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Introduction Africa is a continent of diversity. In this diversity there are hundreds of tribes and communities each practicing its own culture and religion. It would be very difficult to define Africa's traditional religion as it would be difficult to define its culture. More so, it is extremely difficult to establish the dividing line between African Culture and African Religion. However, as much as there were many African Traditional Religions, their similarities were more dominant than their differences. We take up these similarities and encompass them as one African Traditional Religion. In this report, we explore the important aspects of Africa's Traditional Religions and cultures that cut across the entire continent. This essay is based on various researches done by prominent scholars, historical background of Africa, news and books relevant to African studies. This report attempts to define religion, culture, and explores the major religions, African Traditional Religion (ATR), Christianity and Islam and their influence and impact on African culture. Africa is one of the World's six continents. It is the second largest and second most populous continent after Asia. Other continents include; Asia, America-North, America-South, Australia, Europe. Geologically, Present-day Africa, occupying one-fifth of Earth's land surface, is the central remnant of the ancient southern supercontinent called Gondwanaland, a landmass once made up of South America, Australia, Antarctica, India, and Africa. This

massive supercontinent broke apart between 195 million and 135 million years ago, cleaved by the same geological forces that continue to transform Earth's crust today. At about 30.2 million km<sup>2</sup> (11.7 million sq mi) including adjacent islands, it covers 6% of the Earth's total surface area and 20.4% of the total land area. With 1.0 billion people (as of 2009) in 61 territories, it accounts for about 14.72% of the world's human population. The continent is surrounded by the Mediterranean Sea to the north, both the Suez Canal and the Red Sea along the Sinai Peninsula to the northeast, the Indian Ocean to the southeast, and the Atlantic Ocean to the west. The continent has 54 sovereign states, including Madagascar, various island groups, and the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, a member state of the African Union whose statehood is disputed by Morocco. Afri was the name of several Semitic peoples who dwelt in North Africa near Carthage (in modern Tunisia). Their name is usually connected with Phoenician afar, "dust", but a 1981 hypothesis has asserted that it stems from a Berber word ifri or Ifran meaning "cave", in reference to cave dwellers. Africa or Ifri or Afer is name of Banu Ifran from Algeria and Tripolitania (Berber Tribe of Yafran). Pre-colonial Africa possessed perhaps as many as 10,000 different states and polities characterised by many different sorts of political organisation and rule. These included small family groups of hunter-gatherers such as the San people of southern Africa; larger, more structured groups such as the family clan groupings of the Bantu-speaking people of central and southern Africa, heavily structured clan groups in the Horn of Africa, the large Sahelian kingdoms, and autonomous city-states and kingdoms such as those of the Akan, Yoruba and Igbo people (also misspelled as Ibo) in West Africa, and the

Swahili coastal trading towns of East Africa. Religion originates from the Latin world *religare* (*re*: back, and *ligare*: to bind), and this brings up the world "being bound." Faith is usually the core element of religion. Faith encompasses "Value-center," "trust," "loyalty," and "meaning". It is difficult to define religion. A good definition of religion is one that expounds on the following key traits; Belief in something sacred (for example, gods or other supernatural beings), A distinction between sacred and profane objects, Ritual acts focused on sacred objects, A moral code believed to have a sacred or supernatural basis, characteristically religious feelings (awe, sense of mystery, sense of guilt, adoration), which tend to be aroused in the presence of sacred objects and during the practice of ritual, prayer and other forms of communication with the supernatural, world view, or a general picture of the world as a whole and the place of the individual therein. This picture contains some specification of an over-all purpose or point of the world and an indication of how the individual fits into it, a more or less total organization of one's life based on the world view, A social group bound together by the above. Culture (from the Latin *cultura* stemming from *colere*, meaning "to cultivate") is a term that has various meanings. For example, in 1952, Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn compiled a list of 164 definitions of "culture" in *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions*. However, the word "culture" is most commonly used in three basic senses: Excellence of taste in the fine arts and humanities, also known as culture, An integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that depends upon the capacity for symbolic thought and social learning and the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes an

institution, organization or group. Culture has six core elements; politics, economics, ethics, aesthetics, kinship and religion. And out of these, religion " is by far the richest part of the African heritage." It shapes their cultures, their social life, their politics, and their economics and is at the same time shaped by this same way of life. Some of the major religions that influenced African culture; African traditional religion, Christianity and Islam African Traditional Religion It is a unique religion whose sources include: sacred places and religious objects such as rocks, hills, mountains, trees, caves and other holy places; rituals, ceremonies and festivals of the people; art and symbols; music and dance; proverbs, riddles, and wise sayings; and names of people and places. Beliefs cover topics such as God, spirits, birth, death, the hereafter, magic, and witchcraft. Religion, in the African indigenous context, permeates all departments of life. Africa's traditional religion is based on the Ubuntu philosophy, which is a Zulu word for human-ness, and was developed over many centuries in traditional African culture. This culture was pre-literate, pre-scientific and pre-industrial. The concept of Ubuntu was originally expressed in the songs and stories, the customs and the institutions of the people. Another distinctive quality of the Ubuntu philosophy is the African emphasis on consensus. Indeed, the African traditional culture has, seemingly, an almost infinite capacity for the pursuit of consensus and reconciliation. Democracy in the African way does not simply boil down to majority rule since it operates in the form of discussions geared towards a consensus. Christianity The Christian religion was founded in what is today Israel and Palestine 2000 years ago at the beginning of the Common Era. Christianity is based on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, a

Jewish teacher and prophet. Early Christians (followers of Christ) believed that Jesus was divine in that he was the son of God. Islam Islam is a religion that was founded by Prophet Mohammed. Its geographic origin can be traced to the modern-day Saudi Arabia. Influences of Religion on African Culture Religion being one of the core components of culture has a great influence on culture. Every religion practiced in Africa today has had a profound effect on the African culture, be it the African Traditional Religion, Christianity or Islam. Christianity Influence on African Culture arrived in Africa in two groups. One important group was centered in Egypt and had influence throughout North Africa. This group was known as the Gnostics. One of the other major factions of the early Christianity was centered in Rome. This faction was very much influenced by the teachings of the Apostle Paul. This faction became prominent in the fourth century C. E. when the Roman Empire officially became Christian. Recognizing the importance of a sacred text in solidifying their control over Christianity, the Roman faction brought together a collection of writings by early Christians and proclaimed these writings were inspired by God and that they were the true testament of the life and teachings of Jesus. This collection is known as the New Testament and is a central part of the Christian Bible. However, in creating the New Testament the Roman faction rejected as heresy all other writings about Jesus' life and teachings, including many books written by North African Gnostic Christians. In spite of the repression of the Gnostic Christians by Roman Christians, Christianity continued to flourish throughout North Africa until the arrival of Islam in the seventh century C. E. The Christians in this area were known as Coptic Christians, named after the main language of the

area. By the time of the arrival of Islam, the Coptic Orthodox Church had lost most of the Gnostic influence, although the Coptic faith, like the Gnostics placed a great deal of emphasis on contemplation and monasticism. In structure, it was similar to the Church of Rome in that it practiced the same sacraments, and the church structure was made up of priests and bishops. Like the Roman Church, the Coptic Orthodox Church is headed by a Patriarch (similar to the Pope in the Roman Church) who lives in Alexandria. Even after Egypt had been taken over by Arab Moslems, the Coptic Christians continued to form a small but important segment of Egyptian society. Indeed, Coptic Christians today comprise approximately fifteen per cent of the Egyptian population. Christianity was introduced in Nubia by Christian monks and traders in the fifth and sixth centuries C. E. By the seventh century, the rulers of Nubia and most Nubians had converted to Christianity. In practice and structure, the Nubian church was similar to the Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt. In June, 18, 1452, Pope Nicholas V issued the papal bull 'Dum Diversas', granting King Alfonso V of Portugal the right to " attack, conquer, and subjugate Saracens, Pagans and other enemies of Christ wherever they may be found." It gave title over all lands and possessions seized and permitted the Portuguese to take the inhabitants and consign them to perpetual slavery. Dum Diversas legitimised the colonial slave trade that begun around this time with the expeditions by Henry the Navigator to find a sea route to India, which were financed with African slaves. This approval of slavery was reaffirmed and extended in his Romanus Pontifex of 1455. The transatlantic trade in Africans was founded on Christianity. Religion was key in motivating Prince Henry of Portugal, later called Henry, " the Navigator"

(1394-1460), to put in motion Europe's aggressive and ruthless expeditions to Africa. Henry was not only the governor of Algrave Province, who managed a large economic infrastructure based on the unbridled grasp of enormous wealth from trans-Saharan commerce, but he was also the administrator of the Order of Christ, the Portuguese successor to the Knights Templar, a famous Western military order founded in the aftermath of the First Crusade at Clermont on November 27, 1095. As one of the best fighting units, the Soldiers of Christ prompted a series of striking maritime exploits, ensuring the safety of Europeans who made pilgrimages to Jerusalem. It is important to note that during this historical period, the feudal states of European countries were just beginning to unite and major religious wars were being fought between Christians and Muslims, especially the Moors in Morocco. Henry trained men to sail from Portugal, down the west coast of Africa in search of the limits to the Muslim world, in order to halt the Islamization of West Africa and to accelerate the spread of Christianity. In order to further God's intentions for humankind, Ogbu Kalu contends that within the context of religious logic, papal bulls offered rights of patronage to Henry, authorizing him to appoint clerical orders for evangelization and to fend off competing European interests. According to Peter Russell, Henry the Navigator considered conversion and enslavement as interchangeable terms, experiencing no cognitive dissonance in using Christianity as a civilizing agent for making converts into slaves. In "Christianity: Missionaries in Africa," Modupe Labode sums it up this way: The case of the Portuguese exemplifies the close relationship between Crown and Church. In the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494), the pope recognized Portuguese claims to Africa. The



Crown was also responsible for attempting to convert the indigenous people to Christianity. Much of the missionary effort over the next two and half centuries was conducted under Portuguese authority. The vast majority of the missionaries at this time were Roman Catholic priests, many of them belonged to religious orders such as the Jesuits, Capuchins, and Franciscans. Influence of Islam on African Culture led to the spread of Islam, from its heartland in the Middle East and North Africa to India and Southeast Asia, revealed the power of the religion and its commercial and sometimes military attributes. The spread of Islam across much of the northern third of Africa produced profound effects on both those who converted and those who resisted the new faith. Islamization also served to link Muslim Africa even more closely to the outside world through trade, religion, and politics. Trade and long-distance commerce, in fact, was carried out in many parts of the continent and linked regions beyond the orbit of Muslim penetration. Until about 1450, however, Islam provided the major external contact between sub-Saharan Africa and the world. State building took place in many areas of the continent under a variety of conditions. West Africa, for example, experienced both the cultural influence of Islam and its own internal dynamic of state building and civilization developments that produced, in some places, great artistic accomplishments. The existence of stateless societies and their transformation into states are a constant of African history even beyond 1500. As we have seen with Egypt, North Africa was also linked across the Sahara to the rest of Africa in many ways. With the rise of Islam, those ties became even closer. Between A. D. 640 and 700 the followers of Muhammad swept across North Africa from Suez to the

Pillars of Hercules on Morocco's Atlantic shore. By A. D. 670 Muslims ruled Tunisia, or Ifriqiya, what the Romans had called Africa. (The Arabs originally used this word as the name for eastern North Africa and Maghrib for lands to the West.) By 711, Arab and Berber armies had crossed into Spain. In opposition to the states dominated by the Arabic rulers, the peoples of the desert, the Berbers, formed states of their own at places such as Fez in Morocco and at Sijilimasa, the old city of the trans-Saharan caravan trade. By the 11th century, under pressure from new Muslim invaders from the East, a great puritanical reformist movement, whose followers were called the Almoravids, grew among the desert Berbers of the western Sahara. Launched on the course of a jihad, a holy war waged to purify, spread, or protect the faith, the Almoravids moved southward against the African kingdoms of the savanna and westward into Spain. Islam offered a number of attractions within Africa. Its fundamental teaching that all Muslims are equal within the community of believers made the acceptance of conquerors and new rulers easier. The Islamic tradition of uniting the powers of the state and religion in the person of the ruler or caliph appealed to some African kings as a way of reinforcing their authority. The concept that all members of the ummah, or community of believers, were equal put the newly converted Berbers and later Africans on an equal footing with the Arabs, at least in law. Despite these egalitarian and somewhat utopian ideas within Islam, practice differed considerably at local levels. Social stratification remained important in Islamicized societies and ethnic distinctions also divided the believers. The Muslim concept of a ruler who united civil and religious authority reinforced traditional ideas of kingship. It is also important to note that in Africa, as

elsewhere in the world, the formation of states heightened social differences and made these societies more hierarchical. Africans had been enslaved by others before, and Nubian (African) slaves had been known in the classical world, but with the Muslim conquests of North Africa and commercial penetration to the south, slavery became a more widely diffused phenomenon, and a slave trade in Africans developed on a new scale. In theory, slavery was viewed by Muslims as a stage in the process of conversion - a way of preparing pagans to become Muslims - but in reality conversion did not guarantee freedom. Slaves in the Islamic world were used in a variety of occupations, such as domestic servants and laborers, but they were also used as soldiers and administrators who, having no local ties and affiliations, were considered to be dependent and thus trustworthy by their masters. Slaves were also used as eunuchs and concubines; thus the emphasis on women and children. The trade caravans from the Sahel across the Sahara often transported slaves as well as gold. Other slave-trade routes developed from the African interior to the east African coast. The tendency for the children of slave mothers to eventually be freed and integrated into Muslim society, while positive in one sense, also meant a constant demand for more slaves. Islam provided the residents of these towns a universal set of ethics and beliefs that made their maritime contacts easier; but in East Africa, as in the savanna kingdoms of West Africa, Islamization was slow to penetrate among the general population, and when it did, the result was often a compromise between indigenous ways and the new faith. By the thirteenth century, a string of urbanized trading ports sharing the common Bantu-based and Arabic-influenced Swahili language and other cultural traits

- although governed by separate Muslim ruling families - had developed along the coast. Towns such as Mogadishu, Mombasa, Malindi, Kilwa, Pate, and Zanzibar eventually contained mosques, tombs, and palaces of cut stone and coral. Ivory, gold, iron, slaves, and exotic animals were exported from these ports in exchange for silks from Persia and porcelain from China for the ruling Muslim families. African culture remained strong throughout the area. Swahili language was essentially a Bantu language into which a large number of Arabic words were incorporated, though many of them were not incorporated until the 16th century. The language was written in an Arabic script sometime prior to the 13th century; the ruling families could also converse in Arabic. Islam itself penetrated very little into the interior among the hunters, pastoralists, and farmers. Even the areas of the coast near the trading towns remained relatively unaffected. In the towns, the stone and coral buildings of the Muslim elite were surrounded by mud and thatch houses of the non-Muslim common people, so that Islamization was to some extent class-based. Still, a culture developed that fused Islamic and traditional elements. Family lineage, for example, was traced both through the maternal line, which controlled property (the traditional African practice), and through the paternal line, as was the Muslim custom. The enduring legacy of the influence of religion on African culture led to majority of Africans profess either Christian or Islamic faith. Considering that there lie a thin veneer between culture and religion, it is imperative that these two religions have fundamentally altered the African culture, if there exist any. These religions spread into Africa aboard various vehicles, including; slavery, colonialism, trade, education, among others. These religions emphasized a

ruler-ship founded on a hierarchy focused on one centre of power, the imperial dictatorship. This was contrary to African culture that was less hierarchical and more collegiate, that emphasized on dialogue and consensus. It is this imperialist hierarchical structure that still causes chaos in Africa today. To a large extent most Africans remain colonized, whether politically, economically, religiously, culturally, spiritually or otherwise. A society that is still colonized is not a free society, it is a society wallowing deeply in the swampy marshes of slavery. Africa, the mother of humanity, as it stands now is one whose veil of religion and garment of culture has been torn. It is a mother whose dignity has been raped, and its young children defiled by the older siblings who came back from their adventures abroad. One most fundamental question would be: Is colonialism and slavery a just price that Africans have to pay eternally for the reward of education and trade? Whichever way the answer comes to be, Africa needs restoration. Restoration is only possible if Africans can wake up to spiritual reality and eschew the bondage of foreign religion consumed by it from its renegade sons and daughters. The turning point can only be achieved if Africans realize that religion and spirituality are distinct — that spirituality possessed by a religious person can never be fresh and neither can religion exist in a pure spirituality. Africa must free itself from this intoxicating addiction to foreign religion, and for that matter, any religion for it to be truly free.

CONCLUSION. In conclusion, a keen oversee at history slowly shows us more clearly the influence of religion on African culture. The change due to the influence may not have taken place there and then but took time spreading its roots and slowly merging with the native culture and in some other

instances completely eroding it. Just like how Christianity was introduced to Africa, the natives did not completely embrace it just like that, they took their precious time and in present day Africa, it is still being practiced and no one can pin point the exact time when Christianity was completely taken in by the natives of the past. These different religions which were introduced to African culture or way of life made other cultures to take a complete turnaround from their practices and events. It made cultures that had no sense of organization to have a distinct sense of governing themselves. To a large extent this was an advantage and an upgrade to the specific culture. Nevertheless we cannot ignore the negative impacts it caused directly or indirectly. Religion being one of the core components of culture has a great influence on culture. Every religion practiced in Africa today has had a profound effect on the African culture, be it the African Traditional Religion, Christianity or Islam. Reference Davis, Lynn. Gates, Jr. Henry Louis.(1999) Wonders of the African World. New York: Random House Publishing, Horton, Mark & Middleton, John.(2001) The Swahili: The Social Landscape of a Mercantile Society (Peoples of Africa). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing. Koslow, Philip. (1995) Centuries of Greatness - The West African Kingdoms: 750-1900. London: Chelsea House Publishers, McKissack, Patricia & Fredrick Mckissack.(1995) The Royal Kingdoms of Ghana, Mali, and Songhay - Life in Medieval Africa. New York: Henry Holt and Company, Jesse Mugambi. (1996) Religion and Social Construction of Reality (Nairobi: University Press, and African Christian Theology: An Introduction (Nairobi: Heinemann) John S. Mbiti. (1975) An Introduction to African Religion (London: Heinemann, J. O. Awolalu. (1976) " Sin and its Removal in African Traditional Religion." JAAR

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