

A look at african tradition religion religion essay



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The subject of African Tradition religion has much been discussed and argued in relation and comparison with Christianity. A lot has been said by many commentators and scholars of world religions. Others have argued against African Tradition Religions and others bring out some points for African Tradition Religion, while others decide to remain neutral. But what has been ignored in these discussions is the cultural and tradition background and concepts of these two religions.

Peter Sarpong says that “ all human beings are conditioned by their environment, our surroundings shape us. We do different things ranging from language to food, our ideas are made from what we see around us (sarpong; web source). What the western environment is like is totally different from the African environment. Hence, one can not know what they have not experienced or come into contact with constantly. Sarpong goes on to say that “ our imagination and metaphors are meaningful only in the context of what we experience constantly” (Sarpong web source). That is why imposition can not work because of the difference in the context of application and means. The only meaningful thing the west can do is view Christianity from the African perspective if we seek a progress in harmony.

The first step is to acknowledge that both religions are important to the followers. Both have important values that is why Christianity should not only influence African religion but also learn some values that can enrich it.

There is a lot that has happened in the west which has changed and removed some of the important values of its culture. Surely one can disagree that modernization and industrialization have caused the failure by the west

to preserve its cultural values. But this is not obvious in African. Africans still try to hold on to its culture and traditions a thing that the West can learn from Africans. African tradition Religion is not just a religion but a way of life, it is how people live, it is what makes people who they are and they are identified by it. Since it is a way of life the West can learn a few important values that can be beneficial in life.

In Africa there is still in the wider family not just father, mother and children; it includes the extended family going as far as the whole community. This is so because Africans believe that the community is made up of people and it is the strength of every person in the community or families that will make it develop. Everything is shared for the good of all members. This promotes the oneness of community members which Western societies do not promote. Communities in African tradition societies try by all means to look out for each other; there is no problem of high class or low class everyone is considered to be on the same level. Those who can not manage or struggle to manage (the sick, the old, the orphaned or widows) are taken care of by other members of the society those that have; just as the Acts of the Apostles are depicted in Acts 4: 34-35. In these verses the disciples lived in a community as one and every one shared all that they have. This can not be said of the Western world where individualism is on the increase because for them it is each person for themselves. This is contrary to what the Bible teaches in the Acts of the Apostles whose teachings and practice was a service and caring for one another.

In caring and looking out for each other; African tradition appreciates another important aspect which is the gift of life. Life that a human being is

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viewed as a very special gift from God; as a result a human being in African tradition societies is treated with the highest value that maintains a person's dignity.

Other aspects of African religion that the Westerners can learn from are prayer, worship and Spirituality. An African religion scholar J. S Mbiti analyses and gives a deeper insight into the prayer, worship and spirituality of African religion. In his analysis prayer is found to be very important in demonstrating African spirituality and the way of worship. He continues to say that prayer also shows us a deed insight into the religious and philosophical thought of the African people (Mbiti, 1975; 1).

These prayers are offered or made at different times and occasions. They are fashioned in accordance with the prevailing situation or circumstance. The prayers are offered to a supreme being believed to have the power to change and cause something to happen; because he is considered to be the originator of all things. This being has been given different names depending on the different peoples and their culture and tradition.

In most African traditions it is also believed that calamities that befall a society are as a result of God not happy and angry with the people. This is a unique feature and understanding that is not found in Western societies. In Western society science and human understanding and logic plays an important role in explaining the happenings in a society. With Africans there is a deep connection of what happens in societies with God; he is at the centre of it all. This Africans' tradition understanding to one of the hymns in Mission Praise with the title; " what a friend we have in Jesus" (Horrobin and

Leavers, 1990; no. 746). The hymn talks about acknowledging God in everything that happens in the world; getting God involved in all things through prayers.

The African tradition has incorporated the words in the hymn to better understand how God works in the society. Just as the song entails African tradition also presents all that happens before the Supreme Being for consideration. This is the spiritual part of African traditions and considered important and the only way that people are linked and communicate to God. Hence, this is a very important part of African worship. Just as Saint John the evangelist writes in his presentation of the gospel of Jesus that; “ God is Spirit and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and truth” (John 4: 24, NRSV).

All this shows that Christianity is supposed to be a unification of people of different cultures and background, not the imposition of a world culture or popular culture on another. Hence, Christianity should cater for all peoples, bringing with them their rich culture and traditions. It is not the abolishing of peoples traditions and cultures but the incorporation of these different traditions.

We have stated earlier that our surroundings determine our culture and tradition, it gives us the identity. Hence, every culture and tradition tries to apply Christianity according to what makes them who they are, i. e. according to their way of life. Christianity should find itself working and been relevant to the environment which shape peoples culture and makes them who they are. The same Jesus should be viewed and applied differently to

suit a particular society and not according to Western concept. They should not (the West) impose a culture on Africans but learn and understand the African culture so as to see Jesus do his work in these different and important unique cultures.