

FOREWORD

In this wide-ranging and groundbreaking book, Nol Alembong posits that incantations from the Western Grasslands of Cameroon derive their essence from the peoples' religious beliefs and practices and that they reveal a perception of the universe as a complete and ordered system. He bases his key arguments on the following two premises: first, that the worldview of the peoples of the Western Grasslands of Cameroon is informed by the unity of all things and the existence of an ordered relationship among all things in the universe; secondly, that covenant relationships based on a system of ethics impose on the individual the need to abide by the laws and values upon which the whole structure of the cosmological system rests.

The study pinpoints six principal areas that constitute the author's findings. First, it reveals that the incantations studied emanate from practices that are informed by the peoples' religious beliefs. Consequently, incantations are a veritable medium for the expression of the peoples' conception of the universe. Secondly, it is seen that the peoples of the Western Grasslands of Cameroon have a common worldview that sees the universe in terms of a hierarchically unified and ordered system. Thirdly, it is realized that the belief system of the peoples under study is earth-oriented as opposed to, for example, the sky-oriented belief system of the Hebrews. Fourthly, it is discovered that the peoples of the Western Grasslands of Cameroon consider the earth as a potent force that must not be desecrated for fear of reprisals from supernatural forces. Fifthly, it reveals that the ontology of the peoples in question is both anthropocentric and communitarian. Lastly, it is further realized that evil seriously undermines the

stability of the universe. These findings offer invaluable insights on the crucial question of human existence and familiarize the reader with the worldview of those that constitute an important segment of Cameroon's population, anthropologically speaking.

Suffice it to say that Nol Alembong has given us a fascinating idea of incantations and an insight into the various ways in which incantations have gained prominence in human culture. This is the first attempt to study a cross-section of the traditional societies that constitute the Western Grassland region of Cameroon as an entity with a common cosmology. Also, it is the first serious work on incantatory poetry in Africa. Hence, it is an attempt to redress the relative inattention hitherto given to incantations in African literary scholarship. There is no doubt that the work will help to fill the gap that has long existed in the study of African orature. To my mind, this is a powerful, erudite, thoughtful, and carefully argued and challenging study that covers an immense geographical and theoretical range. I find the author's analysis detailed, his interpretation stimulating, his arguments cogent, his findings pertinent and the critical insights offered lucid.

Professor Kashim Ibrahim Tala
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“Africans have their own ontology, but it is a religious ontology, and to understand their religions we must penetrate that ontology. [I]t is an extremely anthropocentric ontology in the sense that everything is seen in terms of its relation to man.”

Reverend John S. Mbiti
Formerly Professor of Theology and Comparative Religion
Makerere University, Uganda

“In every part of Africa, people of diverse origins, geographical entities and ethnic configurations are propelled by, among other things, their belief systems. Several instances attest to the validity of this essence of humanity, and of the relationship of the people with their past, their understandable but sometimes mysterious inexplicable worlds. Therein myth, legends, history and the like come handy in man’s attempt to comprehend his immediate and remote environments.”

Professor Emmy Unuja Idegu
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