

# Christianity and traditional culture: a study of their judging principles that ge...

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CHRISTIANITY AND TRADITIONAL CULTURE: A STUDY OF THEIR JUDGING PRINCIPLES THAT GENERATE CONFLICT IN MODERN AFRICAN SOCIETIES BY OKE OLUFEMI femironaldo@yahoo. com 08033811961 DEPARTMENT OF CREATIVE ARTS UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS AKOKA YABA LAGOS, NIGERIA

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Christianity and Traditional Culture: A Study of their Judging Principles That Generate Conflict in Modern African Societies  
Introduction While growing up, most children depending on their kind of background and society tend to be taught that religion is different from tradition or culture. People tend to see a few religions as those that have a relationship with God with the belief that traditional culture is for the local people who have not accepted a foreign kind of worship. They therefore believe that tradition is for the traditionalists while religion is for those who have seen the light of a new kind of worship and belief system. This notion is debatable, misleading, and highly subjective amounting to falsehood because the religion of a people could be determined by their tradition, culture, custom, generational or ancestral beliefs, and their way of life. The relationship between religion and tradition goes beyond the people involved, but deals more with their beliefs, personal values, system of doing things, obsessions, and opinions. Religion can be seen as people's beliefs and opinions concerning the existence, nature, and worship of a deity or deities, and divine involvement in the universe and human life. It is also an institutionalized or personal system of beliefs and practices relating to the divine. This shows that religion does not necessarily imply the advent of different modes and beliefs of worship to a particular

god(s), but it could be a people or a person's personal belief in a particular deity and not necessarily a foreign one. The African Encyclopedia for Schools and Colleges (424) sees religion as including beliefs from all parts of the world about GODS. It goes further to say that; Some religions, for example Islam and Christianity, teach that there is only one God. There are many traditional religions which existed in Africa before Christianity and Islam were brought there, and these religions often have many Gods. Christians and Muslims often refer to followers of traditional religions as ' pagans', although some ' pagan' beliefs and customs are similar to those of Christianity,... The account here further reveals that because Africans had carved images as symbolic representations of the gods they worship and believe in, the Europeans referred to them as being fetish with the assumption that they were not worshipping God but carved objects and images. This assumption has been transferred through generations and has been the foundation for the belief that religion does not include traditional culture of a people, especially in Africa. Religion also provides a set of principles and rules that are expected to ordain the steps that followers should follow in order to be controlled in their ways of life and in the worship of their god(s). Religion, according to the Encyclopedia, also ensures that man carries out his duty to the god(s) and man. His duty to the gods include prayers, worship, offering of sacrifices, observing prohibitions which are sometimes called ' taboos' and when any of these are not done, there are punishments or certain misfortune that follow. Man's duty to man in religion also include keeping of societal morals, respect to elders, authorities, priests etc. Christianity as a focus of religion in this study is the worship of those who are followers of Jesus Christ.

They believe in the fact that He died and rose on the third day for the remission of their sins. It is a common fact among Christians that, anyone who does not surrender himself or herself to the doctrines of Jesus will not make heaven on the last day. According to the Holy Bible, which is the book of principles for the Christians, (King James Version); " For God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten son, that whosoever beliveth in Him, shall not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3: 16). This statement means that, the only way to heaven or to eternal life is through the worship and total belief in the person of Jesus and his principles. Many have argued even in other religions that this is not true because of their own beliefs and notions of worship albeit they all believe in the supremeness of God Almighty. Many other religions owe their allegiance and worship to one person, image, or medium in order to get to the almighty God and Christianity is not an exception. Little wonder they all believe that they are the ones on the right path. Traditional culture on the other hand is; ...the sum total of material and intellectual equipment whereby they (a people) satisfy their biological and social needs and adapt themselves to their environment. This, according to a sociologist named Piddington (3), is what culture entails. This shows that culture is the totality of the way of life evolved by a people in their attempts to meet the challenges of living in their environment and this gives order and meaning to their social, political, economic, aesthetic, and religious norms and modes of organization, thus distinguishing them from their neighbours. Culture like many other English words came from the Latin vocabulary ' cerele' which simply means to cultivate, tend, or till the soil. Hence, it is found in words such as agriculture,

aquaculture, horticulture, and floriculture. In religious field, the word 'cult' means a piece of worship for paying reverential homage, while in a secular sense the word means to take active care. This is why Hobbes equates the education of children as being "the culture of the mind". The researcher therefore believes that culture, in essence, deals with the totality of the life of a particular people in a society which can be said to include rules, code of conducts and norms guiding the people in a particular community. The culture of a people does not only refer to the customs of their past because it includes the sum total of their attitudes and their traditional values. This include some key elements which are, their language, fashion, food, greetings, value system, beliefs, myths, customs, norms and so on. Every society has its own principles governing conducts in which offences, sins and atrocities can be identified. The relationship between these two terms can be seen in the various definitions they have and this brings to bear the similarities they share and some of the reasons people from time to time misunderstand them. This study will however take a critical and unbiased examination and analysis of these as they affect other aspects of human life since they are most times the foundation of societal conflicts, violence and unrest especially in Africa. Conflict can simply be referred to as a struggle, fight, disagreement, tussle, clash, and incompatibility between two people, among groups or even within an individual based on various differences. Conflicts arise from different sources because of the nature of man and his environment. Man could be in conflict with himself, a situation that makes him do what he may not even believe he is capable of. Man could also be in conflict with another man, his family, his society or the general way of life in

the world. Societies could be in conflict with one another over different issues such as land dispute, superiority (as seen in the old days) and even over natural resources. In the Greek drama, most of the conflicts were between man and the gods and this could be seen in the fact that the fate of man then was decided by the gods without man's opinion of how it should go. In the medieval period, the conflict in their drama was between man and God with strong consideration of the deeds of man and the consequences. Humanity and the society became the subject of conflict from the renaissance drama and subsequent periods took their leads from this era in the area of conflict in drama. The reality of conflict in the lives of human beings cannot be over-emphasized because man confronts oppositions everyday of his life and because he lives in a society, the conflicts he faces begin to have their effect on the environment in which he lives and the society at large begins to feel the effect. Religion, culture, tradition, custom, economy, politics, and the society most times are the basis of conflict in the world and this can be seen in the works of various playwrights and authors as they try to portray life as it is. Conflict is part of life. It exists in different forms and within an individual, among peoples, groups, races, and nations and can be based on religious, economic or political and cultural differences. This study will however focus on the forms of conflicts that are generated from the struggle between religion and traditional culture especially in Africa with a deeper focus on Nigeria. Statement of Problem The researcher intends to examine and discover the major reasons that cause the negative and hostile nature of relationship between Christianity and traditional culture especially in Africa. Also the problem of the different forms of conflict and

conflict resolution in Christianity and traditional culture is a focus of discovery for the researcher in this study. This study therefore sets out to examine the points of misunderstanding between Christianity and traditional culture especially in the area of judging principles and means of diffusing such for future generations. Historical Background A. F. C. Ryder comments on the advent of Christianity in Nigeria when he traces the earliest attempts by Europeans to establish Christianity in the territory that later became modern Nigeria to the sixteenth century when the Portuguese gained inroads into the kingdoms of Benin and Warri. This move faced a lot of restrictions as they concentrated their early efforts on the rulers of these kingdoms with the belief that once these ones get converted to the Christian faith, it would be easier to get their people to do same. This did not really yield the desired result and little wonder it took a lot of years before interest in evangelizing the Christian faith was brought alive again by John Wesley in the late eighteenth century in Africa. E. A Ayandele (8) posits just like many other historians on the held beliefs in the mission of Christianity in Africa when he says that the Christian missions had a three-pronged mission of spreading the three C's: Christianity, Commerce and Civilization, the latter being their own type of civilization. These had serious effects on the traditional beliefs and culture of the African people who were divided at this point into those who were readily open to accepting these ' gifts', thereby betraying their people into accepting and the other group which the researcher believes were those who decided to stick to their beliefs and traditional culture. The communal nature of the African people before the advent of colonialism also stood as a barrier to the acceptance of the western ways of life, but as time

progressed, Africans began to give in to the pressure and seeming successes that the Christian missions were bringing to their society leading to what obtains today. The dialectic nature of religion and traditional culture can be traced to the advent of civilization and the communal will of the African people who even till now have not totally accepted the reign of foreign ideas over theirs in different spheres of their lives. Traditional culture and beliefs hold firm the fact that even though foreign cultures and religion brought to their territories during the colonial era may not be purged, their own beliefs must stand even in the midst of the foreign beliefs. The strength of traditional beliefs can even be seen in the Holy Bible of the Christians in the gospel according to Matthew where Jesus was invited to a traditional wedding and wine finished. Though he says his time has not come, the strength of the belief in the traditional rites and beliefs of his people made him perform his very first miracle by turning water to wine. According to James Haskins (9); Just as no line could be drawn to separate the religious practices of the West African nations from which the greatest number of slaves came, no line could be drawn between religious and nonreligious life. West African religion was not removed from life, not something thought about only on Sundays or only in the morning and night. It was deeply entwined in nearly every part of daily life. This statement shows the fact that Africans before the advent of colonialism had their own traditional religions and cultural beliefs that gave them hope of a better tomorrow and she further says; " Religion was first and foremost between the individual and the spirits he worshipped. And thus, in West Africa religion was very informal and very simple to understand and very ritualistic. " This goes further to



enumerate on the fact that the African religion was such that believed in the existence of supernatural beings or a particular being who all can look up to in times of need and will be answered. Even though this was a fact that stood the test of time, Ayodeji Olukoju (138) says that " In spite of the various setbacks and constraints, Christianity was firmly established in many parts of Nigeria by the beginning of the twentieth century. It turned out to be a potent factor in shaping the evolution of the Nigerian state. " This research therefore takes a critical examination of the impact of Christianity as a religion on the traditional cultures of the Nigerian people and the ensuing conflicts that are generated from the constant lack of understanding that prevail between these beliefs. Aims and Objectives \* This study aims at critically examining and evaluating the relationship between Christianity and traditional culture and the negative effects their conflicting principles and standpoints generate. \* The study also examines the influence of traditional culture on people's mode of religion acceptance and sincerity. \* The study also examines the converging and diverging points of Christianity and traditional culture as it relates to the Nigerian society with Otun's The Third World War and Eghagha's Death not a Redeemer as analytical sources. \* The study also examines the religious impact of Christianity on the traditional culture of the Nigerian people and the different antagonistic viewpoints.

Significance of the Study The significance of this study primarily lies in the fact that religion and traditional culture are closely related, yet seen as enemies hence the conflicts they generate. African traditional culture more or less is the basis of any kind of belief and world view that most traditional Africans boast of today and the researcher sees the need to critically venture

into this area in order to further dig into some areas not yet delved into. The researcher decides to focus on this area and try to trace the relationship between the judging principles of Christianity and traditional culture and their ensuing effect as they relate to the African society and the way of life of the people. This and particularly also, the need to add to scholarly materials already in existence on the topic of Christianity, traditional culture and conflict necessitates the need and significance of this study. The never static nature of the tradition and culture of a people, its evolvement over time, its dynamism, and reliability as a resource point for life and other ventures in life also brought about the uniqueness and relevance of this work to scholarly materials and articles already in existence on the subject. Hence, the researcher believes that, this study will add tremendously to the society at large in knowing more about the issue of Christianity and traditional culture in relationship with conflict in Africa.

**Theoretical Framework of Study**  
The researcher views this study from different theoretical standpoints and view which have direct relationship with the topic being treated. These views are sociological, cultural and Marxist theoretical standpoints. Sociological theoretical view considers art as a manifestation of society, one that contains metaphors and references directly applicable to the existing society at the time of its creation. This is the analysis based on the idea that art is a way of making a political statement, and that examination of a text will reveal some of the social, economic and political structures of a particular culture. According to Richard Courtney (148); The sociological study of drama considers how the culture pattern and the dramatic enactment inter-relate. That the dramatic expression of a community and its social structure

and beliefs are intertwined is an unquestioned fact. Cultural theorists are those who have taken it upon themselves to describe the conduct of their fellow citizens to their fellow citizens. Taking conduct in a very broad sense, including prominently that part of it which concerns moving ideas from one mind to another; to judge whether and how that conduct is wanting; and to suggest more desirable states of affairs. This therefore deals with the communal and societal lives of a people as they believe that these decide what is to be done about various aspects of our life in common (and even our several lives in private, which are inevitably tied to the common life); and many aspects of society are simply beyond the reach of (good) sociology. Marxist theory argues that language can be a tool by which members of one class can hold power over others. A Marxist critic examines texts for themes of social justice, class structure, and the unequal distribution of resources and social status, among others. In Marxist ideology, what we often classify as a world view (such as the Victorian age) is actually the articulations of the dominant class. Marxism generally focuses on the clash between the dominant and repressed classes in any given age and also may encourage art to imitate what is often termed an objective reality. Methodology of Study The researcher views this study from the analytical and experiential points of view hence the methodology of research involves mainly the library and experience gathered from the society. The various dramatic works that are selected for analysis also help a lot in gathering information on the issues of religion, Christianity, traditional culture, and conflict. The choice of the plays selected is because of their richness in the issue of conflict that are generated through the lack of understanding between Christianity and

traditional culture of different people. The researcher also intends to use the field trip method in order to get first hand information from people in the rural areas and locations. The researcher believes that the opinions and views of the dwellers on this subject will aid in knowing how they feel about the seeming neglect of their ancestral beliefs and traditional cultures. The secondary data used for gathering information are related books, internet, journals, and other such sources on the issue of Christianity, traditional culture and conflict.

**Scope of Study** This study examines “ Christianity and Traditional Culture: A Study of their Judging Principles That Generate Conflict in Modern African Societies. The central idea of this research revolves round Christianity, traditional culture and conflict and these three terms and their influence on one another in African societies is the major focus of this study. The study is therefore limited to an exploration of the inter-wovenness, relationship, similarities, differences, and the place of Christianity and traditional culture in conflict and conflict resolution. This study therefore solely focuses on the relationship between Christianity, traditional culture and conflict using a few dramatic works as case studies.

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