

ALIEN RELIGIOUS INFLUENCE ON AFRICAN RELIGION AND SOCIAL CHANGE

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The spirit of this inquiry is not to resist change but is concerned with continuity and identity in change. In other words, it wants to explore the thesis that continuity and identity remain in spite of change and that the humane and the theological elements which give meaning and purpose to African cultural life may not erode under the impulse of change. Thus, change can be assimilated into African culture without alienating the African people from their cultural roots and identity.

There is no question about the fact that religion permeates all aspects of African life. "A study of African culture reveals that almost without question, it is based upon religion--that is, it is within a religious framework that the entire culture resides. Furthermore, this entire culture is an organic whole. In traditional Africa, there is no specialization of disciplines, no dissociation of sensibilities. In other words, from this particular religious focus, there is no separation between religion and society, and religion and art." Religion is the form or kernel or core of the culture".1

In dealing with social changes in African communities, the Western scholars emphasize the "collapse" of African traditional values, the "conflicts" experienced by the "modern, educated" Africans in their "modern" societies; that is, conflicts between the "traditional" and "modern" ways of life, the influence of Christianity, of Islam and of Western technology on African people. They give the impression that African people are passively absorbing alien influences and that Western nations have no psychological conflicts, but are advancing everyday. Even when some scholars have come to realise that every culture has the potential to adapt to change, they give the impression that the so-called "rapid changes" in African societies have completely separated the African people from their religious world to be re-arrange by the rationales of social scientists, Western technology, Christianity and Islam. Since change is fundamental to reality, it is meaningless to say that African societies are changing. Even the dichotomy between the "traditional" and the "modern" has no foundation in the real life. Any meaningful statement about social changes in Africa must not only identify the forces responsible for change, but also the direction of change. This entails, therefore, a knowledge of alien religious beliefs and world-view, the nature and the dimension of African religion and world-view and the normative theories of African culture. In this way, we can determine whether alien religious influence on African societies is superficial or profound, know what aspects of African life have been influenced and what the African responses to that influence are.

The Nature and Dimension of African Religion

African religion, as a way of life, has for its purpose the explanation of the world, the universe and human existence, what man ought to do and the way of life he should follow. As a rule, it offers comfort and consolation in life, suffering and death. Thus, it has profound effects on practical life. Its interpretation of life is an allegorical investiture of truth. Its truth is expressed mythically. The profound meaning and the aim of life are expressed symbolically for only in this way, and not through reasoned convictions, can a religious people grasp and identify themselves with those symbols.

African religion is not merely a belief in God, divinities, spirit, ancestor, etc., but a mode of thought, a world-view, a theory of life, existence and order. It provides the background with which African people can explain changes in the universe. This background, "a system of metaphysics", which accounts for life, world, and existence, belongs to human needs. It possesses a system of morality. Even if the "metaphysics" of a religion appears absurd, the practical value of religion cannot be denied. The foundation of a society, a state or an institution can only stand firm when it is based on a system of "metaphysics" which unifies feelings and emotions and directs individuals towards ideals even beyond conscious understanding.

African religion creates the models of African communities, a mode of association, ethical and moral codes and a justification of authority. Its dimension embraces the following:

1. *Political and Social Organization*: Belief in the Ancestors
2. *Metaphysical Aspects*: Accounts for man, universe, existence, nature, mutual relationship between all levels of reality.
3. *Ethical and moral codes*: Accounts for human solidarity; the relationship between dead, living and future generations; the oneness of the human community.
4. *Artistic Aspects*: Music, carvings, sculpture, poetry, farming, artifacts, drama.
5. *Linguistic Aspects*: Names, the magical and creative power of words, proverbs.
6. *Account for misfortune*: Spirit, deity, witches, sorcery.

African Cultural Universe

The personification of the universe, or the belief that the universe as well as Nature are alive and centered on person, is an essential character of African culture. Reality and trustworthy knowledge are personally experienced, lived and felt not merely

thought of. Faith in God, the creator of the universe, stems from the vital need of giving meaning to human life and the universe. In the hierarchy of African cosmology, God, divinities, spirits, ancestors, man, animals, plants and minerals, occupy different levels, though a constant interaction exists among all things in the universe. The belief in a constant interaction and a mutual relationship between the visible and invisible worlds, between the dead and the living, coupled with the future generation, is another characteristic of African culture and psychology. This belief eliminates the duality of matter and spirit, subject and object, and establishes a world of aesthetic continuum, an intuitive notion of time which sees the past, present and future as an "enduring now". In this notion of time, nothing is isolated and static. It makes the solidarity between the "living-dead", the present and future generations, a living reality. It also accounts for the influence of the ancestors and "living-dead" on the present generations. And, for this reason, no "clear-cut", "specific", and "concrete" distinctions of the rationalists exist in a fluid and personal world of aesthetic continuum hence no fragmentation of life and sensibilities into independent and isolated world. Instead of the dualistic mode of thought which creates an abyss between material and spiritual worlds, the African cultural belief sees reality as material-spiritual or vital.

The forces of social order and change in African communities are not merely "material". A materialistic explanation of changes in African communities is solely the Western mode of thought. The African people believe in the influence of "spiritual" forces--ancestors, spirits, the invisible world--on their lives and communities. This belief is not a scientific hypothesis (science in the Western sense), but an experienced and a lived reality. In African communities, the diviners have the duty of interpreting and enunciating the relationship between the African people and the invisible forces. The ancestors and deities influence the behavior and activities of the people. The deities can be employed by individuals and the whole community to accomplish their goals. It could be said that a form of social-spiritual-material contract exists between the African people and the deities inasmuch as they are "worshipped" or "revered" only if they offered the people their wishes.

Nature itself is alive or a living force associated with fertility, womanhood, fecundity. Living in a vital universe, the African people seek the causes of social change beyond the "material" world. A physical account of an event is not sufficient. "Spiritual" causes such as the influence of ancestors, the "living-dead", deities, even living and powerful individuals like witches, are appealed to in the explanation of social events. Consequently, the forces responsible for change in African communities are not merely material and external, (e.g. Western ideas, Christianity and Islam), but psychological, spiritual, cosmological. It is not solely the conscious decisions of people that account for social changes but the influence of higher powers--God, spirit, ancestors, magical forces--which may bring fortune or misfortune to individuals and societies

and cause social strains. The African people are not passive towards such higher powers. If the knowledge of the forces or the agents responsible for social change is grasped, their influence or action can be controlled. It is the duty of the diviners to find out or interpret the nature of such forces or agents and prescribe remedies. Changes in individuals and societies transcend these and go into the realm of the invisible world. Thus, the belief in the influence of hidden forces on social changes governs the attitude of the African people towards social phenomena, fortune, misfortune, etc.

Alien Religions

Christianity and Islam, two branches of the Asiatic faith, came to Africa through the Western and Asiatic worlds respectively. While the West rejected Islam and Asia rejected Christianity, both alien religions have found refuge and compete for adherents in Africa. It is precisely the tolerance of African religion, African psychology and the material-spiritual or Vitalistic view of the African world, that makes the coexistence of such intolerant monotheistic religions possible.

In speaking about the influence of Christianity in Africa, a distinction must be made between the Christian beliefs and world-view and the Western creed of materialism and its world-view. It is historically, religiously and culturally erroneous to equate Christianity with the Western religion. "The Western nations have never really been Christian. Their true religion has only become apparent as Christianity has declined. That religion--not yet expressed in forms, but implicit in all their conduct--is that the time-process is also the real process; that everything material matters very much indeed; and that spiritualism must either recognize the claims of matter or retire from the conflict. This life (material life) and its purposes are significant, and important, and what a man ought to attend to; that is the real postulate of the modern West..."² This cultural postulate, carrying with it a whole psychology and world-view, is not only contrary to the African cultural premise but constitutes the basis of the Western science--materialism and rationalism.

"Europe received from Christianity ideas which were quite new to it, the knowledge...of the fundamental truth material life cannot be an end-in-itself, that the true end of our existence lies beyond it. The Greeks and Romans had placed this end altogether in our present life, so that in this sense they may certainly be called blind heathens. And, in keeping with this view of life, all their virtues can be reduced to what is serviceable to the community, to what is useful, in fact. Aristotle says quite naively 'those virtues must necessarily be the greatest which are the most useful to others.' So the ancients thought patriotism the highest virtue, although it is really a very doubtful one, since narrowness, prejudice, vanity and an enlightened self-interest are main elements

in it."³ Aristotle classified such virtues as Courage, Justice, Temperance, Magnanimity, Magnificence, Liberality, Gentleness, Good Sense and Wisdom.

"Christianity freed European humanity from this shallow, crude identification of itself with the hollow uncertain existence of everyday".⁴ The preaching of Christianity was not "mere justice but the love of Mankind, Compassion, Good Works, Forgiveness, Love of your enemies, Patience, Humility, Resignation, Faith and Hope. It even went a step further and taught that the world is of evil, and that we need deliverance. It preached despal . of the world, self-denial, chastity, giving up of one's own will, that is, turning away from life and its illusory pleasures. It taught the healing power of pain: an instrument of torture is the symbol of Christianity...For European humanity, Christianity was a new and great revelation".⁵ The worship of Odin, Zeus, Beauty, was extant in Europe. Through the official decree of Emperor Constantine, Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire. And for about fifteen centuries Europe tried, but in vain, to live by the ethics of the Nazarene, the Philosophy of Christianity. In fact, the Christian ethics, morals and philosophy were anti-militaristic and materialistic hence completely contrary to the "inherently masculine and paternalistic" roots of the Western culture. Even though the Christian view of life and the world differed from those of the African and Western cultures respectively, the monotheistic Christian religion, allied with the Western rationalism, bred intolerance, fanaticism, persecutions, religious wars, crusades, inquisitions, heretical tribunals, *auto da fe*, etc. Christianity reached Africa through the Western world, but it was no longer the authentic Christianity, but a rationalized and Christless Christianity.

The Western World

The Western nations were not only introduced to Christianity, they have "never really been Christian". The religion which shapes the Western life, thought, behavior and activity, is that of materialism which defines life and reality solely in material terms. It makes a distinction between matter and spirit and requires that, if the latter exists, it must fit into the scheme of matter, that is, measured, quantified, predicted and handled. Materialism is anti-personal and anti-spiritual. St. Thomas Aquinas, however, tried to fit Christianity into the Aristotelean (Medieval, Western) world-view. He equated Aristotle's Prime Mover, a rational construct, with the Christian "God the Father" and Aristotle's Formal or Final Cause with the Christian soul. During the rebirth of the Western rationalism or materialism, euphemistically called the Renaissance, the mechanistic view of the world (Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, Newton) had no room for God, spirits, miracles, the sacred, the holy. If the world obeyed mechanical laws, the appeal to God's intervention in the world and human affairs became unnecessary. Man, animals, plants, minerals, were believed to be matter-in-motion and subject to mechanical laws. "It is not surprising that the

Cartesian doctrine gave place, in 18th century, to pure materialism in which man is treated as wholly governed by the laws of physics. Will no longer has any place in this philosophy, and the concept of sin disappears. There is no soul, and therefore no immortality, except that of the separate atoms which are temporarily joined together in the human body."6 If man, Nature, world are machines, where does Christianity fit into the mechanical world and the mechanical man? The rationalistic theory of knowledge concluded that God had not come into mechanical world, revealed by a religious expert. With the connexion of the Christian theology to theories of material science or rationalism, Christianity was rationalized and divorced from Life. The Protestants accepted the scientific theory of knowledge hence religion became empty words, merely logic doctrines and polemics. Religion, ethics and morals, were established outside the mechanical world, independent of mechanical life. Hence they could not integrate the whole man and society because, in reality, man and society had disappeared. Rationalism produced an abstract Christ and further destroyed religion as a vital need.

Logos and Theos

The disturbing contradictions between religion and pure reason can be noticed in all aspects of the Western Life. Religion has not only been severed from science, politics, economics and education, that is, from material life and its activities, but what one hears on Sundays in Church Services contradicts scientific text-books. Darwinism contradicts the ethics and morals of Christianity. The blind laws of Nature, and the Western institutions and ideals are based on the laws of Nature, have no room for mercy, love, neighborhood, pity, friendship, etc. The Western people have not made up their mind as to what Nature is. In *De Divinatione per Somnum*, Aristotle held that Nature was daemonic. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he saw Nature as Divine. Locke believed that Nature was a good state. For Hobbes, it was evil. The Western science held that Nature was Lifeless or dead or a machine. It now holds that Nature is alive. In other words, it now accepts the African cultural premise.

Independent ethics and morals have pernicious consequences in the materialistic world. "It soon comes to be the case that faith, ceremonies, rites and the like are proclaimed to be more agreeable to the Divine will than moral actions; the former, especially if they are bound up with the emoluments of the clergy, gradually come to be looked upon as a substitute for the latter. Sacrifices in the temples, the saying of masses, the founding of chapels, the planting of crosses by the road side, soon come to be the most meritorious works, so that even crimes are expiated by them, as also by penance, subjection of priestly authority, confessions, pilgrimages, donations to temples and the clergy, the building of monasteries."7

"Those devils in human form", Schopenhauer continued, "the slave owners and the slave traders of North America are, as a rule, orthodox, pious Anglicans would consider it a grave sin to work on Sundays; and in confidence of this, and their regular attendance at Church, they hope for eternal happiness. The demoralizing tendency of religion is less problematical than its moral influence"⁸ Christianity, in the West, generally means a belief in God, in Christ, the reading of the Bible, etc. African religion is not merely a belief in God, but a way of life, a mode of thought, of association, a world-view. In the Western concept of space and time, God has no room. The Western Christian believes in God, in Darwinism, in the Laws of Nature, in the theory of Supply and Demand, in individualism, in the ethics of situation. Eventually, he or she is fragmented, sceptical, and incapable of making sacrifice.

And who are the Western missionaries in Africa? They are the English, the French, the Irish, the Germans, the Americans, the Dutch, etc. who not only share their own cultural beliefs and values, but are also Protestants and Catholics. These Western Catholics and Protestants still belong to the materialistic world of the Western culture. "The great weakness of the Western man and society, on the eve of the exciting new phase of history, is their habitual and chronic, almost conventional, irreligiousness."⁹

The Baptist sects, the Methodists, the Episcopalians, the Pentecostals, the Presbyterians, the Lutherans, the Seventh Day Adventists, the Church of Christ, Jehovah's Witnesses, have flooded Africa from the Western world. The historical origin of these sects in the West is known. They have brought certain skills and techniques to Africa but, in terms of religion, the religion of integration both of the individual and society, they have brought confusion. The spirit of individualism, rationalism and dissociation of sensibilities, inherent in the Western culture introduced confusion in the African communities.

"The Christian mission to Africa was double-edged. The missionaries came to preach the gospel as well as to 'civilize' and in their role of 'civilizers' they were at one with the colonizing forces; indeed, they were an important vehicle of Western imperialism, which readily lent to the churches its wealth, power and influence...Western values and customs, were, to them, identical with Christian morality...In 1937, Dietrich Westermann urged missionaries to be ruthless with African religions."¹⁰

Prof. Okot p'Bitek described "Mbiti, Idowu, Busia, Abraham, Kenyatta, Senghor, the missionaries, modern Western Christian anthropologists" as "intellectual smugglers" for decorating African religion and deities with the Greek metaphysics and rationalism. "The Christian apologists like Evans-Pritchard, Godfrey Lienhardt and Geoffrey Parrinder address their works mainly to Western scholars and churchmen." To a protest against Parrinder's presentation of African religions, Clayton E. Carlson,

the editor-Manager of Religious Books Department, Harper and Row Publishers, candidly replied: "...In principle we agree with you on your basis point, but books like the Parrinder are primarily used by students brought up in the Western tradition, and with Western minds. I fear that any text intended for those students which did not deal with the topic from that mindset would not achieve a large enough response from the academic market place to allow publication. If the point is Westerners cannot understand and the students being taught are Westerners, I am afraid that there is not much hope for a positive pedagogical text."¹² This candid view summarizes how African culture and religion are sacrificed by most Western and African scholars to Western rationalism, factualism, commercialism and private interests. Positive pedagogical texts exist, but the spirit of commercialism and intolerance coupled with the academic methodology cannot tolerate such texts.

The Western Influence on African Societies

The Western nations can never teach the Africans what it means to be and live in a religious world, universe and community. The West has no religion of individual and social integration but of the emancipation of the individual from the whole. Which God do the Western nations worship; the God of Israel or *Deus ex machina* or *Deus suie Natura*? What the Western materialistic beliefs pretended to do was to banish the African Personal God, deities, spirits, ancestors, living Nature and enthrone a rational God, a mechanistic Nature, rationalism and individualism. The mechanistic world-view, therefore, alters the meaning of man and community human relationship, in African societies. Dr. Bolaji Idowu thus remarks: "Christianity came into Yoruba Land in 1841, pioneered through the slaves who were liberated in Sierra Leone. It came accompanied by Western culture and dressed up in European garb. Its influence for good has been incalculable; it has enlarged men's visions, freed their minds of superstitious shackles and liberated their spirits from unnecessary fears. In that way, it has given them a progressive outlook and a sense of personal values....Its work was greatly facilitated by the *Pax Britannica*, as it had the backing of the law in waging war against those things, which, according to its own light were considered idolatrous evils."¹³ Here is a Western educated African re-echoing the optimism of the Western rationalist, an optimism which has no validity in the Western science and world today. The Western rationalistic optimism based on pure reason—science—was in opposition to the pessimistic, Christian view of life. The Western man rejected the Christian resignation and embarked on a conscious conquest of Nature, World and Universe.

The Western culture, from Idowu's view-point, replaced the African organic view of Nature with a mechanical one. Dr. Idowu is saying, like the Western rationalist, that there are no spirits in the world, that trees are not living forces, that such things should not be approached with fear and caution. The African people are not behaving illogically or superstitiously when they see living forces, spirits, in "material" things. Contemporary physics has not only confirmed it but accepts the zone of the magical.

Parrinder indicated that "the new religions are a great help in town life, in providing communities into which strangers may enter... Universal religions make the transfer easier from village to town, and they serve useful functions in giving a faith to live and providing against insecurity...While they disintegrate to some extent, they also seek to reintegrate society, 'to destroy, to overthrow, to build and to plant'".¹⁴ "In many places", he continued, "it is becoming the respectable thing to declare oneself a Christian or a Muslim; it shows that one is modern and educated...Figures supplied by the Church in the city of Ibadan gave ten per cent of the population as Christian. I suggested that twenty per cent might include adherents. A census taken since then shows that even more, just a third of the total, wish to be regarded as Christian. Muslim I put at anything up to half, in the complete lack of statistics; but the census shows that some sixty per cent put themselves down as Muslims. The number of confessed pagans in this modern form is not much more than seven per cent. But this does not mean that many are not still pagan in outlook, and even in practice. Vast crowds take part in the annual fire and fertility festival in honour of the hill goddess of the town."¹⁵ Parrinder is writing for the Western people with a Western mindset hence the naive presentation of African religion as an observed behavior does not disturb the Western mind. The statistics of Church attendance has been naively but confidently taken as a religious progress and conversion. The Western experts formulate their questionnaire in such a way that they receive their desired results. And worse, their lack of knowledge of African language, psychology, philosophy, world-view, psychic world, drastically disqualify them as the true interpreters of African religion. "In spite of the enormous literature, we have only a very poor knowledge of African religions...Religion is seen from the outside as a thing and not from within as an experienced reality....Books concerning the African religions are basically no more than an immense gallery of mirrors which only reflect the image of ourselves, our desires, our dreams, or our passions. Will we ever be able to break those mirrors which deform...?"¹⁶

The Western nations seem to have accepted the Christian principles as those of civilization but, in their practical lives and modes of thought, apply the theories of individualism, rationalism and materialism. These influences are disintegrating forces once accepted or applied to African societies. The ultimate reality in African societies must be grasped imaginatively and symbolically, felt deeply and lived. The subject-matter of religion, music, poetry, folk-song, cannot be replaced by mathematical abstractions, but must be replaced with such abstractions once the Western view of life and reality are adopted in African culture. It was in the realm of myth, music, art, philosophy, religion, that African societies established strength. Societies, based on the model of the universe, became worlds of ordered relationships where all actions, feelings and emotions are integrated into the order of a cultural universe. Through initiation, a spiritual passage, the African gains contact with and share in the continuum of vital experience. In the realm

of art, religion, philosophy; the African societies express the spiritual awareness that survival is not only collective but rests on the spirit. Life being an art, African art expresses the sense of vital unity, fears, hopes, expectations. Communities are not created by coordinating isolated individuals. Rather, all individuals manifest the spirit of community in them by participating from the collective beliefs. Community, as an organic symbol of the universe, confers on the African his or her personality.

The West offers a new view of society--an atomistic or individualistic society where individuals are deprived of all intrinsic relationships, severed from the universe and environment, and prey to the lower forces of life. Cut off from communal life and obligation individuals become subject solely to perfunctory laws. The mechanic man and society introduce a break in the world view, breed insecurity and destroy identity. As the scientific conquest of Nature advances the mechanical man becomes dehumanized. With the absence of emotion and stability, the energy for sustaining spiritual and religious symbolism which embodies more than words can utter. Such a symbolism belongs to the world of meaning, value; integrates feeling emotions and perceptions. The separation of science, faith, art, is the root of the mechanical and industrialized societies. Artificial propositions, statistics, replace the actual experience of living. The mechanical societies never increased but dulled vital experience or awareness. The mechanical man has not personally known his world and possesses no vivid realization of the paradox of life. Torn asunder by uncertainty and skepticism, he despairs over the meaning of life. Materialism alters the meaning of human communities while its science breeds fear and uncertainty about the future. It opposes the individual with society, family and the universe; breeds social neurosis, deforms and dehumanizes the intelligentsia, destroys folk arts, levels all hierarchies, creates a dull uniformity and devitalizes the whole.

The disintegration of the individual and society leads to that personality. Thus, the great myths of cultural heritage lose the power to integrate the whole man and community. A community has always been the product of common faith not common empirical facts. It is a vast realm of reality, a source of inspiration. Its inner life embraces the sacred, symbolic and the magical. The mechanical man rejects inner experience, deeper intuitions, doubts his own consciousness, knows his mechanical constructs but lacks faith in his own self. The theories of science, applied to technology, have offered material power and wealth. Faith in God, in the unity of selfhood, in the intuitive aspects of life, have been abandoned in favor of the material application of scientific research. The material world is efficient organized though life is inefficient.

The Western missionaries, colonialists, educators and some badly informed Africans tried, but in vain, to introduce the materialistic models of life into African societies. The Puritan ethics against

music, games, dance, dresses, were imported into Africa. Some Protestant sects frowned upon African music and dance as immoral. The Jehovah's witnesses refused medical aids and rely on the healing power of prayer. Islam undermined African art just as the Western Protestantism attacked African religious universe and its values. All these alien influences left African life meaningless, something which the African could not accept. His values, personality, meaning, lie in his religion, art, music, myths, family, community, unitary view of the vital universe.

It was in the realm of practical life that the Africans revolted against the alien religions. The African discovered that the new religions offered no answers to matters of life and death, family, community, etc. Yet, he was forbidden to live by his own faith, traditions and customs. Before the advent of African nationalism, the movement for African religious independence was prominent. The paradox of objective "justice", that is, the Western sense of justice, makes it possible to go free provided they have smart lawyers to defend them. This form of justice introduced immorality in African societies. Christianity helped in the triumph of moral evils. The fear of divinities was replaced by a Christian God who allowed everything by forgiving everything. Islam was preoccupied with the fulfillment of "obligatory duties and acts of penance by good works" as the route to heaven and, like Christianity and the *Pax Britannica*, aided the decay of moral life and society.

"The enlightened Christians can now steal without any twinge of moral compulsion those articles of food placed for sale at cross-roads and by roadsides which used to be quite safe; they can now cheerfully appropriate other persons' property; they can break covenants, or promises made on oath, with brazen indifference; all these they feel free to do where those brought up in the old ways and wisdom still shake and tremble at the mere thought of such things."¹⁷ "Long before what can be described technically as nationalism began, there had been signs of revolt against what people have come to regard as foreign and culture. Voices in the wilderness have been raised to return to the old ways and wisdom of the fathers."¹⁸ The revolt against alien religions and culture strengthened the Babalawo (Diviners) and Ogboni societies in the Yorubaland. African nationalism or cultural values enhanced the revolt. In many Igbo communities, the custom of trying thieves publicly in market places was revived. Those who accept African art automatically accepts the African religion, world-view, values, etc.

The Catholic Church now allows the Africans to use their own names for baptism. African music and languages add lively dimensions to Catholic rituals. It recognizes African traditional marriage and even enforces the payment of bridal dowry. In matters of life, death, childbirth, betrothal, marriage, etc; African religious practices remain alive. "The Christian Church now sees itself in direct confrontation with African religions."¹⁹ The Christian Churches are attempting to declare themselves independent of the Western political and

economic imperialism or as the tools of the Western cultural penetration. The Western scholars busy apologizing that their past misrepresentation of African people and culture was due to lack of empirical facts. Most African scholars know, however, that the apology is deceptive.

"Our first task in approaching another people, another culture, another religion is to take off our shoes, for the place we are approaching is holy. Else we may find ourselves treading on men's dreams. This sense of humility is not genuine until the Western scholars, most of whom distort African religions and culture, accept the African mindset. Beetham has estimated that of the 230 million people south of the Sahara, 55 million are Muslims, 60 million Christians and the rest, 115 million, Animists."²¹ The truth is that the Africans are not classified as Muslims and Christians abandoned their African beliefs. The belief and cult in ancestors are still strong for they depend on and express the bond of relationship between the members of a family and community. "It is a fact that the vast majority of Africans today hold the beliefs of their religion. Christianity has barely touched the core of the life of most African peoples. Keith Russell has estimated that in Northern Uganda, 90% of the homes still have connexions with the clan rituals at times of need. It seems to me that the new god of Christianity was taken by many African people as just another deity, and added to the long list of the ones they believed in. So that many African Christians are also practitioners of their own religions."²²

"Christian sex ethics, its other-worldliness, and its preoccupation with sin are three important areas which African intellectuals and leaders can explore, because, here, Christianity contrasts vividly with African religion."²³ Even in these areas, a study of African religion, psychology and customs will radically modify such Christian ethics.

Contemporary World and Science

The majority of the African and Western scholars are behind the times, enclosed in the by-gone world of materialism and rationalism, and unaware of the nature of the contemporary reality. Contrary to Bolaji Idowu's views, science has not succeeded in eliminating fear. "The progress of atomic fission has given man better instruction, and he is beginning to look on the future with dread." "Modern science has shown us that behind the visible, there is an extremely complicated invisible."²⁴ "The scientists who were supposed to have the monopoly of knowledge suddenly ceased to make a distinction between physics and metaphysics--between fact and fantasy."²⁵ "The out-of-date modern is a rationalist. The contemporary of the future is more religiously minded."²⁶ The modern man, that is, the believer in the power of pure reason to grasp, interpret and control life, history and reality has perished. "We are living at a time when science, at its highest power, has entered the spiritual universe and has transformed the mind of the observer himself, raising it to a plane which is no longer that of scientific intelligence, now proved to be inadequate."²⁷ "We can understand tomorrow better if

we look at the ancient world through fresh eyes. We are no longer living in an age when progress is assessed exclusively in terms of technical and scientific advances."28 "The farther we go back into the origins of the world, and the more closely we study primitive peoples, the more often we discover that their traditional secrets coincide with the present state of scientific research."29 "Our way of looking at the present and the immediate future allows for the possibility of magic in spheres where it is assumed that there is rationalistic explanation for everything."30

In pursuit of material success, the materialists or mechanical intellectuals betray their profound lack of the sense of reality, of imagination, intellectual and moral courage. African religion, culture, philosophy, art, etc. cannot be studied with the mindset of materialism because that mindset has no place in the context of the contemporary world. The African societies may study the technique of machine from the West. But the Western spirit of individualism, rationalism and materialism, can never aid the growth of African organic societies. The religion of individual salvation cannot strengthen that of collective preservation. On the external order, the Western influence (mechanical influence) has introduced certain skills and technique into Africa. But on the vital order, the Western psychology, if accepted, would disintegrate the African organic world and communities.

Conclusion

The African cultural, religious and environmental backgrounds have to be the foundation of African society. The use of African cultural themes in literary and dramatic works would consciously enhance the African social values. The government control of the alien researchers in African culture and social values should be instituted. The duty of African scholars is to decolonize the Western mindset from African religion and culture.

Parrinder indicated that "unchecked individualism, self-seeking, corruption and materialism are the great enemies of modern Africa. Yet the past has been so thoroughly impregnated with religion and its ethics that it is difficult to see how an ordered society can be established without them....Students of African society have felt deep concern at the rapidity of social and religious change in Africa. Some would have prohibited missions from doing their work, but the clock cannot be put back."31 But Parrinder failed to account for the forces responsible for "unchecked individualism, self-seeking, corruption and materialism" which he knew, were the Western legacy for Africa. Individual salvation in the Protestant religion, individual conscience in its ethics, individual right and interests in its politics and economics, individual mind in its psychology, individual or particular fact in its science, are negative forces acting on African beliefs in collective duty, collective obligation, collective conscience, collective interests, collective preservation, collective responsibility, etc. Effective communal

and government action can turn the clock back. The sense of community, family ties, the government control over Missionary schools, the sense of African heritage by African scholars, etc. are effective counter measures against alien destructive, social forces. The West, after over fifteen hundred years, rejected Christianity or, at least, rendered it ineffective in its affairs. Christianity is barely four hundred years old in Africa and, already, it has acknowledged the value of African societies after its futile attempt to eradicate them.

FOOTNOTES

1. Edward Kamau Brathwaite, "The African Presence in Caribbean Literature", *Daedalus; Journal of American Academy of Arts and Sciences*; Spring 1974, p. 74.
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4. *Idem*, p. 35.
5. *Idem*, p. 36.
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7. Schopenhauer, *Religion and other Essays*, pp. 44-45.
8. *Idem*, pp. 46-47.
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19. Okot p'Bitek, *African Religions in Western Scholarships*, p. 56.
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23. *Idem*, p. 113.
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26. *Idem*, p. 61.
27. *Idem*, p. 62.
28. *Idem*, p. 63.
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31. E.G. Parrinder, *African Traditional Religion*, p. 146.

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