Therefore there must be other necessary beings to account for the causation of the actual or potential universes $A_2, A_3, A_4\dots$, thus, these other necessary entities must be different from C_1 according to my hypothesis.

Let's call G an individual necessary being which includes the sum total of all the individualities of the necessary entities C . G is infinite in the quantity of individualities it includes, but also in the quality of its individuality, thus G is absolutely infinite; therefore G must be also the ultimate cause of the universe $A_1, A_2, A_3\dots$ for two reasons: the need to account for the individualities of each C_i , and the impossibility of infinite regress, therefore G is God, the Most-high.

C is the Ultimate Cause of All A

If C is the ultimate cause of all individual universes $A_1, A_2, A_3\dots$, then C is absolutely infinite, because if C is relatively infinite, i.e. if C includes only one necessary individuality, there must be a cause to explain why it includes this very individuality and not another, hence C would be contingent. But this alternative is contrary to my hypothesis. Thus C is absolutely infinite.

An absolutely infinite C must include an infinite number of necessary relative infinite individualities. We know by hypothesis that C is the ultimate cause of all the individual universes A₁, A₂, A₃...; C is therefore by hypothesis God, the Most-high, hence there can't be an essence in C that is merely potential, because this will amount to C being contingent; therefore all the different necessary individualities existent in C are actually essential. Thus, it follows that each of the necessary relative individuality C₁, C₂, C₃... included in C is the respective cause of each actual or potential universe A₁, A₂, A₃... Hence C is in reality G, and this ultimate cause is God the Most-high.

The Nature of the Most-high

The Most-high is absolutely infinite, and if the Ultimate Cause is not absolutely infinite than two situations will arise:

- The Most-high would be limited in the number of individualities He includes: than there must be a cause to account for His inclusion of a particular set of individualities in exclusion of another, and infinite regress being impossible, that cause must be absolutely infinite.
- The Most-high would be limited in the essence of His individuality: than there must be a cause outside of the Most-high to explain why He is allotted with that particular limited essence, and that cause must be infinite in its essence since an infinite regress is impossible.

Therefore, since the Most-high is the ultimate cause of all existence, He must be absolutely infinite and eternal. And furthermore, He is:

- synchronic with all necessary beings: the Most-high includes the aggregate of all necessary individualities, and the necessary individual beings C_i are the eternal manifest proof of the existence of the Most-high; without all the causes C₁, C₂, C₃... being present, some essence in the Ultimate Cause would be merely potential, hence the Most-high can't exist without every C being present; therefore the Ultimate Cause is synchronic with all necessary causes C.
- the source of all existence: since He is synchronic with the necessary realm of existence, and since an eternal God can't create, because creation implies a beginning, and there can't be a beginning in the eternal realm, it follows that the Ultimate Cause is not the creator, but the eternal source of the necessary realm.

- the sum total of the eternal necessary realm: we know that God the Most-high is synchronic with all necessary beings, and that the Most-high can't exist without a complete manifest proof of His essence, otherwise some essence in Him would be merely potential, which will entail a contingency. But if the Most-high can't exist without all the necessary relative infinite beings being manifest, then it would follow that His existence is contingent on the necessary realm, but since the Most-high can't be contingent on something outside or within self, then the only alternative which logically follows is that the Most-high is the sum total of the necessary eternal realm of existence.

The Nature of Our Temporal Universe A₁

Considering the possibilities of a distinct existence along with the infinite necessary realm, there are four possible alternatives to be considered for the existence of our contingent universe A₁:

- A₁ doesn't exist: This hypothesis ought to be discarded since the very purpose of my cosmological argument is to prove the existence of the cause of A₁, thus the existence of A₁ is an a priori fact.
- A₁ exists outside the eternal necessary realm: Being absolutely infinite, the Most-high includes all the possibilities of individuality; therefore there can't be a real individual existence outside of God.
- A₁ exists within the eternal necessary realm: This alternative implies that time is part of eternity, space is part of universality, and matter is part of infinity; but this is impossible because it amount for a violation of the principle of no-contradiction which rules out any simultaneity between a thing and its contrary.
- A₁ exists simply along the eternal necessary realm: Since A₁ exists neither within, nor without the eternal necessary realm, the only remaining alternative is that A₁ exists along the necessary eternal realm.

I have shown that since the God Most-high exhausts all the possibilities of infinity, and since God's essential nature is equal to manifest nature, the necessary universe of the Most-high exhausts all the possibilities of infinity, therefore it includes all the possibilities of individual existence. It follows that since A₁ is an individual existence, A₁ is only C₁'s vision of the necessary world of the Most-high; every contingent world is only a perspective of the necessary realm. This inference of my natural theology has some direct consequences:

- A₁ is a limited perspective: It can't be otherwise since all the possibilities of infinity are exhausted in the necessary universe of the Most-high.
- A₁ is a temporal perspective: Since the Most-high exhausts all the possibilities of infinity, it logically follows that He exhausts all the possibilities of eternity, because eternity is only the infinity of existence, an existence without beginning and without end. Therefore A₁ must be a temporal perspective.
- A₁ involves an illusory limitation: Since each world A_i in the *multiverse* is only a limited perspective of the infinite necessary universe of the Most-high, in whom all the possibilities of infinity are exhausted, A_i must therefore be temporal and illusory in its limitation of an infinite necessary reality. However, the illusory nature is attached to the limitation of the perspective, not to the good on which the perspective tries to put the limitation on, because the essence of this good is God, the Most-high.
- A₁ exist within a temporal consciousness: The existence of a temporal, limited perspective within an eternal consciousness violates the principle of harmony since reality cannot be conceived as being at the same time temporal and eternal, finite and infinite, universal and localized. Therefore A₁ exists in the temporal consciousness of the necessary being C, but since C is a necessary eternal being, this temporal consciousness must be in essence an illusory one.

All this development shows that the hierarchical monotheism is sustained not only by the Bukôngo religious doctrines, but also by logic. The cosmological argument developed above demonstrates this conception of theism and thus logically ensures a divine Supreme Being who is absolutely immutable and perfect; a Supreme Being who is enthroned above the temporal plans, and who is not directly concerned with the creation of this plans. My cosmological argument elucidate the existence of an eternal plan, which is the realm of God, the Most-high, and the Sons of God, the eternal necessary beings, and the temporal universes, which are the works of the demiurgic creators, the Sons of the Most-high.

The Features of Hierarchical Monotheism

From all that proceeds, it follows that in the holistic vision of the African, hierarchical monotheism refers to one God who is enthroned above the visible and the invisible worlds; a sovereign and transcendent Being. The hierarchical monotheism of the Bukôngo is therefore rooted in the following concepts:

- The existence of a supreme transcendent Being,
- A vision of an unwavering unity of the visible and the invisible realms,
- The existence of a creator God demiurge of the supreme God,
- The existence of lower Gods through the agency of whom the prayers are addressed ultimately to the Most High.

It is obvious that if the religion of ancient Egypt is a hierarchical monotheism, it should include these four main features of the theism of the Bukôngo.

The Nature of Egyptian Theism

It is undeniable that the Egyptian theism does not meet the scholastic definition of monotheism. *The Egyptian Book of the Dead* presents the creator as a self-created being and a son of the goddess Nut (Budge 1901: 13), a perception of things which is not in line with scholastic monotheism. But this failure does not disqualify this religion for any claim of monotheism, because I have shown above that the scholastic position is not a standard universally enforceable for the appraisal of any claim of monotheism. Moreover the Bukôngo, with its hierarchical monotheism, offers a more logically sustainable conception in terms of the assertion of the existence of a single Supreme Being who is immutable and perfect. Hence, I will examine the foundations of the theism of the Egyptian religion compared to those of the Bukôngo; a match of these two doctrines will allow me to conclude logically to the hierarchical monotheism of this religion; this process will be the verification of the existence in the Osirian religion of the four traits of the monotheism of the Bukôngo.

Osirian Religion and the Bukôngo: The Existence of a Transcendent God Supreme

In his defense of the idea of monotheism in the religion of ancient Egypt, Rawlinson (1886) states: 'In addition to the common folk religion, the belief of the masses, there was another prevalent among priests and educated people. The first doctrine of the esoteric religion was an essential unity of the divine nature.' Here, as said above, it is not the texts asserting the existence of a transcendent God that lacks in Egypt, as Sayce (1903: 11) admits. And *The Pyramid Text of Unas* provides us with an illustration of this affirmation; we can read this sacred text of the ancient Egypt: 'The Great One will be censed for the Bull of Nekhen, and the flame of the blast will be toward You who are around the shrine, by the King O great God whose name is unknown! A meal in place for the Sole Lord! (Van den Dungen text n° 171).

This 'Great One', whose 'name is unknown,' is certainly not a solar creator God, who was always named in Egypt with various appellations: Ra, Amon, Atmu, Amon-Ra.... So this 'unnamed God' is a transcendent Being who thrones above all, because He is a 'Great God,' who is 'the Sole Lord'. This text clearly proclaims the transcendence of the Great God, the Most-high.

The fact that texts referring to the Supreme Being in ancient Egypt are not common can be justified, because the Supreme Being was not the direct, but rather the ultimate, object of worship, due to the Egyptian holistic vision of the universe. This attitude is akin to what van Wing reveals of the Besikôngo about *Nzâmbi Ampûngu Tulêndo*, the Supreme Being, as being 'elusive and inaccessible' (Van Wing 1959: 305).

This raises another point: advances in anthropology have revealed that, contrary to the evolutionary hypothesis which depicts monotheism as the highest phase of a civilization reached by rising successively above animism and polytheism, more recent researches has revealed that monotheism is the oldest form of cult among the non-Western groups, and that these ones 'have a memory of a 'High God', a benign Creator-Father-God, who is no longer worshipped' (Brow 1996: chap.1 §5).

Seen in light of the Bukôngo, the seeming 'elusive and inaccessible' nature of the Most-high in the memory of people, which is also a characteristic of the Egyptian religion, is in reality a clue to the existence of a hierarchical monotheism in their religions; this feature of the non-Western theism can thus be interpreted as the absolute transcendence of the Most-high in the holistic conception of the universe and God.

A Holistic Vision of the Universe

The Egyptian cosmological holism is a conception that appears at first glance to anyone who looks at their vision of the *ka*, the soul. Mackenzie (1907: 88) argues that in the Egyptian vision of the universe, the *ka* exists in the mineral, the vegetable, the animal and even in human inventions. And he adds that the meeting of the *ka* with the beings of the invisible world was seen as part of reality. This coupled with the importance that the Egyptians attached to dreams and to oracles (attested for instance by Herodotus in his book entitled *An Account of Egypt* as being one of the means of solving even puzzling scientific problems about the Nile), reflects the belief in the existence of a real invisible world essential to the undertaking of daily life in the visible world.

The whole scene described in *The Egyptian Book of the Dead* is centered on the continuity of life in the beyond, where the dead, having lived in purity, hoped to have the right to become an Osiris, a son of heaven. And the fact that the dead claims the right to become an Osiris proves that the invisible world is the realm of the evolving beings; thus like in the Bukôngo, the Gods in the beyond progress toward the eternal realm of the Most-high. This progression is elucidated by the prayer of the Osiris Ani in the Egyptian book of the dead: 'Grant thou that I may come unto the heaven which is everlasting and unto the mountain where dwell thy favored ones' (Budge 1901: 108).

The belief of the Egyptians in an invisible world inhabited by the dead, also involved the belief in mutual reinforcement between the living of this world and the dead. Maspero (1897: chap 2 § 55-57) says that every Egyptian could be soaked up with the vital force, the *sa*, flowing gods to humankind. Sayce (1903: 37) expresses the same conviction about the Egyptian conception of vital force which recalls the African doctrine of mutual reinforcing between the living of this plan and the dead. (Tempels 1945: 27-31).

The Existence of a Demiurgic Creation

The demonstrated existence of a transcendent Supreme Being in the conception of the ancient Egyptians implies that the creator God Ra, is only a demiurge, a son of the goddess Nut, as the *Egyptian Book of the Dead* puts it: 'Thou art beautiful, O Rā, each day, and thy mother Nut embraceth thee' (Budge 1901: 13). According to Petrie (1906: 55), the goddess Nut is the embodiment of heaven, and Ra was perceived as a son of heaven or a son of the Most High.

It is known that each district of Egypt attributed creation to the sun God who was the greatest of the Gods in its pantheon and to whom was attributed the supremacy over all other Gods of Egypt (Maspero 1887: chap.2 § 92-93). But creation in Egypt was not ex-nihilo; it resulted from a pre-existing order, an order in which the solar creator God is sometimes represented as a 'son of heaven'; but often also depicted as a self-created being (Budge 1901: 13). This is also confirmed by Diop (1972: 217) according to whom from the preexisting order, 'the first being generated is the God Ra, demiurge of the world.'

In his affirmation of the demiurgic nature of the creation in the religion of ancient Egypt, Obenga (1990: 35) stresses the fact that the people of the ancient civilization conceived the existence of a universe anterior to the existence of the creator, this 'universe and the creator God are distinct'. This implies the existence of a higher principle of the existence of which the creator is a 'son of heaven'.

The Egyptian Book of the Dead presents the demiurge as the ‘creator of Gods’, and the originator of self from a higher heavenly order, ‘Thou risest and shinest on the back of thy mother [Nut], O thou who art crowned king of the gods! (Budge 1906: 11 & 3)’ The apparent contradiction of a begotten and self-originated being is made clear by my cosmological argument which clearly shows the existence of a necessary eternal realm, the heavenly realm, and a temporal order, the created universe (including the visible and the invisible).

Thus considered from the heavenly order, Ra is presented in *The Egyptian Book of the Dead* as a ‘Son of Nut’, a ‘Son of heaven’, and an offspring of the Most-high (the source of all existence). But in the temporal order, Ra is the self-created ‘the ruler of all the Gods’, because the Most-high is not concerned with the creation of the temporal universe which, according to my cosmological argument, is only a perspective of the eternal realm.

The Existence of Lower Gods Through Whom The Prayers Are Addressed

To the Egyptians, the solar Creator is not only the originator of humankind, but also of the Gods; and their holistic conception of the universe implies the existence of a hierarchy where the invisible world of the Gods comes between the Most-high and the visible world. Thus, the Gods are nearer to the worshiper than the Most-high.

Speaking about the devotion of these ancient worshipers Maspero (1897: chap. 2 §1) says that ‘Nearly every illustration in the works of Egyptologists brings before us the figure of some deity receiving with an impassive countenance the prayers and offerings of a worshipper.’ Now, as in the Bukôngo (Van Wing 1959: 305), the Most-high God was never represented in pharaonic Egypt (Rawlinson 1886: Chap. II, §23); all the devotions of the ancient Egyptians are therefore depicted as being addressed to the intermediary Gods. And we read in *The Egyptian Book of the Dead* a confirmation of this fact, hence ‘I am he who hath offered up prayers to the gods and who knoweth their persons’ (Budge 1906: 108). In ancient Egypt the prayers were invariably sent to the litany of the lower Gods who were ones of human, animal nature, and cosmic nature; this explains the scarcity of the inscriptions referring to the Most-high, the one whose ‘Name is Unknown’, ‘the Sole Lord ‘.

Egyptian Hierarchical Monotheism

It is obvious from this development that, if the Egyptian culture doesn’t meet the criteria of the scholastic monotheism, a comparative study of its religious doctrines with the Bukôngo reveals an essential correspondence in the nature of their theistic convictions. The Egyptian religion was definitely a hierarchical monotheism; the Most-high God ruled over a litany of Gods, the highest for each being the creator solar God which explains some of the features revealed by the history of the pharaonic civilization, such as the absence of religious conflicts.

One of the consequences of the hierarchical nature of the religion of ancient Egypt is that in reality, we do not encounter a multitude of solar Creators, but a rather diversity in the manner of naming and in the conception of the same Creator God. This conclusion is supported by the common features attributed by the different references of Egypt to the creator who is conceived as: a solar being, son of heaven which implies a demiurgic nature, head of the Gods, and self-created... Hence, 'Ra, though worshipped throughout the land, was not the aboriginal god of any city' (Petrie 1906: 51).

History teaches that the presence of different religions led the Roman Empire to a social atmosphere characterized by conflicts, revolts and persecutions; 'Judea was particularly turbulent', and 'the Christians were often accused of disturbing the peace of the Empire;' (*Anchor Bible Dictionary* 1992: 805). But contrary to the early years of Christianity in the Roman Empire, in ancient Egypt the different religious conceptions never resulted in religious conflicts as far as the hierarchical conception of theism was respected. Pierre (2001: 144) affirms that in the study of the history of ancient Egypt the only religious conflict that one finds is the one that opposed the Egyptians to the adepts of the new cult of Akhenaton, an act done in an attempt to deviate from hierarchical monotheism.

Hierarchical monotheism brought to ancient Egypt its essential unity, because this feature alone explains why, in a nation where each district proclaimed a demiurgic creator as being superior to the Gods of others, there was neither proselytizing nor religious conflicts. It also explains why the various cosmogonies were not seen as contradictions, but as opportunities for complementariness; Sayce (1903: 29) stresses this point by affirming that the Egyptians did not care about the discrepancies or contradictions concealed in religion, and thus, such an attitude could only exclude any proselytizing; it is an evidence of the essential unity of religious system in ancient Egypt.

It is also hierarchical monotheism alone that can explain why each conquered nation saw its Gods integrated in the pantheon of Egyptian Gods (Maspero 1897: chap. 2 § 8); since their inclusion could only enrich the pantheon without inducing a fundamental change in the cosmological and soteriological plan, as history shows us that the God of scholastic monotheism, whether Christian or Muslim, was often imposed on other nations by intolerance, proselytizing, and military conquests.

The Reform of Akhenaton

The affirmation of the monotheistic nature of the religion of ancient Egypt brings in the question of the assessment of the reform of Akhenaton. It is understandable for the scholastic Egyptologists to consider this pharaoh as an ingenious reformer who seems to have tried to introduce monotheism in Egypt, in the modern sense of this concept.

But as noted above, Egyptologists agree that the various theories of creation found in the Egyptian religion were not seen as contradictory but as mutually enriching. This therefore implies that they participate in the overall vision of the same religion; coupled with the absence of any proselytizing and of any conflict between the different religious schools this weighs in favor of the opinion that the perception of ancient Egyptian religion was essentially a hierarchical monotheism. And in short, there was not a multitude of creator Gods, but that each district called the demiurge Creator Ra by its own term and developed a theory appropriate to the specialty of its theological school, its initiatory mystery school, which explains why Ra was not an indigenous deity, but rather a generic appellation of the solar God.

Correspondingly, in the Kongo religion, this fact is reflected in the diversity of the conception of the 'presence of the fullness of the divinity' in humankind as this notion is seen in the Lemba, the Kongo civil initiatory academy, as the concept of the *Kimahungu*, symbolized by the action of the wind (*hûnga*) which by swirling gathers all around (Fukiau 1969: 145); it is also seen in the Kinkimba, the Kongo martial initiatory academy, as the concept of *Tafu-Maluangu*, symbolized by the python and the rainbow as representations of a protective encircling power (Kimfoko 1985: 18; Bittremieux 1936: 72, 170...). And furthermore, in the Kimpasi, the sacerdotal Kongo academy, this notion of the perfection of being is called *Kimalungila*, symbolized by the bracelet of the initiate called *n'lungu*, which refers to completeness.

Now, what to think about the so-called reform of Akhenaton? One of the accounts we have of this pharaoh is given by Joseph Flavius in his book entitled *Against Apion*, he observes that Amenophis (Akhenaton) who wanted to be able to 'see the Gods', rebelled against the religion of his ancestors, and that a group of leprous Egyptians, assisted by the shepherds (Hyksos) from Jerusalem fought against the army of Egypt, but were defeated. This account by Flavius seems to explain the cause of the rebellion of Akhenaton against the religion of his ancestors, and the war that the 'leprous' Egyptians made against their nation.

The first aspect in this situation is that Akhenaton wanted to 'see the Gods'. This implies for me that he wanted to be a 'spiritual seer', a prophet. But this attainment, which necessitated deep purification, required an initiatory preparation and seclusion that either a ruling king could not have time to afford, or he was simply denied the privilege. Thus, the failure of Akhenaton to attain to his wish angered him and he was set against the priests of Amon in the capital city of Waset (Thebes).

But being the ruler, Akhenaton had many followers, whom he gathered at his new capital city of Akhenaten. And subsequently, the hatred of Akhenaton toward the religions laws and the priests led eventually the Egyptians to turn against him and his followers qualified as 'leprous', or outcasts. Led by a priest of Lunu also known as Onu and Heliopolis who was also a follower of Akhenaton, the 'leprous' sought the help of the shepherds (the Hyksos) of Jerusalem, but could not stand up against the army of Egypt, and thus, thus they were forced to run away into the desert.

Thus, Akhenaton did not bring monotheism to a polytheistic Egypt, since the kingdom of the pharaoh was already monotheistic, and what this pharaoh brought to the Egyptian culture was in reality an attempted unification of the nomenclature of the creator God Ra which is why his reform has not survived him and was rather perceived by the priest of ancient Egypt as the daring of a heretical, a reform that basically brought nothing new to the Osirian religion, a hierarchical monotheism.

Conclusion

Molefi Kete Asante (2009) argues that any definition is autobiographical. It is therefore evident that the Western elite had to exceed intellectually to judge the Osirian religion by itself, and not from the Western conception of monotheism. Hence, in this article I have shown that the scholastic monotheism is a concept that is not in line with the logic of its theistic philosophy, nor with the Christian idea of an immutable and perfect God. I therefore endeavored to make a comparative study of the Osirian religion in relation to the hierarchical monotheism of the Bukôngo, a monotheism that is more logical in its affirmation of the perfection and the ultimate nature of the Supreme God. And furthermore, this comparison shows a clear convergence between the two religions, a convergence that has allowed me to infer that the religion of ancient Egypt was a hierarchical monotheism and that the nature of the Osirian religion is what explains the absence of proselytism and religious conflicts, as well as the claimed complementariness of different cosmogonies of the theological schools of ancient Egypt.

Bibliography

Anchor Bible Dictionary, Volume V, New York, 1992.

Asante, MolefiKete., *Afrocentricity*, <http://www.asante.net/articles>, 2009.

Batshikama, Raymond, *Voici les Jagas*, Kinshasa, 1971.

Bittremieux, Léo, *la Société Secrète des Bakhimba au Mayombe*, Bruxelles, 1936,

Budges, Wallis. 'theEgyptian book of the dead', in *Egyptianliterature*, 1901.

Diop, CheikhAnta, *Antériorité des Civilisations Nègres*, Abidjan, Présence africaine, 1972.

Fukiau, André, *le Mukongo et le monde qui l'entourait*, Kinshasa, 1969.

Kimfoko Madoungou, J., *le Guide du musée*, Pointe-Noire, 1985.

Koons, Robert, *Western Theism*, <http://www.leaderu.com/conversations>, 2008.

Lemba-Masiala, Nathalis, *le Kaandu chez les Basolongo du Bas-congo (RDC)*, doctoral thesis presented at University of Gand, Belgique, 2007.

Luginbill, Robert, *Essential Doctrines of the Bible in Outline* (Part 1), www.ichthys.com, 2006.

MabikaNkata, Joseph., *la Mystification Fondamentale*, Lubumbashi : Presse Universitaire, 2002.

Mackenzie, Donald, *Egyptian Legend and Myths*, London 1907.

Maspero, Gaston, *A History of Egypt, Chaldea, Syria, Babylonia, and Assyria*, Vol.1, www.gutenberg.org, 1897.

Massey, Gerald, *A book of the Beginnings*, 1881, <http://www.masseiana.org/aebk5>.

Massey, Gerald, *the Natural Genesis*, 1883, <http://www.masseiana.org/aebk5>.

Mbiti, John, *Religions et Philosophies Africaines*, Yaoundé, 1972.

Mbondji, Edjenguèle, *Morts et Vivants en Négro-Culture, Culte ou Entraide?*, Presse Universitaire, Yaoundé, 2006.

Obenga, Théophile, *La Philosophie Africaine de la Période Pharaonique*, l'Harmattan, Paris, 1990.

Petrie, Flinders, *the Religion of Ancient Egypt*, London, 1906.

Pierre, Nillon, *Moïse, l'Africain*, Menabuc, Paris, 2001.

Rawlinson, George, *Ancient Egypt*, www.gutenberg.org.

Sayce, Archibald Henry, *The Religion of Ancient Egypt and Babylonia*, Edinburgh, 1903.

Tempels, Placid, *La Philosophie Bantoue*, Elisabethville : Lovania, 1945.

Van den Dungen, Wim, *The Pyramid Text of Unas*,
http://www.maat.sofiatopia.org/wenis_text.htm.

Van Wing, *Etudes Bakôngo*, 2^e édition, Léopoldville, 1956.