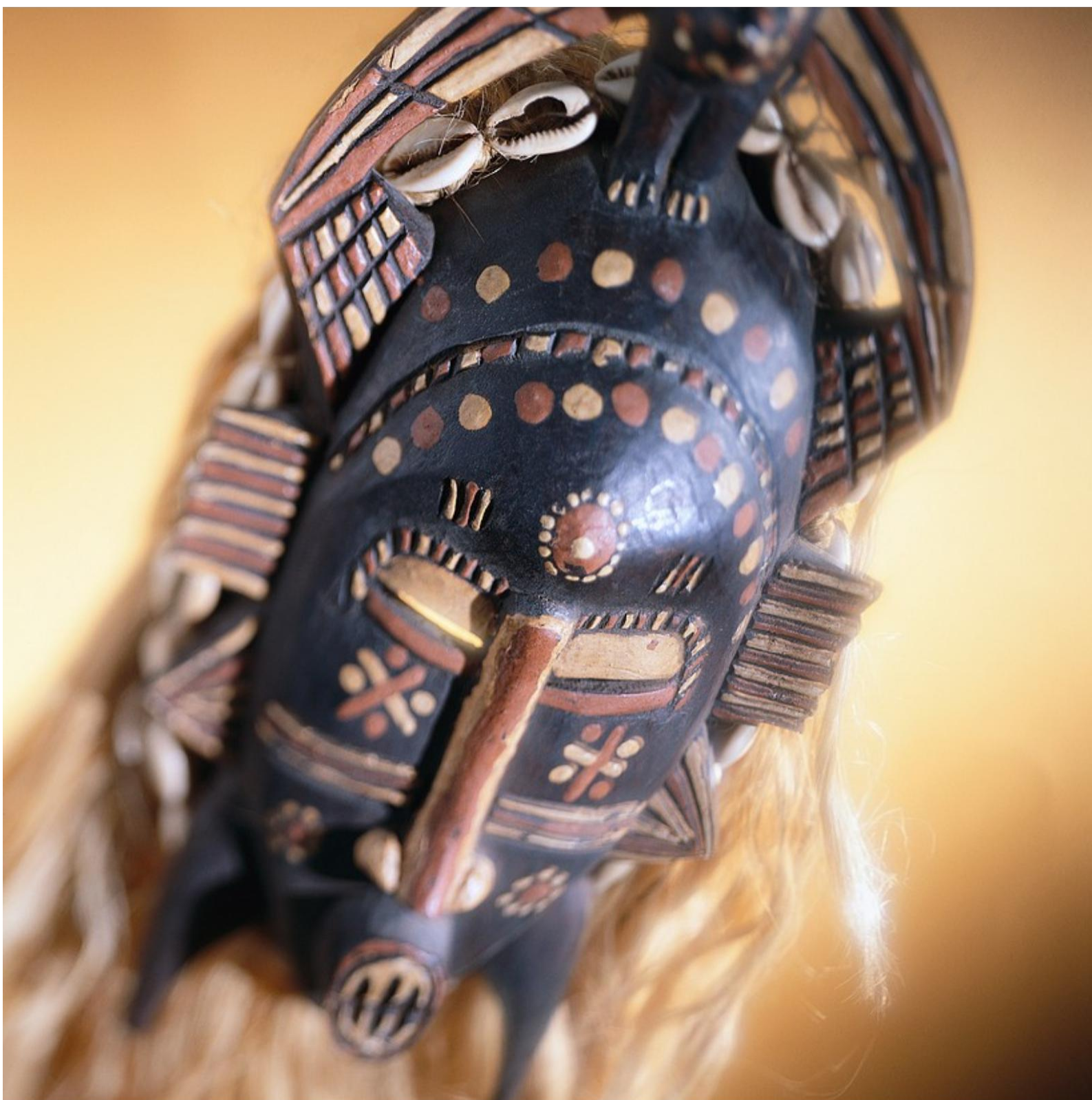




## THEOLOGY OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION



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## **MODULE 1**

- Unit 1 Definitions of African Traditional Religion
- Unit 2 The Theology of African Traditional Religion
- Unit 3 Creation in African Traditional Religion
- Unit 4 The African Concept of Human Beings

### **UNIT 1 DEFINITIONS OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION**

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#### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

You are welcomed to this course on the Theology of African Traditional Religion. In this unit, you will examine the definitions of African Traditional Religion, noting the different labels with which it had been described over the years. You will be exposed to the different names the African Traditional Religion has been known by in diverse settings.

#### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Explain what African Traditional Religion is
- Distinguish and explain reasons for the different labels for African

Traditional Religion;

- Define African Traditional Religion and explain its contents
- Discuss the Sources of Information for the Study of African Traditional Religion
- Highlights the difficulties beseeching the study of African Traditional Religion
- Give reasons for the study of African Traditional Religion
- Outline the stages hitherto in the study of African Traditional religion
- Treats the trends in the study of African Traditional Religion
- Describe the relationship between African culture and African Traditional Religion

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1 African Traditional Religion**

African Traditional Religion is the indigenous religion of the Africans which was handed over from one generation to another by word of mouth until recent attempts at documentation. The title “African Traditional Religion” presents an assumed unitary portrait of the religions of the African. Though it is true that many features of religion and its practice are similar across Africa, it would be erroneous to assume that all African religion (s) is the same. Hence, it has been suggested that the right label for the religions of Africa is African Religions or African Indigenous Religions, to reflect the plurality within the continent’s religious landscape. Another suggestion to describe the religion of Africa has been African Traditional Religions, the emphasis being on the “traditional” aspect of the religion as opposed to other religions which due to the process of contextualization are now construed as African religions too. An example is the reality of African Christianity and African Islam.

#### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1**

What is African Traditional Religion? What other terms are used to describe African Traditional Religion?

#### **3.2 Background to the Various Labels for African Traditional Religion**

The study of African religion at the earliest attempt was not geared towards understanding the people’s religious perspectives but rather the aim was to condemn the religion and advocate conversion to Christianity. Hence, the study of African traditional religion began on the premise that it was negative, devilish, inferior, and should be totally discarded. The study of the religion was marked by the use of foreign theoretical framework into which data was forced. It was therefore inevitable that misrepresentations and misinterpretations would occur.

In the process, the African's identity and self-esteem were greatly disvalued and the consequences are still with Africans today. Until about some decades ago when African scholars started writing on the true nature of African religion, the field of study was controlled by anthropologists, explorers and investors who were non-indigenes from Europe and North America. Consequently, many porous labels were attached to African religion due to lack of knowledge on the true nature of the religion. In addition, these foreign writers were operating with the assumption that Western religion, Christianity, was superior to African religion in its entirety and that African religion should be discarded. Consequently, certain labels emerged in order to disparage the religion and render it unattractive. The following are a number of such labels.

### **Primitive**

The word "primitive" is derived from the Latin word "*primus*" which means "first" or "ancient". The concise dictionary also defined "primitive" as something that is early, ancient, "old fashioned", "simply rude", "original" and primary. The European scholars employed the term to mean that African continent is "backward", "crude" and "under developed". Idowu noted that this mentality sprang out of standardization that anything which did not conform to western cultural pattern could not be accepted as a standard norm by the western scholars. Besides, the element of ancient is found in every culture and religion. These elements maintain themselves by the principle of continuity and discontinuity. Thus, it is unreasonable to be biased or prejudiced racial discrimination in the manner western scholars did to African continent.

### **Native**

The word "Native" denotes one who is local, primitive and traditional. This term was used by European scholars to derogatory described African people as backward and underdeveloped.

### **Tribe**

The pocket Oxford Dictionary defined "tribe" as "group or people in a primitive or barbarous stage of development, acknowledging the authority of a chief and regarding themselves as having a common ancestor. The advanced learners' dictionary of current English, also defined "tribe" as racial group or one united by language and customs, living as a community under chieftains or groups of persons. Whatever may have been the original meaning of the word, there is no doubt that it has departed from anything decent and honourable and has come to bear a dirty, ragged and disreputable fragment of humanity. The European scholars view Africa as an entity or a village consisting of people with diverse cultural

identities. It is therefore wrong to apply the term to a group of people like the Africans who are made up of different nationalities and are technological advanced.

### **Savage**

This is another derogatory term used by western scholars to describe the African people and their religion. The word savage stands at the opposite end of the pole of civilized group of people. The western scholars used this term to describe African people because of the contrast between African culture and their own. Through sheer prejudice, lack of sympathy and understanding, they saw African culture and religious practices as technologically backward.

### **Paganism**

The word “pagan” comes from the Latin word “*pagamus*” which means “a village dweller” or “country man”. It also means a person living far away from the civilized community. When it was brought into the field of religion, pagan was a term used originally to describe a person who was not a Jew, Christian or a Muslim. Later on, the word acquired a derogatory connotation, especially as it was applied to Africans as people who have no religion.

### **Polytheism**

This is a belief in pantheon of spirits. It is wrong to say that African people are pantheons because they believe in divinities and the Supreme Being. Idowu, explained that what is obtained in Africa is “diffuses monotheism” or the existence of pantheon of divinities which are the deputy of Olodumare or the Supreme Deity.

### **Fetishism**

The word “fetish” comes from the Portuguese word “*fetico*” which originally referred to “any work of art” or “man made religious objects” such as talismans, charms, and amulets etc, discovered by the Portuguese on their voyages. Later on the word was used derogatorily as a general theory of primitive religion where external objects are animated by life similar to that of mankind. It was also used as a descriptive term for African traditional religion to mean that African people worship charms, talismans, and amulets.

### **Idolatry**

The word idolatry comes from the Greek term “*eldolon*” which means “a pantheon image, likeness, or an image of God”. The Advanced Learners’

Dictionary defined it as “an image of God” or “objects of worship of a false god”. The European missionaries accused Africans of worshipping false gods which were symbols and emblems representing spiritual beings. However, they failed to understand that these images, shapes and phantom are just cult objects or symbols of worship and not the end in them. Besides, African religion is not the only religion with such symbols. Other religions of the world have such symbols of their own. It is therefore wrong to particularly conclude that African religion is idolatry since the emblems, image, and symbols found in it are only used to symbolize or represent spiritual realities.

### **Animism**

The word “animism comes from the Latin word “Anima” which means “soul” Animism is a belief that spirits inhabits natural objects with separate existence. Edward Tylor who expounded the theory of animism was the first to employ the term to connote the existence of souls in spiritual beings. The term was later used derogatorily on African people to describe their religion and to show that spirits inhabited African society. This is not correct since such belief is found elsewhere not only in African. The Jews for instance, believe that Yahweh their God inhabited mount Hoerb, the mountain of God, and that he was present in the Ark of the Covenant. Muslims too venerate the sacred stone, the Kaba in Mecca wherever they go for pilgrimage. Animism is therefore not a peculiar belief of African people but also of Hindusim and Judaism who believe in the presence spirits especially in animals.

### **Anachronism**

This is another derogatory term used by western scholars and missionaries to describe African people and their religion. The “foreign” writers had the belief that African society is an chromic one, changing to meaninglessness and vehicles traditions. This label holds no water because every society has the right to maintain some of her cherished traditions.

### **Juju**

The word juju comes from the French word *juojuo* which means a little doll or a small try made in the form of a human being. This term was later used by European investigators to describe African religion. It is wrong to say that Africans wear juju as toys, which do not symbolize anything religious or positive intention. This wrong conception of African Religion by western scholars was as a result of African images and cultic emblems which according to their understanding symbolize spiritual beings. However, one important thing to note is that African magic and medicine

are not juju, but an embodiment of a spiritual agent which aimed at achieving cultic powers. These derogatory term used by early western scholars, anthropologists, ethnographers, explorers and missionaries who saw nothing good in Africa, but only the darkness of its continent is a miss-presentation of African identity. Their conclusion that African people have no idea of God is however a mere bias and prejudice.

### **Heathenism**

The word heathenism came into being as an analogy of the word pagan. It comes from the German root. The suffix-en has the meaning ‘belonging to’. Heath on the other hand means the wasteland removed from the outskirts of the town, where outlaws and vagabonds and brigand live. Heathen then means a dweller on the heath. Heathenism as an adjective means the habit or the characteristics, or the disposition of heath-dwellers. As it is with its twin-word *paganus*, heathen which was originally a sociological term became an adjective used to describe religion.

The Microsoft Encarta Premium defines heathen as “an offensive term that deliberately insults somebody who does not acknowledge the God of the Bible, Torah, or Koran” or “an offensive term that deliberately insults somebody’s way of life, degree of knowledge, or non-belief in religion”. It has to be noted that the dictionary agrees that the word has come from the German language. Heathen is a word coined by races that look down from an Olympian height of superiority upon other races. As it is with *paganus*, the name heathenism is a most unsuitable and obnoxious misnomer as far as the African indigenous religion is concerned.

### **Ancestors Worship**

There are still other investigators who have defined African indigenous religion as ancestor worship. According to them, all that African people regard as spiritual beings were no more than deified ancestors. Like other terminologies, this term is not true of the African indigenous religion. Though one cannot deny that the belief in ancestors is a strong element in African indigenous religion, it has to be stated that the ancestors are not worshipped but venerated; and veneration of ancestors is also not the monopoly of African indigenous religion.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2**

What situation led to the different labels assigned to African Traditional Religion by foreign writers? What alternative labels did the African scholars offers?

### **3.3 Difficulties Beseeking the Study of African Traditional Religion**

There are great difficulties in studying African religion. Idowu enumerated some of the difficulties usually encountered by researchers in the study of African traditional religion. They are:

### **Lack of written materials**

Lack of written records constitutes a big problem for the study of African Religion. Before now, all the available information we had on the religion was basically oral. Consequently, none of the manifestations of religious consciousness of the African has been preserved in a sacred scripture. This to a great extent affected a research on African traditional religion and hampered a systematic documentation. More often than not, fragments of one or more traditions are collected and placed together to form a systematic documentation in order to get the whole story. And this makes it impossible for scholars to agree on how to judge the theology of African traditional religion and compare it with other established religious of the world like Islam, Christianity and Buddhism.

### **The Dark Continent Syndrome**

The claim held in some scholarly circles that Africa was highly inaccessible at the beginning earned the continent sobriquet “the Dark Continent”. By this they meant that Africa was a continent about which much was not known. The foreign researchers who first investigated about the religion complained that the geography of the continent made it difficult for them to move around the continent and gather necessary information. Despite the acknowledgement of this fact, a good number of them still went ahead and published incorrect information about the African religion. It is unfortunate that to date such information still makes rounds not only among foreigners but also among Africans. In other words, because of the fact that the early writers lacked adequate knowledge of the people and the religion of Africa, most of what had been written is mostly untrue, exaggerated or distorted.

### **Direct and Indirect Colonial Indoctrination**

From the colonial days there has been a lot of indoctrination of the African mind against their culture and their religion. Even today in the post colonial era, the indoctrination still goes on unabated and it is not uncommon to hear Africans referring to their culture as demonic and evil. As a result, most Africans are not even interested in studying the religion and those who do are looked down upon. This bias also affects the research work of the scholars most of whom today have become Christians or Muslims. The lack of interest in African religion and culture is leading to the gradual extinction of the religion and all it stands for.

## **Death**

Death carries away from time to time those who are custodians of culture and religious traditions. It becomes therefore difficult to get accurate information which has been passed onto younger generations. As the generation passes away, the traditions become lesser and lesser in details and this resulted to dislocation, distortion and weakening of authentic facts. This is where the custodians of culture have all died.

## **Secrecy**

Usually, the practices and information about most aspects of religion are guarded secretly. These secrets are revealed only to the initiates. Those who also have this secret information on these religions are also under oath not to reveal the secrets to any non-initiate. This secrecy makes it difficult for the non-initiates to have a true understanding of these religions.

## **External Medium of Expression of Reality and Reality so Expressed**

Any study of religion deals with the external manifestations of man's response to his object of worship. The gap between man's spiritual experiences and his response behaviour which we may call religion and the inevitable distortion that intervenes between the two constitute a formidable problem for the study of African traditional religion. Whereas in Christian religion, there are prophetic destructions between reality and vehicles of meditation, African tradition religion on the other hand has no records and prophetic documentations. Thus, an "outsider" watching an African at worship at his shrines may equate the objective representation of his object of worship with the object itself. He may conclude, as many have done, that the Africans worship stones, trees and animals. He may forget that religious symbols are not to be equated with the realities they symbolize since the Africans have not been able to express this understanding in written form. The tendency for the scholar, therefore, is to identify his/her symbols with the realities they symbolize.

## **Multiplicity of Languages**

The multiplicity of languages in Africa is also a major hindrance to the study of religion. If you take the case of Nigeria as an example, there are at least 500 languages. No researcher has the capacity to master 500 languages even if his strong interest in religion pushes him to do so. Yet, a proper and in-depth study of any religion requires a thorough understanding of the original language of the adherents of the religion. The Microsoft Encarta Premium has this to say about the number of languages in Africa: "the number of distinctive languages spoken in Africa is open debate. Some experts put the number at round 2,000, while others count more than 3,000".

## **Influence of Other Religions**

Many books on African traditional religion in the early days were written by tourists whose only reason for visiting Africa was to lend air of authenticity to their armchair assumptions and prejudices about African traditional religion. Ever before setting their feet on the African soil, such scholars made up their minds to study African Traditional Religion from the prism of Islam and Christianity. Thus, the influence of other religions, especially Christianity and Islam in the study of African traditional religion cannot be overemphasized. As generation after generation of Africans come under the influence of foreign religions or embrace the foreign religions, one or two things happen: they either cut away completely from the old faith (which may lead to total neglect of the old faith until it gradually disintegrates) or practice the two religions.

## **Unfair Comparison of Different Religions**

More often than not, the religion of scholar making a study is taken as a standard for judging other religions which may not conform to his/her own. Samuel Baker who wrote on the Nilotes of Sudan held that they are without a belief in a supreme being, neither have they any form of worship, or idolatry, nor is the darkness of their minds enlightened by a ray of disposition. It is needless to say that Baker has been proved wrong. However, his study of Nilotic religion from the perspective of others is unfair.

## **The Influence of Western Education and Culture**

Western education has most of the time taken the people out of the native homes and exposed them to foreign education and culture. Consequently, they lost touch with their homeland and culture and this leads to losing touch with their religion. There are times when people like these return home and are made rulers or chiefs yet they lack a proper understanding of the indigenous religion and this has come to poses serious problem to the existence and the study of African religions.

## **The Evolutionary Theory of the Origin Religion**

Over the years, the popular theory of the origin of religion has been evolutionary. This pre-supposition influenced the early writers who assert that the Africans whom they considered to be on the lower rank of the evolutionary ladder could not conceive of absolute creator God. In other words, only those who have “evolved sufficiently” could have religion in the real sense in accordance with the European scholar’s definition o religion.

## **The Humanities Approach to Religion**

Those who did field research in the early days of the study of African traditional religion were mostly anthropologists and sociologists. And not being theologians, they tended to treat African traditional religion from anthropological and sociological points of view. For them, religion is a social phenomenon devoid of objective reality. It goes beyond collective aspirations of the society for stability. And any research conducted under this pre-supposition is bound to yield a result that does not reflect the inner world or religiousness. This, however, creates a problem for the modern scholars who had to work through biases to get the real meaning of religion; especially the emphasis placed on symbols and their social implications.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT 3**

Discuss the difficulties beseeching the study of African Traditional religion

#### **3.4 Why Study of African Traditional Religion?**

The study of African traditional religion is fairly new. Not long ago, many western scholars doubted whether there was any African Traditional Religion, just as some people queried whether there was any African history. African Traditional Religion has not been carefully studied and systematized. What there is was being expressed orally in myths, legends, proverbs, wise sayings and in practical ways like rituals, dances, art and symbols. The systematic and critical studies of these religious beliefs of the peoples of Africa did not begin until recent years, precisely between and after the two world wars. The growth of the science of anthropology and the comparative study of religion aroused the interest of scholars in African traditional religion. Despite the pioneering role of Europeans involved in this study, the outcome of their production was still clouded with racial prejudices.

Thus, one of the aims of the study of African Traditional Religion is to make a comparative survey and to indicate an approach to the understanding of the religion that has so often been miscalled fetishism, paganism, idolatry and heathenism. Gone are the days when Emil Lu Dewing on a visit to Africa ignorantly wrote of "How the Untutored Africans Conceive God". It is now evident that God is one, the God of the whole universe that has revealed Himself to various people in various ways throughout the ages. It is the aim of the study to show the world that Africans like other races, know God and had been worshipping Him before the advent of either Christianity or Islam. This is to puncture the lie sold to the world by Elias, B who said that the idea of Supreme Being is a recent importation to Africa.

Another aim for the study of African Traditional Religion is to discover what Africans actually know, believe and think about the Deity and the super sensible world. In the study of African Traditional Religion, we are not out to glorify the dead past of Africa nor to allow modern nationalism to blindfold us from knowing the sharp from the seed of African religious past but rather, as a legitimate way of discovering what Africans actually know about their heritage.

The third aim for the study of African Traditional Religion is to find out how the beliefs of African people have influenced their worldviews and moulded their scholars who had studied African Traditional Religion. There is no doubt that a great diversity of African religion exist in Africa and common political system. As such, to a distant observer, the homogeneity of other religions is much less real than apparent in Africa. Our aim, therefore, is to prove to the world that to the Africans, the spiritual world is so real and near that its forces do inspire their visible world. African Religion was never prodigally animistic or idolatry. Those who give Africans this label forget that as mankind develops, his/her ideas about God also develop. There is no doubt that in Africa some elements of idolatry religion compares favourably with religion of some of the areas of Europe and Asia.

The fourth aim for the study of African Traditional Religion is to show the relationship of African traditional religion to other religions, instead of treating it as an isolated phenomenon. No worshipper in African traditional religion bows down to any stone. The real cohesive factor of religion in Africa is the living supernatural being or Deity. The fifth aim for the study of African Traditional Religion is to better the ways of evangelizing and acculturating African peoples. Evangelization and acculturation of African continent would help in cultural evolution and refinement of African peoples, especially those practices that are pagan oriented into Christian ones.

#### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4**

Give reasons for the study of African Traditional Religion

#### **3.5 Basic Rules for the Study of African Traditional Religion**

In the study of African traditional religion, the following rules are necessary:

##### **Caution**

This is the first rule or Highway Code for the study of African traditional religion. By this, we mean the scholar must not appear to know too much about the religion in question before beginning to study it. Presuming too much knowledge about people's beliefs hampers the authentic study of another religion and civilization.

## **Reverence**

By this we mean that the researcher must respect the cultural beliefs and practices of the people he/she is studying. He/ she must not tread on the things that are of enduring value to them. The things of supreme concern which the people hold in high esteem must be avoided by the researcher.

## **Openness and Sympathy**

Religion can only be studied effectively from the inside, and only those who are prepared to allow truth to reveal itself to them or are prepared to enter into the feeling of worshippers can make any profitable study of religion. It is only in this way that the scholar can appreciate the genuineness of religion. Openness and sympathy presuppose a mind, which expresses itself to reality. Thus, each religion must be seen in terms of its own perspective, otherwise what is studied cannot be a real thing.

## **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5**

Outline the basic rules for the study of African Traditional Religion and discuss any three of them

### **3.6 Stages Hitherto in the Study of African Traditional Religion**

Another way of understanding the difficulties listed above is to sketch the four distinct periods in history of the study of African traditional religion. These are:

#### **The Period of Ignorance and False Certainty**

This was the period of early study prior to the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the African continent was regarded as “dark” one devoid of religion and culture. This notion of Africa and its religion western scholars had created doubts and uncertainty concerning the study of African traditional religion.

#### **The Period of Doubt and Resisted Illumination**

This is the period that was dominated by people like Andrew Lang, Archbishop M. Coder Long, and Father W. Schmidt who felt that there could be no people without religion, no matter how distorted their consciousness of God might be. These men therefore engaged in research about the religions of the so-called “primitive people” including those in Africa. They came to the conclusion that “primitive man has knowledge of God”. They even suggested that the religion of “primitive people” was basically monotheistic. However, such findings were later rejected by scholars who never come to Africa for field research in order to write

authoritatively on Africa. For example, John Oman, commenting on the works of Lang and Soderblom maintained that African so called monotheism was not “living stone”.

He further stated that the wise persons in Central Africa agreed with him about good or evil, one God and a future state. His views are in contrast to a native speaking standpoint given by a Christian missionary speaking from his own religious background. Prior to the advent of missionaries in Africa, the people had no concept of good, evil, and one God. Therefore, what Livingstone said a wise person told him was a mere repetition of what they had heard from Christian missionaries. Nothing can be said more than this assumption that with the many years of false certainty about the “dark continent” Africa was illuminated. Their doubts above Africa arose from a subtle fixed idea of psychological set, which expected nothing sublime from the “dark continent” of Africa.

### **The Period of Intellectual Dilemma**

This was the period of enlightenment characterized by scholarship. But as scholars were still imprisoned in their psychological mindset created by their misguided theories, they started to devise new means by which the over weighing evidence about the existence of religion in Africa could be rejected without appealing to reason. Instead of denying outright the concept of God found in African traditional religion, the western scholars coined such phrase as “High God” and the “Supreme Being” to describe the idea of God in the West that was not available in Africa.

### **The Period of the Emergence of African Scholars of Religion**

This period began around the late 1940s when African scholars started to engage in the study of religion of the continent. The vestries of African continent with more than 800 ethnic groups makes the study of African religion more difficult especially as most of these scholars ignored the glaring differences and wrote as if African have the same culture, speak the same language and live in one community with identical experiences. This however, does not mean that there are no common elements that run through African traditional religion on the basis of which it is legitimate to speak of African traditional religion in the singular. This as a matter of urgency calls for a radical openness on the part of the scholars who are interested in the study of African traditional religion.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 6**

Discuss the stages hitherto in the study of African Traditional religion

### **3.7 Trends in the Study of African Traditional Religion**

The Early European Christian missionaries, colonial soldiers and administrators who worked in Africa are credited with having made the

first real effort to study African Traditional Religion and culture. They were motivated largely by curiosity, personal interest and by the practical objective of gaining some knowledge about Africans in order to work and communicate with the host groups. Christian missionaries, in particular, needed to understand the language, basic ideas and concepts of the host groups in order to proclaim and preach the Gospel and thereby convert the people.

A couple of them, especially those of the British and North American extraction, did in fact, spend sometimes with liberated African slaves in an effort to acquire a working knowledge of the culture and religion of their respective groups. With the help of local interpreters and assistants, some were able to translate hymnbooks and catechism texts in local African languages. Rev. Thomas Jefferson for example, compiled a dictionary of the Yoruba language and wrote sympathetically about the traditional religion of the people in 1957. Other missionaries who did not publish works supplied descriptive accounts of traditional religious materials in the periodic reports they sent back to the headquarters of their religious congregations, or sponsoring agencies. Most of those reports are still available in archives in Europe.

Besides the missionaries, many pioneer colonial soldiers and administrators also studied aspects of the tradition of different African groups. Major Arthur G. Leonard, Percy A. Talbot in Nigeria, and Captain R.S. Rattray in Ghana are typical examples. Major Leonard for instance, was a British colonial soldier from Scotland who spent about ten years mainly in South Eastern Nigeria, 1995-1905. A year after his departure from Nigeria, he published a book titled; *The Lower Niger and Its Tribes* (1906). It was a detailed discussion of aspects of the religious beliefs, rituals practices and customs of the peoples of the lower Niger River area.

### **Trained and Government-Sponsored Ethnographers**

The challenges of governance prompted several local colonial administrators to seek the assistance of trained ethnographers and anthropologists. They were needed to provide vital data and information about the culture and customs, institutions, beliefs and values of indigenous groups to aid administration. In some territories like Nigeria, Kenya and Sudan, colonial officials were struggling hard to contain actual revolts and violent conflicts. The women of Aba in south-eastern Nigeria had actually revolted against the imposition of taxation in 1929. There was therefore, a felt-need in many parts of the Continent for accurate information about the people and their cultures to help in the formulation and implementation of appropriate policies.

A strong impulse in favour of engaging the services of experts in the colonial field was equally felt at the international level. After the First World War the focus of colonial interest shifted from the acquisition to

the maintenance of control, and there began the first stirrings about development as a consciously-induced policy. Also, the respected anthropologists and propagator of the field work approach in social anthropology; Bronislaw Malinowski had insisted that people concerned with developments in Africa must first understand the workings of the societies with which they were in contact.

A number of institutions were inaugurated for these purposes. One of such institutions include The International Institute of African Languages and Cultures in 1926 which was later known as the International African Institute (I.A.I) by representatives of scientific, missionary and official bodies. It had Lord Lugard as its first chairman. Its defined objective was to bring about a closer association of scientific knowledge and research with practical affairs. Several trained ethnographers and anthropologists got either recruited or financially sponsored by the Colonial Office to provide accurate information to bolster the effort of local colonial governments. The development greatly benefited the study of African Traditional Religion.

Some ethnographers delved specifically into certain aspects of the indigenous religion, particularly those provoking debate at the time. M.D.W. Jeffreys and W.R.G. Horton for example, contributed their findings on the origin of certain African traditional beliefs and symbols as well as the debate on the belief in God respectively. Some other discussed issues like witchcraft and the belief in the ancestors. Researchers like S.F. Nadel, K. Little, Monica Wilson, Mary Douglas and Godfrey Lienhardt incorporated substantial materials from the indigenous religious tradition in their respective works on other aspects of the indigenous culture of Africans they had worked on. Charles K. Meek, one of the official ethnographers who researched into traditional Igbo social, political institutions and legal systems published a book in 1957 titled *law and Authority in a Nigeria Tribe*. The work of the anthropologists affected Christian missionaries in more ways than one. First, it helped to improve their attitude towards African traditional religion in general.

A clear evidence of the better appreciation of traditional beliefs and practices was the incipient effort made to adapt certain local elements by a number of missionary church groups. More relevantly, several expatriate missionaries who had spent many years in Africa like Rev. George T. Basden (spent about forty years in Igbo land), were encouraged to publish their studies of the beliefs and customs of the various groups and areas where they had lived and worked. Interestingly, the approach of the search of most of these missionary writers resembled very much the method of the ethnographers and anthropologist. The essays on the traditional African ideas and beliefs about God published in the edited anthology by Rev. Edwin W. Smith; *African Ideas of God* published in 1950 is a typical example.

## **The Effort of Early African Writers and Scholars**

The entry of indigenous African writers and scholars into the study of African traditional religion was a significant development in the evolution of the subject. The group includes African writers and scholars of the pre-independence era as well as ordained ministers and clerics with Christian theological background of training belonging to both the Francophone traditions. Given the prominent place of religion in traditional African life and culture, it was not a surprise that many early western-educated Africans should discuss and incorporate aspects of it in their publications. Most of them were strong nationalist writers and include people like Mbonu Ojike, J.B. Danquah, and Kenneth Kaunda. They were keen to disabuse the minds of Europeans concerning the widely publicised inferiority of the black race and the distortion of their culture in the writings of colonial writers and some Christian missionary authors. Danquah published in 1944 in particular, was furious with those European authors who sought to discriminate against the belief of indigenous Africans in God. He strongly contended that Africans have as much genuine belief in God as Europeans.

The aim of the first and second generations of ordained African cleric scholars with Christian theological background of training may be more religious than political. But, like the nationalists they also tried to correct mis-presentations of the indigenous culture in western scholarship, as well as show that Africa has visible traditional religious ideas, ritual practices, institutions and values that could be adapted to benefit Christianity in the Continent. Vincent Mulago and A. Kagame were among the first generation ordained African cleric-scholars of the Francophone background who took up the study of Bantu cosmology from where the Belgian missionary author, Placide Temples left off. They tried to present the traditional worldview along the lines of scholastic philosophy. Their theory of vital force and hierarchy of beings drew mainly on the indigenous religious traditions of the peoples of Central Africa. Mulago for example, suggested that Bantu traditional religion is based on the belief in two worlds, one visible and the other invisible, the belief in the communitarian and hierarchic character of these two worlds; the interaction between the two worlds, and the belief in a Supreme Being, Creator and Father of all that exists.

African cleric-scholars of the Anglophone tradition like Mujynya .N have been more theological than philosophical in their approach. Between late 1950s, a number of these scholars including, Harry Sawyerr, E.B. Idowu, N. Ezeanya, and E.C. Ilogu worked on a wide range of issues in African religion. Mbiti and Idowu wrote general texts to guide the systematic study of African Religion. Others including Sawyerr; Arinze, Ezeanya investigated important aspects of the subject like the belief in ancestors, ritual sacrifice and traditional morality. In addition to their individual writings, many of these early African cleric-scholars played notable roles, in the footsteps of a handful European pioneers scholars

like E.G. Parrinder, in promoting the study of African Religion in institutions of higher education, including universities and theological faculties in different parts of Africa; Ghana, Nigeria, Congo and Kenya among others. Idowu, Mbiti, Ezeanya, Mulago and others designed and taught courses in African Traditional Religion in departments of religious studies and theological faculties. They trained successive groups of graduates and scholars to carry on research on different aspects of the traditional religion.

The interest and effort of anthropologists and sociologists did not completely cease in the study of African traditional religion. Rather, with the ever-growing success of the missionary religions, mainly Christianity and Islam in many parts of Africa, a number of Western scholars diverted their attention to the study of religious change and conversion as well as new religious movements in Africa. Interestingly, their investigation of the case, course and consequence of religious change often bring them face to face with the traditional religious culture of the people. It is pertinent therefore, to note that many of the published works, including those of R. Horton, J.D.Y. Peel, R. Hackett on the themes of conversion and new religious movements in Africa often incorporated considerable materials from African traditional religion.

### **The Contemporary Stage**

The cumulative effort of researchers and writers finally led to the emergence of African traditional religion as a full-fledged academic discipline about four decades ago. African traditional religion has since become part of the world. It is a major course offered in departments of Religious Studies in Universities, Colleges of higher education and research institutes. Students are free to major in African Religion at diploma, bachelor, masters and doctorate degrees. In Nigeria for example, the “Minimum Academic Standards of the National Universities’ Commission” places African traditional religion on a similar pedestal as Christianity and Islam, that is, weighted one third of the total credits required for a bachelor’s degree in religious studies.

African traditional religion is also a favoured area for research students, as several candidates register for their graduate programme on the subject. The systematic study of African Traditional Religion has achieved a measure of acceptability as an academic discipline. It is generally classified in the group of indigenous religions or primal worldviews of humankind. The general aim of the study is to present systematically the authentic experience of the sacred by the peoples of sub-Saharan Africa (within the Continent and in Diaspora), in their different socio-historical circumstances and backgrounds. African traditional religion is essentially an oral and folk religion. A persistent effort is currently being made by scholars of different intellectual hues and backgrounds to push forward the frontiers of the subject through a critical approach to certain important

issues of methodology and conceptual scheme that are adopted for the study.

### **Key Issues in Contemporary Scholarship**

Notwithstanding the progress already made in the systematic study, African traditional religion is still a relatively young academic discipline. It is barely forty years old as a subject in its own right. The volume of literature that has accumulated is sizeable, although this says nothing about the quality of the publications. The subject has no doubt, surmounted certain teething problems, including long-standing prejudice and discrimination to bring it to the present status. But there are a number of key issues, many of them deriving from the historical roots of the subject, while others are part of the rigorous requirements of the subject as a serious academic discipline. For purposes of our discussion, I shall group these issues into three broad categories, namely; issues of nomenclature and terminology, issues relating to methodology and theoretical presuppositions as well as schemes of interpretation, and finally issues connected to the content of African Traditional Religion.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 7**

Explain the trends in the study of African Traditional Religion

### **3.8 Components of African Traditional Religion**

African Traditional Religion is orally based, though some recent attempts at its documentation may be cited. The contents of African Traditional Religion are:

#### **Belief in God**

The belief in a Supreme Being who is Omnipotent, Omniscience and Omnipresent is prevalent in the African society. In many African societies, the attributes of the Supreme Being is reflected in the names by which God is called. In addition, some African societies have no specific gender for the Supreme Being whereas in others God is conceived as a male, or female or even being androgynous. Africans have had the knowledge of the Supreme Being and have had interactions with God before their contact with any other culture. This is why the Akan people of Ghana would say that no one shows the Supreme Being to a child.

#### **Belief in the Divinities**

The divinities are the deities that have delegated authority from God. They depend on God for their powers and act as intermediaries between God and the people. There are different classes of divinities and they are in charge of different portfolios. For example, thunder, fertility, water and economics.

#### **Belief in the Ancestors**

The ancestors are the dead members of the family that are still perceived as integral members of the family in Africa. They are seen as always present and interested with the concerns of the members of the family. Ancestors are venerated in African Traditional Religion but they are not worshipped. They may influence happenings in the lives of individuals or the family or even in the community. The desire to be in the good books of the Ancestors by Africans is to ensure harmony between them and the unseen powers. Ancestors are both female and male and death at old age is a compelling prerequisite to be an Ancestor.

### **Belief in Spirits**

There are different classes of spirits. Some reside in natural phenomena like rivers, rocks and grooves whereas others are known to manifest at different occasions as the need may be. The important thing to note is that these spirits operate as agents with divine delegated authority to assist humans at different times. Spirits in African Traditional Religion may be appeased if aggrieved to enforce peace and harmony.

### **Belief in Magic/Medicine**

Medicine in African Traditional Religion transcends of healing and encompasses wellness and wholeness. It may include the use herbs, water or oil to effect healing. However, it could also include offerings, prayers and sacrifices to divine super-sensible powers. The state of the mind is closely related to the health of the body in African medicine, both the psychological and the physical are intertwined. Magic is the deliberate appeal to metaphysical forces in the universe towards a chosen agenda. This often involves recitations of specialized formula by specialist in African mysticism.

## **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 8**

State and discuss the components of African Traditional Religion.

### **3.9 African Culture and African Traditional Religion**

Africans have a very rich culture which has been acknowledged worldwide. This culture reflects in the people's language, songs, fashion, cuisine and ethics. African culture exhibits similarities and differences from one African society to the other. However, certain features are true of African culture in any African society. For example there are emphasis on procreation, respect for old age, male/female dichotomy and being your brother's keeper, to mention a few. African culture and African Traditional Religion have been described as two sides of the same coin due to the close affinity of the two. African Traditional Religion is embedded in African culture and vice versa. This is explainable in the light of the pervasive influence of religion in the African worldview. Everything finds

explanation and validation in religion in Africa.

## **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5**

What is the relationship between African culture and African Traditional Religion?

### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

We have discussed the definitions of African Traditional Religion and a background to how the many labels given to the religion were arrived at. We explained the contents of African Traditional Religion and the relationship between African culture and African Traditional Religion. African Traditional Religion is integral to African worldview and its study is compelling for any understanding of African way of life.

### **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit, we have examined the definition and components of African Traditional Religion. By looking at the background to the study of the religion, we came to understand the many wrong labels that were previously given to African Traditional Religion and how African scholars have rectified this situation. The relationship of African culture to African Traditional Religion was also examined.

### **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. What is African Traditional Religion?
2. Why do we need to study African Traditional Religion?
3. List and explain the components of African Traditional Religion.

### **7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS**

- Awolalu , J. O. & Dopamu, P. A. (1979). *West African Traditional Religion*, Ibadan: Onibonje Press.
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## **UNIT 2 THEOLOGY OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION**

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### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In this unit, you will study the theology of African Traditional Religion, including its scope, approaches, tasks, sources and methodology. The Theology of African Traditional Religion has proven to be dynamic and of constant relevance to the African worldview. Consequently, any attempt to interact with the African on any enterprise should accord serious attention to the theology of African Traditional Religion.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

By the end of this, you should be able to:

- Define the theology of African Traditional Religion;
- Enumerate the various approaches to the theology of African Traditional Religion;
- Discuss the methodology of the theology of African Traditional Religion;
- Mention the tasks of the theology of African Traditional Religion; and
- State the sources of the Theology of African Traditional Religion.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1 What is the Theology of African Traditional Religion?**

The word *theology* is etymologically derived from two Greek words *theos* - God and *logos* - word (reason). Theology then means reason about God or the study about the nature of God. Often times the definition of theology is coloured by the perspective of the religious affiliation of the person defining

theology. For this course, we will work with a definition of theology as the study of God and of God's relationship with human beings.

Consequently, the theology of African Traditional Religion is the African's way of understanding God, and the dealings of God with him/her. The Theology of African Traditional Religion is informed by the history and lived experiences of the Africans from one generation to another. The people's experiences of God influence their understanding of God and the relevance of God to their experiences on a daily basis.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1**

What is the Theology of African Traditional Religion?

### **3.2 The Contents of the Theology of African Traditional Religion**

The contents of the theology of African Traditional Religion may be divided into two broad classifications: the mode of God's revelation of His nature and attributes to human beings and the responses of human beings to the revelations of God. In the first instance, Africans pondered on the mystery of the universe – the smooth seasons, pregnancy, elements of nature and others - and concluded that a super-sensible intelligence must be responsible for the smooth ordering of the universe. African Traditional Religion then is a revealed religion without a founder. It is a theology revealed through nature. Secondly, in addition to observing nature and her elements, Africans evolved a theology through their daily experiences including; moments of joy, sadness, death, sickness and some experiences defying the laws of nature. These led to the theology of a creator who is all-powerful, all-knowing and all-present. The people's response to how they experience God thus constitutes a second component of the contents of the Theology of African Traditional Religion.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2**

What are the contents of the Theology of African Traditional Religion?

### **3.3 The Methodology of the Theology of African Traditional Religion**

Methodology of different theologies may involve two dimensions: above or below. The methodology that begins above starts from the divine (God / Supreme Being) unto the human level; whereas the methodology that prioritizes "below" dimension begins with the human experience and traces this to the divine. The Theology of African Traditional Religion by its very nature combines these two methods in its study and understanding of God. As stated while discussing the contents of this theology, both the “above” and the “below” methodology is significant for the theology of African Traditional Religion. The context of the theology is the African culture and as noted in Module 1: Unit 1, these two are intertwined. Hence, our study of the theology of African Traditional Religion will accord serious attention to the African culture.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3**

What are the methods to employ in doing the theology of the African Traditional Religion?

#### **3.4 The Tasks of the Theology of African Traditional Religion**

The concern of the Theology of African Traditional Religion is to elucidate the true nature of the religion and offer explanations for the people's convictions about God. This is pursued towards attaining a healthy spiritual life for the people as well as an apology to those who are meant to misinterpret the religion as a result of biases. Therefore, if one agrees or disagrees with the tenets of African Traditional Religion, the theology of the religion seeks to remove any ambiguity about the religion.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4**

What are the tasks of the theology of African Traditional Religion?

#### **3.5 Sources of the Theology of African Traditional Religion**

The following constitute sources of the theology of African Traditional Religion:

##### **Myths**

In the study of religions, myths do not refer to false beliefs or narratives as erroneously assumed in some quarters. Myth, from the Greek word *muthos* refers to anything "oral". The Africans came up with myths as explanations for the observed mysteries of the universe. For example, explanations on the origin of the universe, the purpose of life, the problem of evil, the essence of death and the complexity of the galaxies are all recorded by the African in myths.

These myths are explanations by the Africans for the mysteries in the universe. Myths are perpetuated in their oral forms through memory and word of mouth from generation to generation. A careful study of these myths shows the philosophical make-up of the Africans as intelligent people, who analyzed situations and came up with explanations which were informed by their experiences of the divine.

##### **Liturgies**

These are mode of rituals required for public worship sessions. Liturgies are set patterns of prescribed mode of worship as a means of communicating with the divine. The Theology of African Traditional Religion does not comprise the imperative need to maintain that the prescribed format of worship is religiously adhered to. The consequence of contravening such format is an unsuccessful worship session. It is the bid to prevent such undesirable

situations that the cultic functionaries – the priests and the priestesses- are trained and expected to lead in worship sessions. Liturgies include prayers, recitation of names and attributes of the deity and body movements during worship (clapping, dancing and waving).

### **Songs**

Songs are the recordings of a people's lived experiences which are rendered in melodious tunes; songs are integral to the social and ritual lives of Africans. Indeed, there is rarely an occasion, be it joyous or solemn, in Africa where songs do not feature. The people's understanding of God and their experiences of the divine in its different ways are recorded in the songs. You can also find therein, the hopes and aspirations of the people.

### **Oracles/Divination**

Some African people have divination practices whereas others do not. Where they exist, oracles are reliable sources of the theology of the people because it encompasses the basis of the people's philosophy and worldview. Examples of oracles are the Ifa oracular system among the Yoruba people of Nigeria and the Fa oracular system of the Ewe people of the Republic of Benin.

### **Sayings**

These comprise of dictums, riddles and proverbs. These types of saying are usually products of human experiences and interactions over the years. The messages therein are coded and need careful analysis to unfold. Sayings serve different purposes in conversations which may include scolding, teaching, commendation and encouragement. Sayings may also serve as records of a people's hopes and aspiration, especially when facing formidable challenges.

### **Symbols**

Symbols are representations of some other things. These include; works of art, emblems, carvings, paintings and engravings. Oftentimes, symbolic representations may be found at the shrines grooves and sacred places of worship in Africa. Such representations embody divine essence and are treated as sacred objects. Masks are also symbols utilized in Africa to represent visitations from the super-sensible world. The practice of mask festival may be found among different peoples of Africa. Examples include the Gelede Masks of Benin Republic and the Egungun of the Yoruba of Nigeria.

## **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5**

State and discuss the sources of the Theology of African Traditional Religion.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

We have explained the theology of African Traditional Religion and its contents. In addition, we discussed the methodology, tasks and sources of the

theology of African Traditional Religion. The Theology of African Traditional Religion reflects the deep understanding of God by the Africans.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit you have been exposed to the definition of the Theology of African Traditional Religion. In addition, you have explored the contents and methodology of the Theology of African Traditional Religion. The tasks and sources of the Theology of African Traditional Religion also engaged our attention.

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. What is the Theology of African Traditional Religion?
2. State the contents of Theology of African Traditional Religion.
3. Explain the tasks of the Theology of African Traditional Religion.
4. List and explain the sources of the Theology of African Traditional Religion.
5. What are the methodologies of the Theology of African Traditional Religion?

## **7.0 REFERENCES / FURTHER READINGS**

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## **UNIT 3 CREATION IN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION**

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### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Creation is a phenomenon that has interested the African over the years and for which explanations have been proffered based on the experiences of the African in the universe. In this unit, we shall examine the creator (God), the process, purpose and care of creation. The interaction of created things in the universe will also be discussed.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

By the end of this Unit, you should be able to:

- Discuss God as the Creator in African Traditional Religion;
- Explain the process of creation in African Traditional Religion;
- Describe the purpose of creation in African Traditional Religion;
- State and discuss the care of creation in African Traditional Religion; and
- Mention the interaction of created things in African Traditional Religion.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1 God as the Creator in African Traditional Religion**

Africans believe that the world was created by God though variations exist on how each group in Africa explains the modalities of creation. God is acknowledged as the Creator by every narrative on creation by the Africans.

Everything in the universe was put in place by God, just as God controls and maintains the universe. Africans reflect their belief in God as the Creator in the names and attributes that they ascribe to God.

For instance, the Igbo of Nigeria call God “Chineke” which means “the spirit that creates”; the Edo call God “Osanobua” meaning “Source-being, who carries and sustains the universe”; and the Ashanti call God “Odomankoma”, Borebore or Oboadee which connotes “One who creates all things”. Africans perceive God as the one who creates and is in charge of the affairs of the universe. God controls and sustains the operations of the world and is actively involved in the well-being of all created entities.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1**

How is God reflected as the Creator in African Traditional Religion?

### **3.2 The Process of Creation in African Traditional Religion**

Creation stories in African Traditional Religion show that the process of creation among different African ethnic groups varies. Whereas some of these creation stories are orderly in their account, others are not well connected. Some of these stories usually reflect a tripartite structure encompassing a pre-creation setting (watery expanse, darkness), the act of creation (by God who is also known by different names among Africans), and post-creation setting (which sometimes involves the violation of divine prescriptions and the separation of God from humanity).

In some other stories, the first act in the process of creation is the creation of the first man and woman by God. It is also worth noting that the process of creation usually entails the delegation of power by God to the divinities. For instance, Olodumare (God) among the Yoruba delegated the duty of moulding the physical body of human beings to Orisha-nla, the Yoruba arch-divinity. Among the Igbo of Nigeria, Chineke sent Nri - the first man - to earth to marry and multiply on earth. Sometimes, these agents of creation are confused with God but suffice is to state that the divinities are subject to the will, power and authority of God. These lesser agents are means to an end and not an end in themselves, for their authority is prescribed by God which explains why their personal names do not express anything in the absolute sense as is true of the names of God in Africa.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2**

What roles do divinities play in the process of creation in African Traditional Religion?

### **3.3 The Purpose of Creation in African Traditional Religion**

God (known by different names in different African communities) created the universe to manifest God's nature. This is an understanding that is integral in the African worldview and living experience. In addition, the Supreme-

Being through creation makes it possible for Africans to understand, know and relate with God. Thus, the possibility of a divine-human relationship becomes a reality. It is a relationship of a higher power (God) and a lower entity (humans); both of which are in constant relationship and communication. Creation is also to display the power, authority and awesomeness of God. Some names and attributes of God among some African peoples reflect the different purposes for creation.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3**

State and discuss the purpose of creation in African Traditional Religion.

#### **3.4 The Care of Creation in African Traditional Religion**

Whereas the control of the universe is the sole preserve of God, the care of creation requires both divine and human contributions in African Tradition Religion. The care of creation encompasses the care accorded everything that is created by God, including human beings, forests, grooves, water bodies, mountains, animals, birds and the seasons. Though humans could care for some of these identified areas, only God is in charge of the seasons. In spite of the advancement of science in the area of metrological services, the seasons still spring surprises sometimes.

The care of the human body through good nutrition, exercise, adequate sleep and a moderate life style is the responsibility of individuals. Also, the care of trees, grooves, rivers and mountains are countenanced in African Traditional Religion through ritual prescriptions. For instance, hunting is forbidden in some forests to preserve the animal species there (Osun groove, Osogbo) and fishing is forbidden in certain rivers (Odo Awe, Oyo). Mountains are designated as worship sites all over Africa (Oke-Agidan, Oyo) and these mountains are preserved due to the ritual prescriptions attached to them.

However, the controversy trailing the practice of animal sacrifice in African Traditional Religion is worthy of mention. Though animals are preserved in some forest where hunting is prohibited, nonetheless, animal sacrifice remains an integral part of African Traditional Religion. This is a paradox that is daily negotiated in the practice of the religion worldwide, especially in North America and Europe where issues of animal rights are quite prevalent.

The use of taboo in African communities is usually geared towards the care of the universe by individuals in their homes and the communities. There are different types of taboo, including sex taboo, ritual taboo, environmental taboo and interpersonal taboo.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4**

How would you describe the Care of Creation in African Traditional Religion?

### **3.9 The Interaction of Created Elements in African Traditional Religion**

Nature is divine in African Traditional Religion. Every aspect of nature embodies an aspect of the essence of the divine. Some natural phenomena are habitat to spirit bodies who may sometime be accorded offerings. Humans are thus interconnected with other elements of nature in the enterprise of living. This is in opposition to the hierarchical relationship of human beings at the apex of creation as is true of some religions. The recent emphasis of science on the interconnectedness of all lives on planet earth has been a known fact to African Traditional Religion long time ago. Human beings need other elements of nature to live well and vice versa.

Consequently, there is a bi-directional flow of spiritual energy between the element of nature and human existence. Whereas elements of nature such as rivers, sun, moon, wind and rain sustain human life on earth, the activities of human beings as concerns the care or neglect of nature proffer serious implications for everything created by God. Consequences of human neglect of the elements of nature manifest clearly in the polity including earthquakes, floods, and draught. The Earth is a community of interconnected living things; all are mutually dependent on one another for life and survival.

Earth is a balanced and diverse domain where responsible custodians can function as partners, rather than rulers, to sustain a balanced and diverse Earth community. Earth and its components not only suffer from injustices at the hands of humans, but actively resist them in the struggle for justice as is explicated in the instances of volcano, earthquakes and floods in many communities worldwide.

### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

In this unit, we discussed creation in African Traditional Religion. We described the process, purpose and care of creation from the perspective of African Traditional Religion. Explanation on the interdependent relation of everything created was also given. It comes to fore then that creation in African Traditional Religion may be understood as a gift and a responsibility.

### **5.0 SUMMARY**

In summary, this unit explained the act, process, purpose and care of creation from the perspective of African Traditional Religion. The relationship and interaction of everything in creation was also discussed. All things are mutually dependent in creation.

### **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. Describe the process of creation in African Traditional Religion.
2. Explain the purpose of creation in African Traditional Religion.
3. Mention and discuss the care of creation in African

Traditional Religion.

4. Examine the concept of God as the Creator in African Traditional Religion.

## **7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS**

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Olupona, J.K (ed.). *African Traditional Religion in Contemporary Society*, Minnesota: Paragon House.

## **UNIT 4 THE AFRICAN CONCEPT OF HUMAN BEINGS**

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### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

This unit will examine the concept of humanity from the perspective of African Traditional Religion. You will be exposed to the make-up of human beings and their roles in the created order. The understanding of the African concept of humanity is important because in the African thought, human beings are situated at the very core of God's creation.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Discuss the concept of the human beings in African Traditional Religion
- Describe the origin of human beings in African Traditional Religion;
- Explain the human beings in African Religious Thought
- Examine the ontological dimension of the human beings in African Traditional Religion
- List and discuss the visible components of human beings in

African

- Traditional Religion;
- Describe the invisible components of human beings in African Traditional Religion;
- Mention the landmarks in the cycle of life of human beings in African Traditional Religion; and
- Explain the end of human life in African Tradition Religion.

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 The Human Being in African Traditional Religion

The human person in African conception consists of male and female gender. The male gender refers to man, while the female gender connotes woman. Man has been defined variously by different scholars. The psalmists for example, cried out “what is man that thou art mindful of him”. Many philosophers over the years have continued to reflect on the question of which man is. Matson asserts that:

*...the question of man is an open one, which lives up for grabs. It has never been settled or agreed upon, possibly it can never be. It seems that man is the only creature that is a problem to itself. The trouble is that human species is the only one which finds hard to be a specie, for there seems to be no problem about being a cat. Indeed, there is not identity crisis.*

Yet, it is necessary for us to understand “our self”. The quest to know our identity is part of us. Thus, what makes us who we are, what we are and what makes us who and what we are define the human being more appropriately. Jenny Teichman quoted Boethius as saying that “we have found the definition of man and that it is the individual substance of a rational nature”. He went further to examine the various usage of the term man in the three main senses, namely: the theological, legal and philosophical senses. The theological sense defines man as the creature of God fashioned in His moral likeness and image (Imago Dei).

The legal sense describes man as a creature with freedom to do what he chose. While in the philosophical sense, man is defines as a rational or self-conscious being. This however, means that each individual person belongs to specie typified by rationality or self-consciousness. John Lock described man as intelligent being that has reason to think and reflect rationally. His identity dependents entirely on memory, self-consciousness and can consider himself. P. F. Strawson, described man as certain unique individual that must be ascribed to the state of consciousness and corporal characteristics. His definition compliments Abraham Heschee’s description man as a worm crawling on a pebble, the

earthly and speak of life floating aimlessly through the immeasurable vastness of the universe.

The scholastic philosophers have accepted the definition of man as “an animal rationale”. Benjamin Franklin, for example asserts that man is “Homo-Fabes” and a “tool-making animal”. Man is a machine into which we put what can be called food to produce an indigenous assembly of portable plumbing. Aristotle remarked that man is a civilized animal, capable of acquiring knowledge and to walk on two feet’s. He is a political, social and religious animal that has the will power of making choice or imitating other creatures. Robert, E. Fitch opined that the only difference between man and other beasts is that man is a beast that knows he will die. These definitions show that there is still much left to be desired as regards the understanding of the identity of man Gehman.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1**

Discuss philosopher’s views about human beings

### **3.2 Philosophers Views about Human Being**

There are various philosophical views about human being. However, in this section of the book, we shall limit ourselves to only two of them. Kenneth Kantzer views about man are contained in his theories of modern optimistic interpretations, contemporary pessimism and Biblical Realism. He maintained that man is a spark of the absolute spirit and he is inherently immortal, ethically good and morally neutral as destined by evolution to self perfection in complete union with the Divine. He also drew our attention to the contemporary pessimism about man, and emphasized that man is rooted in pessimistic school of thought. Kantzer further quoted Feuerbach by saying that “man is what he eats and receives; a characteristics of the despair modern existentialism”.

Furthermore, he employed the theory of Biblical Realism as the basis for understanding the doctrine of man. He asserts that biblical man is neither a complicated machine nor epigemeral value. He is not a divine being that need only time and opportunity to achieve perfection, but father he lives in daily tension between the tragic, self-caused perversion of what might have been and the glorious foretaste of what may be and what in God’s good grace will be Gehman. The Christian revelation points to the doctrine of creation in which man was made a little lower than God (Heb. 8:5). Man is also seen as the crown of the entire creative process and God Himself declared man to be “very good”. Thus, man was entrusted with possession of the earth and was made to have personal companionship with God.

### 3.3 Features of the Human Being

Our understanding of man can only be complete when we think of him in human terms and abstain from employing categories of lower forms of life. First of all, we must recognize that man is not tabular rasa. Unlike other objects, there is a desire in man to know himself. This is part of his being. And in order to know himself, man always try to question himself and to ask what he is in the light of an intuitive expectation or a vision of what he ought to be. Second, man is not free to choose whether or not he wants to attain knowledge about himself. This knowledge, pre-conceptions and self-interpretation is a necessity for man to know himself. It is part of being for knowing oneself and being a self-go-together.

Human being is concrete being and a place in physical space. And unlike other beings, man is endowed with consciousness of his own being, not just the awareness of the presence of other beings. Man in contrast to animals is a being who not only behaves but also reflects about how he behaves. Sensuality to one's own behaviour and the ability to question it or regard it as a problem rather than as a structure consisting exclusively of irreducible, immutable and ultimate facts is an essential quality of being human. What makes a human being is not just mechanical, biological and psychological functioning, but the ability of him to make decisions constant.

The preciousness of man is another feature that is entirely natural and associated with sanctity. Human life is intrinsically sacred to human being and it is supremely valuable. Each individual is dear to someone, even if nobody cares for him; he is still a human being. Everyone seems to be aware that he is not just "everybody" but evolves as somebody; or a person, and something that cannot be repeated; something for which has no duplicate or substitute. Man is unique.

He alone occupies a unique status. All other beings seem to fit perfectly into a natural order and determined by permanent principles. As a natural being, human being is determined by natural laws. And as a human being, he must frequently choose, confined in his existence and be unrestrained in his will. He thinks and decides; as such the course of his life is unpredictable. No person can write man's autobiography in advance because no two human beings are alike. This mode of being human is man's uniqueness.

The inconstancies in behaviour and in self-understanding are salient characteristics of man. Man does not remain what he is once and for all. For animals, the world is just what it is. But to man, the world is in

making and to be human is to be on the way, striving, waiting and hoping. To be human is to challenge and intend, not just to go on. Man's existence is not a thing replete with energy, but an inter-play of a process and events. Self-sufficiency, independence, the capacity to stand apart, to differ, to resist, and to defy-all is modes of being human. Man is never alone. As Abraham Heschel puts it "man solidarity is not the product of human solidarity". Reciprocity is another feature of man.

In infancy, man begins to obtain and seize things he cares for. On developing and entering maturity, he becomes involved in giving and providing for those he cares for. Thus, to be a person is to reciprocate, to offer in return for what one receives. Reciprocity involves appreciation. Biologically, we will take and give off. Man is sensitive to other people's suffering and other men's humanity while, animals are concerned with their own needs. This implies that man is different from animals. Animals are content when their need is satisfied. But man insists not only on being satisfied, but also on being able to satisfy. So man cannot just be adequately described by one sentence or phrase.

### **3.4 The Nature of Human Being**

Human being is by nature a complex being that is difficult to understand. He is inquisitive by nature and is always interested in thinking where and how he emerged. He is also curious to know why he lives in time and space and certain events occur the way they do. This inquisitive nature of man makes him to behave in a strange manner that is very difficult to understand. The pre-Socratic and medieval thinkers believe that man is a social being whose selfhood, humanism and physical appearance makes him complex to be studied in any religion.

In African the concept of human being is best expressed in the proverb which says "human being is the most valuable of all creation". The Africans summarize his humanism in names which expressed the stupendous nature of man as a dignified being created by the Supreme Deity. Some of these names include: *Or hembra akaa cii* (human being is the most valuable of all possession), *Ka or* (it is the man), *Or gba* (human being has fashioned) *Or hide* (human being has returned), *Or vada* (human being has refused), *Otumun* (human being has accepted) amongst others.

Mbiti has observed that in African society, human being is placed at the centre of existence and he is conceived in relationship with his fellow men in the society in which he belongs. Booth further states that, the position of human being in the society makes him the focus point in African religion. Also, Temples who wrote on Bantu religion collaborated

that religion is centered more on human being than God. He is emphatically as if he is speaking for the whole of Africa. In his words:

*...life belongs to God. His grace and holiness is a gift to human being. Other creatures which are lower or higher vital forces, exist in the divine plan to maintain and cherish the vital gift of God to mankind.*

Mbiti's conception of human being above is cut across the whole of African society and has been seen as contribution of African people to the quest for the study of the history of man in modern time. Kaunda has noted that in Africa, the emphasis on man as the centre of unity is held in high esteem by the African people. He asserts thus:

*...to a certain extent, we in Africa have always had a gift for unity of human beings. It is at the heart of our traditional culture but now we see the possibility of extending the scale of our discovery by example to the whole world. Let the west have its technology and Asia its mysticism. Africa's gift to the world culture must be in the realms of africaness.*

Kaunda's presentation above call for a projection of African people and their spirit of solidarity or collaboration among themselves, his emphasis on the spirit of communism and ones of African continents is at best the re-incarnated words of the author of the "Negritude" which called for an excavation and re-discovery of the lost African heritage. Even though Kaunda implicitly rejects modern science and western technology, yet, he fail to understand that African continent cannot exist independent of other continents. This then pushes his contention to the wall. However, his proposal to project African culture to the outside world is very vital.

Nevertheless, African culture is diverse; as such it becomes inevitable for Africans to closely examine their various religious and cultural practices, and carefully select those that could be presentable to the outside world. It is for this very reason that this study tries to take a close look at human being as the focus point of African traditional religion. Interestingly, this search for self knowledge in turn calls for examination of the nature of human being's humanness, which is not only cosmological but also ontological in perspective. The cosmological dimension however, has to do with human being as a religious being living in African society.

## **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2**

Explain the origin of human beings in African Traditional Religion

### **3.5 The Origin of Human Beings in African Traditional Religion**

The origin of human being is located in God, the Creator. It was God who created human beings and put divine essence in them. In addition, humans are spiritually connected to God before, during and after their lifetime in the African belief system. In African belief system, the origin of human beings could be discerned from the strong cord that links the African to the super-sensible world which is reflected in the African rich spirituality. The African conviction that God is sovereign also gives some indication that the African person is closely linked with God.

God is recognized as the ultimate authority on all issues and the last court of appeal for any aggrieved soul. Different types of sayings in the African communities reflect the belief that God is the origin of human beings. For instance, the divine essence in human beings is designated with the same label as the name of God in some African communities. Examples include the Ijaw who call the divine-essence in human being *Tamuno*, the name of God; and the Idoma who call God, *Owoiko* and also call the divine-essence in humans *Owo* (derived from *Owoiko*). These observations point clearly to God as the origin of human beings in African Traditional Religion.

#### **SELF- ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2**

Describe the origin of human beings in African Traditional Religion.

### **3.6 Human Being in African Religious Thought**

In African traditional religion, the human being is seen primarily as a creature of God, eternal or self existent but a creature of God. Even though the origin of man seems to vary considerably in African mythologies and cosmogonies, African people commonly share the view that man originate from God. However, his origin may vary from one society to another but it is commonly held that man is a creature of God fashioned in His moral likeness and image. This belief about the origin of man is variously emphasized in African cosmogonic myths which show that man is created by God and his holds a central position in the creative order. In the Dogon cosmogonic myths for instance, God (Amma) created man and sent him down to earth in an arch made up of four pairs (Nommo) who later became the ancestors of the Dogon people after he (God) had created and restored order in the world. These “nommos” subsequently cooperated with God in forming the human society with its institutions and civilization.

Similarly, the Fom cosmogonic myth states that Nzame (God) made man with the help of “Mbere” and “Nkwa” the spiritual beings that like themselves and live in harmony with one another. This man created by God according to Fom people was the first man and was full of God’s likeness and beauty. This creativeness of man in the image of God

enables him to enjoy a special relationship with God. He endowed with freedom and intelligence which placed him far above other creatures in the universe and makes him like God. But God transcends man both in power and perfection as illustrated in Fom myth.

The Fom people believe that *Nzame* (God) sent *Zelam* (thunder) to destroy the first man farm and his world due to his superiority over the animal kingdom and refusal to worship Him. This myth of Fom people explains the relationship that existed between God and man in pre-modial time which was often defined in terms of father and son relationship. It is a relationship which is not only marked by man's submissiveness, obedience and resignation but also a relationship which unquestionably the authority of God's love, protection, care, security and trust for man.

Thus, the African people believe that man is an emanation from God Himself (Aeon). God created man body and soul, He then covered him with a skin and poured blood into his lifeless body and after that man began to breathe as a human being who lives in the society. This belief is commonly found in most cultures of African society such as Ti, Lodagga, Akamba, Yoruba, Igbo, Ahanti, Nuer, Kalabari, Bantu, amongst others. The Lodagga people strongly believed that God created man as a potter does to his pot. The Akamba also believe that Mahungu (God) made the first couple and brought them out of a hole in the ground or in the sky. This common belief of African people concerning the origin of man is cut across the African continent and religion of African people. Biblical Christians also agreed with African traditional worshippers that man is part of total created order which is created by the supreme deity himself.

Both Christianity and African religion also agreed that man evolved as a product of an independent process of natural selection and natural development such that man is philosophically and theologically seen as a special and direct creature of God. The Old Testament does not conceive man as specie in the sense of logical attraction but as a concretely existence being who lives in the society. The Hebrew word "Adam" which means "red earth" is an Ugaritic and Arabic term which connotes man as someone that live on earth on earth. The term is also used to denote the nature of man as a being that is different from God and other animals (1 Sam. 15:29, Gen. 1:26).

Human being was created in the image of God (*Imago Dei*) and this indicates that he was not only set apart from the creation order but he was prefigured in creation as a human being upon which everything cantered (Gen. 1:26, : 29, :2: 16). He is a spiritual being deem worthy to be given a divine task and responsibility to rule the face of the earth. Man was created bisexual and this difference the fundamental form of society and lineages emerged. It is based on the understanding that Mbiti refers to man as a being who is anthropocentric. He states:

*...African philosophy of religion is basically anthropocentric, man is at the centre of existence and African people see everything else in their explanation of human being's origin or sustenance, it is as if God exists for the sake of mankind. They describe or explain the destiny of man after a physical life...Animals, plants, land, rain, and other natural objects and phenomena, they also describe man's environment and incorporate it into religious perception of the universe.*

Mbiti's observation above clearly demonstrates that man in African religious thought can be viewed from different viewpoints as earlier mentioned above. Man *Mundu* in Akamba, *Muntu* in Bantu, or *Umache* in Tiv is the art of God who live in the society in close relationship with other people and magical forces. He is made of clay and the breath of God which indicates that his life is not owned by him. He must die and return to his creator when the breath ceases to exist. The physical body of man and the soul are then separated and life comes to an end.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3**

Briefly describe the concept of human being in African Religious thought

#### **3.7 Ontological Dimension of the Human Beings in African Traditional Religion**

The word ontology in its original usage connotes the doctrine about that "which is" or that "which exist". Ontology as a field of study is a totality of the things which exist in the super sensible world. It is a scientific study of that which is or that which exists in the human world. It is a discipline which coincides with metaphysics and philosophy whose branches include: ethics epistemology, amongst others. Thus, ontology in the worlds of Ushe can be defined as:

*...a systematizing of all concepts and principle, which deals with objects that can be verifiable by experience...it is concerned with the super sensible things which are the ultimate goal of metaphysics.*

From Ushe's definition above, it is clearly noted that ontology is a branch of philosophy properly called transcendental philosophy and it contains elements of a prior knowledge. It is also a branch of philosophy which studies the doctrine of abstract determination of the essence of an object in a super sensible world, which is the ultimate goal of metaphysics. The difference between ontology and logic is that, while ontology studies the essence of an object which can be empirically verified, logic on the other hand, takes over the task of knowing the logical relationship that exist between the object and the world of perceiving it.

Human being in African religious thought is conceived in ontological dimension in relation to multiplicity of beings living in the society with one another. The Africans understanding of man is synonymous with the western conception of man as a living force who is in active communion with other forces in the universe. This understanding of man in African worldview is slightly different from the western conception of man as a being composed of body and soul. This duality conception of man by the European is the last agreement accepted by the Africans who refused the dichotomy between the body and spirit and rather conceive man as a whole person. Ushie affirms that man is more of a principle which distinguishes him from other beings who are living in the society. He opines that:

*...many Africans distinguish...spirit, the person and the self. Each of these principles links him/her with a different category of beings in the ontological order.*

Ikenga-Metuh (1985:50), also explicates some of these principles thus:

*...breath is conceived as a verifying principle, a life force that links the person with other life forces in the universe. Destiny refers to the totality of the "bag" of good and bad fortunes associated with the person. The "self" then remains the unique individual person created by God.*

Ikenga-Metuh's presentation is a typical explanation of African doctrine of man which does not admit dualism which is characteristic of the Greco-Roman culture. The Greek and Roman people believed that man possessed body (soma), soul (nepes), spirit (pneuma), flesh (sarx), a heart (kardia), a mind (nous), and conscious (symudesis). The soma (body) represents both the physical body and the person, and should not be despised (Phil. 15:33, 15:44). The Sarx (flesh) was occasionally used by Paul synonymously with soma. It speaks of the transient nature of human being. Flesh further signifies the sinfulness and guilt of human being (II Cor. 4:10, I Cor. 15:50, Rom. 8:11).

The psyche or nepes represents the human person as a living being in Pauline theology (II Cor. 12:15, I Cor. 15:14). Even though the Greco-Roman ontological composition of human being such as the "flesh" (basa), which indicate human being's transitoriness (Ps 78:39), "spirit" (ruah) which refers to man as a living being or as a person (Ps 146:4 and Ezekiel 11:19) and "soul" (nepes) which refers to man as life (leb) are to mean the essential inner human being as opposed to his outward appearance (Job 12:3 and Isa. 16:17), Human being is always seen as a complete whole and not a dichotomised principle consisting of the body and the soul.

The body is not the prison house of the soul as generally conceived by African anthropologists. The principles in man are far from jeopardizing

the unity of man which is closely bind him together and enable him to relate with order entities in the ontological order. Thus, African anthropologists identified four such principles in man which links him to a different category of beings in the ontological order. The “breath” is conceived as verifying principle, and a life force which links man with other life forces in the universe. It relates to the destiny. Soul which is conceived as an “emanation” or “spark” as used here is variously conceived as the personification of man’s personal deity, or a guardian spirit (angel). It comes from God, and goes back to God after death.

But it is not a verifying principle, nor is it a fraction of man conceived in western conception of soul. This concept of the human spirit deity is found mainly in West African societies especially, among the Bantus. The destiny spirit is identified with the ancestral guardian spirit often referred to as the shadow. Finally, come to human being himself, the unique individual person created by God. These principles in man and their relationship is conceived in different ways by African societies as features which explain the harmonious integration of human being with other life forces who are living in the universe.

Temples who studied the Bantu people of Southern Africa affirms that; man consists of four principles which are constituent’s part of his personality. These include; the body, shadow, breath and self. The “self” (*mantu*) is believed to be the whole man and is different from “*muntu*” which in Bantu language refers to a being which possess a visible body as it is translated in English. Thus, *Muntu* (man) in the western usage of the term is translated as “the person” or “self”. In Bantu’s worldview, a whole and integral part and not a fraction of a composite being this survives after death.

The body of human being serves to make him visible. And this in no way diminishes man from losing his physical body as conceived by western scholarship. The shadow of man is associated with self and it can be trapped by other life forces who might take to get hold of the person himself. When the “self” leaves the human body at death, the person ceases to exist in the physical realm. This explains why African people strongly believed that dead people do not cast shadows (Herskovits, 1938).

The *Muntu* looks like a shadow when it is seen after death as a figure of the total person who was a human being but now looks like an incorporeal matter. The shadow is the sign representing the whole person, while the breath is the manifestation of life in a person as a living being. Thus, when the shadow leaves the human body and the breath ceases to exist, the person is certified dead.

This however, explains the general belief of African people which says that “the dead do not cast shadows”. The *Muntu* after death looks like a shadow when it is seen by human beings. Sometimes it looks like an

incorporeal matter or retain the figure of the deceased when he/she was alive on earth. This conception of man based on ontological dichotomy conceived in terms of his composition as an ontological being living with other life forces in the society.

Among the Tiv of Nigeria man is a being which is made up of the body (iyol), soul (jijigi), life (uma) and blood (iyol and wamber). He is believed to be a living entity which live, die and is buried in order to be configured to be cult of the ancestors (Adomoku). However, the body and soul of man have spiritual essence relating to biological entities which are living together with him in the society. The Lugbar people based their conception of man on five elements. These include; the body (rual) breath (ava), shadow (endiilandri), the guardian spirit (adro) and personality (fail).

They believed that human being has body which goes nowhere when he is alive but rots whenever he is dead and buried. His body contains the breath (ava) which leaves the body at death and goes to the spirit world. It is a symbol of life and it is lost once life ceases to exist. Sometimes, the breath is associated with the soul (orindi), which leaves the body after the person is certified dead and hovers around in the form of a spirit before it finally goes to the world of dead.

The Lugbara people also believed that during the time of wandering, the dead spirits can harm the living members especially those who come in contact with them. They could also attack the community members who offended them in dreams. These ghosts in Lugbara worldview go to their ancestral abode to join their ancestors who have gone before them and could descend to live in the shrines by the help of diviners. This Lugbara belief indicates that man possess a guardian spirit (ado) and personality (tali) which are other components of the ontological composition of man. These elements of man are given by the supreme deity to man at birth and they increase as he carries out social responsibilities in the society. However, when man dies, the guardian spirit and personality ceased to exist. They all go back to the Supreme Deity who created them. For the Yoruba's, man is an embodiment of vital principles and manifestation of life. He is believed to have the physical body (ava).

Which perishes when a human being is dead? He has the shadow (ojiji), which represents the invisible man, and whenever it leaves the body, the man becomes a corpse incapable of living in the society. The breath (emi) leaves the body and wanders about and when it comes in contact with people, they begin to dream or have nightmares. The shadow represents the real human being created by God who becomes an ancestral guardian spirit when incarnated into invisible body. The destiny spirit (chi) is believed to be an emanation of the spark of the individuals created by God and it is double in nature one is resident in heaven while the other is resident in the individuals.

This destiny spirit is chosen by God during the conception of a child from the various pages of fortunes. And once it is chosen, it becomes the destiny of such a man. The spirit double lives in the man to administer the package, which contains the fortunes and misfortunes the man, will have in future life. And when a man dies, his destiny-spirit goes back to the Supreme Deity to give account of the works performed by him while he was on earth. In this sense, the destiny spirit can be said to be associated with the ancestral guardian (*eke*) which is the spirit of a deceased ancestor who re-incarnates into a child to be born as man living in the society.

It is assigned to man by God during conception and can be recognized through the physical characteristics which are similar to a human being's supposed re-incarnate soul or the deceased ancestors who re-incarnate in the man as a child. However, when there is doubt about a child concerning his/her identity, divination is consulted to ascertain whether such a child has *ike* spirit or not. The importance of *ike* (the guardian spirit) is emphasized by the Yoruba people such that each person is believed to have a shrine in his/her family where sacrifices are offered to *ike* for good fortunes.

The Akan people worldview of man is centered on four principles which are believed to be packages from the Supreme Deity. These include; the destiny spirits (*okra*), the sunsum (breath), the father's spirit force (*ntoro*) and the mother's blood (*mogya*). The sunsum is man's ego or his personality which is manifested in a man's characters. The Akan people believed that the *sunsum* spirit can leave the body of a man during sleep and wanders away to an unknown place. Sometimes, it may not return to the human being who possessed or be captured by the witches and sorceress and dies. However, the Akan believe that those who heavily possessed *sunsum* spirit cannot die. A human being with a father-life-force linked him to paternal lineage called the *Ntoro* (fathers life force spirits) are blood related spirits which makes a man a composite personality. Thus, the Akan societies, those who share the same blood belong to the mortician lineage and because Akan people are matrilineal blood form the basis of ancestral cult.

The destiny spirits (*okjra/kra*) is a compliment of human being believed to have been given by the supreme deity during the conception of man. It is a life force which lives in everyman's body and can returns to the Supreme Deity when he dies. *Kra* is conceived as a guardian spirit which guides a person to whom it is assigned and give him advice. It is a destiny package from the supreme deity which makes a realization of one's destiny to be obtained and after the death of a human being; it goes back to the supreme deity to give account of the duties performed by him during his lifetime on earth. It may be allow returning to the world or remaining in heaven depending on the account of discharge of its duties in the lives of the people.

## SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

What do you understand by the ontology of the human being in African Traditional Religion?

### 3.8 The Visible Composition of Human Being in African Traditional Religion

Humans are composed of visible and invisible element both of which are necessary to have a whole human being. The physical parts of humans can be seen and handled and could be described as the physical features of the human body. These would include the head, chest, hands, belly, thigh and legs. These physical parts of the human body are known by different names among different peoples of Africa. Nonetheless, each African people usually have a word for the collective physical features of humans. Among the Igbo it is *ahu*, the Yoruba call it *ara*, whereas the Akan call the body *honam*. In addition to this, some parts of the human body are perceived as symbols of unseen entities in the cosmos. Example is the physical head (*ori*) which is a symbol of the personality - soul (*ori inu*) among the Yoruba.

The body enables human beings to interact with the environment. Hence, such activities such as farming, hunting and fishing are as a consequence of the physical features of humans. In addition to this, the human body constitutes a "container" for other non-physical features of human beings. The proper care and nurture of the physical body is the responsibility of individuals but also of the community in certain instances (e.g. the case of pregnant women). The human body perishes at the death of every human being through the process of decomposition.

## SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

What is the physical composition of the human body in African Traditional Religion?

### 3.9 The Invisible Composition of Human Beings in African Traditional Religion

The human shadow could be described as that which occupies the midway between the physical and the non-physical features of human beings. The human shadow is of social and ritual significance among the people of Africa. It is known by different names in many African communities. The Yoruba call the human shadow *ojiji*; the Nupe refer to it as *fufingi*; whereas it is known as *we-sagu* among the Ewe and Fon.

The human shadow is inseparable from the human body but cannot be handled, it thus combines physical and non-physical characteristics. The shadow disappears at the death of the human body. It is conceived by the African as a representation of the soul of individual human beings. In the ritual sense, any enchantment on an individual's shadow affects him or her directly. The African stance that the shadow of an individual is the symbol of his/her

soul may find correlation in the biblical report of Peter's shadow that effected healing on some sick people.

The vital principle, which is represented by the breath of human beings, is an invisible feature of the human body. The breaths of human beings also represent the personality soul of every individual. We shall examine the personality soul in a subsequent section of this unit. The breath is known among the Yoruba as *Emi* whereas the Nupe call it *Rayi*.

The origin of this vital principle could be traced to the creator, the Supreme Being who gave breath to all living creatures. According to some African cosmological narrative, the Supreme Being delegated the fashioning of the physical features of humans to specific divinities but the giving out of breath to make the physical figures into living beings was the sole prerogative of God. The vital principle or breath ceases to exist at the death of each individual.

The personality soul is another invisible feature of human beings. The concept of the personality soul is prevalent among African peoples. Basically, this is the belief that assumes the existence of an invisible aspect of the human being which maintains constant interaction with the super-sensible world. The personality-soul is known by different labels in Africa and the concept is variously developed among the people. The Yoruba, for instance, have a rich concept of *ori*, that is, the personality-soul. The Igbo call it *Chi*, the Edo refers to it as *uhunmwun*; it is *kuci* among the Nupe whereas the Akan and Ga people call the personality-soul *sunsun*.

Again, the creator is the source of the personality-soul which is given to humans from the heavenly abode. Africans believe that the personality-soul is positive while it is given by the creator but certain factors in the environment may alter the positive disposition of the personality soul. Some of the factors that may alter the personality-soul according to Yoruba belief system are: the divinities, the evil ones of the world (*omo araye*) and a person's character. During worship seasons, the personality-soul may be represented by the head of individual concerned (Yoruba) or by the *ora* or *ogbu tree* (Igbo). A major character of the personality-soul is the rich scope of its knowledge base. African Traditional Religion subscribe to the stance that the personality-soul knows all about human life from the pre-existence to the daily activities of the individual till death.

There are other invisible features of the human body among different African peoples but those discussed above may be found in nearly all African communities: The purpose of the African emphasis on these invisible features of the human body is to buttress the dependence of humans on and relationship with the super-sensible world.

## **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 6**

Mention and discuss two invisible components of human beings in African Traditional Religion

### **3.10 Cosmic Human Cycle of Life in African Traditional Religion**

The circle of human life is characterized by some landmarks that are appreciated and celebrated in African Traditional Religion. The cycle of human life in the African perception begins at birth, through puberty, marriage and ends at death. African Traditional Religion recognizes each of these occasions as worthy of celebration and specific rituals known as rites of passage are designated to this effect.

The general aim of these rites is to celebrate the transition of the individual from one stage to another, for example, the transition of a child to adulthood through puberty rites. According to Benjamin Ray it usually involves three stages: the old stage that is to be discarded; the neutral stage when the individual is neither here nor there; and, the new stage into which the individual is to be incorporated.

These rites are of social and ritual significance in Africa because they constitute occasions for congregations, social interactions and harmonious living in addition to their religious elements. Furthermore, these rites of passage are of diverse types and marked by multiplicity of emphasis in different African communities. For illustrative purposes, examples of some rites of passage in some African communities will be cited here. We shall discuss birth rites among the Edo and puberty among the Akan and Ga.

#### **Birth Rites among the Edo**

As is true of all African communities, the birth of a child is an occasion for much joy and felicitation. Among the Edo, the pregnant woman is placed under the care of a woman-healer who is vast in the field of gynecology. The care of the mother and the delivery of the child is generally a duty for women; only in cases of serious problems do men interfere. At birth, the child is given "the water of life" through the process of throwing water on the roof and the water drops on the child. The naming of the child is informed by the circumstance that is prevailing at the time of birth. The baby may also receive the name of the ancestors that is believed to have reincarnated.

#### **Puberty Rites among the Akan and Ga**

A girl's puberty rites commences at the first menstruation. At the appearance of the first menses, the girl informs her mother who gives the information to the community. The mother offers the prescribed sacrifice which includes wine to the creator (*Nyame*) and the ancestors. Thereafter, the girl's hair is shaved, along with the pubic hair and the hair at the armpits. She is gaily dressed as she is perceived as a newborn into adulthood. Five days feasting marks this puberty rite. The girl is expected to get married shortly after and become a mother not too long after that.

## **SELF- ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

7

What are the rites of passage in African Traditional Religion?

### **3.11 The End and Transmission of Human Life in African Traditional Religion**

The end of the human life in the African perception is marked by the departure of breath from the human body. Death is however not the final termination of the journey of the human soul. This is because Africans believe that death is a mode of transition rather than a termination. At death, the human soul leaves the body but is received in the abode of the ancestors from where he/she may continue to influence the activities of people that are still living especially his or her family members.

Clear indications of this African conviction on death may be discerned from three perspectives: elaborate funeral ceremonies, funeral arrangements and the veneration of ancestors. Giving "proper" burial ceremonies to the dead is considered very important in the African belief system. A proper burial ceremony ensures that the departed is enlisted into the guild of ancestors and the children left behind are free to continue their lives without any form of spiritual oppression.

Funeral ceremonies in some African communities may involve the inclusion of clothing, food items and even slaves in the grave to ensure the comfort of the departed in the great world beyond. Also, Africans venerate the ancestors in order to receive blessings and support from them. Indeed, some African communities have elaborate ritual practices to celebrate the ancestors as found in the Egungun festival among the Yoruba. There are different types of death in African Traditional Religion.

There are good deaths which refer to the death of elderly people who have lived purposeful lives. There are also bad deaths which refer to the premature death of young people and the death of questionable characters in the community. Such people may die through divine punishment, for example, people who die due to thunder strike which signifies the activities of the god of thunder (Sango) among the Yoruba; or individuals who die because of an attack of small-pox (Sonponna, the god of small pox). The African belief is that victims of bad death cannot become ancestors because they are given "special" type of burial. A prominent desire of every African person is to have children before death. Those who remain barren to the point of death are considered pitiable in African communities.

## **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 8**

Why is death a transition and not a termination in African Traditional Religion?

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

You have examined the origin and complex composition of human beings in African Traditional Religion. You have also been exposed to the visible and non-visible features of human beings. In addition, you have considered the cycle of human life marked by the rites of passage and the end and transmission of the human life.

#### **5.0 SUMMARY**

This unit examined the origin of human beings from the perspective of African Traditional Religion. We explained the visible and invisible features of human beings and considered the different rites of passage marking landmarks in the individual's life. The place and types of death in African Traditional Religion was also mentioned.

#### **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. What is the origin of human beings in African Traditional Religion?
2. Mention and discuss the visible features of human beings in African Traditional Religion
3. Explain the invisible features of human beings in African Traditional Religion
4. What are rites of passage in African Traditional Religion?
5. Is death the end of human life in African Traditional Religion?

#### **7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS**

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## **MODULE 2**

- Unit 1 Ethics in African Traditional Religion
- Unit 2 Judgment in African Traditional Religion
- Unit 3 Reincarnation in African Traditional Religion
- Unit 4 Women in African Traditional Religion
- Unit 5 Sin and Reward in African Traditional Religion

### **UNIT 1 ETHICS IN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION**

#### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 God as the Source of Ethics in African Traditional Religion
  - 3.2 Guiding Principles of Ethics in African Traditional Religion
  - 3.3 Concept of Good and Evil in Ethics in African Traditional Religion
  - 3.4 Custodians of Ethics in African Traditional Religion
  - 3.5 Ethics and Harmony in African Traditional Religion
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

#### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

We shall discuss the concept and practice of ethics in African Traditional Religion in this unit. Ethics is of great significance among any group of people.

#### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

By the end of this unit you should be able to:

- Define the concept of ethics in African Traditional Religion;
- Describe the principles guiding ethics in African Traditional Religion;
- Explain the concept of good and evil in ethics in African Traditional Religion;
- Mention the custodians of ethics in African Traditional Religion; and
- Explain the relations of ethics in African Traditional Religion.

#### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

##### **3.1 God as the Source of Ethics in African Traditional Religion**

Africans recognize God as the source of ethics as a consequence of God being

the source of human beings and by implication of the world. God is the ultimate authority in African societies and no section of the society escapes the scope of God's power and influence. Therefore, God is the cohesive factor of the society. A clear indication of this observation is the pervasive role of religion in African societies. Ethical prescriptions are perceived as divine injunctions and penalties for contravening such injunctions are regarded as emanating from God. However, the prescriptions and punitive measures may be executed through the intermediaries. For example, the king, divinities, ancestors and elders are regarded as intermediaries. However, the ultimate authority belongs to God. Furthermore, God is judged as the source of ethics because of the divine essence (a part of the Supreme Being) which is given to humans by God.

The divine essence distinguishes humans from other creatures of God. It makes humans to seek God and strive to please the creator. In addition there is the provision of the conscience in humans by God. The conscience commends or condemns human conduct without any external influence. It is the in-built thermometer by God into the human being. Thus, African Traditional Religion holds tenaciously to the fact that God is the source of ethics in human society, some African peoples however profess that society is the source of ethics but God is the enforcer and ground of validation for ethics as can be found among the Akan of Ghana.

### **SELF- ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1**

Why is the source of ethics traced to God in African Traditional Religion?

### **3.2 Guiding Principles of Ethics in African Traditional Religion**

Certain principles were put in place in African communities to guide the concept and practice of Ethics. There include the principle of being your brother/sister's keeper (one for all and all for one), taboo, covenant relationship and the use of traditional media system. The ethical conduct of one individual may jeopardize the destiny of a whole community. This is due to the African belief that a part could influence the whole positively or negatively. In this wise individuals are cautioned to be very careful in their conducts in interpersonal relationships whether between humans or with the super-sensible world. Taboo constitutes another guiding principle for ethics. These are stipulations to deter certain acts or conduct in African communities. Repercussions for breaking taboo are constructed as supernatural penalties and these could proffer serious implications for both the individual and the society.

Taboo may be specific to certain deities, a family, a profession or personal. Whichever it is, taboos are to serve as boundaries to ethical conducts. Covenant relationships compel faithfulness to an agreement between two people, who may be equals (parity covenant) or a higher and lower entity (suzerainty covenant). The terms of a covenant often ensures high ethical standards in human relationship because to disobey these terms could be precarious.

## **SELF - ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2**

Mention and explain the guiding principles of ethics in African Traditional Religion?

### **3.3 The Concept of Good and Evil in African Traditional Religion**

The concept of good and evil in Africa sometimes hinges on divine prescriptions. That which is good in African Traditional Religion is the act that contributes positively to the well-being of the individual, the family and the community whereas evil is perceived as any act which undermines the well-being of individuals, families and communities. Further, the good or evil act may occur, reflect and affect inter-personal and human-divine relationship. The common thread running through these multilayered manifestations of good or evil in Africa is the sustenance of people's well-being. Some prescriptions of good or that which is designated as evil carries divine elements. Good and evil acts may be directed towards fellow human beings or the divine, however, evil acts towards human beings is to be differentiated from those directed towards the divine, which is called sin. Evil acts undermine the well-being of others in the community and may include stealing, gossiping, murder, slander and quarrels.

Repercussion of such acts may manifest as ostracized measures, sickness or lack of progress. On the other hand good deeds are acts such as kindness, goodness generosity, respect and sharing. The concept of character is of utmost importance and occupies a central place in the moral language and ethics of many African communities. It is regarded by Africans as a sure instrument to measure an individual's moral standard. A clear platform that reflects good or evil acts in human life is character. African Traditional Religion asserts that good deeds are rewarded by God whereas evil deeds bring condemnation; hence people are urged to be good wherever they are. Members of the community are encouraged to develop habits and patterns of behaviour that fosters the well-being of everybody in the community.

## **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3**

What is the concept of good and evil in African Traditional Religion?

### **3.4 Custodians of Ethics in African Traditional Religion**

The Supreme Being is the ultimate custodian of ethics in African Traditional Religion but other parties assist in the daily enforcement of ethical prescriptions in the society. These include the divinities, the cultic functionaries, the ancestors, and elders in the community. Since every act of the individual (be it positive or negative) affects the well-being of everybody in the community, the roles of these parties become crucial. The divinities are oftentimes in charge of human conduct towards the super-sensible world whereas ancestors usually, oversee the conduct of the members of their

families. The priest or priestess directs both social and spiritual conducts with the aim of maintaining harmony. The elders (female and male) try to ensure compliance with ethical prescriptions as concerns members of their families. These custodians work towards the same goal of attaining and maintaining the well-being of all in the society and recognize God as the ultimate power and authority.

#### **SELF - ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4**

Who are the Custodians of Ethics in African Traditional Religion?

### **3.5 Ethics and Harmony in African Traditional Religion**

The provision of moral rules and ethical principles in African society reflects that character is basic to the well-being of the community. Character is a concept common to many African communities. It is conceived as an attribute bestowed on humans before birth in some African communities whereas others perceive character as a feature that each individual imbibes during the process of socialization tinted by some inherited traits. Whatever, the origin suggested for character, it is basic to fostering harmony in African communities.

Some submit that character is “a state or condition of the soul which causes it to perform its actions spontaneously and easily” (Gyekye, which in other words implies that character is innate. Other schools of thought, however, disagree with this because character formation also involves habits and oftentimes, inherited traits. In addition, they argue that moral instructions could be useless and irrelevant if character was innate. Ethics and harmony are interdependent from the perspective of Africa Traditional Religion because commendable acts foster peace and unity in the community and a peaceful & harmonious atmosphere promotes commendable acts.

#### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5**

Describe the relationship between ethics and harmony in African Traditional Religion

### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

We have discussed the concept of ethics in African Traditional Religion in this unit. We examined the source, guiding principles and custodians of Ethics. We also discussed the African concept of good and evil and the relationship between ethics and harmony in African Tradition Religion.

### **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit, we considered concept of ethics in African Traditional Religion, guiding principles of ethics, custodians of ethics and the contribution of ethics to harmony in African Traditional Religion. We also explained the concept of good and evil in African Traditional Religion.

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. Why is God the source of ethics in African Traditional Religion?
2. Mention the guiding principles of ethics in African Traditional Religion
3. Describe the concept of good & evil in African Traditional Religion.
4. Discuss the custodians of ethics in African Traditional Religion.
5. How is ethics utilized for harmony in African Traditional Religion?

## **7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS**

- Awolalu, J. O. & Dopamu, P. A. (1979). *West African Traditional Religion*, Ibadan: Onibonoje Press.
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## **UNIT 2 JUDGEMENT IN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Judgment and Morality in African Traditional Religion
  - 3.2 Agents of Judgment in African Traditional Religion
  - 3.3 Methods of Judgment in African Traditional Religion
  - 3.4 Judgment and Human Responsibility in African Traditional Religion
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In this unit, we shall examine the concept of judgment in African Traditional Religion. Judgment suggests forms of reactions to negative human actions.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Describe the concept of judgment in African Traditional Religion;
- Mention the agents of African Traditional Religion;
- Discuss the methods of judgment in African Traditional Religion; and
- Explain judgment and human responsibility in African Traditional Religion.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1 Judgment and Morality in African Traditional Religion**

Morality could be defined as rules and guidelines put in place to regulate and guide people's social conduct in a society. It could also be taken to mean behavioural patterns including attitudes and response to laid-down rules and norms in a society. An individual whose attitudes are deemed satisfactory is described as being morally upright. In Africa, often times, morality flows out of religion. Morality is thus a standard set to which members of the community are expected to live up to. Where an individual fails to meet this mark satisfactorily, then judgment is given. Judgment refers to a repercussion for falling short of certain expectations. Judgment could exist between the divine and humans or within human interpersonal relations. Judgment involves indictments and pronounced penalties.

Because of the close link between morality and religion, God is often believed to be the One who passes judgment on humans directly or through

the delegated authority given to the divinities. Many African people have attributes and names which show the Supreme Being as the only true judge, the impartial judge and the end time judge. Judgment could be ameliorated through rituals in certain cases, depending on the availability of expertise of the cultic functionaries approached. Also, the concept of judgment in African Traditional Religion is both immediate and remote.

Africans conceive of judgment as an immediate occurrence due to the belief that people are to be held responsible for their deed, whereas judgment as a remote concept in Africa Tradition Religion hinges on the conviction that God will ask the individual to give an account of his/her life while on earth. There is an eschatological dimension to it. Furthermore, judgment is regarded as an event that cannot be escaped. Even when the judgment is delayed or it seems like the evil-doer is going scot-free, Africans still believe that judgment is sure. Every action or inaction will necessitate a reaction which may be a judgment by another human being or the creator.

### **SELF- ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1**

What is the relationship of judgment and morality in African Traditional Religion?

### **3.2 Agents of Judgment in African Traditional Religion**

The ultimate agent of judgment in African Traditional Religion is God though in executing such judgments, it is sometimes delegated to the divinities or the ancestor. Africans believe in accountability for one's life while on earth. Every individual would have to give an account of how his or her life was lived on earth. Traditional African belief system subscribes to an abode of ancestor, which is constituted of people who died "good deaths" as opposed to the wandering spirits of people who suffer premature deaths and "bad deaths". However, due to the influence of Christianity and Islam, the concept of a good heaven and a bad heaven is now entrenched in African Traditional Religion. God is thus, the first and ultimate agent of judgment. God is seen as the impartial judge; hence humans can be assured of fairness.

The anti-wickedness divinities are also agents of judgment in Africa Traditional Religion. These divinities operate with delegated power and authority from God on specific areas of operation. Examples include the deities in charge of iron (Ogun among the Yoruba), thunder (Sango among the Yoruba and Amadioha among the Igbo), earth (Ile among the Yoruba and Ala among the Igbo) and small-pox (Sopona among the Yoruba). When the prescribed stipulations of any of these deities are contravened, judgment may descend on the offender.

Ancestors as custodians of family morality and integrity may also be seen as agents of judgment. The well-being of individuals in a family or the family as a whole may be jeopardized if the ancestors find fault. Such occasions may

involve the refusal or reluctance of members of the family to offer sacrifice or Have a festival on behalf of the ancestor. It could also be due to the refusal of an instruction from the ancestors through divination or when dreams are disregarded. Consequently, rules and prescriptions towards the veneration of ancestors are strictly adhered to avoid judgments. Also, in interpersonal relations, especially as it concerns oath taking and making of covenant, the divinities or ancestors may give judgment on violators of such agreements. The greatest violation among the Yoruba in this regard for example is the breaking of covenant between siblings or relatives, known as "alajobi" (that which is born together); such is seriously sanctioned.

## **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2**

Who are the agents of Judgment in African Traditional Religion?

### **3.3 Method of Judgment in African Traditional Religion**

A general assumption underling the concept of Judgment in Africa Traditional Religion is the need to penalized prohibited action. Therefore, negative instances in the life of an individual or a community are construed as evidence of the judgment of God. These may manifest as sickness, lack of material and non material prosperity and tireless work with little or nothing let show for it. The above observation is especially true of judgment that emanate from the divinities and the ancestors. But the method of judgment by the supreme on human life after death is based on accountability of actions and inactions while on earth. Sacrifices, offering and prayers are usually offered to remedy the situation.

## **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3**

What are the methods of Judgment in African Traditional Religion?

### **3.4 Judgment and Human Responsibility in African Traditional Religion**

The responsibility of the individual is seriously upheld in African Traditional Religion. Though the concept of destiny exists nonetheless, it does not negate the concept of human responsibility because humans are endowed with the capacity for thought and action. It follows therefore that once an issue is thought about and action is taken by the individual on such thoughts, whatever the outcome may be, such an individual is to be held responsible for such actions. If such actions demand judgment, then it will be given and this is equally justified. There is the provision for human improvement in the African concept of character and morality. Hence the Akan of Ghana say: "We offer advice (in order to reform one's character") but we do not change destiny.

## **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4**

What is the role of human responsibility in the concept of judgment in African Traditional Religion?

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

We examined the concept of judgment in the unit. The agents and methods of judgment were also discussed. We submitted that the concept of judgment hinges on the African subscription to human responsibility.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit, we discussed the concept of judgment in African Traditional Religion. The relationship of judgment and morality was examined. In addition, the agents and methods of judgment in African Traditional Religion engaged our attention. Also, we discussed the place of human responsibility in judgment in African Traditional Religion.

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. What is the influence of morality on the concept of judgment in African Traditional Religion?
2. Who are the agents of judgment in African Traditional Religion?
3. What methods are employed in executing judgment in African Traditional Religion?
4. How can we reconcile destiny and free will in the concept of judgment in African Traditional Religion?

## **7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS**

- Awolalu, J. O. & Dopamu, P. A. (1979). *West African Traditional Religion*, Ibadan: Onibonje Press.
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## **UNIT 3 REINCARNATION IN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 The Principles of Re-incarnation in African Traditional Religion
  - 3.2 Methods of Re-incarnation in African Traditional Religion
  - 3.3 Influence of Re-incarnation in African Traditional Religion
  - 3.4 Peculiarities Re-incarnation in African Traditional Religion
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In this unit, we shall examine the belief of the adherents of African Traditional Religion in re-incarnation. This is the belief that dead people could be re-born on earth.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Explain the principle of reincarnation in African Traditional Religion;
- Describe the methods of reincarnation in African Traditional Religion;
- Mention the influence of reincarnation in African Traditional Religion;
- Discuss the peculiarity of reincarnation in African Traditional Religion.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1 The Principles of Re-incarnation in African Traditional Religion**

To the Africans, death is not the final end to human life. Rather, it is a transition from earth to the abode of the ancestors. African burial arrangements portray this by making provisions for the comfort of the dead person during this journey. Such provisions could include clothes, food items, cosmetics and sometimes slaves, as is true with the burial of rulers. Also, death and whatever happens thereafter is connected to the African perception of the soul. The African idea about the human soul is complex and intricate.

Whereas some proffer that the soul is of two parts, others say three parts and yet another group submits that the human soul is made up of four parts. There is, however, the general consensus that the human soul originated from the creator and to the creator it will return at death. Africans therefore conceive

the soul as being immortal. Maxims and sayings in different African communities may be cited to buttress this belief in the immortality of the soul.

The Yoruba for instance say “*ko si bi a se pe laye to ao pe ni orun ju be lo*” meaning “no matter how long we stay on earth, we shall stay longer than that in heaven”. Also the people say “*aye l’oja, orun n’ile*” meaning “the earth is a marketplace but heaven is home”. Another observation that confirms the African belief in the immortality of the human soul is the immortality of God in African belief system. Since He is the origin of the soul and God is immortal, it follows therefore that the soul is immortal. Furthermore, the belief in the immortality of the soul in African Traditional religion is geared purposely towards Re-incarnation through which ancestors are re-born into the family. The process of the ancestors being re-born into the family is of prime significance for the continuity of family lines from one generation to another.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1**

What are the principles that underline the belief in reincarnation in African Traditional Religion?

### **3.2 The Methods of Re-incarnation in African Traditional Religion**

The modes of Re-incarnation in African Traditional religion is closely linked to the human character while the individual was on earth and whether the person died a good or a bad death. A good death is death at a ripe old age and full burial rites given to such a person. He/she would be qualified to enter the abode of the ancestors to Re-incarnate in any child born into that family. This is especially true when the time of death and the birth of such a baby occur in close proximity. Names such as *Babatunde* (father has come back and *Iyabode* (mother has returned) are given to such children). However, if a Person is of bad character and morally bankrupt while on earth, he or she cannot Re-incarnate.

A bad death is premature death or death in "precarious ritual situations such as drowning, death with pregnancy or through the affliction of small-pox. Such people would Re-incarnate as bird, stones, animals or reptiles. This same fate is assumed to be the lot of people with bad character while they were on earth. In some cases, traits of the ancestor, like the manner of walking or speaking is noticed in the new born child as she grows up and these are regarded as proves that their mother has returned. Indeed, some members of the family would insist on calling such children "my mother" if this is how they addressed the dead ancestor.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2**

Discuss methods of reincarnation in Africa Traditional Religion?

### **3.3 The Influences of Re-incarnation in African Traditional Religion**

The basic influence of Re-incarnation in African Tradition Religion is the retaining of the family guardian spirit from generation to generation. As long as ancestors (male & female) continue to Re-incarnate in their children and grand children, the guardian spirit of the family is guaranteed to remain alive and relevant. This is one of the reasons for the African prioritization of procreation. Effort is made to ensure that each person produces children in African societies because a childless man or woman is perceived as a loser and one whose journey to earth is non-productive.

In addition, Re-incarnation perpetuates the identity and peculiar traits of families and individuals. Some families are known to be warriors, others as hunters, yet others as artists and such reputations are passed down from one generation to the other. Again, Re- incarnation influences the moral conduct of the living though it operates in an after death setting. This is because certain types and levels of moral conduct, are prerequisites for qualification to be Re-incarnated. Consequently, individuals strive to maintain high moral standards in order to attain the status of an ancestor.

#### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3**

Discuss the influence of reincarnation in Africa Traditional Religion?

### **3.4 The Peculiarities of Re-incarnation in African Traditional Religion**

The doctrine of Re-incarnation is common to many existing religions in the world through generations. However, certain features of Re-incarnation in African Traditional Religion are peculiar. In Hinduism for instance, Re-incarnation is likened to the shedding of old clothes and the donning of new ones. One takes on birth again and again in countless bodies - perhaps as an animal or some other sub-human *form*. In African Traditional religion, people do not just take up birth again and again, neither do they treat life as the shedding of old clothes. Re-incarnation for Africans is the return of a dead ancestor in another body or by a body influenced by features of the ancestors. Again, Re-incarnation is perceived as an individual affair in Hinduism and Buddhism but this is not true for the African whose sole agenda is harmony and the well-being of the community. Consequently, the community has stakes in the practice of Re-incarnation.

#### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4**

Mention the peculiar features of Re-incarnation in African Traditional Religion?

### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

We have examined Re-incarnation in African Traditional Religion. We discussed the principles of reincarnation and its practices. We also distinguished Re-incarnation in Africa Traditional Religion from the practice

in other religions. Reincarnation remains a crucial component in understanding the religion of the Africans.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit, we considered the principles of Re-incarnation in African Traditional Religion. In addition, we examined the methods, influence and peculiarities of Re-incarnation in African Traditional Religion.

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. What principles underline the practice of Re-incarnation in African Traditional Religion?
2. Describe the methods of Re-incarnation in African Traditional Religion?
3. Discuss the influence of reincarnation in African Traditional Religion?
4. Mention the peculiarities of Re-incarnation in African Traditional Religion?

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## **UNIT 4 WOMEN IN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 African Gender Construct and African Traditional Religion
  - 3.2 The Role of Women in African Traditional Religion
  - 3.3 The Place of Women in African Traditional Religion
  - 3.4 Challenges for Women's Roles in African Traditional Religion
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In this unit, we shall discuss the place and role of women in African Traditional Religion. The place of women in African Traditional Religion is also a product of the complementary gender construction in Africa.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Explain African gender construction;
- Describe the place of women in African Traditional Religion;
- Define the role of women in African Traditional Religion; and
- Discuss the challenges for women's roles in African Traditional Religion.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1 African Gender Construction and African Traditional Religion**

Africans subscribe to the concept of interdependence of genders and the maintenance of balance in all human endeavours. Consequently both male and female principles are crucial to every human activity. The concept of African gender relations also reflects the multilayered understanding of the concept of power in Africa. Power is conceived not in terms of hierarchy but as areas of specialization and all is interconnected. Men have their areas of specialization (for example, hunting) and so do women (for example, cosmetics). Whereas the male is in control of the visible, physical and formal power, women control the invisible, non-physical and informal power in the polity.

Yet both classifications of power are potent and relevant to the African social structures and gender relations. Furthermore, the base of power structure in some African communities is in the custody of women. This is

especially true of the Yoruba, where the "Iya mi" (group of knowledgeable women) often referred to as witches, constitute the base of all power structures. Every case – spiritual, economic or political - would be resolved at the council of the Iya mi when the situation gets to the climax. Consequently, African gender construct bestows tremendous power on women. Also, the institution of motherhood is construed as a position of power in African communities. Mothers constitute the only authentic source of any child. This is because though the paternity of a child may be doubted, it is near impossible to dispute the maternity of a child.

Moreover, the elements that prevail in childbirth and child upbringing constitute avenues of power for the women in African communities. These are blood and breast milk. African gender constructions ascribe both elements to women and recognize them as sources of power and authority over the child. It is a normal practice to inquire about a child's well-being at different stages of life from the oracle in Africa. In such a situation, it is the mother's name that is required, not the father's because you don't doubt a child's mother. Also, if a mother curses or blesses her child with the bloodshed at childbirth and the breast milk, the situation in African belief is near past rectification.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1**

Discuss the African gender construction and how it affects women's place in African Traditional Religion.

### **3.2 The Role of Women in African Traditional Religion**

The roles that women play in African Traditional Religion range from worshippers, to leaders, and custodians. Women constitute the majority of membership and worshippers in African Traditional Religion. Women also make up the "sustaining factor" in African Traditional Religion because the daily care of shrines and regular offering at the shrines is ensured mostly by women. Indeed, the role of women as sustainers of African Traditional Religion is crucial to the survival of the religion.

Apart from these, women function as custodians of traditions in African Traditional Religion. This role pertains to the preservation and recitations of many oral genres that are necessary to the practice of the religion. Many of the repertoires are women. Some of these genres include cognomens of deities (oriki), incantations of various kinds, songs and other types of oral literature. In addition, Women function as cultic functionaries, priestesses and religious leaders. Women also function as healers and diviners in African Traditional Religion. In many African communities, women supervise the health care of people especially women and children.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2**

Mention the roles of women in African Traditional Religion

### **3.3 The Place of Women in African Traditional Religion**

Women occupy important position in African Traditional Religion. They constitute the sustaining factor of African Traditional Religion and are the live wire of any festival or religious occasion in Africa. The domestic activities of women during such occasions including washing, cooking and cleaning are construed as ritual activities that carry spiritual connotations and reward. To describe such activities in simple fashion undermines the significance attached to the activities.

Also, women constitute the custodians of tradition in African Traditional Religion. Seldom do you find any ceremony in Africa that not feature songs and recitations and normally, women are in charge of these. Again, women are in charge of the invisible base of power in many African communities. They prescribe and regulate the utilization of power and authority at every level of the polity in Africa but in a non-confrontational manner. Women have been described as the "ground" upon which African Traditional Religion operates. Many activities and participants step on this ground and often take it for granted but remove the ground and nothing works again.

#### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3**

Describe the place of women in African Traditional Religion?

### **3.4 Challenges to Women's Roles in African Traditional Religion?**

The challenges that emanate from roles played by women in African Traditional Religion are many and complex. A major observation cutting across these challenges is the influence of modernity and foreign religions on the contemporary African person. The prevalence of materialism and extensive influence of capitalism have necessitated major shifts in the African conception of womanhood. Again, the prohibitive regulations attached to menstrual blood is an imposed explanation from Christianity and Islam but which has become accepted even within African Traditional Religion. Menstrual blood is perceived as a conveyor of power because of the potential of life in it, therefore, efforts are made to avoid contact between it and any sacred object or setting.

However, such a prohibition in either Christianity or Islam would be due to the conterminous label given to menstrual blood, as a spoiler or reducer of power. The prohibition of women from sacred space due to menstrual blood is, however, fast losing its level of compliance in the contemporary African setting. A clear evidence of this is the increasing number of childbearing women who are priestesses as opposed to the situation about a century ago when they were required to have passed childbearing age.

Further, the need to combine career and motherhood poses a serious challenge to women's roles in African Traditional Religion. The traditional network of

grandmothers and stepmothers has been dismantled by individualism, industrialization and urbanization.

#### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4**

Explain the challenges for Women's Roles in African Traditional Religion

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

We have examined the place and role of women in African Traditional Religion. We also discussed some challenges that women face as they strive to fulfill their roles in African Traditional Religion

#### **5.0 SUMMARY**

We discussed the role and place of women in African Traditional Religion, in this unit. We examined African gender construction as the source of principles to understand roles of women in African Traditional Religion. We also explained some of the challenges to women's place and roles in African Traditional Religion.

#### **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. Explain African gender construction
2. Discuss the role of women in African Traditional Religion?
3. Explain the place of women in African Traditional Religion?
4. Mention some challenges to women in African Traditional Religion?

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## **UNIT 5 SIN AND REWARD IN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 The Concept of Sin and Reward in African Traditional Religion
  - 3.2 The Methods of Sin and Reward in African Traditional Religion
  - 3.3 Agents in Control of Sin and Reward in African Traditional Religion
  - 3.4 The Concepts of Punishment and Removal of Sin in African Traditional Religion
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In this unit, we shall examine the concept of sin and reward in African Traditional Religion including the methods and agents that control both concepts. We shall discuss the relevance of punishment for sin and reward as well as the effects of both concepts in African Traditional Religion.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Explain the concept of sin and reward in African Traditional Religion;
- Mention agents that control the practice of sin and reward in African Traditional Religion;
- Discuss the concept of punishment in African Traditional Religion; and
- Describe the effects of sin and reward in African Traditional Religion.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1 The Concept of Sin and Reward in African Traditional Religion**

The concept of sin in African Traditional Religion hinges on violations of regulations in the society. These violations run contrary to prescribed mode of conduct and speech by the Supreme Being and which are supervised by the lesser deities and the ancestors. Sin in African Traditional Religion therefore, encompasses immoral acts, ritual mistake, breach of covenant and violation of taboos, to mention a few. Again, sin is a concept linked to the structure of African communities such as the cult of the divinities, the ancestors and ritual

relations with others in the society. In some African societies, sin is often linked with sickness of body or brain. Consequently, sick people are often encouraged to confess any hidden violations of regulations in the society. Constant misfortunes, incurable diseases and general penury were all construed as indications that the supernatural powers were punishing an unconfessed sin in the life of the individual so afflicted.

Again, pregnant women who have difficulty in childbirth are encouraged to confess their sins so as to have a smooth childbirth because sin is believed to be responsible for the delay in childbirth. In addition, there are different types and classes of sin in African Traditional Religion. Some sins are limited to the moral setting, examples are theft, lying, rudeness and disrespect to elders and slander. But the scope of other types of sins may be wider and serious and punitive measures accrue to such. These include ritual violations, murder, incest and adultery. Any act connected with sexuality is especially denounced when linked with the land because of the effect of such violations on fertility of the crops. Among the Igbo of Nigeria for instance, it is forbidden for people to have sexual intercourse on the bare floor because it would be a sin against Ala, the earth goddess and this may adversely affect the fertility of the land and consequently the means of livelihood of many in the community. Confession and acceptance of guilt is a crucial factor to the eradication of sins committed in African Traditional Religion and this is usually followed by procedures to ratify the situations.

The concept of reward in African Traditional Religion cuts across human and the supernatural spheres. Commendable moral acts which are in conformity with prescribed code of conduct in African societies are often rewarded. Such acts may include kindness, bravery, truthfulness, faithfulness, leadership qualities and ritual correctness in worship. Such act by any individual is perceived as indications of good character, which is of prime importance among some ethnic groups in Africa e.g. the Yoruba. The Yoruba call character, *iwa*. *Iwa* is also believed to be a crucial determinant of what the lot of an individual would be both here on earth and in the heavenly abode among the ancestors. These acts are also perceived as ingredients for harmony and peace for the promotion of the individual and communal well-being in the society.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1**

Discuss the concept of sin and reward in African Traditional Religion

### **3.2 The Methods of Sin and Reward in African Traditional Religion**

Diverse methods are pertinent to the conclusion that an act constitutes a sin. Central to these methods in African Traditional Religion is morality. The African assumes a strong link between sin and morality, therefore where immoral acts prevail, sin cannot be absent. An individual's moral integrity is thus perceived as a good instrument to measure his/her propensity toward committing sin. Also, taboo is instituted as a way of regulating people's

conduct in the society and violation of any taboo is a sin. There are different types of taboos like food taboo, sex taboo, ritual taboos, taboo for different professions and taboo on social interaction. Food taboo may affect individuals or families or in some cases entire communities and many reasons may be adduced for this. As a consequence of divination at the birth of a baby, certain food items may be forbidden to him or her and this prohibition is to be observed till death.

Some families, due to specific experiences may also decide to abstain from some food items and such restrictions become binding on all members of the family through all generations of members of that family. These taboos are put in place to ensure harmony and well-being for everyone. Therefore violations of such taboo would disrupt the peace of the community. Another means through which sin can be committed is the human relation with the ancestors. Whenever an individual clashes with the ancestors in Africa either through acts of omission or commission, sin is the result.

## **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2**

What are the methods of sin and reward in African Traditional Religion?

### **3.3 Agents in Control of Sin and Reward in African Traditional Religion**

God is the upholder of moral law in African Traditional Religion and God is also the prime agent in control of sin and reward. This is because in African Traditional Religion, every sin committed is ultimately against the Supreme Being and all rewards could be traced to God. However, the lesser deities and the ancestors are the agents who engage humans directly on issues of sin and reward. For instance, some lesser deities are in charge of portfolios guarding the moral conduct of humans in the society. Also, cultic functionaries -priest, priestesses, and elders, - oversee ritual settings that may offer avenues for both sin and reward. These agents are involved in daily human relations and act as means of regulation for the harmony and well-being of individuals in and the community as an entity.

## **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3**

Mention the agents in control of sin and reward in African Traditional Religion.

### **3.4 The Concept of Punishment and Reward of Sin in African Traditional Religion**

Africans believe it is God who ultimately punishes sin through agents to whom authority had been given. Such agents are the divinities, ancestors and elders. Also, Africans believe that God will require an account of the individual's life from him or her after death. Punishment in African Traditional Religion is usually presented as a sanction. These sanctions promote good moral conduct in the society because they act as deterrent to potential

offenders. But at the same time, these sanctions are punishment for violations of regulation in the society. The first level of punishment for sin in African Traditional Religion is the conscience which is in-built by the creator into every person. Africans believe that human conscience can and do condemn evil doers and that it is the conviction of the conscience of the offender that leads to confession. There are different types of punishment commensurate with every sin committed. The underlining principle for punishment in African Traditional Religion is, however, not to destroy the offender but to remove the sin and restore fellowship and harmony.

Different modalities exist for the removal of sin in African Traditional Religion. Such modalities could be cleansing and purification which would entail ritual washing of parts of the body affected or a total cleansing of the body. It could also involve the offering of sacrifice - of food items, animals or other items - to the deity in charge of that area of operation. Once the sin is removed, Africans believe that fellowship and harmony is restored in the society.

#### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4**

Discuss the concept of punishment in African Traditional Religion

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

We have examined the concept of punishment and the removal of sin in African Traditional Religion, in this unit. We discussed how sanctions against sin and reward for commendable acts could disrupt and galvanize the society respectively.

#### **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit are considered the concept of sin and reward in African Traditional Religion. We discussed the methods and agents that control sin and reward in African Traditional Religion. We also examined the African concept of punishment and the removal of sin.

#### **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. Describe the concept of sin and reward in African Traditional Religion
2. Mention the methods of sin and reward in African Traditional Religion
3. Discuss the Agents in control of sin and reward in African Traditional Religion
4. Explain the concepts of punishment and removal of sin in African Traditional Religion

## 7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

- Awolalu, J. O. & Dopamu, P. A. (1979). *West African Traditional Religion*, Ibadan: Onibonje Press.
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## **MODULE 3**

- Unit 1 Eschatology in African Traditional Religion
- Unit 2 The Human Agency in African Traditional Religion
- Unit 3 Modernization and African Traditional Religion
- Unit 4 The Contemporary Study of African Traditional Religion
- Unit 5 African Traditional Religion and other Religions

### **UNIT 1 ESCHATOLOGY IN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION**

#### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 The Cyclic Concept of Eschatology in African Traditional Religion
  - 3.2 Eschatology and Morality in African Traditional Religion
  - 3.3 Burial Ceremonies & Eschatology in African Traditional Religion
  - 3.4 Mourning & Eschatology in African Traditional Religion
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

#### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In this unit, we shall discuss the concept of eschatology in African Traditional Religions. Eschatology refers to end time things and how different people conceive of it. Africans have their own conception of Eschatology and this reflects in their burial ceremonies, moral codes and mourning.

#### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Discuss the concept of Eschatology in African Traditional Religion;
- Explain the place of morality in African Eschatological beliefs;
- Describe African burial ceremonies;
- Explicate the relevance of mourning in African Eschatological belief.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1 The Cyclic Concept of Eschatology in African Traditional Religion**

The African concepts of end times reflect in their understanding of human death and every ceremony attached to the time of death. Since Africans subscribe to the belief that human soul is immaterial and capable of surviving death, it follows that the end time for Africans cannot be conclusive. African belief in eschatology reflects a dual submission, both of which is regarded as true. One that at end times, after the death of humans, the creator would require an account of everything done on earth by each individual. Two, that at death, people with good moral deeds would come back to earth from the abode of the ancestors, either as new born babies or as masked visitors on the occasion of ancestor festivals, for example, the *Egungun* among the Yoruba. Worthy of note, however, is the fact that not every dead person makes it to the abode of the ancestors. The cycle of African belief in end time therefore comprises a baby being born, life lived, died and returns to the abode of the ancestors from where the cycle begins again.

#### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1**

Explain the cyclic concept of Eschatology in African Traditional Religion.

#### **3.2 Eschatology and Morality in African Traditional Religion**

The uppermost incentive for good moral conduct in African societies is tied to benefits accruable at the end of life. Whereas it is true that moral guidelines are instituted to ensure the well-being of members of the society, the idea of recompense at the end of life also aid good behaviour in people. Similarly, the expectations of reward, promotion and goodness after death deter individuals from being immoral. Africans avoid sanctions and strive to be good so that nothing obstructs their qualification for the abode of the ancestors after death. African eschatological concept thus plays an important role in sustaining the moral coherence of African societies. Moreover, as individuals strive to be morally upright, agents in control of moral codes in African societies also try to be upright because any laxity could result in sanctions. Therefore, the African concept of eschatology has acted as a form of checks and balances between members and leaders of the society.

#### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2**

Describe the relations between Eschatology and Morality in African Traditional Religion

#### **3.3 Burial Ceremonies and Eschatology in African Traditional Religion**

Funerals are important occasions and statements about the social accomplishment of the dead and the status of his or her family are pronounced. Funerals are also qualifications required of the dead entry

for the abode of the ancestor. Because Africans believe that death is a transition into another life and that a journey is undertaken by the dead to the land of the spirit after death, provisions are made for the envisaged needs of the deceased. There may include cloths, food items, cooking utensil, cosmetics and slaves to attend to his needs. This belief that life continues after death reflects the people's theology of the end time. This is further buttressed in the contents of African oral genres.

The oral genres, are recited and performed in form of songs, praise names and eulogies at funerals to show that the dead was a morally upright person who lived well and died a good death. A general practice during burials in African societies is the act of sending messages through the dead to ancestors who had long departed from the society. Messages of help, request for retribution on evil doers, especially those suspected to have killed the deceased are also made. Burial ceremonies among the Igbo of Nigeria will be explained here to further highlight the link between morality and eschatology in African Traditional Religion.

The Igbo people of Nigeria perform two types of burial ceremonies for every dead elder. The first is the burial of the physical body while the second comprises of sacrifice and festivities to enable the deceased take a rightful place among the ancestors. Both ceremonies are marked by festivity, various kinds of food items, singing, drinking and the booming of guns. The first ceremony may last for many days and a cock is killed and buried with the corpse. At a later date chosen by the family, the second ceremony is performed. The Igbo belief is that until this second ceremony is performed the deceased continues to roam about because he is denied admittance into the abode of the ancestors. This is unpleasant for both the dead and the living who may be haunted until the dead settles in the new abode with other ancestor. Heirs of the deceased often perform this second ceremony which is characterized by feasting, singing, drumming, dancing and eating.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3**

State the link between burial ceremonies and eschatology in African Traditional Religion.

### **3.4 Mourning and Eschatology in African Traditional Religion**

Mourning in African Traditional Religion reflects the African distinction of the living from the dead and the necessity to separate both as soon as possible after death. This is because without this separation neither the dead nor the living would be at peace. Periods and modes of mourning vary from society to society and for women and men. Basically, however, mourning is supposed to reflect the care and love of the living for the deceased. It is also to show that the living respect and would miss the dead. This explains why physical cleanliness is usually undermined during the time of mourning in some African societies. Mourning reflects soberness at a loss; hence normal social interaction is disrupted and mobility restricted or totally prohibited for the mourning period.

African eschatological beliefs submit that if proper mourning processes and period is not observed the deceased may be denied entry into the abode of the ancestors. It is believed also that such a deceased's soul would continually threaten the life and peace of those living. Prescriptions for mourning are stricter with women than men in African Traditional Religion. The period of mourning may involve some ritual acts of separation between the dead and the living. For example, in certain instances, a living spouse is encouraged to engage in sexual relations shortly after the death of a wife or husband to permanently place a wedge between the living and dead spouse. The assumption is that the dead spouse will be disgusted at the act that he or she would leave in anger and thus sever any emotional ties to the living spouse.

#### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4**

How does mourning affect the African concept of Eschatology?

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

We have discussed the concept of eschatology in African Traditional Religion and how this is reflected in African moral sensitivity. We examined the African burial system and how the dead are mourned.

#### **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit are considered the concept of Eschatology in African Traditional Religion. Also, we examined the place of morality, burial ceremonies and mourning in the African concept of eschatology. We saw that the concept of eschatology in African Traditional Religion proffers significant implications for both the living and the dead.

#### **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. Discuss the concept of eschatology in African Traditional Religion.
2. Explain the place of morality in the concept of eschatology in African Traditional Religion.
3. Describe burial ceremony in one African community.
4. Show the relevance of mourning to the African concepts of eschatology.

#### **7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS**

- Awolalu , J. O. & Dopamu, P. A. (1979). *West African Religion*, Ibadan: Onibonje Press.
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## **UNIT 2 THE HUMAN AGENCY IN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 The Role of Human Beings in African Traditional Religion
  - 3.2 Human Agency in Worship in African Traditional Religion
  - 3.3 The Dynamics of Human Agency in African Traditional Religion
  - 3.4 Limitations of Human Agency in African Traditional Religion
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In this unit, we shall discuss the human agency in African Traditional Religion. Human beings occupy a crucial place in the practice of African Traditional Religion in diverse ways. They represent the divine in some setting and wield power as representatives of the divine. Yet, humans are limited whereas the divine is limitless.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

By the end of this unit, you are expected to:

- Describe the role of human beings in African Traditional Religion;
- Explain the human agency in worship in African Traditional Religion;
- Discuss the human nature and how it affects the representation of the divine in African Traditional Religion;
- Mention the limitations of the human agency in African Traditional Religion.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1 The Role of Human Beings in African Traditional Religion**

The centrality of humans in the world affairs is appreciated in African Traditional Religion. The conception, interpretation and practice of the religion rest with humans at the various levels of relationships in the society. This is why the acts of interpretations and pronouncements by humans have serious implications for the practice of African Traditional Religion. People who recite African oral genres in ritual setting wield tremendous influence because they re-enact rituals and historical occurrences frequently and these shape the African Traditional Religion. Spirit possession in African

Traditional Religion involves the possession of the body and thinking faculty of the individual.

In such situations, the person under possession displays all known characteristics of the possessing spirit and may deliver messages for the benefit of the people from land of the spirits. Again, when worship requires sacrifice, humans perform it according to laid down procedures and format. Such sacrifices are often recommended after the process of divination in some settings in Africa. Divination could be of different types but the main rationale is for guidance in a difficult situation. To attend to the need of the inquirer, sacrifice may be recommended by the diviner. When the sacrifice involves the killing of animals, the blood is shed on the altar but the flesh is cooked and eaten by those who are qualified to do so. The human agency is the "face" of divine power in the ritual setting.

Some humans wield power by various degrees over other human beings and this proffers serious implications for African Traditional Religion. This is because the manner in which power is displayed and exercised affects lives and the integrity of the religion. Instances of power abuse may be cited while some have utilized their access to power positively. Human agency in ritual setting thus translates to the power of a few over the majority, the effects of which may be positive or negative.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1**

How does the human agency manifest in worship in African Traditional Religion?

### **3.3 The Dynamics of Human Agency in Divine Representations in African Traditional Religion**

The human nature is dynamic and complex, therefore many agenda may run through a person's mind at once and this is bound to affect both action and utterances. Humans represent the divine in different capacities in African Traditional Religion. In addition, humans communicate with the divine structure and liturgy of African Traditional Religion. Cultic functionaries act as intermediaries between the worshippers and the deities and this makes them interpreters for both the divine and the worshippers. They convey requests by worshippers to the deities and bring back responses to the worshippers.

When the deities have messages for the worshipers or the ancestors may wish to address members of a family on specific issues, cultic functionaries fulfill these roles. The offering of sacrifices is done by humans to appease,, appreciate or make requests from the deities; hence the continuous relevance of the deities is guaranteed. In the absence of the worship given by humans the relevance of the gods in African Traditional Religion would become highly contested. It has been observed that human beings are connected to God in three ways: through creation, the divine essence placed in humans by the Supreme Being and human destiny, which is given by God. These connections

equip humans with the ability and capacity to influence the practice of African Traditional Religion either positively or negatively.

## **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2**

State the role of humans in African Traditional Religion

### **3.2 Human Agency in Worship in African Traditional Religion**

Worship connotes an act of communication between human beings and the spirits, ancestors, deities or the Supreme Being. Worship is a means of sustaining fellowship between humans and the super-sensible world. Worship is an inner attitude which finds expression in formatted outward expressions. These formatted gestures reflect the inner reverence in the heart of the worshipper and were formatted by the human agency. Both regular and occasional worship revolve around human beings. Other aspects of worship sessions also depend on the human agency, for example, songs, recitation of praise names and cognomen of deities in any particular divinity cult rest upon humans.

Spirit possession is another exhibition of the human agency in diverse settings and for many reasons it is imperative to give cognizance to the dynamic nature of human agency while it is representing the divine. For instance, a common trend today is that Ifa priests and priestesses can do consultation and the offering of sacrifices by proxy while in the past it is imperative that the client should be present and do most of the purchases personally. Moreover, there is the possibility that the material need of the cultic functionaries may influence the items of sacrifice required from some clients, especially if such clients are well to do. However, the exposure of some cultic functionaries to Western education has positively influenced their representative of the divine in the propagation and practice of the religion.

For instance, examples of Ifa priest and priestesses who are lawyers, doctors, agriculturalist, bankers and administrators may be cited. These adherents of African Traditional Religion use their training in schools to enhance the exposition of African Traditional Religion to non-adherents. In addition they use their experiences to portray the religion in commendable light. An example of such personalities is the former Vice Chancellor of University of Ife (now, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife) who took Ifa religion to great heights internationally.

## **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3**

Describe the dynamics of human nature and how it affects representations of the divine in African Traditional Religion.

### **3.4 Limitations of the Human Agency in African Traditional Religion**

The limitations of the human agency centres around the human nature, the divine is limitless. This explains the lapses in human representation of the

divine. Emotions could distract humans in certain settings whereas the divine is unchanging and unaffected by emotions. Human reaction could alter due to anger, jealousy or greed but this is not true of the divine. Again, the mode of communication between the divine and humans could be distorted because of a slant in human nature. Therefore, sometimes, messages that are received through human agency may actually be a misrepresentation of divine injunction. Further, it is possible for humans to deliberately alter divine message for personal gain. Nonetheless, the Supreme Being must of necessity be represented among humans, therefore these limitations would continue to be managed as much as possible.

#### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE.4**

Explain the limitations of the human agency in African Traditional Religion

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

We have examined the human agency and the various ways it impacts on African Traditional Religion. We discussed the different ways by which humans represent the Supreme Being and how human limitations may impair divine representations.

#### **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit we discussed the human agency in African Traditional Religion. We considered the role of human beings in African Traditional Religion, especially their roles in worship sessions and in divine representations. We examined the limitations of the human agency in African Traditional Religion as well.

#### **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. Discuss the roles of human beings in African Traditional Religion.
2. How would you describe the dynamics of the human agency divine representations in African Traditional Religion?
3. Explain human agency in worship in African Traditional Religion.
4. What limitations affect human agency in African Traditional Religion.
5. Would you advise that the human agency be avoided totally in African Traditional Religion?

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## **UNIT 3 MODERNIZATION AND AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 The Effect of Modernization on Worship in African Traditional Religion
  - 3.2 The Effect of Urbanization on African Traditional Religion
  - 3.3 The Effect of the Media on African Traditional Religion
  - 3.4 The Effect of Materialism on African Traditional Religion
  - 3.5 African Traditional Religion in the Diaspora
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In this unit, we shall examine the impact of modernization on African Traditional Religion and vice-versa. Modernization encompasses multilayered concepts and developments and nothing escapes its influence, including religions. African Traditional Religion has been influenced by modernization in different ways.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Explain the effect of modernization on worship in African Traditional Religion;
- Describe the effect of urbanization on African Traditional Religion;
- Discuss the effect of the media on African Traditional Religion;
- Explain the effect of materialism on African Traditional Religion; and
- Explicate the export and practice of African Traditional Religion in the Diaspora.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1 The Effect of Modernization on Worship in African Traditional Religion**

Modernization in this context means all that culture contact between Africa and the rest of the world entails. This is principally in two ways: religion and economics; the introduction of Christianity and Islam and the many trade routes passing through Africa. Ever since the opening of these two avenues of

contact with other cultures, African Traditional Religion has not remained the same.

The influence of modernization reflects in the transfer re-interpretation and sometimes in exchanges of concepts between religions for example between African Traditional Religion and Christianity. An example is the African concept, names and attributes of God which have now been usurped by Christianity and Islam in a modified form. Worship sessions now involve the use of modern musical instruments in addition to the traditional ones previously employed. Liturgy is highly tinted by Western culture, custom and cuisine. The sayings and the instructions of the religion that has been largely oral are presently being documented and translated into English language for a wider distribution and appeal.

Modernization has increased the number of non-blacks and non-Africans to become adherents of African Traditional Religion; consequently there is a vibrant worship community of African Traditional Religion in Europe, North America and Latin American countries. Modernization has influenced all the following: the venue of worship, the methods of worship, the use of language, musical instruments as well as the dressing of worshippers. In some congregations of African Traditional Religion, worship sessions take place in a temple, built for that purpose like a church or mosque. Furthermore, the structures of these temples resemble those found in mosques and churches, for instance, there are choirs with uniform, ushers, different grouping of men and women and youth with specific title and an altar for officiating ministers. Also, some worship seasons are recorded on video cassettes for different purposes. Offerings of money and other items are collected at the appropriate time during worship sessions. Hymn books of songs are utilized during worship sessions, while aspects of scriptures are read and elucidated during these worship sessions.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1**

How would you describe the effect of modernization on worship in African Traditional Religion?

### **3.2 The Effect of Urbanization on African Traditional Religion**

Urbanization dismantled individual, communal and ritual identities in Africa. It could be said that urbanization was a direct product of industrialization and modernization in Africa. The migration of people, men especially, to the urban centres in search of jobs undermined African Traditional Religion because it removed the people from their base. As the people moved to the cities they could not move their shrines, priests or ancestors. Rather, they met Christianity and Islam as the viable options in city life. City life compelled the people to conform to the guiding rules of modernization, one of which was that anything that had to do with African Traditional Religion was demonic and should be discarded totally.

Indeed until very recently, it was nothing of pride for anybody to publicly profess that he or she is an adherent of African Traditional Religion. The preferred options were Christianity and Islam because such an identity carried some level of prestige with it and could open doors in areas of influence. The migration of men to the cities to search for work has also been cited as the reason why African women became custodians of the traditions of Africa. Women continued to sustain the religion long after the men had converted to Christianity and Islam in a bid to belong and put money in the pocket. Urbanization altered the ethical sensitivity of the African person significantly and this could be easily discerned through the many vices that resulted there from.

These include armed robbery, pen robbery, prostitution and other fraudulent activities. African virtues became seriously undermined' and eventually ignored, examples include, humility, goodness, truthfulness, obedience, diligence at work, loyalty, respect for elders and brotherly or sisterly love. African ceremonies in contemporary African societies have become modified with some of them losing their core essence in the process. Examples are naming ceremonies, marriage ceremonies, initiation ceremonies and burial ceremonies. In addition, rites of passage which were often taken for granted in traditional. African societies are now taking up socio-political issues such as human rights, animal rights or gender oppression. Issues of female and male circumcision are examples of contentious issues in African Traditional Religion in contemporary Africa and the Diaspora.

## **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2**

What are the effects of urbanization on African Traditional Religion?

### **3.3 The Effect of the Media on African Traditional Religion**

The media has been both a friend and a foe to African Traditional Religion at different times. A positive effect of the media on African Traditional Religion is in the area of propagation, especially the role of the internet.

Through the World Wide Web (www) African Traditional Religion, its meaning and practices could be accessed by anybody in any country in the world. The television in different African, nations has also assisted the spread and sustenance of African Traditional Religion through publicity. The radio is of immense assistance to African Traditional Religion because of its wide coverage, even in the remote villages where television and the internet may not be readily available. But a major handicap to the utilization of these facilities in some African countries is the epileptic power supply. The supply of electricity is unreliable at best and totally absent for some period in other cases. However, the media is also the chief culprit in hoodwinking innocent people in believing purported miracles such as healing of long term health conditions, raising of the dead and deliverance from satanic powers.

Research findings have proven that some of these advertised "miracles" are nothing short of fraudulent attempts by money-hungry preachers to defraud people. The percentage of such preachers is higher with Christianity and women constitute a very large proportion of their victims. The media has made it possible for some preachers of Christianity and Islam to become tin-gods in their empires (ministries). This is because through television programs these preachers become known and are hero-worshipped, especially by the youths. If by chance such a preacher should visit a city, the youths are seen running after their cars believing that touching the man or woman would alleviate their problems, all these point to hero-worshipping.

Again, the media sometimes promote rancour in religious propagation because some preachers go on air to attack other preachers or other religions instead of explaining the contents of their own religion. An example is a Muslim preacher who goes on air to preach nothing but that God has no son, knowing fully well that Christians profess that Jesus is the Son of God. Thus, the media sometimes contributes to religious crisis in Africa.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3**

Explain the effect of the media on African Traditional Religion.

#### **3.4 The Effect of Materialism on African Traditional Religion**

Materialism may be taken to mean the prioritization of the acquisition of material things, especially money and all that money could buy. There is no gain saying that materialization is a major challenge for religion to manage in the contemporary world and African Traditional Religion is no exceptions. The bid to acquire money has seriously undermined integrity and faithfulness among practitioners of African Traditional Religion. This is especially true in the relationship between practitioners of African Traditional Religion in the Diaspora and on the continent. Diverse cases of fraud in the terms and process of initiation into different Orisa cults may be cited. In addition, there have been complaints on the sale of fake religious products such as symbols, charm preparations and recitations. These developments arose as a result of materialism which has now cancelled the need to be a person of integrity as was the case in the Africa of old.

In another parlance, because individual practitioners are more concerned with their personal pursuit of money and materials, it has been a great challenge to get contributions towards the development of African Traditional Religion from adherents. Projects that are envisaged as possible ways of developing the religion remain dormant due to lack of funds. Materialism undermines the prescribed ethical principle of African Traditional Religion because in their bid to get money at all cost, adherents pay little or no attention to ethical principles, neither do they accord adequate relevance to the reaction of the divinities, spirits or ancestors.

## **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4**

Discuss the effect of materialism on African Traditional Religion

### **3.5 African Traditional Religion in the Diaspora**

The practice of African Traditional Religion in the Diaspora could be traced to two major developments. The transatlantic slave trade through which Africans were forcefully taken from their continent to Europe and Americas, and the exposure of non-African and non-Blacks to African Traditional Religion through travels and the media. Today, there is a viable and vibrant practicing group of African Traditional Religion in the Diaspora and this has compelled an exchange between the continent and the Diaspora in terms of personnel (priest and priestesses and custodians of traditions), and training (initiations, lessons in oral recitations, dancing, drumming and performance) in the ritual setting. Many practitioners from the Diaspora visit Africa regularly to access, learn and renew their energy vibrations in different shrines and groves in Africa.

Likewise, many African practitioners visit Americas, Europe and Islands to train, learn and visit 'sisters' and 'brothers'. The practice of African Traditional Religion in the Diaspora has to a considerable extent removed some of the negative tags previously attached to the religion. An indication of this is the adoption of some sites of African Traditional Religion as world heritage sites such as the Osun Osogbo sacred grove on July 14 2006. Also, many traditional festivals in Africa have become tourist attractions thereby promoting the tenets and practice of African Traditional Religion.

## **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5**

How would you describe the practice of African Traditional Religion in the Diaspora?

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

We discussed the effects of modernization in various ways on African Traditional Religion in this unit. We considered how African Traditional Religion is affected by urbanization, migration and materialism. We also explained how the media contributed positively and negatively to African Traditional Religion.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit we examined the effect of modernization on African Traditional Religion. In addition, we discussed the effect of urbanization, the media and materialization on African Traditional Religion.

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. Describe the effects of modernization on African Traditional Religion
2. Explain the effect of urbanization on African Traditional Religion
3. Discuss the effect of the Media on African Traditional Religion
4. How does Materialism affect African Traditional Religion?
5. Examine the practice of African Traditional Religion in the Diaspora.

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## **UNIT 4 THE CONTEMPORARY STUDY OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Theories in the Study of Religion
  - 3.2 The Influence of Multidisciplinary Approaches on the Study of African Traditional Religion
  - 3.3 Tools for the Contemporary Study of African Traditional Religion
  - 3.4 Trends in the Contemporary Study of African Traditional Religion
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In this unit, we shall consider the contemporary study of African Traditional Religion and the challenges that emanate in the process. The study of African Traditional Religion is a reality at the various institutions of learning in Africa.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Explain theories used in the study of African Traditional Religion;
- Discuss the influence in the study of African Traditional Religion;
- Describe the tools for the contemporary study of African Traditional Religion;
- Explicate the trends in the contemporary study of African Traditional Religion.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1 Theories in the Study of African Traditional Religion**

The origin of African religion demands explanations. This is because the most irreligious person in African tries to offer his/her explanation and theory of religion. The origin with reference to African religion is an ambiguous expression. It may mean source of religion was founded. We possessed no adequate empirical evidence of its origin and to seek for the origin of African religion therefore, are as difficult as finding the origin of society, mankind, speech and reason. In this chapter, we shall discuss the

origin of African religion under four broad theoretical perspectives, namely: the naturalistic theories, sociological theories, psychological theories and Marxist theories of religion.

### **3.1.1 Theories of the Origin of Religion**

There are several theories of the origin of religion. We have discussed some of them here. The theories we have discussed are: Theological theory, Speculative Theory, Mythological Theory, Psychological Theory and Anthropological Theory respectively.

### **3.1.2 The Naturalistic Theories**

The naturalistic theories seek to explain the origin of religion from natural factors. Anthropologists in the past have generally considered all religions as an illusion. They do not accept the super natural development of religion. Evans Pritchard for example, wrote an excellent book entitled “Theories of the primitive religion”, to explain the origin of religion. His naturalistic theories of the origin of religion were developed by men who were brilliant, to illustrate the vanity of men apart from the gracious revelation of God. These theories are mere guesses, without proof to support their opinions. They took the field data and fashioned their own interpretations, conjecturing and theorizing religion from agnostic or atheistic perspective.

### **3.1.3 Theological Theory**

The word theology is from two Greek words: *theos* means “God” and *logos* means “word”. Theology is thus said to be God’s words. Theology is, therefore, a study of God. Theology is divided into six broad areas: the doctrine of God, the doctrine of man, the person of Christ, the work of Christ, the doctrine of the Church and the doctrine of the last things known in Theological language as eschatology. The theologian in the study of these areas uses information from both the old and New Testaments to produce acceptable explanation (i.e. a theory). The essential ingredient in theology is faith in God. The Theologian begins with his personal faith in God and tries to work out the implications of God for human life. He tries to show how human experiences can assist us to understand the nature of God.

The emphasis of a Theologian is on the spiritual aspects of religion rather than the political, economic, and social aspects of religion. The life to be lived beyond (in heaven) is the main concern of the Theologian rather than the affairs of the here and now (this world). According to Christianity, God revealed himself to humanity. Therefore, the transcendental being of God has been broken and has become a part of human history. The history of the Hebrews and of the Christian Church is from this stand point. It is seen as a dialogue between God and his people. According to O’Dea (1966: 34) God has called the people and they have

responded to His call. In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days has spoken to us by a son whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world' (Hebrew, 1: 1-2).

Based on this view, from Abraham to Jesus Christ, God has established a relationship with the people and that relationship has continued. The Christian experience involves the relationship with the supernatural beings. The structure of religious experience examined here is based on the Christian perspective. It is a phenomenological analysis of the religious experience of Christianity.

### **3.1.4 Speculative Theory**

This theory is based on critical and reflective thinking. Many people after the mythological theory of the origin of religion began to question the origin of religion. This approach is called speculative because they did not have sufficient knowledge about the origin of religion. Their ideas were merely based on guess work. They did not use effective methods of research. Brandon said they only used the logical reasoning method which had no valid opinions.

### **3.1.5 Mythological Theory**

This was almost the first known theory of the origin of African religion. In this early period, the origin of religion was linked with the gods and goddesses. The priests of the various religious persuasions taught their believers that the gods were the original creators of the world. According to them, (priests) religion came as a result of the handiwork of their respective gods. That means a divine being created the world, human beings and all the things in the universe. As a result of this explanation, the followers of this beliefs started building temples and shrines for the gods. Sacrifices were also made to the gods for protection and blessings. Brandon says the myths of the ancient people across the world say their gods were the originators of religion.

### **3.1.6 Psychological Theory**

This theory is largely based on the cognitive need theory which says that religion evolved from man's need to find solutions to the uncertainties of his world. This came as a result of the solution to questions which early man asked such as: what is the value of life? What is the purpose of life? Why is there illness, disease and hunger and thirst? What accounts for the vegetational cover? Why do people die? Man needed basic answers to these questions and other aspects of life. This theory of religion was thus developed to provide a rational explanation to these questions. The projection theory which is an aspect of the psychological theory says religion was the projection of man's highest aspirations. Sigmund Freud (1901) observed a psychological element in religion. He saw that it

resembled the behaviours of neurotic patients (i.e. patients with mental disorders).

Freud felt that religion was an expression of psychological processes which were brought out from the inner self. The Freudian theory was based on the concept animism. This was to cope with the problems of this world, the need for security and power. The second strand of Freud's theory of the origin of religion is called Oedipus complex. He said in prehistoric society, due to marriage problems, the father expelled some of his sons. So those expelled conspired and killed their father and ate his body. Later, due to the fear of further killings within the family, the children decided to deify their father. They set up a pattern of worship from where religion emerged.

Freud opines that African traditional religion began from a human fatherhood to a spiritual fatherhood. One can also see from this theory that fear, anxiety, awe, emotions, feelings and despair are all features of religion. This could be described as the emotional theory of the origin of religion. Man in his inexplicable experiences of life which are fascinating and terrifying gave rise to a great feeling and non-rational response to the unseen source of the agent of the experience God. Thus, the psychological theories of origin of religion find their explanations of religion in human intellect as "primitive" people pondered, reflected and thought upon various experiences which gradually involved religious beliefs. His theories are categorized into five groups namely; fetishism, Dream theory, Monotheistic theory, magic religious theory and psychoanalytic theory of origin of religion.

### **3.1.7 Fetishism Theory**

The most popular adherent of this theory is Charles de Brosses who in 1760 contended that religion originated in fetishism, the worship of inanimate things and animates. He observed that every external object in nature poses life and magical powers and the Portuguese who came to Africa found them venerating trees, plants, pebbles and claws of animals, these revered objects formed the most basic and elementary form of religious belief which we are thought to be "*factitus*" or magically artful".

Auguste Comte, a 19<sup>th</sup> century philosopher, also used the term "*fetico*" to refer to a general theory of religion. In 1850 he wrote that the religious period of humanity began with fetishism, theorized that religion evolved from fetishism, polytheism and monotheism which were the prevalent naturalistic explanations from the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. His theory is also faulty because religion cannot be reduced to fetish practices alone.

### **3.1.8 Montheistic Theory**

The monotheistic perspective of the origin of religion was presented by Andrew Lang, a student of Edward Tylor, who was a confirmed animist. Lang thought that belief in souls and spirits might have arisen from psychological phenomena such as dreams. In 1894 he wrote a book titled "The making of religions". And he criticized his teacher, Edward Tylor for refusing to admit that primitive people were monotheists. He also tried to demonstrate that preliterate people had a concept of a high God, which Tylor dismissed as missionary idea. He further stated that beliefs in a creative, moral, omnipotent and omniscience God probably arose among "primitive people" from observing the design of the universe. The weakness of his theory lies in explanation of the origin of religion of the primitive people which he based on monotheistic conception thereby rejecting other people belief in the existence of the supreme deity.

### **3.1.9 Psychoanalytic Theory**

The psychoanalytic theory of the origin of religion was propounded by Sigmund Freud, a "stay at home investigator" who never saw the primitive people on whom he wrote. Freud who got his inspiration from Frazer's book titled the "Golden Bough" and Roberson Smith's book "Religion of the sanities" all of which are the study of the primitive people, firmly based his theory of origin of religion on relationship between the son and the father which according to him best explains how religion came into existence. He noted that religion came into being as result of the guilt done to the illusory heavenly father and as mankind puts away childish things, so will he put away the child neurosis, when he grows to full maturity. Religion for him is a projection of human wishes. Mankind in his/her projection created demons out of hostility of the salvage, the same hostility a son shows towards his father due to his father's sovereignty and unfairness.

Freud further stated that this mental illness and infertile attitude of the son toward his father makes the son to begin to rejoice over his father's death. He mourned the father and turned him into a wicked demon, ready to gloat over his misfortune. This problematic situation compelled mankind to project the forces of nature into a god and exercising the terrors of nature, reconciling mankind to the cruelty of fate and compensating of human existence.

More so, Freud proceeded in his psychoanalysis of the "future of illusion" by saying that, religion originated as a result of the powerful wishful thinking of mankind which enabled him/her to create God for himself/herself in the blue field of nothing. Religions ideas are illusory objects which mankind fear and worship as a father. God for Freud is a mere creation of wishful thinking. A child needs a father because of his helplessness. He needs a father who will be faithful and not subject as weakness or frustration by death. And mankind as an intellectual and

psychological infant produced this father for himself/herself though projection of on illusionary God.

This psychological ailment which makes mankind to fashion religion can be referred to as “Child Neurosis” or “father’s comp” Freud noted “just a healthy minded person outgrown childish thinking, so also will healthy minded person outgrown the illusion which brought religious. He therefore summed up the psychoanalytic theory of the origin of religion as a derailment arising from a “mere delusion belief in eternal life and its illusionary rewards. The weakness of Freud is that religion does not owe its origin to mere search for security even though we seem to agree that when man is hard pressed, he seeks for security.

Mankind whether hard pressed or unheard pressed is often given an imaginary wishful and day thinking in every moments of difficulties and frustration. He/she takes imaginary wings and flay to a dream world where all is well for the best smooth sailing. Mankind is also an adept builder of “castles” in the air and this happens to every person by a trick of thee mind and inducement. Besides, it is wrong to say that the origin of religion is simply the search for security since history has shown that the ever recurring element in religion enable mankind to say with conviction “though HE slay me, yet I will trust Him and who shall separate us from the love of Christ?, Tribulation or peril? In all these we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us”. If the root of religion is a disease of mind as Freud has rightly said, then, its disease virus has to be universally potent and not utterly invincible, since religion is persistent as the most stubborn of all human activities.

Religion is vital to life and if it is suppressed, repudiated and rejected in one form or the other, it can go on with its original nature without changing. And this is the major weakness of Freud’s theory. The second weakness in Freud theory is that it has no place in the sociology of religion due to its psychological character. At best, it explains same general characteristics of all religions. For him to say that “all gods are parent figures” is a mere postulation why the balance between male and female distils is different in the system. Why are some gods personal and immanent? Why is sacrifice so important in some religious and yet nonexistent in others? Freud theory therefore failed to provide adequate answers to the above questions and this makes it faulty.

It does not explain the various religious experiences which characterizes religious traditions of the world. Although religious experiences and feeling go beyond “mere delusion” or “illusion” as the current craze towards religious expressions exemplified, the upsurge towards religion in the last decade of this century pointed to the potency of religion, which goes beyond mere human imaginations and fabrications.

### **3.1.10 The Dreams Theory**

This theory of the origin of religion was put forward by Tylor who got his conviction from the evolutionary theory. He noted that animism was mankind first religion which he/she assumed in early stages of life. Tylor opined that as soul in all things continued to exist, mankind began to venerate certain souls (spirits) as personified objects. This eventually led to the worship of ancestors. In Tylor's view therefore, the belief in spirits and gods arose from human experiences of dream, vision, disease and death. Whenever mankind sleeps at night he/she dreams that he/she was on safari (hunting or visiting in some distant places) and yet, his body remained in the house during sleep. He concludes by saying that human personality is made up of two parts.

The material body and the immaterial soul, the immaterial soul (spirits) could leave the body in spiritual form at night and travel for sadistic mission. While the material body remains lifeless. At death, the immaterial soul departs from the physical body to become an ancestral spirit. Sometimes, these spiritual souls are believed to be inhabited by the inanimate objects (non living things). This earliest belief of mankind arose the idea of non human spirits and eventually a believer in the existence of gods. Though it is difficult to agree with Tylor that mankind with intelligence can decide to hold fear, propitiate and worship that which himself/ herself had created, yet recognition of a spiritual world becomes necessary when mankind realizes that there is a greater power superior to his/her own human nature and powers which he/she must worship.

### **3.1.11 Magico-Religious Theory**

This theory of origin of religion maintained that evolutionary development of religion must have been magical. James Frazier, in his book titled "The Golden Bough" affirmed that there are three stages of evolutionary development of mankind. He asserted hunting trips. However, when intelligent people saw that magic did not always work, they later turned to religion and began to believe in spiritual beings that might aid them. This led to the belief that religion developed from spirits and gradually evolved into belief in many gods.

The last stage in the development of mankind is the age of science when mankind advanced beyond the needs of magic and religion. Marett further observed that magical religion practices which previous scholars including Tylor and Frazer conceived as magic were less intellectual, reflective and more emotionally appealing. In his book titled "Threshold of religion" published in 1909, Frazer dwelled on the origin and nature of religion. He clearly opined that awe, fear, wonder and admiration are the roots of every religion.

### **3.1.12 Anthropological Theory**

One of the earliest known theories of religion is that of animism. This theory was propounded by E.B. Taylor in his book *Primitive Culture*. This theory tried to explain the origin of religion. Taylor sees religion as belief in Spiritual Beings". For Taylor, the primitive man's first experience of the idea of spirit was from his sleep, dreams, shadows, breath and death. He argued that the primitive man conceived that the spirit was an invisible being that could animate as a soul even in natural objects such as stones, trees and the celestial bodies like the stars, sun, moon and water. Thus, the primitive man believed that natural objects had souls. This was because he could not comprehend the power of natural phenomena such as the stars, moon, sun, clouds, wind, rain, rivers, thunder, lightening, etc.

Due to the fear of these inexplicable natural phenomena, primitive man decided to worship the natural phenomena. This lead Taylor to conclude that the idea of animistic souls give birth to the beliefs in celestial gods and thus the origin of religion. The theory of animism says that the primitive man believed that the world was animated by impersonal powers. For James Frazer however, magic was the first known form of religion. Man first tried magic. When magic failed, he tried religion learning to seek favour from the natural power by means of prayer and sacrifice.

### **3.1.13 Sociological Theory**

The sociological theories traced the origin of religion to sociological factors. According to these theories, religion originated as a product of the social structures of the society. It involved in the minds of people as they thought and reflected upon life, which make them to create their own gods in the image of their society. Thus, religion as an institution is a functional part of every culture, intimately linked with the rest of the culture. It is a reflection of the social structures, and it has values because religion provides securities, and assurance in the midst of problems.

For a long period of time, the sociological theories which stressed the intellect and reasoning aspect of the origin of religion were regarded as vain fantasy and an illusion which have produced universal laws of religion. Various scholars expounded their theories to show that religion originated as reflection of the society. Max Mueller suggested that, henotheism (a belief of one dominant god among gods), arose among people before the development of the nations.

Robertson Smith theorized that religion among the Hebrews and the Semitic societies arose out of a sacred relationship with certain totemic animals. Robertson Smith contended that religion began for sociological reasons. The clan thus became idealized as a god and as the clan idealized and divinized itself periodically, the members expressed in their unity by

sacrificing to their totemic animal and eating their feasts together, to shape their culture. The functionalist who promoted the sociological explanations controls beliefs and ritual actions to show logically those religious beliefs are born out of social behaviours. Hence, it will be wrong to assume that totemism as a kind of on-rational social movement can consolidate a tribe.

Euchemurus, a Greek scholar writing about 280BC, attributed the origin of religion to the deification of theories of heroes and ancestors. His theory is fortified since deification of ancestors is common amongst the Greek, Romans and Africans. However, this theory has said, nothing specific about the origin of Religion. Emile Durkheim in 1912 presented his classical theory of the origin of religion. He published a book titled “the elementary forms of the religious life”, which remains the best known manifest of the sociological position and the most influential interpretation of religion from the functional perspective.

His thesis emanated from his studies of the Aborigines of Trinidad and Tobago. He rightly observed that, religion cannot be defined except by its characteristics, which are expressed through the society and which according to him can be conceived as a creative matrix of collective values”. For Durkheim, therefore society is the canopy of morals and conceptual categories, ideas, and sentiments, which exist prior to individual experiences. It is the society that gives them the lenses through which the world takes on shape and symbolic meaning. Each society creates a culture built up the system of beliefs and behaviours representing the social order.

Though, Durkheim’s theory attempts to give us the sociological explanations of the origin of religion, it failed to explain the mystery of religion. In fact, the theory failed to recognize the awareness of man irreligion, or the mysterious element, the supernatural or an “ultimate reality”, which Durkheim impersonalized as “society”. This therefore reduces each living person to a mere cog in the wheel of societal machine. Beside the theory does not provide explanations to the pluralism of religious traditions within a single societal set up, which has become characteristic of our religious world terrain today. However, Durkheim’s theory recognized that societies create their own symbols and their own “gods”. His assertions that “as many societies exist, so are the gods” and that “once societies die out religion vanishes”, is ultimately a false maxim which do not fit human experiences.

Emile Durkheim says man’s dependence on society gave birth to religion. Thus, for Durkheim, the origin of religion can be traced to society. Durkheim maintained that the rules and values of society exist for its members as something beyond and above them. Each member of the society believes that the rules and values of society go beyond and are more lasting than his/her existence. Durkheim therefore, defined religion as an acknowledgement of man’s dependence on a superior power. This

acknowledgement is put into action by means of rituals which enables a person to put his/her self in the right relationship to this power. Thus he/she can receive rewards and punishment from this power. For Durkheim society is far and above man. That man respects and worships the symbols of society which are seen as sacred things of religion.

On the other hand, Spenser states that religion started with animism to polytheism to monotheism. Animism is the belief that all things both animate and inanimate have souls. While polytheism is the worship of many gods, monotheism is the worship of only one god or deity. Spenser is of the opinion that religion is a mistake and in fact an illusion that has surrounded humanity. That sleep, dreams and death gave rise to the idea that the soul can live independent of its body. Thus sacrifice came as a result of the worship of the souls of the departed persons.

Also natural phenomena which possess power were adored and were believed to have indwelling spirits in them. These include the sun, moon, stars, storms, thunder, lightening, rain, etc. This theory was essentially shared by E.B. Taylor. According to this theory, the primitive man created religion out of his intellectual ability and ignorance of the workings of the natural phenomena. Marx's idea of the origin of religion can also be classified under a sociological theory. Marx says men were the ones who created religion and not religion that created man.

Karl Marx sees religion as a creation of the rich. According to Uchegbue the rich created religion in order to calm and control the poor people's thinking, behaviour aspirations and reactions. Marx actually sees people becoming religious to improve on their poverty situation. By fitting everything into a beyond, man believes that all his frustrations, fear and anxieties would be overcome. This Marxian theory is almost similar to that of Freud. Freud sees religion as a defence by man in his helpless confrontation with the terrible nature. Man is afraid of the deities but he is sure that they would provide him security against all dangers.

Marx interpretation of the origin of religion is similar and compatible with the sociological theories. Karl Marx presented his theories and was later on followed by Engel's, Lenin and others. The proponents of Marxists theory attempt to prove that religion is eternal and it arose at a definite stage in society's development. Karl Marx who spearheaded Marxists theory believed that mankind evolved religion as a result of his/her inability to explain the natural spontaneous forces, which seems to overpower him/her amidst social control. Mankind in his/her helplessness has evolved as being in a better life (hereafter as "God which becomes" a status enhancing and manipulating symbol of authority" of oppression.

He also stated that religion is a "delusion" something which arose from the needs for a better world due to social conditions of life. It is an imaginary solution of the despair over the unhealthy conditions of life which mankind must find in religion. Religion more than anything else

has always been used as an instrument of spiritual oppression subordinating the working people to their interests and buttressing their own dominant place in the society.

Marx summed up his theory of the origin of religion in one “the opium of the people”. He observed that religion as a sign of the oppressed creature, the heart of the heartless world and the spirit of spiritless situation, makes people to sleep with faith in God and future hope of heaven. It is only when people reject religion and overthrow the ruling class that the working class can gain justice. He therefore concluded by saying that religion is an “invented” duplicate of the world mirroring in reverse the human condition and an imaginary realm which mankind can seek, solace and compensate for all human trials on earth. This seems to be the cornerstone of the whole Marxist outlook of religion. In the same vein, Lenin opined that religion paralyses people revolutionary energy, giving them passivity and patient for everything to be done by God’s will. He also noted that, religious beliefs are made of stuff which alienate mankind from problem on earth becomes liveable and harmonious.

Marxists claim they are the creators of the real kingdom of justice here on earth and good Samaritans treating those that need to be cured. Karl Marx affirmed this when he wrote thus: The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is required for their real happiness. Creation of a paradise on earth is more important than unity of proletarian opinion on the paradise in heaven. Religion is a “tool of providing imaginary flowers which decorate and camouflage the chains human servitude” which needs to be redeemed. Marx’s presupposition above is religious projections are not just errors, or mistakes in reasoning but compensating symptoms and statements about every specific social reality.

This Marxist position forms the Judea Christian philosophy of history and eschatology. Its false humanism which seeks to make men the centre of all creation and of its god rejected every effort to impose moral dogma as an internal and ultimate love. Also, Marx concluded that moral theories are the result of the economic stage which society has reached and that religion is only used by the capitalist societies to defend the land owners from the poor peasants under their control is but a negation of absolute truth of Christianity. Thus, religion can be said essentially to be a tool used in controlling cultural relativism.

It is an outcome of clan struggle which reflects the antagonistic contradiction of clan societies. This suggests that before and after clan societies, there have been or would be societies without religion. This assumption however, agrees with Marxist’s hope that religion will vanish in future communist societies.

The problem with Marxist theory therefore is that, it is not so clear on why the ruling class should alienate in terms of religious faith. For according to the Marxist’s, the social order they dominate was God given

and not human creation. Thus, for Marx to deny that the ruling class is truly religious will only be a partial way of answering the question. The religion that the ruling class practiced is only to keep the essential faith alive in the lower orders and not the means of alienating other people or themselves from human conditions of life. Primitive and class ridden societies were religious and the source of their religion lies in the ignorance and emotion of total dependence and fear of natural forces which began to turn people into class consciousness and struggle against the oppressors when resources set in and which rejection of all religious and construction of new ones to replace old values that were turned upside down makes his theory faulty.

Religion is “the sign of the oppressed creature, the soul of the soulless and opinion of the people” is a vague projection of religious idea. Furthermore, Marx’s view that “Religion like art can only be explained from the viewpoint of fields is in fact a way of narrowing down the definition of religion”. His explanation of the origin of religion in Marxist perspective is also the reactionary role religion has historically played in maintaining class rejection of caste divisions from legitimating racial, nationalist superiority and imperialism. Their assumption that religion is essentially an illusion or an empty dream further denied the existing of religion and this of course, is prejudice and bias against African religiosity.

### **3.1.14 Phenomenological Theory**

The theory of phenomenology attempts to describe and understand the religious consciousness of the believers who practice the particular religion being studied. It is usually marked by three methodological approaches: *epoche*, *empathy* and *eidetic* vision. *Epoche* is bracketing out of the researcher's belief system. *Empathy* advocates that the observer must empathize with internal understanding. The *eidetic* vision suggests that religions cannot be compared as wholes rather practices such as sacrifices, prayer or liturgy may be abstracted and analyzed in relation to similar components from a wide range of religions.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1**

Explain the theories used in the study of African Traditional Religion.

### **3.2 Influence of Multidisciplinary Approaches in the Study of African Traditional Religion**

The prevailing multi-disciplinary approaches to the study of religion generally have had some influence on the study of African Traditional Religion. It has broadened the scope of analysis because of the possibility of diverse perspectives in the analysis of any topic at hand.

Take for example the practice of sacrifice in African Traditional Religion, which has until recently been construed as an issue in the realm of ritual but which now carry connotations of environmental theories.

This is because the process of ritual and the effect of such processes on the environment can no longer be ignored. The killing of animals for sacrifice, the burning of wood in the process of sacrifice and the noise level of songs and recitations during ritual are now serious issues brought to fore because of the concerns on theories of environmental sustenance. The sociological theories mandate that the positive and negative impact of religion on society and its structures be adequately analyzed instead of just assuming that religion is good for society at all times and in all ramifications. Thus, these multi-disciplinary approaches have helped to broaden (in depth and scope) the study of African Traditional Religion.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2**

How has multi-disciplinary approaches helped in the study of African Traditional Religion?

### **3.3 Tools for the Contemporary Study of African Traditional Religion**

Ethnographic data analysis has continued to be relevant as a tool to study African Traditional Religion over the years. Its usefulness is informed by the need to allow the practitioner speak directly on the religious practices and reason for such practices. Consequently, phenomenology of religion enjoys prevalent use in the study of African Traditional Religion. Also, participant observation and interviews are undisputed tools in the study of African Traditional Religion.

Notwithstanding however, documentation of materials on African Traditional Religion continues to rise, thus books are potent tools for the study of the religion in the contemporary setting. Traditional oral genres are tools for the study of African Traditional Religion as well. Through recitation, and performances, it is possible to study different aspects of African Traditional Religion. Arts (painting, sculptor, batik etc.) constitute tools for the study of African Traditional Religion in many ways, especially as concerns the use of symbols and representation of the divine.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3**

Describe the tools for the contemporary study of African Traditional Religion.

### **3.4 Trends in the Contemporary Study of African Traditional Religion**

African Traditional Religion moved from being ignored as a subject to being

studied in the periphery of religious studies and is now well positioned in the study of religions in the world. This is because the religion is intertwined with African culture which is versatile, rich and dynamic. The study of African Traditional Religion has extended beyond the continent of Africa and the trend will continue. The religion is studied in universities in North America and Europe with an exchange of faculty (Professors) between universities in Africa and the Diaspora, this trend will also continue.

In addition, there is an attempt to integrate the study of African Traditional Religion on the continent and in the Diaspora, especially in the area of publications, either by individual African or non-African scholars in Africa and in the Diaspora or as collaborative research work between scholars in Africa and in the Diaspora, this trend also will continue. Further, conferences on African Traditional Religion bring together scholars of the religion all over the world but also practitioners who get to hear and see what academic engagement is being done on the religion and have the privilege of having inputs into such exercises.

#### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4**

Mention the trends in the contemporary study of African Traditional Religion?

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

We have examined the contemporary study of African Traditional Religion. We discussed the theories in the contemporary study of religion and attempted to analyze how they affect the study of the religion. We noted certain trends in the study of the religion as well.

#### **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit, we discussed the theories in the study of African Traditional Religion. We also examined the influence of multi-disciplinary approaches, the tools and the trends in the study of African Traditional Religion. We suggested that the identified trends could continue.

#### **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. Explain the theories in the study of African Traditional Religion.
2. Describe the influence of multi-disciplinary approaches on the study of African Traditional Religion.
3. What are the tools for the contemporary study of African Traditional Religion?
4. Discuss the trends in the contemporary study of African Traditional Religion.

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## **UNIT 5 AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION AND OTHER RELIGIONS**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Initial Contact between African Traditional Religion and Christianity
  - 3.2 Initial Contact between African Traditional Religion and Islam
  - 3.3 Tension and its Resolution in Inter-religious Relations
  - 3.4 Borrowing and Negotiations in Inter-Religious Relations
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In this unit, we shall discuss the relationship between African Traditional religion and other religions in Africa. The close proximity of these religions compels some level of interaction among them.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Describe the initial contact between African Traditional Religion and Christianity;
- Discuss the initial contact between African Traditional Religion and Islam;
- Explain the tension and resolution of such in inter-religious relations in Africa;
- Discuss instances of borrowing and negotiations in inter-religious relations in Africa.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1 Initial Contact between African Traditional Religion and Christianity**

Tension marked the initial contact between African Traditional religion and Christianity because Christianity condemned everything African and depleted the membership of African Traditional religion through conversion by various methods. Christianity arrived Africa with the assumption that the African was uncultured, barbaric and demon-invested. It was the duty of Christianity then to enlighten and introduce God to the unlettered African. Whereas Africans

were warm and accommodating towards the propagation of Christianity in the light of African hospitality to visitors, Christians recompensed them with degradation and oppression. However, after many years of interaction, certain levels of understanding were arrived at by both parties.

For instance, experience soon proved to the Christians that it was futile to expect a complete separation between Africans and the African culture and worldview. In view of this, the churches started giving cognizance to African culture and worldview in the propagation of the Christian message. Also, the influence of Western culture on some structures of African culture cannot be denied. Examples include the changes in modalities and items used during African naming and marriage ceremonies.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1**

Describe the initial contact between African Traditional religion and Christianity

### **3.2 Initial Contact between African Traditional Religion and Islam**

Islam arrived Africa earlier than Christianity and this was primarily through trade activities. Many similarities exist between Islam and African cultures such as polygamy and the use of herbs. This invariably reduced but did not eradicate the tension between the two religions. For instance, though Islam allowed the marriage of one man to as many as four wives if need be, there were conditions guiding this practice. But polygamy in African cultures was limitless, a man could marry as many wives as he liked, especially as this was considered a sign of prestige in the society. In addition, the Islamic injunctions on inheritance were not at par with what obtains in African cultures. Whereas the Quran specified what percentage of inheritance should go to each relative of the deceased, such a decision was at the prerogative of the elders in the deceased's family in African communities.

Years of constant interaction between the two religions has produced influences on both sides from each of them. The practice of Islam in Africa has not escaped the influence of the African culture. Examples of such influence include the use of African songs, dressing and leadership structures. An example of the leadership structure could be seen in the turbanding of the Iya Adinni and Baba Adinni.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2**

Describe the initial contact between African Traditional religion and Islam.

### **3.3 Tension and its Resolution in Inter-religious Relations**

Many religions dot the African landscape and interaction between them is unavoidable, hence tension sometimes erupts. In Nigeria for example, instances of religious conflict between Muslims and Christians could be cited.

It is worth mentioning that these conflicts may oftentimes be traced to the exclusive nature of these two religions and their evangelistic efforts, both of which are absent from African Traditional religion. African Traditional religion until recently had no evangelistic zeal. Workshops and seminars have been conducted at local, State, and national levels in Nigeria to address the issue of inter-religious conflict.

All these seem to agree that a major factor that contributes to inter-religious conflict and that needs to be removed is suspicion, which is often a product of ignorance concerning other people's religions. Consequently, it has been advocated that each person should have a general knowledge of all religions existing within his or her locality. Christians should have a general knowledge of Islam and vice versa. Unfortunately little attention is paid to African Traditional religion in this regard yet many Christians and Muslims resort to African Traditional religion in their times of crisis. It is, however, commendable that religious knowledge - Islamic, Christian and African - is part of the curriculum in schools at all levels in Nigeria. This stance needs to be sustained and all efforts to remove religious knowledge from school curricula in Nigeria should be rejected.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3**

Discuss tensions of Inter-religious relations in Nigeria.

#### **3.4 Borrowing and Negotiations in Inter-religious Relations in Africa**

Some levels of borrowing and negotiations may be discerned in inter-religious relations in Africa. A prime reference on this score is the African Independent (Indigenous) Churches who give important attention to African culture in their practices and organizational structures. For example, the Musama Disco Church in Ghana models its leadership structure after the political structure of the Asantehene of Kumasi in Ghana. Also, the leadership structures of Yorubaland reflect in the structures of leadership in the Cherubim and Seraphim and Celestial Churches in Nigeria.

The chiefs (male and female) in these churches are similar to the chiefs in Yoruba communities in terms of installation process, duties and responsibilities as well as regalia and the use of dressing accessories like neck and wrist beads. Also, the prioritization of African worldview reflects in the practice of prophecy and predictions in these churches. Sometimes, these prophecies and predictions may lead to sacrifice of animal victims and/or ritual baths. Christianity has also borrowed from African culture in the area of regalia. For example, the robes of the clergy are now made from African fabrics like kente (Ghana) and aso-oke (Yoruba, Nigeria) in part or in full.

Further, ritual components like spirit possession which is a salient feature of African Traditional religion is presently operating in Christianity. Music is another borrowed component from African Traditional religion, especially

vibrant music produced by African musical instruments. African leadership structures reflect in Islam as well because offices for male and female are created for smooth administrative purposes in the mosque though such offices cannot be traced to the Quran. These borrowings and negotiations in inter-religious relations is an ongoing process that is likely to continue so long as they meet the need of the worshippers.

#### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4**

Explain borrowings negotiations in inter-religious relations in Africa.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

We discussed the state of relations between the many religions in Africa today and challenges that emanate from these relations. Tensions and its resolutions were also examined.

#### **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit, we examined the initial contact between Christianity, Islam and African Traditional religion, we described the tensions that resulted from these contacts and how the tensions were resolved. Some borrowing and negotiations in inter-religious relations were also identified.

#### **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. Describe the initial contacts between African Traditional Religion and Christianity
2. Discuss the initial contacts between African Traditional Religion and Islam
3. Explain tensions and its resolution in inter-religious relations in Africa
4. Discuss borrowing and negotiations in inter-religious relations in Africa.

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