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THE INFLUENCE OF CULTURAL PRACTICES
ON THE CHURCH IN YORUBA LAND

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ABSTRACT

In this work a concerted effort is made to examine the influence of cultural practices on the church in Yorubaland. To do this effectively, an attempt is made in chapter one to identify the people called Yorubas in terms of their historical background, socio-political organizations such as settlement pattern, family system, festivals and ceremonies. Their traditional religious beliefs in the supernatural, worship of idols, deities and monumental objects are not left out among other things.

In chapter two, an overview of major aspects of Yoruba culture is also examined for deeper understanding of the people called Yorubas. Here the major divisions of culture to material and non-material are discussed. Further, various aspects of Yoruba culture such as respect for elders, dressing, hospitality, mutual help, marriage, arts and crafts and sex discrimination are discussed. An emphasis is laid on religion as an aspect of Yoruba culture because of the permeable influence of religious beliefs on the lives of the Yoruba people.

The following chapter three deals with the church in Yorubaland. This is where an attempt is made to trace the introduction, establishment and growth of the church in Yorubaland. The efforts of the European and American Missions and their representatives (Missionaries) are highlighted.

The impact of Western culture is another key area that the study examined in chapter four. It is discovered that introduction of Christianity to Yorubaland brought along with it the transmission of European cultural practices to

the people of Yorubaland. This had its positive and negative influences on the church, on the positive side, the standard of living of the Yorubas greatly improved as a result of access to Western education, better health services and improved technology. However, the Yorubas did not initially take the imposition of Western culture on their own kindly in some areas such as monogamy, living in isolated reservation areas and introduction of a new religion that opposed their inherited traditional religion.

After the establishment of the church in Yorubaland, the influence of Yoruba cultural practices on the practice of Christianity is examined in chapter five. It is discovered that certain aspects of Yoruba cultural practices are compatible with the doctrines preached by the church and are classified as desirable aspects while some aspects are at variance with the tenets of Christianity and are therefore classified as undesirable. The desirable aspects influence the church positively by way of reinforcing Christian beliefs and doctrines whereas the undesirable ones influence the church negatively by way of impeding church growth.

The sixth and last chapter is devoted to drawing some specific conclusions or established observations from the foregoing discussions, and making some practical recommendations.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, one can make the following observations as established by the findings of this study. It is established that some aspects of Yoruba cultural practices that were in line with Christian teachings helped to boost and expand church work in Yoruba land. Today, the Yorubas can boast of being the first Nigerian tribe to have the Bible translated to their language by their kinsman in person of Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther. Early access to the Bible in the Vernacular facilitated the spread of Christianity and church growth among the Yorubas. Language is part of culture.

Another influence is found in the use of Yoruba music, drama and musical instruments, in propagating Christianity. The Yoruba talking-drum and other percussion, blended with Yoruba folk-songs and lyrics are now being used in producing gospel songs and drama for evangelism. There had been instances of unbelievers who were just invited to play musical instrument in the church service or other Christian gatherings, but eventually surrendered their lives to Jesus Christ.

It was also established that the church suffered some setbacks because some Yoruba indigenes saw Christianity and its teachings as a foreign religion brought to push their cultural heritage into oblivion. Such people did not only shun Christianity, they antagonised the church too.

Some who professed to be part of the church found it difficult to really abandon their native cultural practices for their new faith. The result is what can be called "adulterated Christianity". For instance, there are church members who also belong to secret societies under the pretext of protecting and projecting their culture. Many social clubs

transform to secret cults where blood initiations are taken, libations are poured, oaths are taken and blood covenants are administered. Some churches allow the use of some materials like Kolanuts, bitter kola, Salt, alligator pepper, hot drinks (alcohol) and others, on occasions like child-naming, wedding, house-warning or purchase of a new vehicle or machinery, just as it is done at the shrines of gods and idols. Superficially, these things are done in the name of culture, but the ulterior motive is to appease some gods, goddesses or ancestral spirits.

Findings also reveal that: the inevitable clash of Yoruba culture and European culture was more severe in the early years of the church than now. People of Yoruba land had since outgrown the initial skeptical attitude towards Western education, culture and the Church. In fact, the yearning for Western education and cultural practices by the people had reached alarming rate. Many have sent their children to overseas countries while many are still struggling to do so. Today, there are countless number of overseas trained clergymen and other professionals in the land. As people become more and more enlightened, the influence of cultural practices on the church is fast declining.

In addition, discussions with Young Christians reveal that the influence of Yoruba cultural practices, especially the undesirable ones, are fast fading away. The trend now is that many Christian youths seem to despise many aspects of Yoruba culture which are considered abominable to Christian beliefs and practices. Many churches have, and are still witnessing quarrels, misunderstandings because the youths now challenge the "middle of road" attitude of older church members as regards cultural practices they hold on to. The youths, in manners close to rebellion, challenge the adults and elders

