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## MISSION AND HUMAN PROGRESS

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## *Religious Humanism Among the Yoruba of Nigeria*

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The Yoruba race is the only major Nigerian race that has experienced a high degree of heterogeneity of religious humanism. This is due to the wide acceptance of Islam and Christianity by the people who were hitherto practitioners of Indigenous Religion. In Yorubaland today, unlike the other major sections of the country, Islam and Christianity are widely practised side by side with the Indigenous Religion. The chronology of the three religions is epitomised in the Yoruba adage: *Aye la ba fa, aye la ba Imale, Osan gangan ni gbagbo wole de* (meaning, we met *Ifa*\* in the world, it was followed by Islam while Christianity gained entry late in the day).

There is no gainsaying the fact that the arrival of the acclaimed world religions, namely Islam and Christianity, have dealt a great blow to the growth of Indigenous Religion in view of the loss of most of its adherents to the new faiths. This is why the present day Nigerian governments are doing everything possible to revitalize the indigenous culture. It is pertinent to say that even though the Yoruba are today mostly Muslims and Christians, they still practise their religions within the context of their indigenous cultural background. The diversity in religious beliefs of the Yoruba shows that the people have wider religious experience. This article is therefore concerned with the religious aspect of the Yoruba culture. We shall examine the basic beliefs and practices of the three main religions practised in Yorubaland with a view to high-lighting their impact on their life.

## THE YORUBA INDIGENOUS RELIGIOUS HUMANISM

In this part of the world, extensive work has been done on this subject by eminent scholars such as Idowu, Awolalu and Dopamu, to mention a few. They have been able to correct certain misconceptions of the non-African writers about the subject.

The Yoruba Indigenous Religion is structured on the following beliefs: belief in the Supreme Deity; belief in divinities; belief in ancestral spirits, belief in moral order, and belief in the hereafter.

Many Western Writers have written to deny that Africans believe in the existence of a Supreme God. Some are of the view that God to the Africans is a *deus incertus* and *deus remotus*<sup>1</sup>. This view does not represent the view of the Africans about their religion. It has been argued that the strongest proof of their belief in God's existence is the fact that every ethnic group has names for the Supreme Deity in contradistinction to the divinities. In Yorubaland, the name for the Supreme Deity is Olodumare or Olorun<sup>2</sup>. What this implies is that God to the Yoruba is not merely an abstract concept, a vague entity, but a veritable reality. The name depicts their understanding of God. Apart from the names, the Supreme Deity possesses attributes ascribing traits, properties, qualities or characteristics to Him<sup>3</sup>. These demonstrate how the Yoruba perceive God and how He relates to creatures. It is to this Supreme Deity that the Yoruba direct their worship and supplications through the lesser gods.

The divinities known among the Yoruba as *Orisa* are phenomenological spiritual beings who serve the will of

<sup>1</sup> IDOWU, E.B., *Olodumare, God in Yoruba Belief*, (Longmans, London, 1962), p. 140.

<sup>2</sup> The word *Olodumare* which has three components is translated to mean "The unique King who holds the sceptre, wields authority and has the quality which is superlative in worth, and he is at the same time permanent, unchanging, and reliable". The word *Olorun*, on the other hand, has two components and it is simply translated "the Owner of heaven" or "the Lord of heaven". See J. OMOSADE AWOLALU and P. ADE DOPAMU, *West African Traditional Religion*, (Onibonje, Ibadan, 1979) pp. 37-39.

<sup>3</sup> Among the attributes of God as given by Idowu are Eleda (the creator); *Oyigiyigi Oba aiku* (The Immortal rock that never dies). *Adakadejo* (he who executes judgement in silence) etc.

Olodumare in the creation and the theocratic government of the world<sup>4</sup>. According to Yoruba theology, the divinities are not created, rather they have emanated from the Supreme Deity<sup>5</sup>. Consequently they are regarded as His offspring taking part in the running of the theocratic government of the world. The divinities serve as intermediaries between God and man. Prayers and sacrifices are offered to God through them. Prominent among the Yoruba divinities are *Obatala* or *Orisa nla* (the earth divinity), Orunmila (the Oracle divinity), Esu (divinity of Mischief), Ogun (god of Iron) and Oya (goddess of river), to mention a few.

The divinities form the Yoruba pantheon. Idowu<sup>6</sup> has argued that their preponderance does not suggest polytheism. To him the Indigenous Religion is monotheistic and more specifically diffused monotheism. This view is not plausible considering the fact that the divinities feature prominently in the Indigenous Religion, each of them having its temples, shrines, and priests. Sometimes because of adoration of the divinity, the worship tends to be an end in itself. It may not be appropriate to describe the Yoruba religion as monotheistic since it is believed that the divinities partake of the attributes of the Supreme Deity. One problem with the Yoruba divinities is the fact that some of them are used by the wicked men to inflict sickness, death and other misfortunes on the innocent<sup>7</sup>. Since they can be used for evil purposes, it means they sanction evil-doing. Esu, Sanpanna, Sango and Ifa are examples of Yoruba divinities usually employed for evil ends.

In Yoruba theology, distinction is made between ancestral spirits and divinities. While divinities are not related to the world, the ancestors are related to the living community as members of the earthly families to which they belonged before their death<sup>8</sup>. Death in the understanding of the Yoru-

<sup>4</sup> IDOWU, E.B., *op. cit.*, p. 57.

<sup>5</sup> AWOLALU, O., and DOPAMU, P.A. *op. cit.*, 132.

<sup>6</sup> IDOWU, E.B., *op. cit.*, p. 168.

<sup>7</sup> DOPAMU ADE, "The Weakness of the Yoruba Divinities", in Sam Babs Mala and Z.Z. Oseni (eds.) NASR Conference papers (NASR, No. 2 September, 1980) p. 10.

<sup>8</sup> EARDES, J.S., *The Yoruba Today* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, London) p. 123.

ba involves transformation of the personality of the dead into an ancestral spirit. It is believed that the ancestors take active interest in members of their earthly families, hence they give them advice through dreams and trances. Prayers and offerings are made to a dead parent for protection. The Yoruba take care not to offend the ancestors who they believe can cause disaster if offended. The ancestors are regarded as intermediaries between man and God or divinities. The significance of *egungun* cult lies in its commemoration of individual ancestors.

The Indigenous Religion lays premium on the moral order of the society. The activities of man are not left unregulated. In Yoruba theology certain norms and codes of conduct are entrenched which facilitate orderly maintenance of the society. These form the moral values. Every man is endowed with the sense of right and wrong, he knows what is morally right and what is morally wrong. Those things which are morally disapproved by the society are known as *eewo* (taboos), the prohibited action. These are not contained in any revealed law, rather they are preserved in the tradition. To break a taboo or act contrary to the will of the Deity amounts to sinning against Him. The sinner can be punished or forgiven if he performs the necessary rites of atonement<sup>9</sup>.

The Yoruba's belief in the hereafter has to be explained in the light of their understanding of death. Death in their belief marks the transition to the afterlife. It is a means of passing from the earthly world to the world of the spirits where the soul of the deceased continues to exist. Hence, much of the symbolism of Yoruba burial rituals is that of a journey. The eschatology consists of three phases: Separation of the deceased, transformation of the soul and incorporation of it into the spirit world<sup>10</sup>. The dead go either to 'good heaven' (*Orun rere*) or bad heaven (*Orun apadi*) depending on how they are judged by the Supreme Deity. This is to say that the Yoruba believe in man's accountability for his earth-

<sup>9</sup> AWOLALU, J.O., *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites* (Longman, Essex, 1981) p. 152.

<sup>10</sup> DOPAMU, P.A., "Towards Understanding African Traditional Religion", in Balogun, I.A.B. (eds.) *Religious Understanding and Cooperation in Nigeria* (Department of Religions, University of Ilorin, 1978) p. 143.

ly deeds in the hereafter, thus resting his salvation on his righteous acts. It is believed that there who go to good heaven would experience no sorrow and can choose to reincarnate while those who go to bad heaven would experience torments and they can never be reborn<sup>11</sup>.

The Yoruba Indigenous Religion is not just a religion, it is also a culture. Consequently, apart from its sets of beliefs it has its cultural dimension which cuts across the different facets of Yoruba life. We would draw illustration from the major events of man's life circle, viz. birth, marriage and death, each of which has its traditional rites and ceremonies to be performed.

The birth of a child in the family is a thing of joy and it is regarded as one of the greatest blessings. Hence the event is greeted with joy and happiness. Once pregnancy is noticed in a woman there are traditional methods of ensuring protection of the pregnancy and also of the child after birth. Traditional medicine-men and diviners are usually consulted for this. Protection is sought for the baby against evil forces. Since the birth of a new baby is a thing of joy, feasting, eating, rejoicing and dancing are associated with it. A name is given to the new-born on the seventh day if it is a female and on the ninth day if it is a male. Many factors determine the type of name give: the circumstances of birth; events prevailing at the time; family divinity; occupation or even the mood of the parents. This goes to show that names in Yoruba tradition are pregnant with meaning. On the naming day the child's hair is shaved (if it has not been shaved before) while prayer and sacrifice are made to appease God and thank him for his blessing. To make prayers efficacious some items used for offerings and sacrifices such as Kola nut, bitter kola, oil, salt, honey, money etc. are used. In some families the mother of a new baby is forbidden to eat certain foods thought to be harmful to her health. The rites of birth are not complete without circumcision of a baby boy or clitoridectomy of a baby girl. This is usually done at a very early age especially before the baby starts to crawl.

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<sup>11</sup> IDOWU, E.B., *op. cit.*, p. 197f.

Marriage according to Yoruba tradition is a sacred duty which every normal person must perform because it is seen as a means of perpetuating the society. The 'Institution of marriage is the meeting point of the three layers of human life according to the general African Religion. These are the departed, the living and those to be born. The departed are the roots on whom the living stand, the living are the link between death and life, those to be born are the buds in the loins of the living and marriage makes them to germinate and sprout'<sup>12</sup>. Among the Yoruba serious importance is attached to marriage (and childbearing) because they are regarded as medicines against death. He who dies and leaves offspring still lives.

An important aspect of the Yoruba marriage custom is the choice of the life partner. This is done either by the parents or the children themselves. Even when the choice is made, the parents of the partners are brought into the knowledge because of their wider experience. The parents would sanction a marriage when they know it would be a source of happiness for the partners and the members of the extended families. People who are related by blood or by marriage are prevented from marrying one another.

Marriage gifts are important aspects of the tradition. They serve as symbols of the marriage bond. They are legal instruments which authorize the husband and wife to live together. The gifts often consist of yam, money, goat, cloths, ornament etc. They are given during engagement. It is not regarded as payment for the wife because the amount given is usually not exorbitant.

After fulfilling all the necessary requirements, the partners are joined on the agreed date. Prayers are offered by members of the two families for the welfare of the new couple. They are also given instructions on how to live successful material life. Marriage ceremonies are usually accompanied with feasting, feeding, rejoicing and dancing. Virginity of the bride is highly valued among the Yoruba. Women who until their marriage retain their virginity are usually highly respected. Multiple marriages (polygamy) is an essential fea-

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<sup>12</sup> MBITI, J.S., *Introduction to African Religion*, (Heinemann, London 1981) p. 98.

ture of the Yoruba marriage custom. A man can marry several wives depending on his financial strength.

Death as earlier noted is not regarded as the end of a man's existence according to Yoruba belief. Here lies the significance of some of the rituals performed for the deceased before burial.

The rituals concerning the preparation of the corpse for burial consist of washing of the body, shaving of the hair, cutting of the nails and oiling of the bodily openings. Time is not wasted at all before burial takes place. It is customary for the deceased to be buried with his belongings in the belief that he will continue to use them in the next world. The rites performed at burial are intended to send off the departed peacefully. Wailing, weeping and lamenting accompany the burial while the funeral rites are followed by feasting if the deceased attained old age before he died. Feasting can be extensive and take several days. The Yoruba believe in resurrection of the dead during which they would stand before God to account for all their earthly deeds before receiving judgement. Hence, their belief in the good and bad heaven where the righteous and the unrighteous abide. According to Mbiti, this belief is not commonly held among many African Societies. It is therefore peculiar to the Yoruba-speaking people<sup>13</sup>.

#### THE PENETRATION OF ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY INTO YORUBALAND

As noted earlier Islam arrived in Yorubaland before Christianity. According to Fafunwa the former predated the latter by three hundred years<sup>14</sup>. With the arrival of Islam, there came to an end the era of Indigenous Religion which held unchallenged sway till about the middle of the 17th century. With the emergence of Islam, the gradual decline of the Indigenous Religion set in.

It is not easy to say with precision the date Islam penetrated into Yorubaland as this is still a subject of controversy

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* p. 117.

<sup>14</sup> FAFUNWA, BABS. A., *History of Education in Nigeria*, (George Allen and Unwin, London 1974), p. 70.



among scholars. Adam Abdullah has suggested that Islam was first known in Yorubaland during the reign of Mansa Musa of Mali (d. 1337). He argued that the Yoruba came to understand the practice of Islam at the hands of Mali traders and from some Mallian Ambassadors who used to visit the Old Oyo during the reign of this great Mallian King; hence the religion is known as Imale<sup>15</sup>. Ahmad Baba of Timbuktu (d. 1610) is reported to have mentioned the presence of Islam in Yorubaland in his work<sup>16</sup>. Gbadamosi<sup>17</sup> reported the incident of one Baba Kewu, a Muslim Mallam from Nupeland who challenged the action of Alafin Ajiboyede (1562-1570) for killing some people on account of this son's death. It is reported he later showed remorse and tendered apology in public. The presence of Baba Kewu in Oyo during the reign of that king indicates the presence of Islam in the town at the time. However, by the 18th century Islam had become widely accepted in Yorubaland considering the fact that by that time mosques had sprung up in the different parts of Yoruba country. Oyo Ile Mosque is dated 1550 A.D. Ketu Mosque 1760; Iseyin Mosque 1770, Lagos Mosque 1775 together with Idumagbo and Okunu Mosque in 1776 (all during the reign of Oba Adele I) and Oyo town had its recognised mosque in 1775 during the reign of Alafin Ayinde. After the Jihad of Uthman dan Fodio in 1809 and the Islamisation of Ilorin, Yorubaland experienced more influx of the Muslims from the Islamised areas.

Islam was introduced to Yorubaland through peaceful means by traders and scholars from the North. The traders settled in the urban centres to trade, in the process of which their hosts were fascinated by their practice of Islam. The itinerant scholars on the other hand spread Islam through preaching and education. They taught people how to read and write. Many factors contributed to the rapid spread of Islam among the Yoruba, including: conversion of family units rather than individuals, support of many tradition

<sup>15</sup> ADAM ABDULLAH EL-ILORIN, *Mujiz Tarikh Nigeria* (Beirut 1965) p. 147.

<sup>16</sup> The work is entitled *Al-Kashf al-Bayān li asnaf majlub al-Sudan*.

<sup>17</sup> GBADAMOSI, G.T.O., *The Growth of Islam among the Yoruba 1841-1908*, (Longmans, London, 1978) p. 6.

rulers and chiefs; the multi-functional roles of the scholar as man of God, preacher, trader, adviser and medicine man as well as introduction of literacy and civilisation<sup>18</sup>. The Islamic Institution of polygamy, the impressive Islamic festivals; the Mallams' use of talisman, charm and divination to offer protection were also admired by the people because they met their social and spiritual needs. The growth of Islam among the Yoruba was tremendous. The religion became the way of life of its adherents within a short time of its acceptance. Even when Christianity came early in the 19th century it did not retard the progress of the religion, rather it motivated its adherents to make Islam compatible with Western Civilisation. This was the concern of Muslim organisations like Ansar-ud-Deen, established early in this century.

As for the penetration of Christianity, three events of major historical significance occurred in Europe which paved the way for its introduction in West Africa and eventually in Yorubaland in the second half of the 19th century. These are the evangelical revival of the late eighteenth century, the formation of Christian Missionary societies and the abolition of the slave trade<sup>19</sup>. After the abolition of the slave trade in Britain in 1807 the British government founded the colony of Sierra Leone in order to resettle the freed slaves there. The colony was soon transformed into a Christian population through the Missionary activities of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) which first established their mission work among the liberated slaves.

It is a well-known fact that the first real missionary work in Nigeria began with the 1841 Expedition sent to the areas of modern Nigeria by the British government acting upon Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton's proposal. The close cooperation which existed between the missionaries and those interested in trade resulted from the dual aim of the missions, namely to encourage 'legitimate' trade between the Europeans and Africans as a substitute for the slave trade and to

<sup>18</sup> GBADAMOSI, G.T.O., "Islam and Christianity in Nigeria" in Obaro Ikime (ed.) *Groundwork of Nigerian History* (Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, Ibadan, 1984) p. 349.

<sup>19</sup> OLADOJA J.O., "African Response to Christianity: The Yoruba Episode", in Sam Babs Mala and Z. Oseni *op. cit.*, p. 80.

convert Africans to Christianity. If the Expedition failed to achieve most of its primary objectives, it at least succeeded in bringing missionaries into the country, and Yorubaland had her fair share.

The first Missionaries (the Methodist Mission) arrived in Badagry in 1842. They tried to make the town their base but found it unsatisfactory because the missionaries received little cooperation from the indigenous people. The missionaries nevertheless succeeded in establishing the first mission in the town, thus making it the cradle of Christianity in Nigeria. The Missionaries turned their attention to Abeokuta where they were accommodated after a protracted negotiation in 1846<sup>20</sup>. The Church Missionary Society (CMS) under the leadership of Townsend, Crowther and Gollmar embarked upon pioneering missionary activities in Abeokuta. They built schools and churches. The Methodists were equally actively involved in the pioneering missionary activities in the town. From Abeokuta Christianity spread to other Yoruba towns, thus making it the gateway of the missionaries into Yorubaland. The Baptist mission pioneered missionary activities in Oyo and Ogbomoso areas. African Independent Churches (Aladura Church) emerged much later, with the aim of relating the indigenous experience to Christianity.

#### THE BASIC TENETS OF ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY

Islam is universally acknowledged to be a religion as well as a way of life. As such it lays down detailed regulations to guide man in all his earthly endeavours both spiritual and material. The superstructure consequently rests on faith, ritual observances and transactions. In a short chapter like this it is not possible to treat these subjects in detail.

The articles of faith in Islam are five, viz. belief in the existence and oneness of God, belief in the angels, the prophets, the revealed books, and the hereafter. Islam requires belief in God in recognition of His Being as the source of creation. Disbelief in God or to associate a partner with Him is a

<sup>20</sup> GBADAMOSI G.T.O., "Islam and Christianity ..." in Obaro Ikime *op. cit.*, p. 349.

heinous sin which is not forgiven<sup>21</sup>. Islam teaches that angels, unlike the devil, are agents of good inclination and good thoughts. They are sent on special errands by God. Belief in them is required in order to emulate their good qualities. Belief in the prophets and the revealed books is required in consequence of man's need for divine guidance to live a righteous life. Belief in the hereafter enables man to realise that he is to account for his earthly deeds in the hereafter.

The Islamic ritual observances (worship system) consist of *Salāh* (canonical prayer) *Zakāh* (alms giving) *Sawm* (fasting) and *hajj* (pilgrimage). These together with the belief system form the five pillars of Islam. Apart from the fact that all the rituals are instituted to promote equality and unity of the Muslims, each of them has other roles to play in the spiritual development of the individual Muslim. *Sallah* keeps man in constant remembrance of his Creator and it affords him the opportunity of being in communion with Him from time to time. *Zakāh* enables have-nots to share from the wealth of those who have, to alleviate their suffering. *Sawn* strengthens the will-power of a Muslim as he makes efforts to resist all temptations even when he is not seen by others. Lastly, *Hajj* inculcates in the pilgrim the lesson of detachment from the carnal-self and materialism<sup>22</sup>.

The Islamic belief and worship system discussed above has to do with man's relationship with God. The aspect relating to man's relationship with man covers different facets of human endeavour: social, political, economic, moral, legal etc. The religion, being a way of life, has its tradition for the conduct of the life-circle ceremonies discussed under the Indigenous Religion.

Christianity, on the other hand, is based on faith and works. Unconditional faith in the redemptive role of Jesus Christ is required of a true Christian for salvation. This is emphasised in the Pauline epistles<sup>23</sup>. It is not just faith in the person of Jesus Christ which is required, it is faith in his crucifixion and resurrection as a result of which the Christian

<sup>21</sup> *Surah* 4 : 48.

<sup>22</sup> NOIBI D.O.S., *Islamic Perspectives: A comprehensive Message* (Shebiotimo Publications, 1988) p. 23f.

<sup>23</sup> ROMANS 2 : 21 - 3 : 10.

becomes justified, regenerated, adopted and sanctified<sup>24</sup>. It is the only condition for the atonement of his sins. The necessity for works as an additional condition for salvation is recognised by James in his epistle<sup>25</sup>. Thus in Christianity as in Islam a combination of faith and works is a necessary condition for salvation.

#### INTERACTIONS IN RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

Each of the three religions discussed above has its tradition and culture within the context of which its adherent operates in his dealings and actions. However, interaction in diverse religious traditions are permissible where the teaching of one does not conflict with the other. This is why it is possible for a Muslim or a Christian to live according to the tradition of his religion and still retain elements of his indigenous tradition without committing syncretism. Syncretism sets in where an attempt is made to live in two religious traditions. Let us illustrate with a few examples.

As already noted, belief in God is paramount in the belief system of the three religions. However, in spite of this common belief the conception of God greatly differs. In the Indigenous Religion the Supreme Deity is approached through intermediary divinities who are believed to be co-sharers of divine attributes which make the belief system polytheistic. In Christianity Unity of God is understood in trinity of the Godhead, Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost being manifestations of divine presence. Islam, on the other hand, teaches absolute monotheism. Thus religion for the Yoruba Muslim and Christian has evolved from polytheistic tradition into monotheistic tradition of two different concepts. It has been plausibly argued that the understanding of God is reflected in man's theological reasoning which portrays the development the mind of man has undergone at different points in time<sup>26</sup>. Hence at the earliest stage God is per-

<sup>24</sup> WILEY, H.O. and CULBERTSON, P.T., *Introduction to Christian Theology* (Beacon Hill Press, Kansas, 1946) p. 275.

<sup>25</sup> JAMES 2 : 14 - 3 : 12.

<sup>26</sup> BALOGUN, I.A.B., "Religious Tolerance as a Pre-requisite for peace, Progress and Unity in Nigeria" in Balogun, I.A.B. *op. cit.*, p. 58.

ceived through several inanimate objects; at another stage through the Ark of the Covenant; at yet another stage, through Jesus Christ, and lastly religion reached a stage where no representation is sought for God. This is indeed an evolutionary process.

Since the belief system of the Indigenous Religion is generally incompatible with those of Islam and Christianity, they are not expected to be combined, otherwise that would mean syncreticism. Syncreticism means the practice of owning loyalty to and practising more than one religion at the same time<sup>27</sup>. Every religion frowns at it, particularly Islam and Christianity<sup>28</sup>. There is the tendency among the Yoruba Muslims to practise syncreticism, hence the adage: *Igbagbo* (or *Imale* as the case may be) *Ko ni ki a ma soro, a o soro ile wa*. Meaning, "Christianity could not prevent us from celebrating our indigenous rites, we shall celebrate it".

Hence it is not uncommon to find Muslims and Christians participating actively in Indigenous Religious rites. A research I recently conducted in Ile-Ife and Ila-Orangun, two ancient Yoruba towns, reveals that more than 40% of the *egungun* (Masquerade) cult members in the two towns are mosque and church goers; about 50% of those who put on *egungun* masks bear either Muslim or Christian names while an overwhelming majority of those entertained by the Masqueraders are Muslims and Christians.

Participation in the traditional religious rites and festivals always involves undergoing intensive rituals which are often not compatible with the tenets of the revealed religions. Those who are mostly involved in this are the traditional rulers and chiefs. Most of the *Obas* in Yorubaland as well as their Chiefs are either Muslims or Christians, yet they are active practioners of Indigenous Religion. This they usually want to justify by their claim to be father of all and custodians of indigenous tradition. It is equally found among the Yoruba instances when traditional taboos (*eewo*) are given reverence even when they contradict Islamic or Christian

<sup>27</sup> WILLIAM MORRIS (ed.), *American Heritage Dictionary of English Language* (Houghton Mifflin, Atlanta) p. 1304.

<sup>28</sup> See REVELATION 2 : 14 and Surah 2 : 208.

tenets. Syncretism is usually the problem of someone who lives in a tradition that is not indigenous to him.

This is however not to say that every aspect of the Indigenous tradition is to be cast away in favour of Islamic or Christian tradition. Islam like Christianity absorbs elements of the indigenous culture and tradition that are amenable to it, it rejects some aspects while other aspects are modified. It would be appropriate to illustrate with the rites and ceremonies connected with life-circle events — discussed in the first section.

The distinctive characteristic feature of Islamic and Christian naming is the service associated with them with the prescribed recitations from their scriptures. In both cases, the naming ceremony takes place on the eighth day as against the traditional naming which takes place on the seventh day if the baby is a female or ninth day if it is a male. Babues born into Islam are given Islamic names while those born into Christianity are given baptismal names. In addition to these, indigenous names including names determined by circumstances of birth are given, but not in the sense of idolatry. All the feasting, eating, dancing, rejoicing which accompany the child's birth and naming are permitted. The shaving of the baby's head, circumcision, clitoridectomy, burying of the placenta, are practices common to the adherents of the three religions. The indigenous tradition which forbids a woman who has just delivered a baby to eat certain foods in the belief that they are harmful to her health is observed in many Muslim and Christian homes believing that they do not conflict with scriptural teaching<sup>29</sup>. The use of food items such as alligator pepper, salt, bitter kola, kolanut, honey etc. to invoke God in prayer for the baby is not tolerated in Islamic naming and it is also frowned at by some denomina-

<sup>29</sup> Qur'an is explicit on the kinds of foods that should not be eaten as evident in *Surah* 2 : 172-173 and 5 : 3. Qur'an also warns against making unlawful what God makes lawful as evident in *Surah* 2 : 168 and 5 : 87-88. It would seem this latter verse contradicts the view expressed in the chapter but to my mind it is not necessarily a contradiction. In *Surah* 2 : 168 and 5 : 87-88 what God desires for man is ease and comfort and if man decides to disregard such an injunction for whatever may be his reason it is left to him. The wrath of God is not to be aroused for that. It would be a different matter if the tradition referred to above makes lawful what is forbidden. That would be a serious sin.

tions of Christianity including the Christ Apostolic Church. Using them in prayers is like praying through intermediary gods, more so because the objects are materials offered as offerings to the idols.

With regard to marriage tradition, the same philosophy underlines marriage contract. The three religions see marriage as an institution legalising intercourse and procreation of children. Indigenous Religion and Islam attach serious importance to marriage. For them it is a sacred duty enjoined on their adherents. Christianity on the other hand permits celibacy for any one who chooses not to marry.

With regard to the number of wives a man is allowed to marry, again, Indigenous Religion and Islam have closer affinity, as the two allow polygamy while Christianity teaches monogamy. However, while the Indigenous Religion permits unlimited polygamy, Islam limits the number of wives to four. This is why one cannot but disagree with Adelowo when he opines, quoting Trimingham, 'that Islam allows unlimited polygamy but regulates it by introducing two categories of wives, usually called legal wives and concubines'. This view to say the least is misleading. The Qur'an in *Sūrah* 4 : 3 and 4 : 129 makes it explicit that a man cannot exceed the limit of four wives if he decides to be polygamous. It is also clear in the passages that monogamy is the rule while polygamy is only an exception to the rule<sup>30</sup>.

The teachings of the two religions had effect on the attitude of the Yoruba when they were first introduced to them. Islamic polygamy, in spite of the limitation imposed, was more appealing to the Yoruba than the Christian monogamy. It is however important to note that polygamy is becoming increasingly popular among some Indigenous African Churches using the examples of some Biblical figures as justification.

The requirements to be fulfilled for the validity of marriage are essentially the same for the three religions. These are mutual consent of the partners, the sanction of the par-

<sup>30</sup> ADELOWO, E.O., "Islam and Yoruba in Religious contact: An Episode of Acculturation" in Sam Babs Mala and Z. Oseni (eds.) *op. cit.*, p. 70.



ents or guardians, payment of the dowry, and the presence of witnesses.

Belief in the hereafter during which man is expected to account for his earthly deeds is entrenched in the theology of the three religions. The traditional Yoruba belief in it, as noted, is not common among many African societies. However funeral rites and ceremonies are performed strictly according to Islamic and Christian traditions. The major Islamic rites performed are the ritual bath and the ritual prayer after which burial takes place. Similarly Christian rites involve washing of the corpse and conduct of the Christian service. All the wailing, weeping and lamentation are discouraged. The funeral tradition appears to be an example of the aspect of Yoruba culture that has been supplanted by the traditions of Islam and Christianity.

The focus of this chapter as we have seen so far has been the changing religious experience of the Yoruba and the effect religion has had on their life. When we speak of the Yoruba today we are speaking of the Yoruba living within three different religious traditions, the traditionists, the Yoruba Muslims and the Yoruba Christians. It can be said that this is divisive, as indeed it is. This is because there is the tendency these days among the Yoruba to think first in terms of their religious affiliation or brotherhood before thinking of Yoruba as a racial entity. This is the magnitude of the influence which religion can have on the life of man. Be that as it may, religions should not be divisive in view of their common philosophical base. This is the aspect of religious culture which needs to be emphasised in the overall interest of the Yoruba as a race.