

The influence of christianity on culture religion essay



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BUSTER**

The novel, *Things Fall Apart*, was written by Chinua Achebe and was first published in 1958. The book deals with Okonkwo, the main character in the book, and his approach towards Christianity and the new Umuofia after his exile. The novel shows us the impact of a western culture on the Igbo society and how the citizens have to adapt to the new changes and beliefs. Achebe, through this story, wants to show the readers that, things, culture and relationships do fall apart as we read it. White men arrived in Africa as traders, missionaries and administrators. In this essay, I will talk about the influence of Christianity on the Igbo culture. Is the Igbo culture civilized or barbaric? Was the arrival of the white missionaries in *Things Fall Apart* positive or negative? My essay will be divided into four sections, each giving a different influence of Christianity on the Igbo culture. I will discuss the four main influences.

Christianity has influenced the Igbo culture in many ways. The main influence is on the religion that tribes follow. The white missionaries bring a different set of beliefs and laws which are incompatible with Igbo traditions and practices. The church which is built by the Christians, contributes to the destruction of the clan. Many Umuofians decide to convert to Christianity, as they feel they will get more freedom, comfort and they can be and do what the clan does not agree to. The converts are outcasts, people with no titles and women who had twins. Such people are mistreated in the Igbo society. Christianity is giving such people dignity. The converts have the chance to find their true identity. The missionaries begin to establish themselves through the church. The white men's power increases as they survive the Evil Forest. The missionaries say " We have been sent by the Great God to

ask you to leave your wicked ways and false gods and turn to Him so that you may be saved when you die". The power of the traditional gods is challenged by the survival of the missionary hut in the Evil Forest, in which, the unfortunate people, twins and 'ogbanje' children are thrown. Christianity points fingers to the beliefs of the Igbo culture. For many, Christianity is an answer for all their queries. People think that converting to Christianity means peace and was better than the Igbo religion and its superstitions. " Three converts had gone into the village and boasted openly that all the gods were dead and impotent and that they were prepared to defy them by burning all their shrines." This shows that the converts and the missionaries no longer respect the views and beliefs of the Igbo clan. The converts know that they are protected by the white men and they feel that they have a ' greater god' than the Igbos. In Chapter 18, with the episode of the python, the belief of the Igbos in god strengthens and the death of the convert responsible proves that the gods still exist and do justice to its people. In a sense, despite the influence of Christianity, some of Igbo people still have firm belief in their gods.

The second major influence is on the legal system in the Igbo tribes. It has a major hand in the collapsing of the clan. The new rules also apply to the Igbo tribe members, which has people who do not wish to convert to Christianity. The imposition of an alien legal system confuses the Igbos and adds up to the hatred the Igbos have towards the white men and the converts. "... stories were already gaining ground that the white men had not only brought religion, but also a government. It was said that they had built a place of judgment in Umofia to protect the followers of their religion. It was even said

that they had hanged one man who killed a missionary.” Before the coming of the white men, decisions are made by the heads of the clan, the men with high titles. But now, these men have lost their place and there is the police to pass laws and give final verdicts and punishments. The new legal system proves to be neither just nor deserves praise. While the ‘ egwugwu’ frequently settle land disputes both effectively and fairly, the colonial court’s decisions result in conflict and murder. The previously accepted traditions now are punishable offenses. Soon, the prison is “ full of men who had offended against the white men’s law. Some of these prisoners have thrown away their twins, while some have molested Christians.” This shows that to a great extent, the Igbo members of the society neither fear the Christians, nor are they scared of the new legal system and its laws. By building the Christian church and establishing a new legal system with their own western laws, the colonial government gradually makes the tribal legal procedure less effective and destroys traditional beliefs. This shows that the western culture is interfering in the day-to-day running of the Igbo government.

The third influence is on the education given by the Igbos. Educating people of different age groups in Umofia helped those who were eager for self-advancement, who soon realize the potential of the schools. Hence, by educating the people of Umofia, the Christians do well to the place. The people are able to widen their knowledge. There is no harm in educating somebody. Mr. Brown, one of the missionaries, teaches the ambitious students. Mr. Brown is, understanding, patient and friendly, which make the people, feel welcomed and they would thus want to continue studying to become responsible. “ More people came to learn in his school, and he

encouraged them with singlets and towels. They were not all young, these people who came to learn." This shows that Mr. Brown's school produced quick results. " A few months in it were enough to make one a court messenger or even a court clerk. Those who stayed longer became teachers." This tells us that Mr. Brown's school is effective and good. The students can become successful and can even educate others, keeping the trend of education. On the other hand, through education, Mr. Brown is luring the Umofians to convert. By aiming at the different age groups, he wants the maximum number of converts who will accept the religion and its beliefs. The ' singlets and towels' are forms of bribe as the Igbo have never used them. These items, therefore, symbolize luxury and also the mode of living of the white. By using such stuffs, they will feel superior to their fellow Umofians. Mr. Brown tries to become godly figure in the eyes of the people. Mr. Brown's ' polite and caring' nature helps him in his strategy to attract Umofians to convert.

The last striking influence is that on trade. Christianity takes hold over the community but the clan also benefits from the trade and prosperity which it brings with it. In Chapter 21, the influence is introduced. " The white man had indeed brought a lunatic religion, but he had also built a trading store and for the first time palm oil and kernel became things of great price, and much money flowed into Umofia." The coming of Christians brings money indirectly to the Igbos. By trading, they grow their knowledge about trading and other countries. Trading helps Umofia as they now have a trading store and get money to improve the place. The traders mostly trade palm oil and kernels. This buying and selling of goods changes Umofia. People now

believe in the white missionaries and trust them better. This shows that the coming of Christianity in the Igbo society brings both positive and negative changes. This dealing requires manual skills and special training which might be given in Mr. Brown's school. But in Umofia, before the arrival of Christianity, money was not of great value as sharing and borrowing existed. The appearance of money, through trading, decreases fraternity and friendship that was once there among the citizens. In a sense, the evil has been introduced in Umofia. There is competition and people want to be rich, unlike before.

To conclude, the Igbo culture, in *Things Fall Apart*, is presented as both good and bad. Achebe manages to a great extent, to destroy the myth of the African savage. He impresses the reader by the fact that the white men are not bringing civilization, but are destroying the society. It shows that the colonization of Africa by western powers perpetuated the stereotype of primitive African savage. In Part 1 and Part 2, Achebe portrays a long-established and orderly African society with its strict hierarchy of gods, elders and titled men and with its own customs and religious beliefs. As from the end of Part 2, the white missionaries decide to destroy the culture and create hatred among its citizens. I think that each culture has the right for its own systems and other modern cultures, intruding, will just result in misunderstandings and hatred among the people who belong to the separate cultures. The arrival of the white missionaries makes few positive effects but also brings detestation in Umofia. Nevertheless, it also contributes considerably, as the Africans can learn new languages and modern techniques.

1550 words.