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## The Impact of Christianity on African Tradition and Culture: X-Raying the Conflicts

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### ABSTRACT

This research is focused on “the impact of Christianity on African tradition and culture: x-raying the conflicts”. Culture is any society’s way of life while conflicts are issues or crises which occur between two parties. The part played by Christianity towards the changes that have occurred in the society of Africa especially as it relates to her culture cannot be over-emphasized. Christianity affirms that Jesus of Nazareth is Christ the “Son of God” and is a foreign religion imported into Africa while the traditional religion is the indigenous faith of the Africans that believe in gods, divinities and spirits. Today, Christianity is one of the major religions in Africa with a significant numerical strength as well as a profound social, economic, political, and religious influence. Since its establishment, Christianity has made great achievements in the areas of education, healthcare, and rural development. However, change is the only thing that is constant in human life and as such it is inevitable in human interaction. Rapid social change in Africa, owing to the Western influence in the second part of the nineteenth century helped to transform a very simple, harmonious and homogenous society into a complex and heterogeneous one. There have been and there are still ongoing conflicts between Christianity and African traditional religions in the area of worship, rites, culture, etc. This research analyzed an overview of African culture, Christ and culture, the impact of Christianity on African social life and the impact of Christianity on African cultural practices. The study made use of historical and analytical methods as well as the utilization of books, internet sources and journal articles for proper clarity. It therefore recommends amongst others that cultural curriculum be built into our educational system from primary schools down to tertiary institutions for the preservation of African cultural heritage.

## INTRODUCTION

Christianity finds itself today in numerous cultures. Her encounters with different cultures come with attendant challenges. In Africa, one can notice these challenges after numerous years of the existence of Christianity and such challenges have become visible elements of contemporary religious experience in the land. How are these being expressed in the 21st century and what does it mean for Christianity in the area?

The Christian message was communicated to African people as good news that supersedes all traditional means of answering questions of ill-health, poverty, infertility and lots more. With a myriad of socio-political, economic and spiritual concerns and needs, so many Christians in Africa seem to be heavily in doubt about the hope they had once cherished and in some cases were preached into believing. This doubt and its evident manifestations are the predictors of the crisis of religious commitment we have recently seen people live out. With over a century of the presence of Christianity in Africa, Christianity seems to be receiving a cold shake amid a filled cathedral, lavish structures and seeming ecclesiastical growth. What factors account for this situation? What best attempts can solve the problem? What essentially does this reaction say about African conversion to Christianity? These concerns have remained a recurrent theme amongst some scholars of religion and theologians. In the main, some quickly write it off as manifestations of a liberal culture. For others, it is a consequence of resentment over missionary and colonial control. Still others are more deepened in their analysis to discover that this situation represents at best, confusion traceable to false or deceptive conversion. Ibenwa belongs to the latter category and he identifies the situation thus:

Some of those converted in the mission schools and who now constitute the African elite, have abandoned the true faith, some others who still profess Christianity are corrupt politicians, fraudulent

government officials or dubious men and women, whose private moral lives, are tainted by the materialistic and hedonistic culture of the day cannot be said to be any better than that of their non-Christian counterparts.... There is thus a dislocation between the theory expressed in ecclesiastical documents and the practical life of many Africans recently converted to Christianity (Ibenwa 2014, 13).<sup>1</sup>

This is exactly the Nigerian state with the reality of lack of authentic Christian followership and the accompanying watering down of Christian values are true indicators of a grave state of dismay and disillusionment among Christians in Africa. It is obvious today that many Christians live hypocritical spiritual lives. While professing faith and avowed allegiance to the Christian faith, they have also secretly refused to disconnect from the practices of their primal religion. This ambivalence of commitment constantly invites a keen reflection on the quality of faith passed on to the African people, the method of proselytisation, and the degree to which the Christian faith has been internalised.

African people have a rich spiritual, cultural, and religious heritage. This statement carries with it significant and multiple implications. It means that as historically discovered during pre-missionary times, an average African man finds answers to all of his problems in the domain of religion. His religion provided solutions to domestic and spiritual worries varying from sickness, famine, infertility, hunger, and even death. It practically means that for a religion to remain true and acceptable to an African man or woman, it must carry with it answers to existential questions and challenges. Christianity has in times past and at present impacted so much of African culture in general and it is still doing so now. Against this backdrop, (Ugwu as cited in Ibenwa 2014)<sup>2</sup> said, that although the imported world religions have brought in some positive influences or possible effects on

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<sup>1</sup> C. N. Ibenwa. 2014. Influences of Christian religion on African traditional religion and value system. *Research on Humanities and Social Science*, 4(3), 13

(Afterwards cited: Ibenwa. 13)<sup>2</sup>

the Nigerian communities, they have also dealt a staggering blow on our social, economic, religious and political systems.

### **African Culture: An Overview**

The African traditional society is a homogenous and close one with unique characteristic features that set it apart from other cultures of the world. The culture of Africa is varied and manifold; consisting of a mixture of countries with various tribes that each has their unique characteristic from the continent of Africa. African culture is expressed in its arts and crafts, folklore and religion, clothing, cuisine, music and languages. Beliefs and practices in Africa like Caste-system, killing of twins and people with albinism, burying of chiefs/kings with slaves, witch-crafting and obnoxious cultural practices against women and widows etc appear to be evil in contemporary society and therefore, need to be sermonized against so as to review them in the light of religion like Christianity (Adibe 2022, 17).<sup>3</sup>

Cultures are abundant in Africa with large cultural diversity being found not only across different countries but also within a single country. Even though African cultures are widely diverse, they are also seen to have many similarities. For example, the morals they uphold, their love and respect for their culture as well as the strong respect they hold for the gods and the importance of Kings and Chiefs (Mbiti 1970, 28).<sup>4</sup>

Culture is the totality of the way of life evolved by a people in their attempts to meet the challenge of living in their environment, which gives order and meaning to their social, political, economic, aesthetic, and religious norms thus distinguishing a people

from their neighbours, (Bello 1991, 22).<sup>5</sup>

Culture serves to distinguish a people from others, and (Aziza 2001, 45)<sup>6</sup> asserts that:

Culture refers to the totality of the pattern of behaviour 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 passage from birth, through marriage to death, traditional occupations, religious as well as philosophical beliefs.

“Culture is passed on from generation to generation. The acquisition of culture is a result of the socialization process” (Idang 2015, 99)<sup>7</sup>. Explaining how culture is passed on as a generational heritage, (Fafunwa 1974, 66)<sup>8</sup> writes that the child just grows into and within the cultural heritage of his people, he imbibes its culture in traditional society and is not taught. 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. Obviously, (Madu 2004, 31),<sup>9</sup> opines that:

The child in a traditional society cannot escape his cultural and physical environment. This shows that every human being who grows up in a particular society is likely to become infused with the culture of that society, whether knowingly or unknowingly during the process of social interaction.

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<sup>3</sup> G. E. M. Adibe. 2022. *The crisis of faith and morality of the Igbo Christianity of Nigeria*. Onitsha: Tabansi press. 17

<sup>4</sup> J. S. Mbiti. 1970. *African religion and philosophy* London: Publishers Heinemann educational Books. 28

<sup>5</sup> S. Bello. 1991. *Culture and decision making in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Hope Publication.

<sup>6</sup> R. C. Aziza. 2001. The relationship between Language use and survival of culture: The case of Umobo youth. *Nigerian Language Studies*, 4, 45

<sup>7</sup> G. E. Idang. 2015. African culture and values. *Phronimon (UNISA)*, 16(2), 99

<sup>8</sup> A. B. Fafunwa. 1974. *History of the work concept: From physics to economics*. New York: Springer. 66

<sup>9</sup> I. E. Madu. 2004. *Honesty in African cultural heritage*. Calabar: Franeth. Publisher. 31

Africa has influenced and been influenced by other continents. This can be portrayed in the willingness to adapt to the ever-changing modern world rather than staying rooted in their static culture. One of the ways Africa as a continent has been influenced is through Christianity which is the focus of the work. On the other hand, Christianity is not a culture, but the Christian faith can be expressed and communicated only through cultural media. A Christian is a person who has accepted the Christian faith and made a firm decision to become a follower of Jesus Christ. To become a Christian is to accept Jesus Christ and his teachings as prescribed in the Christian scriptures and maintained by the church. The question as to what constitutes authentic Christian tradition is complicated by the existence of numerous Christian denominations. However, there is no doubt that the need for cultural freedom and cultural identity has been an important factor in the establishment of Independent African Churches during the colonial period. According to (Onyeidu 2021, 51),<sup>10</sup> "an African cannot choose the ethnic community into which one is born, so it is almost impossible for him to dissociate from his religious heritage and cultural background".

### **Christ and Culture**

Jesus Christ appears to be a revolutionist (Matt.10:49-53). His teachings brought about serious conflicts but he said he did not come to abolish the law and the prophets, but to fulfil them (Matt. 5:17). Therefore, Christ did not intentionally come to destroy all that stood for culture in the days of His earthly ministry. Jesus was subjected to the culture of circumcision, formal naming ceremony and dedication service. All these were done as prescribed by the culture prevalent in His day (Luke 2:21-24 cf Lev. 12:1). If the culture and rites were not appealing to God, God should have stopped such rites and practice through an Angel. These cultural rites are still practised in many African communities.

The reason why Christ involved himself in the culture of baptism and other related ones was to fulfil all righteousness and that was how he put it. John tried to object to it when Jesus came to him for baptism but Christ refused and insisted (Matt. 3:15). Finance was an issue that came his way as his disciples were asked to pay tax. This finance-sourcing culture of the Jews was rightly responded to by Jesus when he told Peter that these taxes were charged from "strangers" only, thus as Jews, they were not bound but free and should therefore pay. But on reaching Capernaum, Jesus directed Peter on how to obtain money from the mouth of the fish for the defrayal of their taxes, in order not to offend them (Matt. 17:24-27). It is proper that the scripture or Bible be interpreted in the light of African culture to have in-depth meaning in the lives of Africans. In the Jewish tradition, a woman who had an issue of blood was seen to be unclean and should not touch anybody (Lev. 15:19-24). This brought a serious and immediate response from Jesus as the woman with the issue of blood touched him (Mark 5:30). Jesus said that her faith had made her whole.

However, Jesus' response to the dilemma of the disciples on whether or not taxes should be paid to Caesar is a clear indication that he had respect for constituted authority and wanted his disciples to do the same. He asked whose image was on the currency of their time and they confirmed that it was Caesar's. Thus, Jesus said "Render to Caesar the things which are Caesar's and unto God the things which are God's (Matt. 22:15-21). This points to the fact that Jesus did not condemn this culture and that it was not detrimental to the cause of God's kingdom.

On divorce and other related marital issues, Jesus upheld the culture of divorce on the grounds of infidelity but placed a clause that both he that divorces and the woman divorced should not remarry otherwise they have committed adultery, (Nmah 2004, 167).<sup>11</sup> He even visited or attended the marriage

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<sup>10</sup> S. O. Onyeidu. 2021. *African traditional religion*. Umuahia: Essay Quality press and Series Publishers. 51

<sup>11</sup> P. E. Nmah. 2008. *Religion and society in Africa*. Enugu: Rabonni. 167

ceremony at Canaan of Galilee where he provided wine (Matt 19:9, John 2:1-11).

We should also understand that Christ is above culture. He was seen as the Messiah, Lord, Christ, Son of God and Son of Man. Jesus was not comfortable with the idea of the people about the Sabbath. He was criticized for healing on the Sabbath day. His disciples were rebuked or criticized for plugging corn or maize on the Sabbath day. All these made Jesus respond to the Jews with questions to which they could not proffer answers. Hence, he said that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath. He strictly said that they should understand that "the Son of Man is the Lord of the Sabbath".

Our culture should not be made to enslave us and it is important to note that any culture that is not dynamic that is, to change for the betterment of its people as new generations crop up is not fit to be called culture. Yes, culture can be abolished when it is no longer contributing to the development of the human person in society. Remember, culture was made by man and can be changed by man.

### **Impact of Christianity on African Social Life**

In Africa, the people strictly observed the religion and culture of their communities (Chuta 1992, 71).<sup>12</sup> Foreign religion (Christianity) and the cultural baggage which accompanied their preaching have been identified to be responsible for the disorganised and rebellious state of affairs in Africa. This cultural baggage (that is, education and urbanisation) served as the sweet pills with which Africans were enticed and captured, (Ozigbo 1988, 43).<sup>13</sup> No wonder, (Wood 1942, 19),<sup>14</sup> aptly remarked that Judaism, Christianity and Islam have all acted as social revolutionary forces in our societies. It should be noted that some of the changes are inevitable because they are a part of the survival strategy; others are irresistible in the presence of conquering culture. A

reinterpretation of the theme has, therefore, shown a few instances of those changes.

For instance, the introduction of Christianity and Islam in Africa marked the beginning of religious pluralism on the continent. It is evident that "a whole system of taboos and ritual of ordination has controlled the entire life of Africans", (Jordan 1948, 27).<sup>15</sup> These whole systems of taboos and rituals of ordination that controlled their entire life were expanded by (Onyeidu 2021, 65)<sup>16</sup> to include: "swearing of oath, making of blood pact, trial by ordeal, oracles, vows, secret societies and the meticulous observation of customs and traditions". Unfortunately, these whole systems of taboos and rituals are no longer strictly observed because of the influences of Christian doctrines and this perhaps explains why there are so many crimes in the indigenous communities today (Ibenwa 2014, 11).<sup>17</sup>

Again, in contact with the Europeans, Christianity condemned polygamy and upheld monogamy. Still, on the influence, the introduction of Western education in Africa brought Western ideas of rationalism and individualism into Africa, (Chuta 1992, 62).<sup>18</sup> Many Africans began to doubt their religious traditions and subsequently decided to live without them, and that was the inception of secularism in Africa. There in school, the children acquired a whole body of new teachings, touching on all aspects of human existence, and these were openly and widely advertised as antithetical to the African way of life. Western education weaned African children from the control and influence of their families. Another direction where Christianity excelled was in the area of reducing discrimination against women in traditional society. There is no gain saying the fact, that women are seriously discriminated against and very few of them were given the opportunity by their parents to acquire higher education. For some women, their parents

<sup>12</sup> S. C. Chuta. 1992. *Religion and social control in traditional African societies*. Lagos: Mecklink Publishers. 71

<sup>13</sup> J. R. A. Ozigbo. 1988. *African responses to Christianity and Islam: The case of West African*. Benin: Vivian publishers. 43

<sup>14</sup> A. Wood. 1942. *Christianity and civilization: Current problem*. Cambridge: Cambridge University press. 19

<sup>15</sup> J. P. Jordan. 1948. *Bishop Shanahan of southern Nigeria*. Dublin: Glonmore and Reynolds. 27

<sup>16</sup> (Afterwards cited: Onyeidu. 65)

(Afterwards cited: Ibenwa. 11)<sup>17</sup>

<sup>18</sup> (Afterwards cited: Chuta. 62)

arranged their marriage and imposed husbands on them contrary to their wishes. Other areas of influence are patterns of dressing, greetings, occupation, design of houses, politics etc. Furthermore, Christianity helped in the character modification of our children and made our young ones imbibe such virtues as love for one another, truth, obedience and respect for elders, parents and people in authority.

### **Impact of Christianity on African Cultural Practices**

With the advent of Christianity in Africa, certain cultural practices are going to extinction as Christians were not allowed to indulge in them. They are as follows;

#### **Reduction of practicing Sorcery, Magic Charms, and Witchcraft:**

In traditional society, when something goes wrong in the welfare of the individual or his family, he immediately wonders who had caused it to happen. In most cases, the individual would suspect that someone had used evil magic, sorcery, or witchcraft against him or his household, animals, or fields. Whereas traditional religionists hate and fear these forces, Christians do not believe that sorcerers, witches, and charms have any effect on people or their property. Christians condemned magic; they used prayers and sacraments to drive away dangers and difficulties. In situations where a diviner (native doctor) was consulted for solutions due to family problems and to appease the gods, Christian converts in the family always insist that prayer through their priests would be the solution (Okeke, Ibenwa, & Okeke, 2017, 48).<sup>19</sup>

According to (Sibani 2014, 71):<sup>20</sup>

It is a general belief that when the witch eats the flesh of a person, the

person becomes weak and sick sometimes resulting in the death of the victim. Some weak Christians are very afraid of witches while others stand to exercise the power of God in them against the power of Witchcraft and sorcery.

The Bible recognizes sorcery and witchcraft, but it does not make a strong distinction between the two (Micah 5:12. Nah. 3:4, Deut 18:10-11, Isaiah 479, 12). The Bible recognizes that spells, curses and people such as witches and sorcerers have power. Yes, all these have powers but their power is nothing compared to the power of the Almighty God (Isaiah 47:9). Jesus Christ, who lives in the heart of a Christian is infinitely more powerful than the power of any sorcerer, witch, evil spirit or evil power in the universe. Obviously, (Nmah 2008, 167),<sup>21</sup> is of the view that such powers are terrified in the presence of Christ, who dwells in the heart of a Christian (Acts 8:9-24). Witchcraft exhibits itself in many ways, the commonest being illnesses that are difficult to diagnose and cure, resulting in sudden mysterious deaths.

#### **Impact on African Modes of Worship:**

Worship comprises all modes of giving expression to the various feelings toward the divine power, feelings of awe, reverence, obligation, depreciation, gratitude, hope, and others. "Africans profess traditional religion, and worship the Supreme Being through many minor gods or divinities. Those who profess Christianity, worship God directly through church services, prayers, songs, meditation, and through other various services" (Okolo 1979).<sup>22</sup>

There are shrines erected for the worship of the lesser gods by the traditionalists. There is no shrine for the worship of the Supreme God because it is believed that the Supreme God is invisible and his domain is the

<sup>19</sup> C. O. Okeke, C. N. Ibenwa, & G. T. Okeke, 2017. Conflicts between African Traditional Religion and Christianity in Eastern Nigeria: The Igbo Example. *Sage Open Journals* 7. 44-57. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full>

<sup>20</sup> C. M. Sibani. 2014. *Fundamentals of religion and culture in African society*. Enugu: Frankpana. 72

<sup>21</sup> (Afterwards cited: Nmah. 167)

M. S. C. Okolo. 1979. *African literature as political philosophy*. <sup>22</sup>  
<https://onlineproject.com.ng/64086/the-influence-of-christianity-on-burial-rites-in-nigeria/education/>

sky and also, He is a transcendent God. For this reason, they make use of the minor gods and ancestors called intermediaries. For Christians, the worship of God is effectively performed by the ordained priests and their agents, the catechist, and lay readers. They regard the holy saints and angels as God's messengers, (Sakamoto 2022, 38)<sup>23</sup>

Christians also oppose certain aspects of traditional worship such as human sacrifice, blood sacrifice, twin killing, and other fetish items used in sacrifice. Based on this Christian belief, new converts no longer partake in traditional family festivals and thanksgiving. Their parents or guardians see this as a rebellion that deserves punishment because they believe that the sin of one member of the family affects the whole family (Okeke, Ibenwa & Okeke 2017, 51).<sup>24</sup>

### **Massive Destruction/Demolition of Shrines and Sacred Grooves**

The massive destruction/demolition of shrines and sacred groves is another conflict area. Perhaps, this explains why (Wotogbe 2013, 47)<sup>25</sup> opines, "The huge resources that would otherwise be generated through the tourism industry which is encouraged by the government nowadays is lost through reckless destruction of sacred groves". Most of these groves house costly masks that were traded by barter for a piece of singlet, sugar, or mirror to the missionaries, which today are displayed for tourist attraction in many European museums. Christianity believes that God is worshipped in the church not in groves, and as such, wasting the groves for idol worship was not acceptable to them.

Suffice it to say that so many churches bought forests which is seen to be "evil forest" for church buildings. In some communities, most of the dreaded areas known to be the abode of the malignant spirit were donated to churches for them to contend with the gods. Churches took over these areas and built massive

structures for the development of those communities.

### **Birth and Naming Rites in Traditional African Culture in Conflict with the Christian Faith**

In African culture, the birth of a child is accompanied by various rites, which involve the presentation of the child to the ancestors and the cleansing of the mother from the "pollution" at birth. According to (Uwalaka 2001, 22),<sup>26</sup> cleansing from the pollution of childbirth may be performed after three native days depending on the part of the Igbo nation. This practice is also the same in Christianity, where a woman after childbirth offers live animals and a special cleansing prayer to God, for readmittance into the Christian folk (see Leviticus 12:1-8 and Luke 2:22-24). According to (Sibani 2009, 46-47),<sup>27</sup>

Traditionally speaking, as soon as a child is born in an African community, he becomes a member of the community and relatives visit to present gifts. Drinking and eating ceremonies are organized social encounters in which the living and the dead are brought together to rejoice at the admission of a new member into the community. The umbilicus of the child is taken into the social family or community shrine where the child will be initiated into membership connected with the ancestral world, for protection and intimacy. This practice is mostly found among the Ogonis, Igbos, etc. and this in every ramification is like sacrificing the child to the power that rules the unseen world.

The missionaries and the present-day church have condemned such practice of initiating/dedicating the child to the ancestors to be fetish and evil. The church has destroyed such cultural rites from the pulpit by preaching against them.

<sup>23</sup> K. Sakamoto. 2022. *Social development, culture, and participation*. Yohamama-shi, Japan: Shumpusha Publishing.

(Afterwards cited: Okeke, Ibenwa & Okeke. 51).<sup>24</sup>

<sup>25</sup> W. O. Wotogbe. 2013. Ikwerre indigenous religious beliefs and practices. *Elechi Amadi's Works with References to the Concubine*. 47.

<sup>26</sup> A. Uwalaka. 2001. *The anguish of Igbo as a mother tongue: Internal and external conflicts*. Awka: Enicrowfit Publishers. 22

<sup>27</sup> C. M. Sibani. 2009. *The acceptable sacrifice*. Port Harcourt: House of Graphics. 46-47

After that, the naming of the child and its presentation to the people follows. Some factors determine the name given to a child, and this is where conflict arises with Christian belief. According to (Ukaoha 2014, 39),<sup>28</sup> three factors that usually determine the name given to a child are as follows:

1. The day of the native week on which the child is born (and Christianity believes that the days of the Igbo native week: *Eke, Orië, Afò*, and *Nkwò* are named after deities. But they forgot that apart from August, named after Caesar Augustus, January to December are all names of Jewish deities;
2. The historical incident peculiar to the child's birth or to the circumstances of the parents;
3. The philosophical or socio-religious faith, which the child stimulates in the parents.

The naming of the child and the rites performed are always done through divination. Some Names given to children in Africa are circumstantial and they are also named after a deity or given name because of reincarnation. In opposition, Christians do not accept the traditional beliefs of naming ceremonies. Christians believe that as God is the creator of every human being, names should relate to Him. Often coercion is used to force Christians to perform the naming rights. Of course, some Christians do resist and it generates conflicts (Sibani 2009, 49).<sup>29</sup>

### **Christianity against Traditional Initiation Rites**

Christians have no puberty ceremonial rites. Children are baptized sometimes as infants, in their early youth, and sometimes in later years as the case may be. Christians in Africa vehemently oppose the traditional rites of puberty, which they regard as heathenish and ungodly. The initiation into the masquerade cult is still causing a lot of conflicts between fanatical Christians and the traditionalists, (Okeke, Ibenwa & Okeke 2017, 54).<sup>30</sup>

### **Conflict on Rites in African Marriage and Customs:**

Christian marriage is different from traditional marriage in Africa. In traditional marriage, the religious aspects include the preliminary divination by which the young man who seeks a wife is enabled to find out from what clan or lineage his Chi (Guardian Spirit) permits him to take a wife of fortune. When the diviner pronounces the clan or lineage and the girl is found, all the preliminaries are finished and the bride price is paid, the girl is ready to go and settle in her new husband's home. Christians are opposed to this aspect of traditional marriage. They contend that their way of marriage is the ideal as revealed by God. But how far is the ideal Christian marriage as revealed by God separable from the traditional marriage? This is the question often asked by some traditionalists. They argue that Christian marriage and many Christian families are failures in traditional marriage life, going by the number of Christian divorces prevalent now (Chuta 2021, 69).<sup>31</sup>

Another area of conflict is polygyny. The traditionalists believe that the number of wives a man has is a show of his opulence. The number of wives often determines the number of children and one of the major reasons for having many children is to have enough labour for farming, which is their major occupation. However, the idea of Polygyny runs contrary to the Christian doctrine of monogamy, which believes in one man, and one wife. Many Christians are in a dilemma when they have marital problems such as childlessness or the problem of gender mix in the children. If ever the man defies the church order and marries more than one wife, he is seen as a backslider and denied the Holy Communion and other church rights, (Sibani 2014, 129).<sup>32</sup>

### **Reduction of Obnoxious Cultural Practices (Widowhood Practice)**

Widowhood practice in Africa especially Igbo land is characterized by a serious accusation against the widow of killing her husband;

<sup>28</sup> E. I. Ukaoha. 2014. *Conflict between African traditional religion and Christianity*. Enugu: Okolex Publishers.<sup>39</sup>

(Afterwards cited: Sibani. 49).<sup>29</sup>

(Afterwards cited: Okeke, Ibenwa & Okeke. 54).<sup>30</sup>

<sup>31</sup> (Afterwards cited: Chuta. 62)

(Afterwards cited: Sibani. 129).<sup>32</sup>



hence she is termed a murderer. Widows are denied property inheritance by the in-laws, disinheritance of the husband's bank account (i.e. finance), some are even ostracized, prohibited from seeing the husband's corpse and as well as forced to drink the corpse's water. Also, a situation where a widow is treated as chattel by being forced to remarry a relation of the late husband; the husband's brother will then inherit her alongside her husband's property. This is seen as levirate marriage (Sibani 2014, 39).<sup>33</sup> It is pertinent to point out that some men believe that some of these harmful widowhood practices are sacrosanct. They do not realize that these practices have remained so long because nobody has queried them. An evil practice, which remains unchallenged for some time, tends to become a custom. Most of our women lack the courage to question these evil and atavistic practices.

Christianity has brought freedom from bondage to women in the light of cultural practices. Today, in some areas, widows now see the remains of their husbands, the age-long traumatic maltreatment of widows has been abolished; widows have been liberated from the emotional and psychological torment inflicted upon them, by lecherous men who take advantage of them by turning them into a free for all sex object, due to church interventions. Yes, the church can save widows from the traumatic experience they receive.

Women's education is very necessary in our modern world most especially in our rural communities where these practices are burning very high. The government should collaborate with non-government organizations (NGOs) to salvage this ugly situation. These NGOs include Women in Development-Network (WID-N), FIDA, Widows Development Organization (WIDO), Society for the Welfare of Women Prisoners (SWEWP), and Widow Organization International (WO) to name a few.

It is also important that Widows voice out their plights for urgent intervention. Widows are tormented by fear of the wagging tongues of members of the community, fear of the sanctions of the *Umuada* (first daughters), fear of breaking one taboo or another, fear of stigmatization, or of ostracism, fear of being dispossessed of family property, fear of being thrown out of the matrimonial home, it is fear that holds widows down. Fear keeps widows chained to a hopeless and helpless acceptance of all manner of dehumanization. The outcry of widows will help to bring so much attention to their intervention. To this end, (Okoye 2000, 13),<sup>34</sup> says that "as battles against these nefarious acts towards widows are ongoing in several areas of the Nigerian States; we should not forget that violence against women directly and subtly affect men, women and even children". It calls for the consciousness of our women and above all, to cry out against criminal harmful widowhood rites and practices. Offenders should be punishable under laws of the States enacted against this wickedness.

### **Impact on Burial Rites and Ceremonies**

One of the other areas of conflict between the traditional religion and Christianity in Africa is in burial ceremonies. The traditional religious view of the African concept of death is that a man is dead when his soul leaves the body for the land of the dead (Eke 2014, 16).<sup>35</sup> The traditionalist performs some ritualistic ceremonies before burying a dead person while Christians oppose such ceremonies. In African traditional society, there are rituals concerning the preparation of the corpse for burial. Diviners are consulted to find out the cause of death. In the olden days, the traditionalists buried important personalities, chiefs, and titled men with people who were alive. The aim is to give the deceased company to the land of the spirits. Other material wealth such as gold, money and many other ornaments were buried with dead bodies.

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(Afterwards cited: Sibani. 39).<sup>33</sup>

<sup>34</sup> P. U. Okoye. 2000. *Harmful widowhood practices in Anambra state: The new millennium strategies for eradication*. Enugu: Nucik. 13

<sup>35</sup> N. N. Eke. 2014. *The Igbo concept of death by suicide and its religious, moral and social*

*implications*. An unpublished Doctoral Dissertation presented to the Department of Religion and Cultural Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. 16

Nnamdi, C. (Oral Interview 2016)<sup>36</sup> states that the early missionaries frowned at second burial rites practice in Africa. He said after a year or more, the second burial would take place with more elaborate ceremonies than the first. If the second burial was not performed, the proper inheritance of the late father's property would not occur (this is still in existence in some Igbo communities such as Iwolo, Nenwe and Nkanu in Enugu State, Ohaozaro, and Abiriba in Abia State). Christians challenged many traditional burial ceremonies and opposed the traditional second burial rites. And, traditional religionists believe that this burial rite helps the spirit of the dead person reach the spirit world, join his ancestors, and enable him or her to reincarnate.

Oreh identifies the principal dehumanizing widowhood rites and practices to include the following: drinking water used in washing the husband's corpse, crawling over the husband's corpse, long mourning and restriction period, loss of right of inheritance (if she has no male child), sitting on bare floor during the period of mourning, a widow not having bath until eight market days (28 days), and so forth. Christianity frowns at such practices and warns its members never to partake in them, (Oreh 2014, 10).<sup>37</sup>

### **Reduction in the Practice of Ancestor Worship**

Christianity has always stood against the worship of ancestors in African cosmology. The instruction given by God thus; "You shall have no other gods before or beside me" controls their faith and strict reverence for the monotheism of the one and only true God. The act of ancestor veneration in Africa has generated conflicts between Christians and traditional worshippers. Christians instruct

their adherents not to submit to ancestral worship. Mbiti posits that when a person dies, his soul or spirit wanders around the bush until his relatives perform the necessary and befitting burial rites. The waiting stage before the incorporation of the deceased into the world of the dead is called the transitional period of the deceased. The ancestors as believed by Africans wield tremendous powers of blessings and power of curse. After the interment of a fulfilled elder, and after the obsequies must have been completed, the family usually or the Igbos, the *okpala* (the first male child in the family), erects a shrine and creates an *okposi* (*ofo* like sticks) for venerating the spirit of the dead through prayers and sacrifices (Mbiti 1970, 33)<sup>38</sup>

According to (Ifemesia 2020, 67)<sup>39</sup>:

Sometimes the dead ancestor may reincarnate into their families. They believe that the dead ancestors do not come back in their original forms; rather, they become especially interested in the newborn child, who they say may inherit some of the ancestors' characteristics. The ancestor becomes the tutelary spirit of the child and sees to the well-being of the child. The Africans regard these ancestors as the special guardians of morality and they create shrines in their honor, as well as creating symbolic references to their existence.

An African man views ancestors as a representation of justice, righteousness, and truth. They stand for fair play, innocence, trust, good luck, peace, equity, sacredness, good moral conduct, good leadership, accountability, and honesty.

### **Reduction of Diviners and Medicine Men in Africa**

(Afterwards cited: Mbiti. Op. Cit. 33)<sup>38</sup>

<sup>39</sup> C. C. Ifemesia. 2020. The Social and cultural impact of Christian missionaries on West African in 19th and 20th Centuries. *West African religion*, 12, 67-68.

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<sup>36</sup> C. Nnamdi. Oral Interview 2016. *The influence of Christianity on burial rites in Nigeria*. <https://onlineproject.com.ng/64086/the-influence-of-christianity-on-burial-rites-in-nigeria/education>.

<sup>37</sup> C. I. Oreh. 2014. *Igbo cultural widowhood practices: Reflections on inadvertent weapons of retrogression in community development*. 80th inaugural lecture, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. 10

Diviners are those who foretell the future and are just like prophets in the Christian religion. Christianity taught and saw diviners as operating with false powers (spirits) and made their followers disregard them. They condemned the place and relevance of medicine men in Africa. These were men who used herbs and roots as antidotes for different ailments as directed and revealed by the spirits etc. Diviners and medicine men reported that the divinities were angry because of the new religion and warned that nobody should join the missionaries. Christianity termed the Diviners and Medicine men as those who are operating with evil and fetish powers and immediately discouraged Africans from patronizing or consulting them for solutions but should rather see God through the church as a solution to their challenges. Others refused to embrace the new religion because they thought that the missionaries wanted to destroy their culture.

Despite these reasons and threats, Christianity began to win converts in Africa. Christianity in Nigeria had community church-school teachers called church agents. These agents were very active in moulding the attitude of the converts, especially the young, toward the traditional society. Most of them were half-educated and in many cases utterly misguided, contributing significantly to open disrespect for and disregard of the society's time-honoured customs and religious practices. Churches and schools were built and youths and children were made to attend schools. These children were adolescents and they were campaigners for converts to Christianity. This method of conversion conforms to (Ifemesia 2020, 70) assertion, which states: "The Christian missionaries were the object of education and religious instruction, and converting the younger people into Christianity was easier since the young were believed not to be rooted in the ancestral ideas and practices as their fathers".

## Conclusion

The activities of Christian missionaries greatly changed the religious landscape in Africa, however, many of the basic features of their

indigenous beliefs and practices have survived to this day. Also, Christianity reappraise the specific strategies that prevailed during the entire missionary process and aimed at providing an assessment of the impact of these strategies on the Christian converts. This rendered the African Christian populace into a heightened vulnerability to unhealthy religious conflicts. It also caused catastrophic identity diffusion among these converts as some did not find the ultimate answers to their life's questions within Christian folds. The socio-cultural impact of Christianity on Africans reveals resistance from traditional Africans and the decline of our cultural heritage. However, Christianity brought in formal education, a modern healthcare system, change in the political system, change and modernization of culture etc. in Africa. These impacts have become blessings in disguise in Africa, hence the conflicts.

## Recommendations

This research gives the following suggestions for continuous critical analysis:

1. It will be tantamount to gross academic misconduct for scholars to make derogatory and inflammatory remarks on the religious beliefs and practices of other people without an empirical thorough systematic study, therefore they should make careful observations and use genuine available scientific tools to unearth dispassionately the region they are investigating;
2. There should be systematic sensitization and honest cultural re-engineering for the promotion of cultural heritage and its preservation in Africa;
3. Christianity in Africa has positively impacted the lives of African people, however, she should respect Africa's rich cultural heritage;
4. African traditional religion and Christianity should avoid conflicts by embracing religious tolerance. Non should impose its religious practice on the other.

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