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CULTURAL CONFLICT IN RELIGIOUS PRACTICE:
A CASE STUDY OF
FIRST AFRICAN BAPTIST CHURCH, SAKI

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ABSTRACT

Religion is a cultural phenomenon. All religions the world over are developed and practised with a given culture. Therefore, no religion is operated in vacuum. Religion and culture are two inseparable twins.

In the primitive communities, people fear certain natural phenomena like thunder, earthquakes, spirits, wild animals and snakes. Indeed people dread illness, sickness and death. The fear of these natural hazards leads man to find solace in the Supreme Being, that is commonly called God. Since all cultures respect the existence of one High God, doctrinal practices differ in the worship of this God. African culture towards dresses, marriage and other social affairs differ from that of the whites. Any attempt by the whites to impose their own dresses and marriage cultures on Africans, under the guise of religion ends up in religious crisis.

The crises precipitated by these religious differences have merits and demerits on the part of the Church and propagation of Christianity as a religion. Since religious crises may be negative or positive, the lessons learnt act as checks and balances for the religious practice in given religious locations in Nigeria.

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This work attempts to trace the causes and effects of religious conflicts in the First American Baptist Church in Saki town. The work deals in details with the religious conflict that erupted in this church in 1946. It also examines how First African Baptist Church separated from the First American Baptist Church, Saki in June 1948 and became an established church today. This work also examines the positive and negative effects of the religious conflicts.

In the first chapter which is the introduction, the following points were examined: Political, geographical location of Saki, background to the study, statement of problems, purpose and scope of study. Chapter two treats the history of the First African Baptist Church. Chapter three looks into the effects of the nationalist movements in the religious and political practices in Saki town in particular and Africa in general.

This work also enumerates some observations, made some recommendations, identifies strengths and weaknesses of the religious and cultural conflicts in the church.

The work is concluded with the submission that the crises in Christian religious practice carried with it education and evangelism. The need for tolerance in religious practice is, however, the antidote for peace in religious ecumenism. Cultural tolerance in religious practice can lead to national and international world peace.

CONCLUSION

Culture and religion are inseparable. Religion is, therefore, the product of culture. If culture is the total way of life of the people in a given political area, religion, therefore, is used as a means of social and political unity in a given culture.

At present, religion has more recognition in community. Religion as the by-product of culture, has turned round to face culture to be responsive to the dictates of religion. Religion, however, has influenced the mentality of some Africans to the extent that foreign dress, architecture, music, art and crafts stand to force these Africans to improve on their own native culture.

Religion, according to J. S. Mbiti, has the following values:

1. People find religion as a necessary part of life.
2. People are often ready to die for their religion.
3. People sacrifice the best they have for religion.
4. People are ready to spend their wealth on religion.
5. People are ready to fight for religion.
6. Government sees value of religion.
7. Public holidays are associated with religion.¹

¹J. S. Mbiti, Introduction to African Religion (Ibadan/Nairobi/London/Lusaka: Heinemann, 1978), pp. 195-198.

From the values of religion, it is obvious that these values cannot be achieved in a vacuum. The values are to be and can be appreciated within a given culture. With the good cultural study and understanding of cultures, different from that of Africans, it can be observed that religion aids societal unity and unity in religious practice - unity in diversity.

In Christian religious practice today, certain African cultural aspects like dress, architecture, music, arts and crafts are tolerated, but the issue of cults and cultural marriage are still cog in the wheel of the Baptist Christian unity today. The writer is of the opinion that Christians the world over, should understand that culture should not be allowed to ride on religion, but religion should be used to improve culture. Culture, therefore, should be responsive to changes in the society and religion should not destroy culture, but to improve it. Jesus did not come to destroy culture.

In those early days of missionary activities in Saki town, they (missionaries) tied the organization of the church to the apron of marriage and alcoholism. These two areas of the native culture was subject to the missionary attack. These two areas are still in our churches today. Polygamy is the product of African culture of marriage while alcoholism was imported by the white people themselves, especially the British in order to

strengthen trade and her economy. But according to E. A.

Ayandele:

The leaders of the anti-liquor crusade, it must be emphasized, were moral and spiritual zealots, who wanted to see Nigeria tee total state. They were often guided by fancies and not by facts. All the evils under the sun were ascribed to the liquor traffic - military expeditions, depopulation, infantile mortality, brevity of life among Africans and Europeans, crimes and assumed laziness of Nigerians.²

The Europeans in West Africa in the nineteenth century were as a rule drinkers, and believed that unless they partook regularly, a moderate quantity of liquor as a stimulant and preventive they would succumb to fever.³

From Alayande's assertion, Africans were infected by the imported British culture of alcoholism. In spite of the fact that alcoholism is medically proved to be injurious to healthy living, yet the whites introduced it to the Africans. It is wrong that the missionaries who introduced alcoholism turned round to blame Africans for partaking in alcoholism.

The problems with alcoholism and polygamy are still around in religious practice among Christians today. Thank God, in spite of the two cancerworms, the proclamation of the gospel is growing by leaps and bounds.

²E. A. Ayandele, Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria 1842-1914 (Ibadan: Longman, 1966), p. 308.

³Ayandele.