

Sankofa! How legitimate is the rally cry of the Afrikania or Afrikan Renaissance movement, from a Christian perspective?

Introduction:

Here is a profound statement:

ROOTS ARE LONG.

If you don't believe me, think about what happens if you pull out a dandelion or mango tree. If you don't dig down deep to the end of the root, what happens? It starts growing again. So which is the root—the little short stub you pull out? Or the long root that you have to really dig to get to the end of it?

It has become very fashionable to cry Sankofa! Back to our Roots! I see the Sankofa symbol carved into official buildings in Ghana and stamped into cloth. I find websites and read newspaper articles calling out for a return to African roots.

Well, I affirm that this cry is legitimate, as far as it goes. Every people needs to understand their heritage. We all need to value the good that has been handed to us by our ancestors. The Bible in several places talks about going back to our roots.

Examples of the Bible taking us back to the root of things:

When Jesus was asked a difficult question about divorce, when He wanted people to really understand marriage, he took his questioners back to the root of marriage. The Pharisees thought they were going back to their roots when they quoted Moses, but Jesus focused their attention on God's purpose for marriage by going deeper down the root—back to Creation (Mark 10:2-9).

The Bible begins with the book of Genesis. Do you know what Genesis means? It means ORIGINS, which is just another word for ROOTS. The Bible does not begin with the birth of Jesus Christ. In a sense the whole Old Testament is a book of ROOTS or preparations for the Messiah.

Israel had a priesthood, described in Exodus. Yet to understand the priesthood of Jesus, we go back past Exodus to Genesis (Genesis 14:8-20, Hebrews 5:6, 7:1-17), past the levitical priesthood to the ancient priesthood of the order of Melchisedek. Israel thought they were going back to their roots when they looked at the levitical priesthood that had been handed to them by their ancestors. God said that the priesthood of Jesus had deeper roots than that. They had to go past Moses, back to the time of Abraham to understand those roots.

The Real Question--Why do we settle for such short roots?

It's great to go back to our roots, and not an unbiblical idea in itself, as we have already seen. But why do we so often stop short? Why are we satisfied with such a short section of root? Here's one example: Many defend the worship of "lesser gods" on the basis that African ancestors did it. Yet, Paul in his definitive treatise on Christian doctrine (Romans) condemns the world for its idolatry, and proclaims that before idolatry, the world knew God (Rom. 1:21-25). Some say, let's go beyond colonialism—back to the time of the black African kingdoms. The Afrikania "Mission" (not a Christian group), proposes going back to Egypt and the worship of Amen-Re.

Alex Haley in his well known book *ROOTS* sought to go beyond his American slave ancestry, back to his African heritage. Islamic propagandists urge us to go back beyond modern Christian influence to Islam. Others urge us to go back beyond Christianity to African Traditional Religions.

A Plea to Dig Deeper

OK, so let's find our roots. In this, the Christian faith asks only one thing of us—dig **deeper**. Get back to the end of the root. Get the whole root. Find that taproot--that growing point that pokes its way further and further down into the soil. Only then can we really say that we went back to our roots.

For example, Israel had a priesthood, described in the Bible book of Exodus. It was instituted a long time ago. Yet to understand the priesthood of Jesus, we have to go back past the priesthood of the Exodus, back to Genesis 14:18-20, where an earlier priesthood—the priesthood of Melchisedek—is described. It was this priesthood that Jesus claimed (Hebrews 5:6, 7:1-17). If you go back to Egypt, don't go back only as far as Exodus 1-12, where idols dominate. Go back further down the root. Go back nine chapters earlier to Genesis 41, where the Pharaoh of Egypt listens to Joseph, the man of God, and honors him. Go back to Genesis 45 & 46, where Pharaoh welcomes Joseph's family, knowing they are devoted to the One true God. Go back to Genesis 12 where Pharaoh easily recognizes and obeys the hand of God working in his life. Go back to Ham, the original ancestor of Africa who heard God speak and saw Him act. If we go back to the time between Noah and Abraham, we find what seems to be a transitional time when many nations are headed toward idolatry, yet they are not yet hardened in its path. There are also in this time many exceptions to the idolatrous trend. Some worship the Lord. [\[i\]](#) Go back to Creation, the ultimate end of the taproot, where all people find their origin and their ultimate meaning. We are more than creatures of our ancestors. We are creatures of Almighty God, created in His image.

Read all the Bible has to say about Africa. You can find prophecies of judgment on African nations because of their idolatry. Isaiah chapter 19 is an example, a prophecy against Egypt. "Behold, the LORD rides on a swift cloud, and will come into Egypt; The idols of Egypt will

totter at His presence, And the heart of Egypt will melt in its midst. (Isa 19:1). Yet the purpose of the judgment is not ultimately to destroy, but to restore. “And the LORD will strike Egypt, He will strike it and heal it; they will return to the LORD, and He will be entreated by them and heal them.” (19:22). Even in judgment, God shows His love, His mercy, and His good plan and purpose for Africa!

So yes, SANKOFA! Let's return to our roots. Roots are long. Let's not break off our roots halfway down in the ground. Let's return all the way. Let's go past the lesser gods. Let's return to the Creator of African peoples, the Creator of this great continent and all its families. Let's return to the One True, Living Eternal God. The land is sick to its stomach from eating short roots running just under the ground. If we will follow our roots to the taproot, the Creator of Africa is waiting to heal us.

[1] Even in the Holy Land, God did not yet give the land to Abraham because “the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet full” (Gen. 15:16). Melchisedek, priest of the city of Salem, was not idolatrous. The Bible describes him as “priest of the most high God”, and uses him as a picture of Christ (Gen. 14:18). In the same time period, Job acted as a priest for his family before God (Job 1:5) and was also a priest to God for others (Job 42:7). We don't have specific examples cited in Africa, but we can guess that there could well have been priests in Africa during this period who knew God and worshipped Him faithfully without idolatry.