

**A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF MORAL VALUES IN
URHOBO RELIGIOUS TRADITION AND ITS RELEVANCE
FOR THE CHRISTIAN FAITH**

**A THESIS PRESENTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THEOLOGICAL STUDIES
THE NIGERIAN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
OGBOMOSO, NIGERIA**

**IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
MASTER OF THEOLOGY DEGREE**

**BY
AMBROSE AKPOTOR
OGBOMOSO, NIGERIA**

JUNE, 2005

**J. C. POOL LIBRARY
BAPTIST SEMINARY
OGBOMOSO NIGERIA**

ABSTRACT

This study "A Critical Evaluation of Moral Values in Urhobo Religious Tradition and Its Relevance for the Christian Faith" is an attempt to prove that the World religions of Christianity, Islam, Confucianism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Shintoism and African traditional religion etc. in an atmosphere of tolerance and understanding possessed the potential to influence one another positively.

The approaches adopted in this study are anthropological, sociological and historical. In addition, literatures on African traditional relation, Anthropology, sociology, Ethics, Urhobo church history and interviews served as sources for the study. The information from books, articles from books and journals as well as interviews, confirmed that some moral values in Urhobo religious tradition can be of help to the development of Christianity.

The study has shown the positive influence which Urhobo religious tradition moral values can have on Christianity. Moral values such as humility, respect, protection, respect, truth, kindness, chastity, loyalty, justice as well as moral issues of sexual relationship, social relationship, dignity of labor, environmental ethics, medical ethics and human dignity can assists the Church to fully acclimatized or wedded to the Urhobo environment in particular and Africa in general. This position is contrary to the erroneous view of some Christians that Christianity with its sound ethical teachings such as Jesus' sermon on the mount (Matthew 5-7), has nothing to gain from the Urhobo indigenous religion.

This objective is achieved through a systematic look on the history of the Urhobo and her religion, the study of the Christian doctrines and lapses, moral values of the Urhobo religious tradition and analysis, its relevance to Christianity and recommendations. The study concluded with the submission that some Urhobo religious traditional moral values can speed up the rate of growth and development of Christianity if adopted and practiced.

B. Conclusion

The subject matter of moral values cuts across every religious tradition the world over. This confirmed and proved the proponents of the idea that morality emanates from God. The presence of the concept of morality in all religions is a clear indication that morality is the heartbeat of human existence and true religiosity. For no one can be truly religious without the adherence to the ethical teachings of God through the light bearer of each of the religions such as Jesus Christ in Christianity and Muhammad in Islam.

These ethical teachings found in the religions of the world reveal that morality is divinely oriented and anthropocentric.² It is against this background of man at the centre of divine moral standard that Urhobo religious tradition under the canopy of the African Indigenous religion is built. The concept of morality in African traditional religion which is also applicable in the Urhobo religious tradition serves as the bedrock of the African communal life as it maintains and promotes the communal life of interdependence which in turn enhances the harmonious existence of the community or society. On this note, Gwinyai H. Muzorewa quoting Oduyoye said,

Africans recognize life as life-in-community. We can truly know ourselves if we remain true to our community, past and present: The concept of individual success or failure is secondary. The ethnic group, the village, the locality, are crucial in one's estimation of oneself. Our nature as beings-in-relation with God and with our fellow human beings.³

This assertion is further strengthened by a Yoruba proverb that says, "If a member of one household is eating poisonous insects and

² Kwensi A. Dickson *Theology in Nigeria* (New York: Orbis Books, 1984), 60.

³ Gwinyai H. Muzorewa, *The Origin and Development of African Theology* (New York: Orbis Books, 1985), 17.

we fail to warn him to desist, the after-effect of his action would rob neighbours of sleep."⁴ Morality in Urhobo religious tradition permeates the total man. It reflects in the language, thought patterns, culture, behaviour, and relationship to one another and to the divine.

C. Recommendations

The under listed are some recommendations to the church and society for consideration and further enhancement of morality.

1. The Church As a Community

Considering the communal life of African Indigenous religion applicable to the Urhobo religious tradition emphasized indivisible unity of members. On this basis, the church of Jesus Christ globally and Africa in particular, must embrace the spirit of oneness planted by Christ during His earthly ministry. The oneness is reflected in one of His statements, "That they all may be one, as you, Father, are in me, and I in you; that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that you sent me" (John 17:2).

This recommendation becomes paramount as a result of the spirit of denominationalism currently tearing the Christian faith apart. Bearing in mind that it is only when the church is united that her fight against immorality can be effective.

2. Preaching Against Sin

While the Urhobo religious tradition is constantly waging war against immoral practices by laying strong penalties or sanctions

⁴Jacob K. Olupona, ed., *African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society*, 103.

against offenders, the church on her part must emulate this good gesture by enacting rules that can lead to the eradication of the immoral practices of stealing, murder, adultery, incest from the society in general and the church in particular.

3. Decent Dressing

Decency is one of the virtues of life. Every normal human being is expected to be decent in life and in outlook. Unfortunately decent dressing which is the heritage of every African community is degenerating rapidly due to the influence of modernity and wrong indoctrination on the part of some Christian pastors and church leaders. The degeneration has come to a level where many people put on what they like, both in the society and even in the church. As a result of this development, the society, church and the law enforcement agents should do everything within their power to eradicate or reduce it to the barest minimum.

4. The Inequality in Moral Assessment Between the Sexes

In Urhobo religious tradition, there is gross moral inequality between the sexes. That is the moral assessment favours the males than the females. For instance, if a man is involved in extramarital engagement with the exception of rape, incest and married woman, the act is to some extent tolerated. But on the part of the female, it is a serious matter

This act of moral inequality is what the church and government must wake up to correct in order to have a balanced society of justice.

