THE INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY ON AFRICAN CULTURES

REV. KARBON PHILIP BENJAMIN, PhD
Department of Christian Religious Studies,
Taraba State University, Jalingo, Nigeria
karbon01@yahoo.com

&

NAIRA DANLADI
(Masters Student)
Department of Christian Religious Studies,
Taraba State University, Jalingo, Nigeria
danladinaira1997@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

African folklore, religion, clothing, music, languages, and arts and crafts are all manifestations of the continent's culture. There are many distinct ways that culture is expressed in Africa, and there is a great deal of cultural diversity both within and across nations. The brief history of Christianity in African culture was the main topic of the paper. Christianity's impact on African culture. African Christian education. Religion's Impact on the Political and Social Development of Africa. Christianity's effects on indigenous religion and cultural practices in Africa. The internet and library research provided the data for this study. Africa's way of life and worship has benefited from Christianity as it exists today, which is a Western culture of worshiping their own God, according to the research. It demonstrates that Africans are also aware of the difficulty of enculturating Christianity in Africa, which is an intense kind of evangelizing for African Christians those honours and validates their unique cultural identities while attempting to reconcile faith and culture. It is impossible to comprehend African heritage without comprehending its religious component. Christianity has undoubtedly had a significant impact on the many civilizations of Africa. Therefore, the argument made in this paper is that the influence of Christianity on African culture is that our fundamental cultural traditions, which define us as belonging to a specific African tribe, need to be preserved for future generations. The researchers recommended among others, that even if Christianity has had a significant impact on African culture, Africans themselves should be aware of cultural dynamism.

Keywords: Influence, Christianity, African Culture, Cultural Dynamism, Evangelization.

INTRODUCTION

African traditional society is close-knit and homogeneous, with distinctive traits that distinguish it from other cultures worldwide. According to Ibenwa (2014), some of their beliefs and practices, such as the system (osu, which is devoted to an idol or god), slavery (ohu), the killing of twins and albinos, the burying of chiefs and kings with slaves, polygamy, nude clothing, and specific practices against women and widows, seem evil in today's society and should be condemned in the context of a higher religion like Christianity.

Nonetheless, African culture is diverse and multifaceted; it is made up of a variety of nations and tribes, each of which has its own distinctive characteristics from the continent; it is a result of the diverse populations that currently live on the continent and in the African Diaspora; it is expressed through arts and crafts, folklore and religion, clothing, cuisine, music, and languages; it is abundant within Africa, with significant cultural diversity found both within and between nations; and, despite its great diversity, it is also found to share many characteristics when examined closely.

According to Bello (1991), culture is the entirety of the way of life that a people have evolved in their attempts to meet the challenges of living in their environment. This gives order and meaning to their social, political, economic, aesthetic, and religious norms, which sets them apart from their neighbors. Examples of this include the morals they uphold, their love and respect for their culture, and their strong respect for the gods they believe in and the important people, such as Kings and Chiefs. People are distinguished from one another by their culture, and according to Aziza (2001),

> *Culture refers to the totality of the pattern of behavior of a particular group of people. It includes everything that makes them distinct from any other group of people for instance, their greeting habits, dressing, social norms and taboos, food, songs, and dance patterns, rites of passages from birth, through marriage to death, traditional occupations, religious as well as philosophical beliefs (Idang, 2015).*

Idang, (2015) avers that culture is passed on from generation to generation. The acquisition of culture is a result of the socialization process. Explaining how culture is passed on as a generational heritage, (Fafunwa, 1974) writes that:

> *The child just grows into and within the cultural heritage of his people. He imbibes it. Culture, in traditional society, is not taught; it is caught. The child observes, imbibes, and mimics the actions of his elders and siblings. He watches the naming ceremonies, religious services, marriage rituals, and funeral obsequies. He witnesses the coronation of a king or chief, the annual dance and acrobatic displays of guilds and age groups, or his relations in the activities. The child in a traditional society cannot escape his cultural and physical environment.*

This demonstrates how every individual who is raised in a given society is likely to absorb its culture, whether consciously or unconsciously, through social interaction (Idang, 2015). Other continents have impacted and been impacted by Africa. This is demonstrated by their readiness to adjust to the rapidly evolving modern world rather than remaining entrenched in their traditional way of life. The work's main focus is Christianity, which is one way that the continent of Africa has been impacted. Christianity, on the other hand, is not a culture; rather, it can only be articulated and shared through cultural means.

A person who has firmly decided to follow Jesus Christ and adopted the Christian faith is known as a Christian. Accepting Jesus Christ and his teachings as they are upheld by one's preferred church and recorded in Christian scriptures is the prerequisite for becoming a

Christian. The existence of multiple Christian denominations complicates the question of what defines real Christian tradition. However, it is undeniable that the development of Independent African Churches during the colonial era was significantly influenced by the demand for cultural freedom and identity.

A broad definition of the term "church" is the group of individuals who have embraced Christianity and are intentionally united as a community by the Christianity affirms that Jesus of Nazareth is Christ the „Son of God", but each church lives this faith according to its understanding of the demands of the Gospel. Each adult must decide for himself whether or not to become a Christian and each church has developed a system of nurturing children towards adult membership in the church.

However, when the children of Christian parents grow up, they have to make up their minds whether or not to remain Christians. Their choice is heavily influenced by how the Christian faith would affect them as children. It is impossible to make someone stay a Christian against their will. One of the most notable distinctions between a dedication to Christianity and an African religious background is this. It is very impossible to separate one's religious legacy from one's entire cultural past, just as an African cannot choose the ethnic community into which they are born (Mugambi, 2013).

BRIEF HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY IN AFRICAN CULTURE

In the first or early second century AD, Christianity made its way to North Africa. North Africa was home to some of the world's first Christian settlements. According to legend, one of the four evangelists, Mark, carried Christianity from Jerusalem to Alexandria on the Egyptian coast in the year 60 AD. Possibly prior to the spread of Christianity in Northern Europe, this occurred about the same time.

Christianity gradually moved west from Alexandria to Ethiopia after arriving in North Africa. Christianity was accepted throughout North Africa as the religion of opposition to the Roman Empire's growth. The Ethiopian monarch Ezana established Christianity as the state religion in the fourth century AD. Emperor Constantine proclaimed Christianity the state religion of the Roman Empire in the year 313.

The rise of Islam caused Christianity to withdraw in the seventh century. However, it continued to exist in some areas of North Africa and was the official religion of the Ethiopian Empire. The Portuguese introduced Christianity to Sub-Saharan Africa in the fifteenth century. In 1652, the Dutch established the foundations of the Dutch Reform Church in the southern part of the continent. Up until the 19th century, the majority of people in the interior of the continent carried on with their religious practices unhindered. The antislavery movement and Europeans' desire to colonize Africa at the time led to a rise in Christian missions to the continent. Christianity, however, was not very successful in areas where people had already converted to Islam.

Africa saw significant change as a result of Christianity. It upended the status quo, giving some people new chances while weakening the authority of others. Christian missions

brought literacy, education, and hope to the underprivileged. But when Christianity grew, it opened the door for commercial speculators and, in its strict European form, it made people less proud of their customs and traditions. Hugh (2024).

INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY ON AFRICAN CULTURE

This section attempts to examine how Christianity, a foreign religion, has contributed to societal developments. Africa's traditional religion is the native faith, whereas Christianity is a foreign import (Onyeidu, 1999). African culture as a whole has been greatly influenced by Christianity in the past and continues to do so today. Given this, Ugwu stated in Ibenwa (2004) that "the imported world religions have dealt a staggering blow to our social, economic, religious, and political systems, even though they have brought in some positive influences or possible effects on the Nigerian communities."

However, human connection will inevitably involve change because it is the only thing that is continuous in human life (Ibenwa, 2014). A fairly basic, harmonious, and homogeneous civilization in Africa was transformed into a complicated and varied one in the second half of the nineteenth century due to Western influence, according to Ibenwa (2014). They adhered rigorously to their communities' religion and culture (Chuta, 1992).

This situation has been attributed to foreign religion (Christianity) and the cultural baggage that went along with its teachings. Africans were lured in and taken prisoner by this cultural baggage, which included urbanization and education (Ozigbo, 1988). Not surprisingly, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have all served as social revolutionaries in our cultures (Wood, 1942). It should be mentioned that while certain changes are unavoidable due to survival strategies, others are unavoidable in the face of a dominant culture. Thus, some examples of those alterations have been shown by a reinterpretation of the theme (Ibenwa, 2014).

For example, the arrival of Islam and Christianity in Africa signaled the start of the continent's religious diversity. According to Jordan (1948), the entire African population, especially the Igbos of Eastern Nigeria, have been governed by a system of taboos and ordination rites. Onyeidu (1999) extended these extensive systems of taboos and ordination rites that governed every aspect of Igbo life to include: vows, oracles, trial by ordeal, blood pacts, swearing oaths, secret organizations, and the careful observance of customs and traditions.

Unfortunately, due to the impact of Christian ideas, these entire systems of taboos and ceremonies are no longer carefully obeyed, which may be the reason why there are so many crimes in traditional communities today (Ibenwa, 2014). Once more, Christianity promoted monogamy and denounced polygamy in contact with the Europeans. Nevertheless, the Western concepts of individualism and rationalism were introduced to Africa through the influence of Western education (Chuta, 1992). Secularism in Africa began when many Africans started to question their religious traditions and then made the decision to live without them.

The youngsters learned a wide range of new lessons at school that addressed every facet of human life. These lessons were publicly and extensively promoted as being anti-theatrical to the African way of life. African youngsters were weaned from the authority and influence of their families through Western schooling. Reducing prejudice against women in traditional society was another area in which Christianity succeeded. The reality of severe discrimination against women cannot be denied; few of them were permitted to pursue further education by their parents, and some were forced into marriages against their will by their parents (Ibenwa, 2014).

Additional spheres of impact include attire, greetings, profession, home design, politics, etc. Additionally, Christianity aided in the development of our children's character by instilling in them values like respect for parents, elders, and authority figures, love for one another, truth, and obedience.

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION IN AFRICA

Missionary ideologies and philosophies were taught in schools established by Christians and Muslims across Africa. A Muslim must study and comprehend the meaning of Arabic words in order to memorize and/or recite the Quran, as it must only be repeated in Arabic. Muslim missionaries were not encouraged to translate their sacred scripture into the local tongue because of the characteristics of Islam in Africa. Christian missionaries were forced to share their message in the local tongue of the native people they were trying to convert, in contrast to that of Islam.

Following then, the Bible was translated and shared in various indigenous tongues. In addition to teaching English, Christian schools also taught philosophy, mathematics, and ideals that are fundamental to Western civilization and culture. The opposing strands of secularism and religiosity seen in Christian schools reflect a difference in the diverse objectives of African educational establishments. Mazuri (1985).

One of the two most popular religions in Africa today is Christianity. (1992, Verstraelen). A significant increase in the number of Christians in Africa has coincided with a comparatively lower level of devotion to traditional African religions.

In 1900, there were just nine million Christians in Africa; by 2000, that number had risen to an estimated 380 million. A 2006 Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life study found that 147 million African Christians identified as "renewalists" (Charismatics and Pentecostals). David Barrett claims that the majority of the 11,500 denominations and 552,000 congregations that existed in Africa in 1995 are unknown in the West. (2010). Rather than European missionaries, a large portion of the recent Christian expansion in Africa can now be attributed to native African evangelism and missionary work as well as high birth rates.

From the earliest forms of Oriental Orthodox Christianity in Egypt, Ethiopia, and Eritrea to the newest African-Christian groups in Nigeria, a nation that has seen a significant increase in Christian conversion in recent years, Christianity in Africa exhibits a great deal of diversity. According to some scholars, the industrialized nations of Europe will no longer be the core of

Christianity in the modern era; instead, Africa and Asia will. "African Christianity was not just an exotic, curious phenomenon in an obscure part of the world, but that African Christianity might be the shape of things to come," said historian Lamin Sanneh of Yale University. Lamin (2007).

THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN AFRICAN POLITICAL AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

The forces of industrialization and enlightenment have pushed religion into the private realm and separated it from socio-political and economic life in the countries of the global North, also known as the so-called developed world. According to Clarke and Jennings (2009), "reason and faith were constructed as oppositional, mutually incompatible spheres" in order to give the modernization goal a philosophical and ideological foundation. Religion was viewed as counter-developmental over the same time period. According to Clarke and Jennings (2008), religious reasoning was thought to be rigid and unyielding in the face of social and political change.

However, there was a shift from alienation to interaction between faith and progress over time, especially in the latter half of the 20th century. For instance, donor agencies have aggressively attempted to engage in discourse on development-related issues with faith-based organizations (FBOs), primarily led by particular Christian churches, and donors have done the same. Religion continued to play a major role in all facets of African society, in contrast to civilizations in the global north where faith and development were once divorced (Laguda, 2013).

In the past, and in many cases still are, religion, morals, wealth, and social advancement were all communal issues. The prevalence of poverty was not particularly high in African societies. For instance, among the Olulumo (Okuni) people of Cross River State, Nigeria, who have already been discussed, there are still customs that are based on religion and guarantee that everyone in the community is taken care of. In order to meet their food needs, a stranger or a member of the community may take food crops from another person's farm.

When hungry, a stranger walking by a yam barn can stop by, roast a yam, and eat to their heart's content. A thirsty individual who wants to sip palm wine but cannot purchase it can do so while passing by tapped palm trees. It was enough to let the owner know that the wine was stolen by someone in need rather than a thief by placing a cut tree branch or leaves on the location where the person in need helped themselves.

African traditional communities are unfamiliar with the idea of accumulating material possessions for one's own benefit. Having a lot of individuals in the community is a sign of affluence.

It also refers to being in harmony with one's creator, ancestors, and community, as well as being morally upright and healthy (Narayan, 2001). In African communities, the idea of respect and shame was also beneficial since it discouraged theft in order to obtain recognition or honor from the community. Since stealing was frowned upon, the thief, his family, and his society would all be shamed and stigmatized as a result of the action (Agbiji, 2012).

Some critics contend that the material backwardness of African countries is due to African social behavior patterns. However, as they are currently seen as the answer to the world's economic and environmental problems, alternative developmental models are calling for humanity to return to communal and sustainable lives (Theron, 2008). Religion—whether African traditional, Christian, or Islamic—continues to play a significant role in the advancement of African societies, even though the forces of modernity and globalization have destroyed many religiously based traditional activities. Religion can provide as a framework for critically analyzing a society's prevailing value systems.

Religious principles have influenced both domestic and international law; these principles are highly valued and have substantially aided in the conception and growth of contemporary democracy and democratization. Human equality, decency, and the sacredness of human life are among these principles (Tsele, 2001). This is the prophetic role of religion as understood by Christians. Religion is essential for communicating moral principles in a culture, in addition to serving as a benchmark for evaluating the value system of that society.

Despite Africa's failed governments and economic institutions, religion fosters optimism and hope. A common illustration of the immense hope that transcends religion and society is provided by African Christianity through African Pentecostalism. Emphasizing the Bible's ability to foster spiritual growth and stave off evil powers serves as a mediator between hope and optimism (Kalu, 2010). Due to the continent's severe fragmentation brought on by colonialization, economic globalization, and growing poverty, religious communities in Africa are acting as a unifying force and a catalyst for social, economic, and political growth (Tsele, 2001).

Religious communities offer viable and essential networks that can act as glue for leveraging collaboration and harnessing resources for the social transformation of the continent, despite the fact that religious fundamentalism is a significant contributing factor to such fragmentation in contemporary African society. Churches have an essential role in fostering social cohesiveness (Lamle, 2013).

Impact of Christianity on African Indigenous Religion and Cultural Practices
There was a high awareness of and belief in the existence of a Supreme Being, who was seen to be the creator and sustainer of the cosmos and with whom humans attempted to maintain a permanent relationship. This was the deeply religious indigenous context into which Christianity arrived. Gyekye (1996). Two important characteristics of African Indigenous Religion are the idea and belief in a Supreme Being and intricate systems of belief in the spiritual aspects of nature.

African Indigenous Religion is a part of African culture because of the communal and pragmatic nature of this traditional religion, which suggests that those who were born into the traditional community were also born into the religion, in which they naturally participated as they grew up through the traditional socialization processes. As stated by Mugambi (2002). The culture in which each church has grown is reflected in it.

Marriage: In African societies, kinship ties were maintained and reinforced by the practice of traditional marriage. Marriage between two people was viewed in the African cultural context as a way to initiate or solidify the union of the homes and clans to which the couple belonged. In traditional African contexts, marriage serves to bind families and clans in addition to the woman and the man. Married people were welcomed into social adulthood with rites of exchange that defined the marital process.

In order to strengthen social ties and bind the union, tokens in kind, or dowries, were traded as part of these transactions. The arrival of Christianity altered long-standing traditions and practices related to marriage ceremonies. Following a ritual that was novel to African religious practice, the Christian wedding was held in a church. New foods and beverages, such wedding cakes, were provided at the celebration, and the bridal party dressed in new, culturally appropriate attire for the Christian wedding.

Despite acknowledging their membership in the Church, African Christians were unable to completely cut their links to their relatives. In order to marry in peace, a Christian had to win over both his family and the Church by performing both church and traditional rites, which ultimately resulted in dual marriage. This has made it necessary to inquire as to when a young man and a woman who have decided to get married can be regarded as a married couple in society. Is it after a Euro-American church wedding ceremony or after African traditional marital rites?

Which of these, if either, certifies a marriage? According to (Oynima, 2014), a person is not considered married in the majority of Christian households in Africa unless they have staged a white wedding and received a pastor's or priest's blessing. This has seriously jeopardized our cultural identity and is arguably largely a conflict between tradition and modernity.

RECOMMENDATIONS
The following recommendations are offered in light of the aforementioned studies:
- Even if Christianity has had a significant impact on African culture, Africans themselves should restructure their culture such that no western religion may contaminate it.
- African traditional leaders ought to make their presence known in order to guide the continent's culture, values, and customs.
- In order to affect other religions that are practiced on African soil, African culture should be reviewed.

CONCLUSION
In conclusion, Africa's way of life and worship has benefited from Christianity as it exists today, which is a Western culture of worshiping their own God. According to Sarpong (2006), Africans are also aware of the difficulty of enculturating Christianity in Africa, which is a thorough evangelism of African Christians those respects and supports their unique cultural identity and aims to close the gap between faith and culture. It is impossible to comprehend African heritage without comprehending its religious component.

Without a doubt, Christianity has had a significant influence on Africa's various cultures. Accordingly, this paper argues that the impact of Christianity on African culture is that our fundamental cultural practices that define us as members of a specific African tribe and culture need to be preserved for future generations.

REFERENCES

Aziza, R.C. (2001). *The Relationship between Language Use and Survival of Culture*: The Case of Umobo Youth. Nigerian Language Studies. No.4.

Agbiji, O.M (2012). *Development-oriented Church Leadership in Post-military Nigeria*: A Sustainable Transformation Approach. Stellenbosch University.

Bello, S. (1991). *Culture and Decision making in Nigeria*. Lagos: National Council for Arts and Culture.

Chuta, S. O. (1999). *"Religion and Social Control in Traditional African Societies"*. Nigeria: Mekslink Publishers Culture of Africa.

Clarke, G & Jennings, M. (2008). *Development, Civil Society and Faith-based Organizations*: Bridging the Sacred and the Secular, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

"Ecclesiastical Cartography and the Invisible Continent: The Dictionary of African Christian Biography" at http://www.dacb.org/xmaps.html 2024.

Fafunwa, A. B. (1974). *History of Education in Nigeria*. London: George Allen and Unwin.

Gyekye, K. (1996). *African Cultural Values: An Introduction*, Accra: Sankofa Publishing.

Ibenwa, C. N. (2014). *Influence of Christian Religion on African Traditional Religion and Value System.* Research on Humanities and Social Science. Vol. 4, No.9, ISSN (paper) 2224-5766, ISSN (online).

Idang, G. E. (2015). *African Culture and Values*. Phronimon (UNISA), Vol. 16, No.2, pp 97-111

Jordan, J. P. (1948). *Bishop Shanahan of Southern Nigeria*. Dublin: Glonmore and Reynolds.

Kalu, O.U. (2010). *Faith and Politics in Africa*: Emergent Political Theology of Engagement in Nigeria, Africa World Press.

Laguda, D.O. (2013). *Religious Pluralism and Secularization in the Nigeria Religious Sphere*: Farnham: Ashgate.

Lamin, Sanneh (2007). *Historian Ahead of His Time*, Christianity Today.

Mugambi, J. N. K. (2013). *Christianity and the African Cultural Heritage*. In Christianity and African Culture. Nairobi: University of Pretoria, Library Service.

Mazuri, Ali A. (1985). *Religion and Political Culture in Africa*. Journal of the American Academy of Religion, vol. 53, no. 4, p.817.

Narayan, D. (2001). *Various of the Poor*, Oxford: Regnum.

Onyeidu, S. O. (1999). *African Traditional Religion*: The Problem of Definition. Nigeria.

Ozigbo, I. R. A. (1992). *Readings in African Humanities in World Culture*. Nigeria: Vivian and Vivian Publishers.

Oynima, B.N (2014). *Marriage Ceremony: The Clash between Traditional Marriage Rites and Western Marriage*. Journal of religion and human relations, 8(2), 171.

Sarpong, P.K (2006). *Can Christianity Dialogue with African Traditional Religion*? Retrieved 25, March 2024 from http://www.afrikaworld.net/afrel/sarpong.html

Theron, F. (2008). *The Development Change Agent*: A Micro-level Approach to Development, Pretoria: Van Schaik.

Tsele, P. (2012). *Religion and Organization: A Critical Review of Current Trends and Future Directions.* Oxford: Regnum.

Verstraelen-Gilhuis, Gerdien (1992). *A new look at Christianity in Africa*: essays on apartheid, African education, and a new history, Zimbabwe: Mambo Press.