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SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

COURSE CODE: CTH 821

**COURSE TITLE: AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS
MYTHOLOGY AND COSMOLOGY**

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Course Title: African Traditional Religious Mythology and Cosmology

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COSMOLOGY**

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Introduction

CTH 821 African Traditional Religious Mythology and Cosmology is a one semester, 3 credits unit course. It is available to all students as a course in master degree programme in Christian Theology. The course is also suitable for anybody who is in the theological study of Christian faith and African Traditional religion. The course consists of 21 units, which include introduction to religion, Definition of African traditional religion, the Structure of African traditional religion, the trends in the study of African traditional religion, the methodology for the study of African traditional religion, the theories for the study of African traditional religion and the taboos and totems in African traditional religion, definition of African religious mythology, the nature and origin of African religious mythology. Others include religious concepts in African mythology, African theism and concept of god, the nature and concept of humanity in African traditional religion, mystical powers in African traditional religion, and spirits worlds in African religion. The concept of African cosmology and cosmogony, history of cosmology from ancient to modern times, creation in African traditional religion, worship and sacrifice in African traditional religion, ritual in African traditional religion, rites of passage in African traditional religion and the life after death and final end of mankind in African religion.

The material has been specially developed for students in African context with particular focus on African culture. There are no compulsory pre-requisites for the course. The Course Guide tells you briefly, what the course is about and what you are expected to know in each unit, what course materials you will be using, and how you can work your way through these materials. It also emphasizes the need for tutor-marked assignments. There are periodic tutorial classes that are linked to the course.

What You will Learn in this Course

The overall aim of CTH 821 African Traditional Religious Mythology and Cosmology is to introduce you to the basic issues in African Traditional Religion like myths of creation,

origin of human beings, the Supreme Being, death and hereafter, sin, salvation and eschatology, among others. Your understanding in this course will prepare you as a student to understand the beliefs in African for good and profitable interaction. Further, the course will broaden the understanding of the students about African Traditional Religion within the context of Nigeria.

Course Aims

The aim of the course can be summarised as follow: The course aims at helping the students to understand African Traditional Religion. It also examines the African Traditional Religious mythological, cosmological, and cosmogonic views.

Course Objectives

To achieve the aims set above, there are set overall objectives. In addition, each module and unit has specific objectives. The modules and units objectives are always included at the beginning of every module and the unit; you should read them before you start working through the unit. You may want to refer to them during your study of the module and unit to check on your progress. You should always look at the module and unit objectives after completing each section. In this way, you can be sure that you have done what was required of you by the module and unit. Stated below are the wider objectives of this course as a whole.

By meeting these objectives, you should therefore, know that you have achieved the aims of the course as a whole. On your successful completion of the course, you should be able to explain the following: know the definition of African Traditional Religion, mythology, cosmology, typology of mythology and cosmology, functions of mythology in the society, among others. On successful completion of the course, you should be able to:

- Explain the concept of African Traditional Religion
- Discuss the structure of African Traditional Religion
- State the trends in the study of African Traditional Religion
- Narrate the mythology, sources and theories of the origin of African Traditional Religion

- Examine the nature of African Traditional Religious mythology
- Explain religious themes in African mythology
- Discuss the mystical powers and spirit forces in African Traditional Religion
- Examine the concept of cosmology and cosmogony in African Traditional Religion
- Discuss the African theism and the concept of God
- Highlight African concept of humanity in relation to the Deity and community
- Discuss ritual word and action in African Traditional Religion
- Explain worship and sacrifice in African traditional religion
- Examine the rites of Passage in African traditional religion
- Discuss the concept of death and after life in African traditional religion

Working through the Course

To complete the course, you are required read the study units, read recommended books and other materials. Each unit contains self-assessment exercises, and at some points in the course, you are required to submit assignments for assessment purposes. At the end of this course is a final examination. Below you will find listed all the components of the course and what you have to do.

Course Materials

Major components of the course are:

1. Course Guide
2. Study Units
3. Textbooks
4. Assignment File
5. Presentation Schedule

In addition, you must obtain the materials. Obtain your copy. You may contact your tutor if you have problems obtaining the text materials.

Study Units

There are fifteen study units in this course broken into 3 modules of 5 units. They are as follows:

Module 1

Unit 1 Introduction to Religion

Unit 2 Definition of African Traditional Religion

Unit 3 Structure of African Traditional Religion

Unit 4 Trends in the Study of African Traditional Religion

Unit 5 Methodology for the Study of African Traditional Religion

Unit 6 Theories for the Study of African Traditional Religion

Unit 7 Taboos and Totems in African Traditional Religion

Module 2

Unit 1 Definition of African Religious Mythology

Unit 2 Nature and Origin of African Religious Mythology

Unit 3 Religious Concepts in African Mythology

Unit 4 African Theism and Concept of God

Unit 5 Nature and Concept of Humanity in African Traditional Religion

Unit 6 Mystical Powers in African Traditional Religion

Unit 7 Spirits Forces in African Traditional Religion

Module 3

Unit 1 Concept of African Cosmology and Cosmogony

Unit 2 History of Cosmology from Ancient to Modern Times

Unit 3 Creation in African Traditional Religion

Unit 4 Worship and Sacrifice in African Traditional Religion

Unit 5 Ritual Symbolism in African Traditional Religion

Unit 6 Rites of Passage in African Traditional Religion

Unit 7 Concept of Death and after Life in African Traditional Religion

Each unit contains a number of self-assessment in general terms. These self-assessment test questions on the materials you have just covered are to be of help to you in your relationship to the traditionalists and it is meant to help you to evaluate your progress and to reinforce your understanding of the materials. Alongside with your tutor-marked assignments, these exercises will assist you in achieving stated learning objectives of the individual units and of the course.

Textbooks

Awolalu, J.O. and Dapamu, P.A. (1979). *West African Traditional Religion*, Ibadan: Onibonoje Press and Book Industries (Nig) Ltd.

Idowu, E. Bolaji (1973). *African Traditional Religion: A Definition*, London: SCM Press Ltd.

Imasogie, O. (1982). *African Traditional Religion*, Ibadan: Ibadan University Press Ltd.

Olapuna, J.K. (ed.). *African Traditional Religion in Contemporary Society*, Minnesota: Paragon House.

Gyekye, Kwame (1996). *African Cultural Values: An Introduction*, Accra: Sankofa Publishing Company.

Mbiti, John: *African Religious and Philosophy*, London: Longman.

Parrinder, E.G. (1974). *African Traditional Religion*, London: Sheldon Press.

Ray, Benjamin, (1976). *African Religion: Symbols Rituals and Community*, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.

Assignment File

In this file, you will find the details of the work you must submit to your tutor for marking. The marks you obtain from these assignments will count towards the final mark you obtain for this course. Further information on assignments will be found in the Assignment File itself and later in this Course Guide in the section on assessment.

Presentation Schedule

The Presentation Schedule included in your course materials gives you the important dates for the completion of tutor-marked assignments and attending tutorials. Remember, you are required to submit all your assignments by the due date. You should guard against falling behind in your work.

Assessment

There are two aspects to the assessment of the course. First are the tutor-marked assignments; second, there is a written examination. In tackling the assignments, you are expected to apply information and knowledge acquired during this course. The assignments must be submitted to your tutor for formal assessment in accordance with the deadlines stated in the Assignment File. The work you submit to your tutor for assessment will count for 30% of your total course mark. At the end of the course, you will need to sit for a final three-hour examination. This will also count for 70% of your total course mark.

Tutor-Marked Assignments

There are fifteen tutor-marked assignments in this course. You need to submit all the assignments. The best four (i.e. the highest four of the fifteen marks) will be counted. The total marks for the best four (4) assignments will be 30% of your total course mark. Assignments questions for the unit in this course are contained in the Assignment File. You should be able to complete your assignments from the information and materials contained in your set textbooks, reading, and study units. However, you are advised to use other references to broaden your viewpoint and provide a deeper understanding of the subject. When you have completed each assignment, send it, together with the TMA (tutor-marked assignment) form to your tutor. Make sure that each assignment reaches your tutor on or before the deadline

given to the Assignment File. If, however, you cannot complete your work on time, contact your tutor before the assignment is done to discuss the possibility of an extension.

Final Examination and Grading

The final examination of CTH 821 will be three hours' duration and have a value of 70% of the total course grade. The examination will consist of questions, which reflect the type of self-testing, practice exercises, and tutor-marked problems you have come across. All areas of the course will be assessed. You are advised to revise the entire course after studying the last unit before you sit for the examination. You will find it useful to review your tutor-marked assignments and the comments of your tutor on them before the final examination.

Assessment	
Assessments 1-4	Four assignments, best three marks of the four counts at 30% of course marks.
Final Examination	70% of overall course marks
Total	100% of course marks

Course Overview

This table brings together the units, the number of weeks you should take to complete them, and the assignments that follow them

Table1: Course Overview

Module 1	Title of Work	Week's Activity	Assessment (end of Unit)
Unit			
1	Introduction to Religion	1	Assignment 1

2	Definition of African Traditional Religion	2	Assignment 2
3	Structure of African Traditional Religion	3	Assignment 3
4	Trends in the Study of African Traditional Religion	4	Assignment 4
5	Methodology for the Study of African Traditional Religion	5	Assignment 5
6	Theories for the Study of African Traditional Religion	6	Assignment 6
7	Taboos and Totems in African Traditional Religion	7	Assignment 7
Module 2			
Unit			
1	Definition of African Religious Mythology	8	Assignment 8
2	Nature and Origin of African Religious Mythology	9	Assignment 9
3	Religious Concepts in African Mythology	10	Assignment 10
4	African Theism and Concept of God	11	Assignment 11
5	Nature and Concept of Humanity in African Traditional Religion	12	Assignment 12
6	Mystical Powers in African Traditional Religion	13	Assignment 13
7	Spirits Forces in African Traditional Religion	14	Assignment 14
Module 3			
Unit			
1	Definition of African Religious Mythology	15	Assignment 15
2	Nature and Origin of African Religious Mythology	16	Assignment 16
3	Religious Concepts in African Mythology	17	Assignment 17
4	African Theism and Concept of God	18	Assignment 18
5	Nature and Concept of Humanity in African Traditional Religion	19	Assignment 19
6	Mystical Powers in African Traditional Religion	20	Assignment 20

	Religion		
7	Spirits Forces in African Traditional Religion	21	Assignment 21

How to Get the Most from this Course

In distance learning, the study units replace the university lecture. This is one of the great advantages of distance learning; you can read and work through especially designed study materials at your own place, and at a time and place, that suit you best. Think of it as reading the lecture instead of listening to a lecturer. In the same way that a lecturer might set you some reading to do, the study units tell you when to read your set books or other material. Just as a lecturer might give you an in-class exercise, your study units provide exercises for you to do at appropriate points.

Each of the study units follows a common format. The first item is an introduction to the subject matter of the unit and how a particular unit is integrated with the other units and the course as a whole. Next is a set of learning objectives. These objectives let you know what you should be able to do by the time you have completed the unit. You should use these objectives to guide your study. When you have finished the units, you must go back and check whether you have achieved the objectives. If you make a habit of doing this, you will significantly improve your chances of passing the course.

Reading Section

Remember that your tutor's job is to help you. When you need help, do not hesitate to call and ask your tutor to provide it.

1. Read this Course Guide thoroughly
2. Organize a study schedule. Refer to the 'Course Overview' for more details. Note the time you are expected to spend on each unit and how the assignments relate to the units. Whatever method you chose to use, you should decide on and write in your own dates for working on each unit.

3. Once you have created your own study schedule, do everything you can to stick to it. The major reason that students fail is that they get behind with their course work. If you get into difficulties with your schedule, please let your tutor know before it is too late for help.
4. Turn to Unit 1 and read the introduction and the objectives for the unit.
5. Assemble the study materials, information about what you need for a unit is given in the 'Overview' at the beginning of each unit. You will usually need both the study unit you are working on and one of your set books on your desk at the same time.
6. Work through the unit. The content of the unit itself has been arranged to provide a sequence for you to follow. As you work through the unit, you will be instructed to read sections from your set books or other articles. Use the unit to guide your reading.
7. Review the objectives for each study unit to confirm that you have achieved them. If you feel unsure about any of the objectives, review the study material or consult you tutor.
8. When you are confident that you have achieved a unit's objectives, you can then start on the next unit. Proceed unit by unit through the course and try to pace your study so that you keep yourself on schedule.
9. When you have submitted an assignment to your tutor for marking, do not wait for return before starting on the next unit. Keep to your schedule. When the assignment is returned, pay particular attention to your tutor's comments, both on the tutor-marked assignment form and on what is written on the assignment. Consult your tutor as soon as possible if you have any questions or problems.
10. After completing the last unit, review the course and prepare yourself for the final examination. Check that you have achieved the unit objectives (listed at the beginning of each unit) and the course objectives (listed in this Course Guide).

Facilitators/Tutor and Tutorial

There are 8 hours of tutorial provided in support of this course. You will be notified of the dates, time, and location of these tutorials, together with the name and phone number of your tutor, as soon as you are allocated a tutorial group. Your tutor will mark and comment on your assignments, keep a close watch on your progress and on any difficulties you might encounter and assist you during the course. You must mail your tutor-marked assignments to your tutor well before the due date (at least two working days are required). They will be marked by your tutor and returned to you as soon as possible. Do not hesitate to contact your tutor by telephone, e-mail, or discussion board if you need help. The following might be circumstances in which you would find help necessary. Contact your tutor if:

- You do not understand any part of the study units or the assigned readings,
- You have difficulty with the self-tests or exercises,
- You have a question or problem with an assignment, with your tutor's comments on an assignment or with the grading of an assignment.

You should try your best to attend the tutorials. This is the only chance to have face-to-face contact with your tutorial and to ask questions which are answered instantly. You can raise any problem encountered in the course of your study. To gain the maximum benefit from course tutorials, prepare a question list before attending them. You will learn a lot from participating in discussions actively.

Summary

CTH 821 intends to introduce you to basics of the Theology of African Traditional Religion. Upon completing this course, you will be able to answer questions such as:

- Defined Religion
- What is African Traditional Religion?
- What are the trends in the study of African Traditional Religion?
- Describe the terms cosmology and cosmogony
- What are the functions of mythologies in African Traditional Religion?
- What is the African understanding of God?
- Give the theories of the origin of African Traditional Religion

- Examine ritual word and action in African traditional religion

Of course, the questions you will be able to answer are not limit to the above list. African Traditional Religion is an exciting study. We wish you success with the course and hope that you will find it both interesting and useful.

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Module 1

Unit 1 Introduction to Religion

Unit 2 Definition of African Traditional Religion

Unit 3 Structure of African Traditional Religion

Unit 4 Trends in the Study of African Traditional Religion

Unit 5 Methodology for the Study of African Traditional Religion

Unit 6 Theories for the Study of African Traditional Religion

Unit 7 Taboos and Totems in African Traditional Religion

UNIT 1 INTRODUCTION TO RELIGION

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3.0 Main Content

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3.4 Typology of World Religious Traditions

3.5 Functions of Religion in the Society

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5.0 Summary

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The need to understand religion in the context of African beliefs system requires critical examination of African Traditional Religious mythology and cosmology. This is because man from its origin is born with culture and belief system that enabled him to worship his creator God in the way that his conscience and ability direct him to do. The study of religion is aimed at understanding the similarities and differences in religion, the religious mythologies and cosmologies and their relevant to the human society. African with diverse culture has religion as unifying factor that helps people to appreciate the corporate development of the environment in which people live in harmony. Therefore, an understanding of African Traditional Religion will create room for a clear understanding of the African people contextually within the framework of their belief system.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Define religion from different perspectives
- Explain the different types of religion
- Discuss the need for the study of religion
- State the significance of religion in society
- Give the functions of religion in society

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Definition of Religion

How to explain or even define religion has yielded less scholarly agreement than any other matter studied. This is because there is no one definition of religion since various scholars see religion from their own perspective. Religion is diverse in historical development, so either culturally varied that definitions developed from our African or western experience often fail to encompass it adequately. A.C. Bouquet argued in his book, *Comparative Religion* that the word 'religion' is of European origin and that it acquired many meanings in Europe. He however observed that scholars in the ancient world did not agree on the etymological connotation of the word. Some scholars connected *religio* with other Latin

terms *relegere* which means to re- read; *relinquere* which is to relinquish; or *religare* which means to relegate, to unite, to bind together. Bouquet examined the two of the various views: The Roman Cicero and Roman writer Servius Cicero took the word from *relegere*, to gather things together, or to pass over the same ground repeatedly.

Another possible meaning, according to Cicero, was ‘to count or observe.’ Cicero focused on the term ‘observe’ to be appropriate in understanding the term ‘religion’. Using the word ‘observe’ would have religion interpreted as “to observe the signs of divine communication.” For Servius and most others, religion was to be associated with the Latin *religare*, to bind things together. The possibility of accepting this root origin is obvious in that this notion expresses the most important feature of religion. That is, “religion binds people together in common practices and beliefs, drawing them together in a common enterprise of life” (Bowker 1997: xvi). This notion shows *religio* as pointing to relationship. Bouquet strongly felt that both roots could be combined to give the sense of the meaning of religion: “a communion between the human and the superhuman.

Thus, he interpreted religion to mean “a fixed relationship between the human self and some non-human entity, the Sacred, the Supernatural, the Self- existent, the Absolute, or simply ‘God’. *Religio* therefore implies a relationship between human beings and some spiritual beings. As we shall see in our study of religion, religion involves relationships both in essence and functions. John Ferguson listed seventeen definitions of religion, which can be organized into the following categories; theological, moral, philosophical, psychological and sociological.

Theological Definition of Religion

The theological definition of religion include religion is the believing in God, religion is belief in spiritual beings, religion is life of God in the soul of man, and religion is a mystery, at once awesome and attractive. The above are the theological definitions of religion because they centred on the ideas that religion has to do with God or super natural spiritual powers. E.B. Taylor asserts that religion being a belief in God and spiritual being involved a belief in a hierarchy of spirits from the lower to the most powerful beings. It is said to be the life of God in the soul of man; an idea which comes from Newton Clarke, who stressed the two realities of God and the soul as necessary for religion to exist. Further still, the definition that related religion to something mysterious is that, religion is a mystery: awesome and

attractive. Rudolf Otto, who found the essence of religion in the idea of the holy, which he claimed, attracts people, owing to its mystery and its power, created this ideology.

Moral Definition of Religion

The moral definition of religion are: religion is leading a good life, religion is morality tinged with emotion, religion is the recognition of all our duties and demand commands and religion is sum of scruples which impede the free use of our faculties. Morality deals with the provision of rules, norms, and directives of how people should live their lives in an acceptable manner. According to moral theory, religion is defined as lading a good life. Mathew Arnold expanded the moral definition of religion by insisting that human emotions or feelings must be added to morality before religion can become real. It is said to be the recognition of all our duties as divine commands, a theory of Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative. Thus, the moral definition of religion makes the central criterion of religion a code of correct behaviour affirmed by believers as having its source in an unquestioned and unquestionable authority.

Philosophical Definition of Religion

The philosophical definition of religion view religion in terms of an abstract or impersonal concept. Religion is what a man does with his solitariness. Alfred North Whitehead described it as the relation of man to his own being, but as a being outside himself. It is a relationship, which according to Paul; people hold with that which concerns them ultimately. Psychological definition of religion stressed that religion has to do with the emotions, feelings, or psychological states of the human in relation to the religious object. Ferguson defines religion as the result of seeking comfort in the world, which, dispassionately considered, is a terrifying wilderness.

Bertrand Russell stresses that because of the misfortunes and sufferings people experience in the world, they seek comfort or consolation in religion. Friedrich Schleiermacher further described religion as "a feeling of absolute dependence". These definitions of religion, which fall within the viewpoint of psychoanalytic school of Sigmund

Freud defined religion as “a universal obsessive neurosis” and “psychological disturbance” which must be overcome if humanity is to attain psychological health.

Psychological Definition of Religion

The psychological definition of religion makes the central criterion of religion feelings or emotions within people, which cause them to appeal to forces greater than themselves to satisfy those feelings. The sociological definition of religion emphasizes on religion as a group consciousness embodying cultural norms or as a product of society in general. Ferguson listed the following definitions, which falls within this category. Religion is the “opium of the people”. Karl Marx posits that religion results from the oppression of the masses by those in positions of social or economic power who use the message of religion to keep the oppressed content with their lot in this life in the hope of a just order in the next one. Religion thus, plays a sociological function for both the oppressor and the oppressed.

Herald Hoffding defined religion as the conservation of values. Though this definition reflects a widely held view of traditional sociologists such as Emile Durkheim or Bronislaw Malinowski, Hoffding maintained that religion is a conservation force within society which defines the fundamental values of the group and then enforces those values by an appeal to supernatural powers. It is co-operative quest after a completely satisfying life”. The emphasis of this definition seems to group it within the psychological; however, it falls within the cooperative quest in sociological category. Martin Frozesky who laces this definition in contemporary scholarship said that religion is “a quest for ultimate well-being”. William Lessa and Evon Vogth described religion as a system of beliefs and practices directed toward the “ultimate concern” of a society.

Sociological Definition of Religion

The sociological definition makes the central criterion of religion the existence of a community of people, which is identified, bound together, and maintained by its beliefs in power or forces greater than the community itself maintain.

3.2 Characteristic Emphases in the Definition of Religion

It is important to mention that each person who defines religion focuses on some particular aspects of human life and experience, or on what religion does, positive or negative. We shall now examine the characteristic emphases in their various definitions. Radoslav A. Tsanoff, in his *Religious Crossroads*, classifies the definitions of religion into the following ways: (1) theistic and other beliefs, (2) practices, (3) mystical feelings, (4) worship of the holy, and (5) conviction of the conservation of values. For our own, we shall identify the definitions of religion and consider them under the following categories.

Feeling

Friedrich Schleiermacher, an important 19th century German theologian and philosopher, has defined religion as “the feeling of absolute dependence, of pure and entire passiveness” and that “true religion is sense and taste for the Infinite.” He asserts that religion should include emotions. Schleiermacher bases his definition on human’s feeling and intuition. It anchors on dependence on one Infinite, or the Eternal, which in some religions may be termed God. The definition does not reflect human participation in religious scheme as in knowing or doing something in the name of religion.

Ritual Activity

This definition emphasises the performance of specific acts that are established by the religious community. Anthony Wallace, an anthropologist defines religion as “a set of rituals, rationalized by myth, which mobilizes supernatural powers for the purpose of achieving or preventing transformations of state in humans or nature.” The definition holds that religion is only situated within the realm of humanity and society. There is no reference to the divine as some religion may hold.

Belief

It is very common to both young and old when asked about the definition of religion to define it as belief in God or the supernatural. Most theo-centric religions like Christianity and

Islam will define religion in terms of ‘belief’, particularly belief in a supernatural power or entity.

Monotheism

Monotheistic religions like Judaism, Christianity and Islam emphasizes that religion is a relationship with one omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient divine being who manifests in and superintends on the affairs of humanity and the whole universe. The essential relationship is differently captured in definite terms in different religions. An example in Judaism is the *Shema* in Judaism as contained in the Old Testament (Deut. 6:4-6); in Christianity as revealed in the belief in Jesus Christ who is regarded as the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6); and in Islam as contained in the *Shahadah*, the Testimony to the oneness of Allah (Qur’an 112).

The Solitary Individual

Alfred North Whitehead, a prominent English-American philosopher, defines religion as “what the individual does with his own solitariness; and if you were never solitary, you were never religious.” This emphasises the involvement of the individual in an intimate personal dialogue with himself or herself. It does not refer to either the supernatural or a group or the society in which a person lives.

Social Valuation

William Lessa and Evon Vogt, (two anthropologists) define religion as “a system of beliefs and practices directed toward the ‘ultimate concern’ of a society.” To them, religion is human-centred. Here, society provides the centre for religious valuation. Religious beliefs, practices, and attitudes are directed toward the expression of what a society of people holds to be of central importance.

Illusion

Karl Marx, a 19th century social philosopher, and the father of communism, defines religion this way: “Religion is the heart of the heartless, sigh of the oppressed creature ... It is

the opium of the people.” Religion is only the illusory sun, which revolves around humans as long as he does not revolve around himself. Marx sees religion as something that misinterprets reality. This portrays human being’s response to the universe as essentially immature and distorted.

Ultimate Reality and Value

John B. Magee says, “Religion is the realm of the ultimately real and ultimately valuable.” Religion is seen as the true and ultimate measure of people’s existence, the final test of life is meaning.

3.3 Aims for the Study of Religion

The study of religion is not new. Many centuries ago, western scholars have conducted studies on religion. What there is was being expressed orally in myths, legends, proverbs, wise sayings and in practical ways like rituals, dances, art, and symbols. The systematic and critical studies of the religious beliefs of the peoples did not begin until recent years, precisely between and after the two world wars. The growth of the science of anthropology and the comparative study of religion aroused the interest of scholars in religion. Despite the pioneering role of Europeans involved in this study, the outcome of their production was still clouded with racial prejudices.

Thus, one of the aims of the study of religion is to make a comparative survey and to indicate an approach to the understanding of the religion. It is now evident that God is one, the God of the whole universe that has revealed Him to various people in various ways throughout the ages. It is the aim of the study to show the world that religion is part of culture and of all history of humankind. A study of religion allow us to understand the differences and to see the similarities between nations and culture; psychologically, philosophically, theologically, sociologically and morally. It will also help us to appreciate our own beliefs by seeing them alongside those of others. Furthermore, it will help us to work for ecumenism via a meaningful exchange of ideas between religious group in dialogue, seminar and open discussions.

Another aim for the study of African Religion is to discover what the adherents actually know, believe, and think about the God and the super sensible world. In the study of religion, we are not out to seek legitimate ways of discovering what the people actually know about their beliefs system and heritage. Religion allows the adherents to how the beliefs of people have influenced their worldviews and moulded their scholars who had studied religion. There is no doubt that a great diversity of religion exist in the world and common political system. As such, to a distant observer, the homogeneity of other religions is much less real than apparent in the world. Our aim, therefore, is to prove to the world that the spiritual world is so real and near that its forces do inspire their visible world.

The study of religion is also to show the relationship of religions in the world with one another. The real cohesive factor of religion in the world is the living supernatural being or God. The study of religion is to better the ways of evangelizing and acculturating peoples. Evangelization and acculturation of the world would help in cultural evolution and refinement of people's culture, especially those practices that are pagan oriented into Christian ones.

3.4 Typology of World Religion Traditions

There are many types of world religious traditions. These include Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Shintoism, African Traditional Religion, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Three of these living world religious traditions are monotheistic religion. They include Christianity, Islam, and African traditional Religion.

a. Taoism

Taoism also known as Daoism is a tradition of Chinese philosophy and Chinese religion, first arising in about the 4th century BC. Among native Chinese schools of thought, the influence of Daoism has been second only to that of Confucianism. Daoism as now understood consists of two separate streams, a school of philosophical thought originating in the classical age of Zhou dynasty China, and a system of religious belief arising some 500 years later in the Han dynasty. These two are normally termed philosophical and religious Daoism and the Daoist basis of the latter lies in the revelation from the sage Laozi that a Daoist called Zhang Daoling claimed to have received in AD 142 in the Sichuan Mountains. Philosophical Daoism has therefore been preserved beneath a mass of religious accretions

derived from native Chinese paganism, shamanism, divination, and superstition; while religious Daoism is now a thriving creed interwoven with Chinese popular culture.

Philosophical Daoism arose out of the intellectual ferment of the Zhou dynasty, in which various philosophical schools competed to advise rulers and others on the correct way to live and govern in a world racked by political and social change. It's likely origins are in the so-called Yangist school, despised by Mencius, who caricatured its doctrines by declaring that Yangists would not pluck a hair from their own heads to benefit the whole world. In fact, it apparently preached self-cultivation and withdrawal to private life, drawing on a native Chinese tradition of mysticism and contemplative exercises resembling yoga.

This tradition was developed in the late 4th century BC by the philosopher Zhuangzi (Chuang-tzu), who began as a Yangist. Soon after, an anonymous thinker, perhaps a minor official, produced a book of related reflections under the name of the semi-mythical figure Laozi (Lao-tzu), who had allegedly instructed Confucius. Evidence suggests that while Zhuangzi saw his beliefs as purely for private use, Laozi presented his as an explicit manual of government.

b. Islam

The Arabic word *islam* literally means “surrender” or “submission”. As the name of the religion, it is understood to mean “surrender or submission to God”. One who has thus surrendered is a Muslim. In theory, all that is necessary for one to become a Muslim is to recite sincerely the short statement of faith known as the *shahadah*: I witness that there is no god but God (Allah) and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God. Although in an historical sense Muslims regard their religion as dating from the time of Muhammad in the early 7th century AD, in a religious sense they see it as identical with the true monotheism which prophets before Muhammad, such as Abraham (Ibrahim), Moses (Musa), and Jesus (Isa), had taught. In the Koran, Abraham is referred to as a Muslim. The followers of these and other prophets are held to have corrupted their teachings, but God in His mercy sent Muhammad to call humanity yet again to the truth.

Features of Islam

Islam has five duties, which traditionally are seen as obligatory for all Muslims, although some mystics (Sufis) have allegorized them, and many Muslims observe them only

partially. These duties are called five pillars of Islam: bearing witness to the unity and uniqueness of God and to the prophethood of Muhammad (*shahadah*); prayer at the prescribed times each day (*salat*); fasting during the month of Ramadan (*sawm*); pilgrimage to Mecca, and the performance of certain prescribed rituals in and around Mecca at a specified time of the year (hajj); and paying a certain amount out of one's wealth as alms for the poor and some other categories of Muslims (*zakat*). The first of these pillars balances external action (the recitation of the *shahadah*) with internal conviction (although different groups within Islam have held different views about the relative importance of recitation and belief in the *shahadah*); the other four, although they take belief for granted, consist predominantly of external acts.

There are other duties and practices regarded as obligatory. As in Judaism, the eating of pork is prohibited and male circumcision is the norm (the latter is not mentioned in the Koran). Consumption of alcohol is forbidden. Meat must be slaughtered according to an approved ritual or else it is not *halal*. In some Muslim communities, practices, which are essentially local customs, have come to be identified as Islamic: the wearing of a sari, for example. There are variant practices concerning the covering of the head or face of a woman in public. Koranic texts that address the issue are interpreted by some to mean that the entire head and face of a woman should be covered, by others as indicating that some sort of veil or headscarf should be worn. Others argue that the Koran does not require any such covering.

c. Judaism

Judaism is the religious culture of the Jews (also known as the people of Israel); one of the world's oldest continuing religious traditions. Judaism originated in the land of Israel (also known as Palestine) in the Middle East in c. 1800 BC. Due to invasions and migration, today's Jewish communities are found all around the world. In mid-1993, the total world Jewish population was some 14.5 million, of whom about 6.8 million lived in North America, more than 3.6 million in Israel, and more than 1.9 million in the countries of the former Soviet Union, the three largest centres of Jewish settlement. Just fewer than 1 million Jews lived in the rest of Europe, most of them in France and Great Britain, and 600,000 in the rest of Asia. Around 1.1 million Jews lived in Central and South America, and about 200,000 in Africa.

Features of Judaism

As a rich and complex religious tradition, Judaism has never been monolithic. Its various historical forms nonetheless have shared certain characteristic features. The most essential of these is a radical monotheism, that is, the belief that a single, transcendent God created the universe and continues providentially to govern it. Underpinning this monotheism is the teleological conviction that the world is both intelligible and purposive, because a single divine intelligence stands behind it. There is nothing that humanity experience that is capricious; everything ultimately has meaning. The mind of God is manifest to the traditional Jew in both the natural order, through creation, and the social-historical order, through revelation. The same God who created the world revealed Himself to the Israelites at Mount Sinai.

The content of that revelation is the Torah revealed instruction, the core of the Hebrew Bible), God's will for humankind expressed in commandments (*mizvoth*) by which individuals are to regulate their lives in interacting with one another and with God. By living in accordance with God's laws and submitting to the divine will, humanity can become a harmonious part of the cosmos. A second major concept in Judaism is that of the covenant (*berith*), or contractual agreement, between God and the Jewish people. According to tradition, the God of creation entered into a special relationship with the Jewish people at Sinai. They would acknowledge God as their sole ultimate king and legislator, agreeing to obey His laws; God, in turn, would acknowledge Israel as His particular people, and be especially mindful of them.

Both biblical authors and later Jewish tradition view this covenant in a universal context. Only after successive failures to establish a covenant with rebellious humanity did God turn to a particular segment of it. Israel is to be a "kingdom of priests", and the ideal social order that it establishes in accordance with the divine laws is to be a model for the human race. Israel thus stands between God and humanity, representing each to the other. The idea of the covenant also determines the way in which both nature and history traditionally have been viewed in Judaism. Israel's well-being is seen to depend on obedience to God's commandments. Both natural and historical events that befall Israel are interpreted as emanating from God and as influenced by Israel's religious behaviour.

A direct causal connection is thus made between human behaviour and human destiny. This perspective intensifies the problem of theodicy (God's justice) in Judaism, because the historical experience of both individuals and the Jewish people has frequently been interpreted as being one of suffering. Much Jewish religious thought, from the biblical Book

of Job onward, has been preoccupied with the problem of affirming justice and meaning in the face of apparent injustice. In time, the problem was mitigated by the belief that virtue and obedience ultimately would be rewarded and sin punished by divine judgment after death, thereby redressing inequities in this world.

The indignities of foreign domination and forced exile from the land of Israel suffered by the Jewish people also would be redressed at the end of time, when God would send His Messiah (*mashiah*, “one anointed” with oil as Israelite kings were), a scion of the royal house of David, to redeem the Jews and restore them to sovereignty in their land. Messianism, from early on, has been a significant strand of Jewish thought. Yearning for the Messiah’s coming was particularly intense in periods of calamity. Ultimately, a connection was drawn between the messianic idea and the concept of the Torah: the individual Jew, through proper study and observance of God’s commandments, could hasten the Messiah’s arrival. Each individual’s action thus assumed a cosmic importance.

Although all forms of Judaism have been rooted in the Hebrew Bible (referred to by Jews as the Tanach, an acronym for its three sections: Torah, the Pentateuch; Naviim, the prophetic literature; and Ketubi the other writings), it would be an error to think of Judaism as simply the “religion of The Book”. Contemporary Judaism is ultimately derived from the rabbinic movement of the first centuries of the Christian era in Palestine and Babylonia and is therefore called rabbinic Judaism. A rabbi (*rabbi* meaning “my teacher” in Aramaic and Hebrew) is a Jewish sage adept in studying the Scriptures. Jewish tradition maintains that God revealed to Moses on Sinai a twofold Torah. In addition to the written Torah (Scripture), God revealed an oral Torah, faithfully transmitted by word of mouth in an unbroken chain from Moses to successive generations, from master to disciple, and preserved now among the rabbis themselves.

The oral Torah was encapsulated in the Mishnah (that which is learnt or memorized), the earliest document of rabbinic literature, edited in Palestine at the turn of the 3rd century. Subsequent rabbinic study of the Mishnah in Palestine and Babylonia generated the Talmud (that which is studied), a wide-ranging commentary on the Mishnah. It later became known as the Gemara (Aramaic for learning or completion), and today the term “Talmud” is often used to refer to the Mishnah and Gemara together. Two Talmuds were produced: the Palestinian or Yerushalmi (of Jerusalem) Talmud, completed around 450 CE, and the Babylonian Talmud, completed around 550 CE, which is larger and considered to be more authoritative. The Talmud is the foundation document of rabbinic Judaism. Early rabbinic writings also include exegetical and homiletical commentaries on Scripture like the

Midrashim and the Midrash and several Aramaic translations of the Pentateuch and other scriptural books like the Targums.

d. Christianity

Christianity is a major world religion, having substantial representation in all the populated continents of the globe. Its total membership may exceed 1.7 billion people. Like any system of beliefs and values, Christianity is in many ways comprehensible only from the inside to those who share the beliefs and strive to live by the values; and a description that would ignore these “inside” aspects of it would not be historically faithful. To a degree that those on the inside often fail to recognize, however, such a system of beliefs and values can also be described in a way that makes sense to an interested observer who even cannot share their outlook.

Features of Christianity

Credo are authoritative summaries of the principal articles of faith of various Churches or bodies of believers. As religions develop, originally simple doctrines are subject to elaboration and interpretation that cause differences of opinion. Detailed creeds become necessary to emphasize the differences between the tenets of schismatic branches and to serve as formulations of belief when liturgical usage, as in the administration of baptism, requires a profession of faith. In the Christian Church, the Apostles' Creed was the earliest summation of doctrine; it has been used with only minor variations since the 2nd century. In addition to the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed are in common use in the Roman Catholic liturgy. In the Orthodox Church, the only creed formally adopted was the Nicene Creed, without the insertion of *filioque* in connection with the source of the Holy Spirit.

With the Reformation, the establishment of the various Protestant Churches necessitated the formulation of new creeds, which, because of the many differences in theology and doctrine, were much longer than the creeds of the ancient Church. The Augsburg Confession is accepted by Lutherans throughout the world, as is the Smaller Catechism of Martin Luther. The Formula of Concord, accepted by most early Lutherans, is now more limited in acceptance. The doctrines of the Church of England are summarized in the Thirty-Nine Articles, and those of the Presbyterians, in the Westminster Confession. Most Reformed

Churches of Europe subscribe to the *Helvetica Posterior*, or Second Helvetic Confession, of the Swiss reformer Heinrich Bullinger, and most Calvinists accept the Heidelberg Catechism.

e. African Traditional Religion

As mentioned above, the three religions of Nigeria are ATR, Islam, and Christianity. Their co-existence has been relatively peaceful until fairly recently. The problem between these religions is relatively recent, though for ATR and Islam, their contact with each other is about a thousand years. Religious pluralism in the world today characterized by mutual suspicion, intolerance, exclusivism and uncompromising attitude, has made itself felt today in Nigeria in all these manifestations. We shall see more of this when we treat the relationship between the three below. Here lies the root of the problem of religious pluralism. Here lie the claim and counter-claim of uniqueness and possession of the entire religious truth. This claim of possessing the truth either between the religious or between different sects within one religion has led to a lot of bloodshed. Hans King writes:

No question in the history of the Churches and of religions has led to so many disputes and bloody conflicts, indeed, “religious wars” as the question about the truth. Blind zeal for truth in all periods and in all Churches and religions, has ruthlessly injured, burned, destroyed and murdered. Conversely, a weary forgetfulness of truth has had consequently a loss of orientation and norms, so that many no longer believed in anything.

It is this situation that has given religion a very “bad name” and has caused in many, an attitude of “practical indifference. Many historians of comparative religion have adopted the attitude that all religions are equal and bring all equally to salvation. Mahatma Ghandi writes that all religions are likes “rivers that meet in the same ocean...if we look to the aim, there is no difference among religions. Again, over this problem, Sergio Bocchini asks: “Una religion vale l’altra?” (Is one religion as good as another is?) to this question, one ought to affirm the undeniable fact that all religions contain some truth which must respected but equally clear is the fact that all cannot be equal, even from the point of view of their origin and from the fact as to whether they are revealed or natural; grace is always higher than nature. Again, with regard to their differences, for example, concept of God and of salvation, some are so basic

and contradictory that not all can be equally correct. Thus, all non-Christian religions contain some truths even if not the whole truth. Vatican Council II says:

Men look to the various religions for answers to...profound mysteries of the human conditions...other religions...found everywhere strive variously to answer the restless searching's of the human heart by proposing "ways" which consist of teaching, rules of life, and sacred ceremonies...The Catholic Church rejects nothing which is true and holy in these religions.

As to the position of the Church among these various religions, we shall go into that as we discuss Christian response through dialogue. What this section wishes to affirm is that religious truth is found in all religions though the degree differs. Not all religions are equal but they agree on this one point, that religion is man's search for God or the ultimate reality.

f. Hinduism

Hinduism is a religious tradition of Indian origin, comprising the beliefs and practices of Hindus. The word Hindu is derived from the River Sindhu, or Indus. The geographical term was Al-Hind, and the people of the land east of the Indus were therefore called Hindus. This was not initially a religious label. The word Hinduism is an English word of more recent origin. Hinduism entered the English language in the early 19th century to describe the beliefs and practices of those residents of India who had not converted to Islam or Christianity and did not practise Judaism or Zoroastrianism. Hindus themselves prefer to use the Sanskrit term, *sanatana dharma* for their religious tradition. *Sanatana dharma* is often translated into English as "eternal tradition" or "eternal religion" but the translation of dharma as "tradition" or "religion" gives an extremely limited, even mistaken, sense of the word.

Dharma has many meanings in Sanskrit, the language of some of the Hindu scriptures, including "moral order", "duty", and "right action". The Hindu community today is found primarily in India, Nepal, and Bali in the Indonesian archipelago. Substantial Hindu communities are present in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Mauritius, Fiji, the Caribbean, East Africa, and South Africa. Scattered Hindu communities are found in most parts of the Western world. Hindus today number nearly 900 million, including about 20 million who live outside India, making them the third largest religious community in the world, after

Christians and Muslims. Three other religions that originated in India branched off from Hinduism: Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism.

Characteristics of Hinduism

Belief in Brahman: The Ultimate Reality Various schools have contributed to Hindu thought, each school with a different emphasis. The school known as Vedanta has been the standard form of intellectual Hinduism. According to Vedanta, the highest aim of existence is the realization of the identity or union of the individual's innermost self (atman) with the ultimate reality. Although Vedanta states that this ultimate reality is beyond having a name, the word Brahman is used to refer to it. Reincarnation in Hinduism is referred to as Samsara. According to Hinduism, this current life is merely one link in a chain of lives that extends far into the past and projects far into the future.

The point of origin of this chain cannot be determined. The process of involvement in the universe-the chain of births and deaths-is called *samsara*. *Samsara* is caused by a lack of knowledge of the true self and resultant desire for fulfilment outside self. We continue to embody ourselves, or be reborn, in this infinite and eternal universe because of these unfulfilled desires. The chain of births lets us resume the pursuit. The law that governs *samsara* is called *karma*. Each birth and death we undergo is determined by the balance sheet of our *karma*-that is, in accordance with the actions performed and the dispositions acquired in the past. The belief in *Karma* is a crucial Hindu concept. According to the doctrine of *karma*, our present condition in life is the consequence of the actions of our previous lives. The choices we have made in the past directly affect our condition in this life, and the choices we make today and thereafter will have consequences for our future lives in *samsara*.

An understanding of this interconnection, according to Hindu teachings, can lead an individual towards right choices, deeds, thoughts, and desires, without the need for an external set of commandments. The principle of *karma* provides the basic framework for Hindu ethics. The word *karma* is sometimes translated into English as "destiny", but *karma* does not imply the absence of free will or freedom of action that destiny does. Under the doctrine of *karma*, the ability to make choices remains with the individual. When we cause pain or injury, we add to the karmic debt we carry into our future lives. When we give to others in a genuine way, we lighten our karmic load. In the Bhagavad-Gita, an important Hindu text, Krishna states that the best way to be free of debt is by selfless action, or by dedicating every action as an offering to Krishna himself.

In addition, human beings can purify themselves of karmic debt through different *yogas* (disciplines), *kriyas* (purification processes), and *bhakti* (devotions). Hindu thought takes the personality of the seeker as the starting point. It divides human personalities into types dominated by physicality, activity, emotionality, or intellectuality. The composition of our personality intuitively predisposes us to a type of yoga—that is, a path we might follow to achieve union with Brahman. Although many people associate the word yoga with a physical discipline, in its original Hindu meaning yoga refers to any technique that unites the seeker with the ultimate reality.

While physical fitness buffs may seek such a union by practising Hatha yoga, people with different personality traits have other choices. For the action-oriented person there is Karma yoga, the yoga of action, which calls for a life of selfless deeds and actions appropriate to the person's station in life. For the person of feeling, Bhakti yoga, the yoga of devotion, calls for unconditional love for a personal divinity. For the person of thought, Jnana yoga, the yoga of knowledge, calls for spiritual and physical discipline intended to bring direct insight into ultimate reality. The yogas do not represent tightly sealed compartments, merely convenient classifications. A well-balanced personality might well employ all four. These yogas are sometimes called *margas* (paths), suggesting that the same destination can be approached by more than one route, and indeed by more than one mode of travel.

g. Buddhism

Buddhism, a major world religion, founded in northeastern India and based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, who is known as the Buddha, or the Enlightened One. Though Buddhism originated as a monastic movement within the dominant Brahman tradition of the day, it quickly developed in a distinctive direction. The Buddha not only rejected significant aspects of Brahmanic philosophy, but also challenged the authority of the priesthood, denied the validity of the Vedic scriptures, and rejected the sacrificial cult based on them. Moreover, he opened his movement to members of all castes, denying that a person's spiritual worth is a matter of birth. Gautama was born around 560 BC in Northern India.

His father was a king from the Sakya clan and by all standards; he was from a background of opulence and luxury. At the age of 16, he got married to a princess called Yasodara who bore him a son named Rahula. On his 29th birthday, he came face to face with some of the harsh realities of life when for the first time he saw a sick man, an old man, and a

dead man. This made him to realize the subjectivity of all human beings to birth, disease, and death. This marked a turning point in his life as he turned to seek a panacea to the problem. Seeing all his possessions as impediments, he renounced them and went in search of peace. He went through much unsuccessful self-denial until under the Bo tree; he attained the state called '*nirvana*'.

Features of Buddhism

The major feature of Buddhism is the concept of the Four Noble Truths. Four Noble Truths, which in Sanskrit is called *Catvari-Arya-Satyani*, is the four fundamental principles of Buddhism, expounded by the Buddha first sermon in the deer park at Benares after the enlightenment. They are as follows: (1) The Holy Truth of Suffering: all existence is suffering (*dukkha*); (2) The Holy Truth of the Cause of Suffering: the cause (*samudaya*) of suffering is ignorant craving (*tanha*) for pleasure, for perpetuating life, and an inclination to assume that everything ends at death; (3) The Holy Truth of the Suppression of Suffering: suffering can be suppressed (*nirodha*) by withdrawal from and renunciation of craving; (4) The Holy Truth of the Way to the Suppression of Suffering. The path (*magga*) that leads to the suppression of suffering is the Noble Eightfold Path.

Although interpreted in various ways, these precepts are accepted by all schools of Buddhism, and essentially summarize the religion. They are held to provide the key to attainment of nirvana. The Buddhist sacred texts called the *tipitaka* comprise of 31 books that are organized into three collections called the *Vinaya Pitaka* (basket of discipline), the *Sutta Pitaka* (basket of discourses), and the *Abhidhama Pitaka* (basket of ultimate doctrines). Presently, Buddhism has large population of followers especially in countries like Thailand, China, Mongolia, and Sri-Lanka. Some of the states in America have Buddhist temples, which attest to the emergence of Buddhism in the United States.

h. Confucianism

Confucius, which in Chinese is called Kongfuzi, was a Chinese philosopher, founder of Confucianism and one of the most influential figures in Chinese history. According to tradition, Confucius was born in the state of Lu of the noble Kong clan. His original name

was Kong Qiu. Accounts of his life record that his father, commander of a district in Lu, died three years after Confucius was born, leaving the family in poverty; but Confucius nevertheless received a fine education, for Lu was famous for preserving the state traditions of the Zhou dynasty. He was married at the age of 19 and had one son and two daughters.

During the four years immediately after his marriage, poverty reportedly compelled him to perform menial labours for the chief of the district in which he lived. His mother died in 527 BC, and after a period of mourning, he began his career as a teacher, usually travelling about and instructing the small body of disciples that had gathered around him. His fame as a man of learning and character with great reverence for traditional ideals and customs soon spread through the municipality of Lu. Living as he did in the second half of the Zhou dynasty, when central government had degenerated in China and intrigue and vice were rampant, Confucius deplored the contemporary disorder and lack of moral standards.

He came to believe that the only remedy was to convert people once more to the principles and precepts of the sages of antiquity. He therefore lectured to his pupils on the ancient classics of Chinese literature. He also stressed the importance of music, for the Chinese music of this time had ceremonial and religious functions important in state functions and worship. He taught the great value of the power of example. Rulers, he said, can be great only if they themselves lead exemplary lives, and were they willing to be guided by moral principles, their states would inevitably attract citizens and become prosperous and happy.

One popular tradition about Confucius's life states that at the age of 50 he was appointed magistrate of Zhongdu, and the next year minister of crime of the state of Lu. His administration was successful; reforms were introduced, justice was fairly dispensed, and crime was almost eliminated. So powerful did Lu become that the ruler of a neighbouring state manoeuvred to secure the minister's dismissal. It is more likely, however, that he was only a minor official in Lu. In any case, Confucius left his office in 496 BC, travelling about and teaching, vainly hoping that some other prince would allow him to undertake measures of reform. In 484 BC, after a fruitless search for an ideal ruler, he returned for the last time to Lu. He spent the remaining years of his life in retirement, writing commentaries on the classics. He died in Lu and was buried in a tomb at Qufu, Shandong.

The entire teaching of Confucius was practical and ethical, rather than religious. He claimed to be a restorer of ancient morality and held that proper outward acts based on the five virtues of kindness, uprightness, decorum, wisdom, and faithfulness constitute the whole of human duty. Reverence for parents, living and dead, was one of his key concepts. His view

of government was paternalistic, and he enjoined all individuals to observe carefully their duties towards the state. In subsequent centuries, his teachings exerted a powerful influence on Chinese philosophy and the history of China. The principles of Confucianism are contained in the nine ancient Chinese works handed down by Confucius and his followers. These writings can be divided into two groups: the Five Classics and the Four Books. The *Wujing* (Five Classics), which originated before the time of Confucius, consist of the *Yijing* or *I Ching* (Book of Changes), *Shujing* (Book of Documents), *Shijing* (Book of Poetry), *Liji* (Book of Rites), and *Chunqiu* (Spring and Autumn Annals).

The *Yijing* is a manual of divination probably first compiled under the Shang dynasty before the 11th century BC; its supplementary philosophical portion, contained in a series of appendices, may have been written later by Confucius and his disciples. The *Shujing* is a collection of ancient historical documents, and the *Shijing*, an anthology of ancient poems. The *Liji* deals with the principles of conduct, including those for public and private ceremonies; it was destroyed in the 3rd century BC, but presumably, much of its material was preserved in the present compilation, which dates from the Han dynasty. The *Chunqiu*, the only work reputedly compiled by Confucius himself, is a chronicle of major historical events in Confucius's home state of Lu and elsewhere in feudal China from the 8th century BC to Confucius's death early in the 5th century BC.

The *Sishu* (Four Books); compilations of the sayings of Confucius and Mencius and of commentaries by followers on their teachings, are the *Lunyu* (Analects), a collection of maxims by Confucius that form the basis of his moral and political philosophy; *Daxue* (The Great Learning) and *Zhongyong* (The Doctrine of the Mean), containing some of Confucius's philosophical utterances arranged systematically with comments and expositions by his disciples; and the *Mengzi* (Book of Mencius), containing the teachings of one of Confucius's great followers. Confucius's own teachings were passed on as oral traditions and collated in the *Lunyu*. They show him as a self-confessed moral conservative in a turbulent age, appalled at the political chaos and social changes, which followed the disintegration of the Zhou kingdom into warring feudal states.

This turbulence had forced Confucius and others to start thinking about the lost “Way of the Ancient Kings” of Zhou, and how to restore it, obliging them to become philosophical innovators despite themselves. For Confucius, social and political order was the same, and the personal virtue of rulers and people ensured the health of the state. His keys to good order were rites (*li*) and music, for Chinese music of the period was central to religious and official rites, and Confucius valued both its ritual function and its power to move men's hearts. He

also valued the poems of ancient Chinese literature (most of which were sung to music) as civilizing and edifying influences. Allied to this was his emphasis on the rectification of names, ensuring that the correct social and other distinctions were maintained by using only the appropriate words for them.

A state provided with the most befitting rites and music, selected from the various available traditions, would automatically produce virtuous and happy citizens; laws would be almost unnecessary because disputes would never arise. Confucius roamed China seeking in vain for a sympathetic ruler to adopt his scheme. The keynote of Confucian ethics is *ren*, variously translated as “love”, “goodness”, “humanity”, and “human-heartedness”. *Ren* is a supreme virtue representing human qualities at their best; in Confucius's time, it apparently was associated with the ruling class and had a meaning more like “nobility”, but its usage soon broadened. In human relations, construed as those between one person and another, *ren* is manifested in *zhong*, or faithfulness to oneself and others, and *shu*, or altruism, best expressed in the Confucian golden rule, “Do not do to others what you do not want done to yourself”.

Other important Confucian virtues include righteousness (*yi*), propriety (*li*), integrity (*xin*), and filial piety (*xiao*). One who possesses all these virtues becomes a *junzi* (perfect man). Politically, Confucius advocated a paternalistic government in which the sovereign is benevolent and honourable and the subjects are respectful and obedient. A ruler should cultivate moral perfection in order to set a good example to the people, and to attract subjects to swell his realm. In education, Confucius upheld a theory, which was remarkable for the feudal period, in which he lived, that “in education, there is no class distinction”.

3.5 Functions of Religion in the Society

Religion is found in every human society in the world. It is one of the most important structures of social system in human societies. Religion is concerned with man's relation to and attitude towards God and other spiritual beings. The major significant of religion is to bring peace and harmony among people in the society. Since religion has continued to exist from ages, no society can do away with religion because it permeates all the activities of life. Religion by its dealing with the divine beings which are concerned with human destiny and welfare, and to whom humanity may respond and relate themselves, provides support, consolation, and reconciliation.

Religion provides important spiritual and emotional comfort and consolation in the face of failures and disappointment in life. Religion makes relationship between humanity and the divine possible through cult and the ceremonial ritual and thereby gives humanity assurance for a new security and feels more confident in the midst of the uncertainties and impossibilities of the vicissitudes of life. Religion gives sacred Backing or support to the custom norms and values of an established society, by maintaining or uploading the dominance of group goals or values or needs of the generality of the society over individual wishes and needs, and thereby suppressing the individual impulses for the general good of the society.

That is, religion does not allow individual needs and impulses to over-ride the general interest of the society. Religion also prescribes rituals in which guilt can be expiated and the individual or sinner released from bondage and reintegrated into the social group. Thus, religion hallows the norms and values of the society; contributing to social control and thereby aiding order and stability; and helps in the reconciliation of the sinner. Religion also provides a standard of values in terms of which the established norms, rules, and values may be critically examined and found seriously wanting or lacking. This is especially likely to be true in respect of religions, which emphasize the transcendence of God and His consequent superiority over, and independent of the established authorities in the society. Religion aids self identify. When individuals accept religious values and the belief about human nature and destiny associated with them, they develop important aspects of their own self-understanding and self-definition.

Secondly, as they participate in religious rituals and worship they openly dramatize the significant elements of their own identity. In these various ways, religion affects individuals' understanding of "who they are "and" what they are". Davis, a sociologist has expressed the idea that religion gives the individual a sense of identity with the distant past and the limitless future. It invokes in people the sense of awareness. It expands their ego or spirit by making their spirit significant for the universe and the universe significant for them. Religion as in the above has in various ways contributed to the integrated of the personality. Religion is closely related to growth and maturation of the people and their passage through the various ages grading which are recognized or identified by the society. Psychologists have said that individual development goes through a series of encounters, which are related to the various age levels of people: a series of encounters from infancy to death.

4.0 CONCLUSION

This unit provides a general introduction of religion with emphasis on the definition of religion, characteristics emphasizes in the definition of religion, typology of religious beliefs, aim for the study of religion and functions of religion in the Society. Religion is seen as an indispensable institution in the society despite of its positive and negative influences.

5.0 SUMARRY

The following are the major points of this unit:

- Religion can be defined from various perspectives.
- There are six types of religious beliefs: atheism, deism, humanism, monism, theism, polytheism, and henotheism.
- Most functions of religion are sociological.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Define religion with reference to its sociological, theological, psychological, phenomenological, anthropological, and philosophical definitions.
2. Briefly explain the various types of religions that are regarded as living religions.
3. What are the functions of religion in the society?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 2 INTRODUCTION TO AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

That religion plays a significant role in the lives of people all over the world is not an understatement. The truth of this is brought out much more in the life of the African. This unit introduces you to the religion that was and still being practiced in Africa prior to the advent of Christianity and Islam. The aim of this course is not to turn you to a traditional religionist but to give you an insight into the religious worldview of the adherents of this

religion. This will give you an opportunity to minister to them at the point of their needs. In this second unit, you will be introduced to the study of African Traditional Religion. You will examine the problem encountered in defining African Traditional Religion, the obstacles and the difficulties experienced in the process of the study of African Traditional Religion, the stages hitherto in the study of African Traditional Religion, the basic rules for study of African Traditional Religion and the sources of information for the study of African Traditional Religion.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Discuss the Errors of Terminology in the Study of African Traditional Religion
- Identify the obstacles facing the study of African Traditional Religion.
- Identify the stages hitherto in the study of African Traditional Religion.
- Discuss the sources from where African Traditional Religion can be studied.
- State the basic rules in the study of African Traditional Religion

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 African Traditional Religion: The Quest for Appropriate Nomenclature

The study of African Traditional Religion is bedevilled with many problems, which makes its studies very difficult and complex. Initially, the problem was that of the name, whether it was to be called African Traditional Religion in the singular, or African Traditional Religions in the plural. The contention hinged on the fact that there were various religious traditions of the various tribes of the African people. There are those who think that African Religion without “s”, is a better description of African Traditional Religion, while other think that African Traditional Religions with “s” is a better description of African Traditional Religion. Others think that African religion should be called “Tribal Religions,” “Indigenous Religions”, “Ethnic Religions” or “Preliterate Religions. The reason behind this

is to capture the tribal nature of African Traditional Religions and to show that each is bound and limited to the people among whom it evolved and to show that one indigenous religion cannot be propagated in another tribal group.

In addition, there is no conversion from one indigenous religion to another. However, we argue in favour of rendering African Traditional Religion in the singular. The argument being that the existence of a common world-view as well as similarities in belief-systems, ritual forms, values and institutions across the various regions of the continent, provide a sufficient basis for keeping the singular form of the name. Again, there is no reason, whatsoever, to single out African religion for pluralization, while accepting as normal a multiplicity of denominations, even rival sects in other religions of humankind, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Thus, the tribal variants of African religion should rather be seen as denominations of the religion.

In addition, there is the question of whether to render the religion as African Traditional Religion or just as African Religion. Initially, the practice was to refer to it as African Traditional Religion but years of studies by such scholars like Tempels, Mbiti, Idowu and others, questioned the use of the word “Traditional” in qualifying African Traditional Religion. For these scholars the term, traditional, was considered derogatory. The major demerit of calling the religion African Traditional Religion stems from the evolutionist overtones involved in the usage. However, proponents of African Traditional Religion did not give up without a serious fight. For instance, Erivwo contends that throwing away “traditional” in the rendition entails a great loss as traditional, along with African, are the two major components of African Traditional Religion.

According to Erivwo, a thing becomes traditional once it has been handed down from one generation to another. Thus, a custom or usage is traditional if it has been transmitted from one generation to another, “from time immemorial,” so that in this sense, Islam and Christianity known historically to have been imported into Africa from Europe and Arabia cannot be traditional to Africa. However, by far, the more important word in the term is “African” which presents an assumed unitary portrait of the religions of the African. In addition, proponents argue that though it is true that many features of religions and its practice are similar across Africa, it would be erroneous to assume that all African Traditional religion(s) is the same.

Hence, it has been suggested that the right label for the religions of Africa is African Traditional Religion or African Indigenous Religion to reflect the plurality with the continent’s religious landscape as opposed to other religions, which due to the process of

contextualization are now construed as African religions too. An example is the reality of African Christianity and African Islam cannot be called “African Religions” because both claim to be universal religions, but they originated outside Africa. One can talk of Christianity in Africa or African Christianity or African Islam but to refer to Islam or Christianity as African Traditional Religion would be to contradict the basic claims of both religions to transcend all geographical cultural and racial boundaries. In fact, the term “African Religion” is an apt term to identify and distinguish traditional religion from other religions, now practiced in Africa. From the foregoing, African Traditional Religion can therefore, be defined as:

Institutionalized patterns of beliefs and worship practiced by African Societies from time immemorial in response to the Supernatural Being as manifested in their environment and experience.

Mbiti noted that African beliefs are not formulated into sets of dogmas. Every member simply assimilates whatever religious ideas and practices are held in his family and community. They have no founders, no reformers, and no sacred scriptures, so that the beliefs among the different communities differ greatly, especially as each group sprang from different historic and environmental experiences. Agriculturalists, for example, emphasises fertility cults like the worship of the Earth-Deities, while nomadic groups cherish the worship of sky-Deities. This evidence clearly indicates that one cannot talk of African Traditional Religion as one organization or movement, which has one historical origin, and a codified system of beliefs and practices. There are philosophical principles, which underline and unify the various African beliefs, myths, symbols, and rituals. These have been subsumed under four concepts, namely:

- 1) Dynamism (being is active not static). It is a life force, which tends towards self-increment.
- 2) Harmony (beings are interlinked and constantly interact with one another).
- 3) Continuity (life and time is cyclic, no demarcation between the spiritual and material) and
- 4) Humanism (African Religion is anthropocentric and this worldly).

Booth has pointed out that the similarities in African beliefs do not always follow geo-cultural lines. Smith noted that there are major difference in the beliefs of West African

“Negroes” and the “Bantus” of East Central and South Africa because the former pays more attention to the “Deities” than the latter.

3.2 Errors of Terminology in the Study of African Traditional Religion

The study of African religion at the earliest attempt was not geared towards understanding the people’s religious perspectives but rather the aim was to condemn the religion and advocate conversion to Christianity. Hence, the study of African traditional religion began on the premise that it was negative, devilish, inferior, and should be totally discarded. The study of the religion was marked by the use of foreign theoretical framework into which data was forced. It was therefore inevitable that misrepresentations and misinterpretations would occur. In the process, the African’s identity and self-esteem were greatly disvalued and the consequences are still with Africans today.

Until about some decades ago when African scholars started writing on the true nature of African religion, the field of study was controlled by anthropologists, explorers and investors who were non-indigenes from Europe and North America. Consequently, many porous labels were attached to African religion due to lack of knowledge on the true nature of the religion. In addition, these foreign writers were operating with the assumption that Western religion, Christianity, was superior to African religion in its entirety and that African religion should be discarded. Consequently, certain labels emerged in order to disparage the religion and render it unattractive. The following are a number of such labels.

Primitive

The word “primitive” is derived from the Latin word “*primus*” which means “first” or “ancient”. The concise dictionary also defined “primitive “as something that is early, ancient, “old fashioned” ,”simply rude” , original” and primary. The European scholars employed the term to mean that African continent is “backward”, “crude” and “under developed”. Idowu noted that this mentality sprang out of standardization that anything which did not conform to western cultural pattern could not be accepted as a standard norm by the western scholars. Besides, the element of ancient is found in every culture and religion. These elements maintain themselves by the principle of continuity and discontinuity. Thus, it is unreasonable to be bias or prejudiced racial discrimination in the manner western scholars did to African continent.

Native

The word “Native” denotes one who is local, primitive, and traditional. This term was used by European scholars to derogatory described African people as backward and underdeveloped.

Tribe

The pocket Oxford Dictionary defined “tribe” as “group or people in a primitive or barbarous stage of development, acknowledging the authority of a chief and regarding themselves as having a common ancestor. The advanced learners’ dictionary of current English, also defined “tribe” as racial group or one united by language and customs, living as a community under chides or groups of persons. Whatever may have been the original meaning of the word, there is no doubt that it has departed from anything decent and honourable and has come to bear a dirty, ragged, and disreputable fragment of humanity. The Europeans scholars view Africa as an entity or a village consisting of people with diverse cultural identities. It is therefore, wrong to apply the term to a group of people like the Africans who are made up of different nationalities and are technological advanced.

Savage

This is another derogatory term used by western scholars to describe the African people and their religion. The word savage stands at the opposite end of the pole of civilized group of people. The western scholars used this term to describe African people because of the contrast between African culture and their own. Through sheer prejudice, lack of sympathy and understanding, they saw African culture and religious practices as technologically backward.

Paganism

The word “pagan” comes from the Latin word “*pagamus*” which means “a village dweller” or “country man”. It also means a person living far away from the civilized community. When it was brought into the field of religion, pagan was a term used originally to describe a person who was not a Jew, Christian, or a Muslim. Later on, the word acquired a derogatory connotation, especially as it was applied to Africans as people who have no religion.

Polytheism

This is a belief in pantheon of spirits. It is wrong to say that African people are pantheons because they believe in divinities and the Supreme Being. Idowu (1973), explained that what is obtained in Africa is “diffuses monotheism” or the existence of pantheon of divinities which are the deputy of Olodumare or the Supreme Deity.

Fetishism

The word “fetish” comes from the Portuguese word “*fetico*” which originally referred to “any work of art” or “man made religious objects” such as talismans, charms, among others, discovered by the Portuguese on their voyages. Later on the word was used derogatorily as a general theory of primitive religion where external objects are animated by life similar to that of humanity. It was also used as a descriptive term for African traditional religion to mean that African people worship charms, talismans, and amulets.

Idolatry

The word idolatry comes from the Greek term “*eldolon*” which means “a pantheon image, likeness, or an image of God”. The Advanced Learners’ Dictionary defined it as “an image of God” or “objects of worship of a false god”. The European missionaries accused Africans of worshipping false gods, which were symbols and emblems representing spiritual beings. However, they failed to understand that these images, shapes, and phantom are just cult objects or symbols of worship and not the end in them. Besides, African religion is not

the only religion with such symbols. Other religions of the world have such symbols of their own. It is therefore wrong to conclude that African religion is idolatry since the emblems, image, and symbols found in it are only used to symbolize or represent spiritual realities.

Animism

The word “animism comes from the Latin word “Anima” which means “soul” Animism is a belief that spirits inhabits natural objects with separate existence. Edward Tylor who expounded the theory of animism was the first to employ the term to connote the existence of souls in spiritual beings. The term was later used derogatorily on African people to describe their religion and to show that spirits inhabited African society. This is not correct since such belief is found elsewhere not only in African. The Jews for instance, believe that Yahweh their God inhabited mount Hoerb, the mountain of God, and that he was present in the Ark of the Covenant. Muslims too venerate the sacred stone, the Kaba in Mecca wherever they go for pilgrimage. Animism is therefore not a peculiar belief of African people but also of Hindusim and Judaism who believe in the presence spirits especially in animals.

Anachronism

This is another derogatory term used by western scholars and missionaries to describe African people and their religion. The “foreign” writers had the belief that African society is a chronic one, changing to meaninglessness and vehicles traditions. This label holds no water because every society has the right to maintain some of her cherished traditions.

Juju

The word juju comes from the French word *juojuo*, which means a little doll, or a small try made in the form of a human being. This term was later used by European investigators to describe African religion. It is wrong to say that Africans wear juju as toys, which do not symbolize anything religious or positive intention. This wrong conception of African Religion by western scholars was because of African images and cultic emblems, which according to their understanding symbolize spiritual beings. However, one important thing to note is that African magic and medicine are not juju, but an embodiment of a spiritual agent, which aimed at achieving cultic powers. These derogatory term used by early western

scholars, anthropologists, ethnographers, explorers and missionaries who saw nothing good in Africa, but only the darkness of its continent is a miss-presentation of African identity. Their conclusion that African people have no idea of God is however, a mere bias and prejudice.

Heathenism

The word heathenism came into being as an analogy of the word pagan. It comes from the German root. The suffix-en has the meaning 'belonging to'. Heath on the other hand means the wasteland removed from the outskirts of the town, where outlaws and vagabonds and brigand live. Heathen then means a dweller on the heath. Heathenism as an adjective means the habit or the characteristics, or the disposition of heath-dwellers. As it is with its twin-word *paganus*, heathen, which was, originally a sociological term became an adjective used to describe religion.

The Microsoft Encarta Premium defines heathen as “an offensive term that deliberately insults somebody who does not acknowledge the God of the Bible, Torah, or Koran” or “an offensive term that deliberately insults somebody’s way of life, degree of knowledge, or non-belief in religion”. It has to be noted that the dictionary agrees that the word has come from the German language. Heathen is a word coined by races that look down from an Olympian height of superiority upon other races. As it is with *paganus*, the name heathenism is a most unsuitable and obnoxious misnomer as far as the African indigenous religion is concerned.

Ancestors Worship

Still other investigators have defined African indigenous religion as ancestor worship. According to them, all that African people regard as spiritual beings were no more than deified ancestors were. Like other terminologies, this term is not true of the African indigenous religion. Though one cannot deny that the belief in ancestors is a strong element in African indigenous religion, it has to be stated that the ancestors are not worshipped but venerated; and veneration of ancestors is not the monopoly of African indigenous religion.

3.2 Obstacles Facing the Study of African Traditional Religion

There are many obstacles in the study of African religion. Idowu enumerated some of the obstacles usually encountered by researchers in the study of African traditional religion to include:

Lack of Written Materials

Lack of written records constitutes a big problem for the study of African Religion. Before now, all the available information we had on the religion was oral. Consequently, none of the manifestations of religious consciousness of the African has been preserved in a sacred scripture. This largely affected a research on African traditional religion and hampered a systematic documentation. More often than not, fragments of one or more traditions are collected and placed together to form a systematic documentation in order to get the whole story. Moreover, this makes it impossible for scholars to agree on how to judge the theology of African traditional religion and compare it with other established religions of the world like Islam, Christianity, and Buddhism.

The Dark Continent Syndrome

The claim held in some scholarly circles that Africa was highly inaccessible at the beginning earned the continent sobriquet “the Dark Continent”. By this, they meant that Africa was a continent about which much was not known. The foreign researchers who first investigated about the religion complained that the geography of the continent made it difficult for them to move around the continent and gather necessary information. Despite the acknowledgement of this fact, a good number of them still went ahead and published incorrect information about the African religion. It is unfortunate that to date such information still makes rounds not only among foreigners but also among Africans. In other words, because of the fact that the early writers lacked adequate knowledge of the people and the religion of Africa, most of what had been written is mostly untrue, exaggerated, or distorted.

Direct and Indirect Colonial Indoctrination

From the colonial days, there has been a lot of indoctrination of the African mind against their culture and their religion. Even today in the postcolonial era, the indoctrination

still goes on unabated and it is not common to hear Africans referring to their culture as demonic and evil. As a result, most Africans are not even interested in studying the religion and those who do are looked down. This bias also affects the research work of the scholars most of whom today have become Christians or Muslims. The lack of interest in African religion and culture is leading to the gradual extinction of the religion and all it stands for.

Death

Death carries away from time to time those who are custodians of culture and religious traditions. It becomes therefore difficult to get accurate information, which has been passed, onto younger generations. As the generation passes away, the traditions become lesser and lesser in details and this resulted to dislocation, distortion and weakening of authentic facts. This is where the custodians of culture have all died.

Secrecy

Usually, the practices and information about most aspects of religion are guarded secretly. These secrets are revealed only to the initiates. Those who also have this secret information on these religions are also under oath not to reveal the secrets to any non-initiate. This secrecy makes it difficult for the non-initiates to have a true understanding of these religions.

External Medium of Expression of Reality and Reality so Expressed

Any study of religion deals with the external manifestations of man's response to his object of worship. The gap between man's spiritual experiences and his response behaviour, which we may call religion, and the inevitable distortion that intervenes between the two constitute a formidable problem for the study of African religion. Whereas in Christian religion, there are prophetic destructions between reality and vehicles of meditation, African tradition religion on the other hand has no records and prophetic documentations. Thus, an "outsider" watching an African at worship at his shrines may equate the objective representation of his object of worship with the object itself. He may conclude, as many have done, that the Africans worship stones, trees, and animals. He may forget that religious symbols are not to be equated with the realities they symbolize since the Africans have not

been able to express this understanding in written form. The tendency for the scholar, therefore, is to identify his/her symbols with the realities they symbolize.

Multiplicity of Languages

The multiplicity of languages in Africa is also a major hindrance to the study of religion. If you take the case of Nigeria as an example, there are at least 500 languages. No researcher has the capacity to master 500 languages even if his strong interest in religion pushes him to do so. Yet, a proper and in-depth study of any religion requires a thorough understanding of the original language of the adherents of the religion. The Microsoft Encarta Premium has this to say about the number of languages in Africa: “the number of distinctive languages spoken in Africa is open debate. Some experts put the number at round 2,000, while others count more than 3,000”.

Influence of Other Religions

Many books on African religion in the early days were written by tourists whose only reason for visiting Africa was to lend air of authenticity to their armchair assumptions and prejudices about African religion. Ever before setting their feet on the African soil, such scholars made up their minds to study African Religion from the prism of Islam and Christianity. Thus, the influence of other religions, especially Christianity and Islam in the study of African religion cannot be overemphasized. As generation after generation of Africans come under the influence of foreign religions or embrace the foreign religions, one or two things happen: they either cut away completely from the old faith (which may lead to total neglect of the old faith until it gradually disintegrates) or practice the two religions.

Unfair Comparison of Different Religions

More often than not, the religion of scholar making a study is taken as a standard for judging other religions, which may not conform to his/her own. Samuel Baker who wrote on the Nilotes of Sudan held:

The people of Nilotes of Sudan are not without a belief in a supreme being; nor they have any form of worship, or idolatry, nor is the darkness of their minds enlightened by a ray of disposition.

This presentation of Baker has been proved wrong. However, his study of Nilotic religion from the perspective of others is unfair.

The Influence of Western Education and Culture

Western education has most of the time taken the people out of the native homes and exposed them to foreign education and culture. Consequently, they lost touch with their homeland and culture and this leads to losing touch with their religion. There are times when people like these return home and are made rulers or chiefs yet they lack a proper understanding of the indigenous religion and this has come to poses serious problem to the existence and the study of African religions.

The Evolutionary Theory of the Origin Religion

Over the years, the popular theory of the origin of religion has been evolutionary. This pre-supposition influenced the early writers who assert that the Africans whom they considered to be on the lower rank of the evolutionary ladder could not conceive of absolute creator God. In other words, only those who have “evolved sufficiently” could have religion in the real sense in accordance with the European scholar’s definition o religion.

The Humanities Approach to Religion

Those who did field research in the early days of the study of African religion were mostly anthropologists and sociologists. In addition, not being theologians, they tended to treat African traditional religion from anthropological and sociological points of view. For them, religion is a social phenomenon devoid of objective reality. It goes beyond collective aspirations of the society for stability. Moreover, any research conducted under this pre-supposition is bound to yield a result that does not reflect the inner world or religiousness. This, however, creates a problem for the modern scholars who had to work though biases to

get the real meaning of religion; especially the emphasis placed on symbols and their social implications.

3.3 Stages Hitherto in the Study of African Traditional Religion

There are four distinct periods in history of the study of African traditional religion. These periods include:

The Period of Ignorance and False Certainty

The Period of Ignorance and False Certainty was the period of early study prior to the 19th century when the African continent was regarded as “dark” one devoid of religion and culture. This notion of Africa and its religion western scholars had created doubts and uncertainty concerning the study of African religion.

The Period of Doubt and Resisted Illumination

This is the period that was dominated by people like Andrew Lang, Archbishop M. Coder Long, and Father W. Schmidt who felt that there could be no people without religion, no matter how distorted their consciousness of God might be. These men therefore engaged in research about the religions of the so-called “primitive people” including those in Africa. They concluded, “Primitive man has knowledge of God”. They even suggested that the religion of “primitive people” was monotheistic. However, scholars who never come to Africa for field research in order to write authoritatively on Africa later rejected such findings. For example, John Oman, commenting on the works of Lang and Soderblom maintained that African so-called monotheism was not “living stone”. He further stated that the wise persons in Central Africa agreed with him about good or evil, one God and a future state. His views are in contrast to a native speaking standpoint given by a Christian missionary speaking from his own religious background.

Prior to the advent of missionaries in Africa, the people had no concept of good, evil, and one God. Therefore, what Livingstone said a wise person told him was a mere repetition of what they had heard from Christian missionaries. Nothing can be said more than the assumption that with the many years of false certainty about the “dark continent” Africa was

illuminated. Their doubts about Africa arose from a subtle fixed idea of psychological set, which expected nothing sublime from the “dark continent” of Africa.

The Period of Intellectual Dilemma

This was the period of enlightenment characterized by scholarship. However, as scholars were still imprisoned in their psychological mindset created by their misguided theories, they started to devise new means by which the overweighing evidence about the existence of religion in Africa could be rejected without appealing to reason. Instead of denying outright the concept of God found in African traditional religion, the western scholars coined such phrase as “High God” and the “Supreme Being” to describe the idea of God in the West that was not available in Africa.

The Period of the Emergence of African Scholars of Religion

This period began around the late 1940s when African scholars started to engage in the study of religion of the continent. The vastness of African continent with more than 800 ethnic groups makes the study of African religion more difficult especially as most of these scholars ignored the glaring differences and wrote as if African have the same culture, speak the same language and live in one community with identical experiences. This however, does not mean that there are no common elements that run through African religion based on which it is legitimate to speak of African religion in the singular. This as a matter of urgency calls for a radical openness on the part of the scholars who are interested in the study of African religion.

3.4 Basic Rules in the Study of African Traditional Religion

In the study of African traditional religion, the following rules are necessary:

Caution

This is the first rule or Highway Code for the study of African traditional religion. By this, we mean the scholar must not appear to know too much about the religion in question

before beginning to study it. Presuming too much knowledge about people's beliefs hampers the authentic study of another religion and civilization.

Reverence

By this, we mean that the researcher must respect the cultural beliefs and practices of the people he/she is studying. He/ she must not tread on the things that are of enduring value to them. The things of supreme concern, which the people hold in high esteem, must be avoided by the researcher.

Openness and Sympathy

Religion can only be study effectively from the inside, by those who are prepared to allow truth to reveal itself to them or are prepared to enter into the feeling of worshippers can make any profitable study of religion. It is only in this way that the scholar can appreciate the genuineness of religion. Openness and sympathy presuppose a mind, which expresses itself to reality. Thus, the study of any religion must be seen in terms of its own perspective; otherwise, what is studied cannot be a real thing.

3.5 Sources of Information for the Study of African Traditional Religion

The greatest handicap in the study of African Religion is that it is not a religion of the Book. There are no sacred scriptures, which are regarded as repertoires of authentic beliefs and practices of African Religion as most traditional African Societies did not develop the art of writing. Therefore, in no traditional African society were the tenets of their beliefs found collected and preserved in any written form. However, Africans are very deeply religious. Religion permeates every aspect of their life and Leonard, attests to this fact when he writes that Africans:

Eat religiously, drink religiously, bathe religiously, and dress religiously. In fact, all that was sustaining or weakening in African life, has been anchored in religion whether it be the individual's relationship to the family, the clan and tribe or morality, law, worship, politics, social status, economics, etiquette,

wars and peace, so that the source of African religion is the whole of African life.

Nevertheless, non-literate African societies have institutionalized devices for preserving and transmitting their norms, beliefs, and traditions in three broad groups. Every African Society has a set of beliefs, which deals with religious ideas. Beliefs are essential part of religion handed down from generation to generation with modifications. Without them, no religion can inspire its adherents. These beliefs are expressed in religious objects recovered from archaeological excavations or contemporary works of arts, shrines and sacred places and some of them belong to individual families, while others are community owned ones. In almost all parts of Africa, the sacred shrines and sacred places are highly respected by the people and no one touches them unlawfully.

Some of the religious shrines and places are fabricated, while others are natural places and priests are chosen to look after them. The shrines, actor, and priests are monuments of religious art whose structure and furniture reflect the belief and worship performed in them. In these shrines and other sacred places are found mud ancestral spirits, men, and animals. For example, image of *Eshu* (the trickster deity), *Legba* (the mischievous spirit of the Dahomeans), *Ala* (the great Earth-mother deity), and *Amadioha* (the thunder deity of the Igbo) are found in these shrines and sacred places. Religious objects and articles are also found in African Society. Some of them are tied round on people's right arms, legs, and waists; while others are kept in the pockets, bags, house roofs, and gates leading into the homes.

Some people swallowed them or dug the ground to bury them for protection against the evil forces and enemies. The sacred art forms are the creation and dedication of the works of arts, which serves as invaluable source of religious beliefs in African Society. Bascom, noted that the art forms recovered from archaeological excavations provide a wealth of information on the people's past and contemporary religious beliefs, and could permit us to know if the present beliefs are developments from the past or a complete break from them. He states that:

Most African sculptures appear to have been associated with religion, which pervades most aspects of African life. The religious genres included, votive figures, which adorned shrines, stools used in initiation to the cults, the apparatus for divination, dance staff, musical instruments and variety of other ritual paraphernalia.

These art forms served as valuable sources for the study of African religious beliefs and practices found in every society of Africa.

The Physical Sources

Since Africa was largely oral and had no written record, the question then had been where we can gather facts from which we can bring out the teachings and concepts of African religion. The following gives us a wide array of physical and oral sources.

Shrines and Sacred Places

These places are connected with the worship of the divinities. They could be found in the homes where family religious rituals are conducted or in the grooves that are normally hidden to the uninitiated. These places are important because religious concepts could be expressed through them.

Music, Dance and Drama

Africans are dancing people and their religion is usually embedded in religious festivals, rituals, and ceremonies. The religious music, dance, and drama are powerful media of communication especially in the traditional societies. The Africans sing and dance out of religious feelings. Thus when people participate it serves as an outlet for their religious feelings.

Religious Articles and Objects

Indigenous religion does not frown at the use of religious articles and objects. These include objects worn round the neck, waist, on the arms and the legs. The importance of these objects lies in the fact that these religious articles and objects help the researchers to peep into the concept behind the objects.

Art Works and Symbols

Different categories of art works could be invaluable sources of religious beliefs. They provide a wealth of information on the past and present religious beliefs of the people. These include wooden and clay sculptures found in the family shrines and general shrines and grooves. These simple cultic objects and symbols could throw more light overall complexity of beliefs and practices connected with their use.

Religious Specialists or Cultic Personnel

Religious specialists or cultic people are found in every society. They know a lot about rituals, ceremonial and religious matters. They include medicine men, priests, rainmakers, diviners, musicians, and artisans. Each one of these people is a trained specialist in their profession and in most cases highly experienced. A lot can be collected about African religion from these sets of people.

Non-Physical Sources

Myths

Myths are source material for the beliefs of African peoples in pre-literate times. Malinowski in *Ikenga-Metuh* (1969) calls it the “pragmatic charter of primitive faith and moral wisdom”. Herman Baumann after studying about two thousand five hundred African myths concluded, “a myth is the clear presentation of the outlook of people living in communities. It is their objective and permanent philosophy of life”. Bascom (1969), who has done an extensive study of Yoruba oral verses and belief systems, is of the view that Yoruba myths are serious items of belief to be distinguished from ordinary folktales. According to him:

Legends and myths both of which are called “Itan,” are regarded as history that is believed to have happened, while the latter “Alo” is regarded as fiction. Myths about deities were formerly matters of faith, “a sacred tale” believed to have happened. Diviners describe all Ifa divination verses as “itan”, myths.

Malinowski posited that the traditional Islanders whom he studied clearly distinguished myths (Liliu), from both folktales and legends. Folktales he noted are told for entertainment,

and legends are supposed to recount unrecorded history of the group. He therefore defines myths as “acred tales which are told when rite, ceremony, or a social or moral rule demands justification, warrant of antiquity, reality, and sanctity.” Myths do tell us a lot about a people’s worldview including their religion. A people’s understanding of their environment, their geography, history, medicine, social organization, and religious ideas could be easily revealed in their myths. Some of these myths are popular stories and could draw from facts and ideas familiar to the people.

These facts enhance their values as vehicles of a people’s religious beliefs, since such beliefs could enjoy an appreciable degree of authenticity. In this context, myths could serve as an indispensable means of conserving, preserving, and transmitting religious beliefs. Besides, there are some myths, which are creeds or esoteric ritual formulae. These also enjoy a high degree of authenticity because they are learnt and recited like prayers. The study of myths is therefore, essential for the understanding of religion in traditional African Societies. Parrinder, views the African myths as vehicles of future scripture of African religion.

For Africans to record the myths they help to reveal the African’s own thoughts about religion, life, and so, with illustrations of art, this begins to provide the basis for a scripture of African religion.

Theophanous Names

Names are another important source of African Religion. For Africans, as for the Romans “*Nomen est omen*”-a name is an omen. There is a story conviction that there is a close connection between a person and his name. A name expresses a person’s personality and in some circumstances, some identity between a person and his name is recognized. According to Idowu, “name” represents character and the essence of personality as among the Hebrews. It is generally believed that if a person’s real name is known, it will be easy to bless the person, or harm him by magic. Anozia asserts that the name for Igbos is an expression of that which it stands for in the sense that it should suffice to have the name to know, that which goes by it.

In other words, the name gives us an ideal or some notion of the nature of that which it represents. Names often represent the most cherished thought in the mind of the giver at the time the name is given. The genius, achievements, and philosophy of life of some great man can sometimes be in the names they give to their children. Many African societies distinguish

three types of names. The first groups that may be called Natural Names are names deriving from the circumstances of birth. The Igbo call these “Aha-*omumu*” (names from birth). The Yoruba call them “*Amutorunwa*” (names brought from heaven). The Tiv call these “*ati a mav*” (names of birth). These may be just names of the day of the week on which the child was born or they may be derived to have influenced the birth of the child. For example, the first of the twins among the Yoruba is named Taiwo; the second is called Kehinde. The name Taiwo means “He who came to taste the word”.

The names express the Yoruba belief that the first of the twins is actually the younger, and he is sent out first by his elder brother to ascertain if the world is habitable before the latter comes out. The second group of names could be called “Given Names”. The Yoruba call them “*Abiso*” (Conferred names). The Igbo call them “*Aha okpensi*” (names given before the ancestral shines), The Tiv call these “*ati-a naan*”(the given names). These names are the free choices of parents. The third group of names is those chosen by the bearer himself/herself or given to him/her in recognition of his/her achievements or his/her status. Among some South African peoples, they are called “*Izibongo*” (praise names). The Izibongo of chiefs portray their achievements and exploits. Every African Male on attainment of manhood chooses for himself greeting name, which usually expresses his philosophy of life aspiration.

Many African names commemorate historical events in the family or country. Names may also express parents’ state of mind, their anxieties, joys, fears, and hopes; others are affirmations of religious beliefs, or expressions of prayerful wishes. Some names reaffirm philosophical, moral or religious truths, which the parents may have experienced, and now hold very dear, so that in pre-literate societies, names are records, living personal memories of persons and events. There are names based on concepts and values dearly held by Africans, important subjects of life and death, fortune and misfortune, on family and social relationships, and on moral and ethical values. A collection, classification, and analysis of these names will help in the study of African Religion.

Proverbs

Proverbs are short sayings, full of sense, which has come into common and recognized use. African Society has a rich store of proverbs in which are enshrined an ancient wisdom, beliefs and accumulated experiences of past generations. The value of proverbs is that they are sources of material for religious beliefs of non-literate peoples. Proverbs spring

spontaneously, from the people and are “*vox populi*” (the voice of the people) in the profound sense and therefore, should be accepted as a true index of what a people regard as true, and are interpretative of their principles of life and conduct. Proverbs are consequently trustworthy witnesses of the social, political, ethical, and religious ideas of the people among whom they originated and circulate.

The use of proverb is cultivated as an art and cherished as an index of good oratory and acquaintance with traditional knowledge and ancestral wisdom. In some cultures of Africa, like the Zulu, Ovambo, Akan, Igbo, Yoruba among others, proverbs give us great insight into the people’s beliefs. The Zulu people for example, say, “without proverbs, that language would be but a skeleton without flesh, a body without soul.” The Yoruba would say proverbs are “horses for chasing missing words”. The Ovambo have it that “a speech garnished with proverbs parables and wisdom sayings are pleasant to hear”. Proverbs, the Igbo would say. Is palm oil with which words are eating? Another Igbo proverbs claims that “a child who knows to use proverbs, has justified the dowry paid on his mother’s head”.

In African Society, proverbs are the mark of wise man, for says a Tiv proverbs;”if you talk to a wise man in proverbs, he understands, but if to a fool he flings them into the bush”. Rattary has collected thousands of proverbs of the Akan people of Ghana, and found out that proverbs give us meaning into the people’s beliefs. Proverbs refer to other objects of religious beliefs and practices as well as ethical and moral principles. Many of these proverbs describe one or other of the many attributes of God in the people’s beliefs. Some describe his power, his transcendence, his mercy, his care for his creatures, his lordship over the universe, and his divine providence, while many proverbs affirm some moral attributes of God, God’s mercy, his goodness, his justice and uprightness. The themes of some proverbs include the deities and their relationship with man. The analysis of some of these proverbs reveals not only their meaning but also the wealth of religious beliefs, concepts, and values contained on them. There are hundreds of such proverbs in different African Societies.

Prayers

Prayers are religious activities and they contain a lot of information on religious beliefs. Prayers in Africa are usually made to God, the deities and the ancestors. Through prayers, one can see man’s dependence on God and the belief that God has the ability to meet man’s need being expressed.

Sacred Institutions

There are many sacred institutions on African Society, which have the imprint of traditional religious beliefs and practices. Some of these institutions are hedged round with certain beliefs, rites, observances, or taboos, which are inspired and sustained by firmly held religious beliefs. They include the sacred kingship, the priesthood, chieftaincy titles, initiation rites, festivals, and so forth. In some parts of Africa, the “Golden stool” linked with the sacred kingship shows how the knowledge of a people’s institution can give us an insight into the vast resources of their religious beliefs and traditions. It also shows how ignorance of the beliefs and the traditions, which surround them, could bring about disaster of great magnitude. (The “Golden Stool” of Ashanti kingdom for example, was a symbol of embodiment of the “Soul of the nation”, and not just a symbol of royalty.

The king as the occupant or sole trustee of the stool represents all those who have occupied the stool before him. The dead, the living, and those yet to be born of the tribe are regarded as members of one family. Thus, Ashanti people regarded the stool that binds as symbol of unity that binds the family together. The “Golden stool”, is a demonstration of how belief linked with an institution as pointer to the different ramifications of the traditional beliefs of a people.

Oral Tradition

African Religion is essentially oral tradition. The absence of the art of writing has made it necessary to employ oral tradition as a means of preserving and transmitting cherished traditional religious beliefs and practices. Forms of oral tradition include; myths, legends, folklore, proverbs, names, riddles, prayers, stories and formulae of invocations, blessings or curses. The reliability of these forms of oral traditions as vehicles of authentic beliefs of the peoples varies. Some of them are religious by nature and they contain religious beliefs, morals, and warnings, while others are symbols representing kings. The condensed and memorized forms like proverbs, names, sayings, or the famous *Ifa* divination verses which diviners used are said to be memorized as they were handed down from time immemorial, are certainly more reliable than myths, legends, folktales, sayings and daily speech which are susceptible to changes and sometimes have discordant. Here, we shall make analysis of the use of myths, names, proverbs, and prayers as sources of traditional beliefs to illustrate the value of oral traditions.

4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit, you have been introduced to African Traditional Religion. You have studied about the problem involved in defining African religion, the obstacles to the study of African Traditional Religion, the basic rules for the study of African Traditional Religion and sources from where data concerning the religion could be found.

5.0 SUMMARY

The following are the major points that you have learnt in this unit:

- There are many problems involved in defining African Traditional Religion.
- Many factors serve as obstacles to the study of African Traditional Religion.
- There are basic rules for the study of African Traditional Religion.
- There are various stages hitherto in the study of African Traditional Religion.
- The sources for the study of African Traditional Religion can be found in physical and non-physical sources.
- The physical sources include shrines, art works, religious artefacts and symbols as well as dances, music and drama.
- The non-physical sources include myths, proverbs, and prayers.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Discuss the problem involved in defining African Traditional Religion.
2. Give five factors militating against the study of African Traditional Religion.
3. Explain the four stages hitherto in the study of African traditional religion
4. What are the basic rules to the study of African Traditional Religion?
5. Examine the applicability of the various terminologies that have been used to describe the African Traditional Religion.
6. Give the sources of information for the study of African Traditional Religion.

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UNIT 3 STRUCTURE OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
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 - 3.5 Belief in Magic and Medicine
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The issues of the elements that are common to African Traditional Religion are without agreement. In his survey of the various positions that have been posited by foreign authors,

Idowu made an analysis of Talbot, Parrinder, and Rattray. Talbot advanced four main elements: polytheism, anthropomorphism, animism, and ancestor worship. In Parrinder's fourfold classification, you have belief in a supreme God; the chief divinities; the divinized ancestors and the charms and the amulets. While Talbot's classifications smirks of racism that of Parrinder is close to the truth. The same goes with Rattray. We will proceed to study these structures accordingly.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- To identify the structure of African Traditional Religion
- Explain and discuss the main elements in the structure of African Traditional Religion.
- Discuss why African Traditional Religion may not be classified as polytheism.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Belief in God

The belief in a Supreme Being who is Omnipotent, Omniscience, and Omnipresent is prevalent in the African society. In many African societies, the attributes of the Supreme Being is reflected in the names by which God is called. In addition, some African societies have no specific gender for the Supreme Being whereas in others God is conceived as a male, female, or even being androgynous. Africans have had the knowledge of the Supreme Being and have interacted with God before their contact with any other culture. This is why the Akan people of Ghana would say that no one shows the Supreme Being to a child. Though we may not be to talk of a monolithic but a multi-sided concept of God in Africa, you will see and know that there is the belief in God in African Indigenous Religion.

You must also understand that the multi-sided concept of God in Africa comes from the basic fact that in each locality, the concept of God derives from the sociological structure as well as the climate of the area. For example, among the Yoruba and the Bini where the society is highly graded and hierarchical, God is thought of as the Supreme King over a

theoretic world while among the Birom and Ti such ministerial system is very absent. In addition, in the matriarchal societies of Africa like the Ewe, God is thought of in feminine terms whereas the masculine concept is widespread. The following are however true of the African concept of God:

God is real

To the Africans God is real. Each people group has a specific name for God in Africa. The name could be unique to God and at times may be used partly by other divinities. When this is done however, it is to emphasize the fact that such beings derived their being from God. The names of God in Africa are usually descriptive of God's character and an emphatic assertion that to the African mind God is not thought of in abstract terms. For example, the name *Olodumare* is used uniquely for God among the Yoruba while among the Igbo the name *Chukwu* is used. *Chuukwu* is a combination of 'Chi' and 'ukwu', which will literally mean the Great Source Being. The prefix 'chi' is however used in other people's names, such as *Chibuzor* (God first).

God is Unique

In the African mind, God is he to whom no one else can be compared; be it spirit or human. An Edo mythology is one of such myths that teach the uniqueness of God; it goes thus:

Olokun (the goddess of the river, in Edo myth is an arch-divinity) believed to be the beloved child of *Osanobwa* (the Edo word for the Supreme Being) and is therefore, vested with all the glory and splendour of that position. *Olokun* was however overwhelmed by the majesty of this position that she challenged *Osanobwa* to a display of splendour and majesty at an open market space in line with African practice. On the day of the challenge, *Osanobwa* sent his messenger to tell *Olokun* that he was ready for the challenge. *Olokun* dressed up in what she thought to be her best only to discover father's messenger was dressed up exactly as she was. She went back to change only to discover that the messenger has changed to what she had on again. After several attempts, she gave up admitting that she cannot complete with *Osanobwa* since she

could not beat her messenger who turned out to be the chameleon. This myth is one way of saying that God is unique and incomparable.

Another issue that emphasizes the uniqueness of God is the fact that there are no image either graven or in drawing or painting for God in Africa. This is because in Africa, the issue is that no one can be compared with God. The concept of God as king is also another way to emphasize the uniqueness of God. Among the Lugbara, God (Leza) is “the one who does what no other can do”. Another Ruanda proverb says” there is none equal to Imana (God)”.

God is the Absolute Controller of the Universe

In the African thought, God is the absolute controller of everything. He is the source of every power and authority. All other things exist in consequence of him and all events that happen come to be because he permitted them to be. In the attempt to express the fact that God is the controller of all things, the Bantu of South Africa has a saying that:

Shikakunnamo (God) sits on the back of every one of us, and we cannot shake him off. For the Nuer they believe that *Kwoth* (God) is the very spirit of the universe and that the universe belongs to him.

This belief is the determinant of their attitude to life. African people believe that only God that can give humanity the essential personality that makes them human. God is equally the only one that can determine when that part of human beings returns to him. For example according to the Konkomba, *Ungwin* is that part of man which God gives”. There is a cosmogonic myth of the Yoruba people that also teaches that God gives Obatala (the arch-divinity among the Yoruba) the responsibility of moulding the physical aspect of human beings and never questions him on what he does whether they are deformed or whole or different shades of colour. However, for the body to live and become human, God puts the spirit or the soul into the physical body that has been melded.

3.2 Belief in Divinities

The divinities are the deities that have delegated authority from God. They depend on God for their powers and act as intermediaries between God and the people. There are different classes of divinities and they are in charge of different portfolios. For example, thunder, fertility, water and economics. In discussing the issue of divinities in Africa, one will have to be very careful and even clear issues that could lead to misunderstanding. Firstly, the existence of divinities is not common to the whole of Africa. In fact, as Bolaji Idowu has asserted “West Africa may be said to be the home of divinities”. It has to be noted that even within West Africa, there are different shades of pantheon from the crowded to the thinly populated ones and to the ones with doubtful existence. For example, the Yoruba and the Dinka has a thickly populated pantheon while the Ugandan situation is not clear.

The concept of polytheism is also common to African religious worldview. Here, they speak about the existence of co-eternal and co-powerful gods that describe the African situation. In African theology, the divinities were brought into being because of things about the divine ordering of the world. For example, Orisanla also called Obatala in Yoruba pantheon is thought of a partaking in the nature of Olodumare (God). He is usually referred to as the son of Olodumare or his deputy. This also goes with Olokun in Edo and all Akan divinities are regarded as Onyame’s sons. This is what qualifies them to be called divinities. The divinities are derivatives from God. In other words, they have no independent existence of their own. They are only in existence due to the being of God.

Consequently, they are nothing apart from God. Each divinity has its own local name in the local language of the people. The name is usually descriptive of the functions allotted to the divinity or the natural phenomenon to which it is associated. Among the Yoruba, the divinity that is representative of God’s wrath is Jakuta. The same divinity among the Nupe is called Sokogba. The divinities were brought into being as functionaries in the theocratic government of the universe. Consequently, the divinities are like ministers with their own department to look after and thus act as intermediaries between human beings and God with reference to their particular portfolio. Finally, the divinities in African belief can be said to be made up of the following categories: The first set is the primordial divinities. These principal is part of the original order of things. The second set represents those who are conceptualization of prominent attributes of God as discerned especially through the natural phenomenon. The third and the last set are those who are deified ancestors and heroes. The deification usually comes because they have exhibited in their lifetime the attributes of the deities.

3.3 Belief in Spirit

There are different classes of spirits. Some reside in natural phenomena like rivers, rocks, and grooves whereas others are known to manifest at different occasions as the need may be. The important thing to note is that these spirits operate as agents with divine delegated authority to assist humans at different times. Spirits in African Traditional Religion may be appeased if aggrieved to enforce peace and harmony. Spirits are apparitional entities, which form separate categories of beings from those called divinities. In African belief, spirits are ubiquitous. There is no area or object, which does not have spirits of its own. For example, we have the spirits that inhabit trees, dwelling areas, heaths and other artefacts. There are spirits, which dwells in rocks, mountains, hills, and valleys. Generally, it is believed that spirits can possess and can be used for either good or bad causes. Though they do not have specific names except for the generic local names, the following are the various categories of spirits.

Ghost-Spirits

The African believed that if the dead is not properly buried with the necessary rites, the dead will not be admitted to the abode of the departed ones, and will therefore become a wanderer having an aimless haunting existence. Some other groups in addition to this believes that those who did not die naturally (like who died by hanging, drowning or of incurable diseases or during pregnancy) are regarded as accursed and will also becoming wandering spirits. This is also true of those that are considered to have died prematurely. The group also includes those who have been wicked while on earth and have been excluded from the fellowship of the good people.

The ‘Born-to-Die’ Spirits

This group is known among the Yoruba *abiku* and among the Igbo as *ogbaje*. The belief here is that these are spirits of wandering children who find their way into the womb of pregnant women and thus began a cycle of being born to die repeatedly. In most communities in Africa where this belief is common, it is not out of place to see pregnant women looking for protection against such spirits.

The Guardian Spirits

The prevalent belief here is that the essence of human's personality becomes a sort of split entity, which acts as the person's spiritual counterpart. There are the groups that see the guardian spirit as a separate entirely. This concept is known as "ori" among the Yoruba; "chi" among the Igbo and "ehi" among the Edo. It can either bring good fortune and at times put obstacles in one's way. It is as a result of this that the guardian spirit is usually appeased.

3.4 Belief in Ancestors

The ancestors are the dead members of the family that are still perceived as integral members of the family in Africa. They are seen as always present and interested with the concerns of the members of the family. Ancestors are venerated in African Traditional Religion but they are not worshipped. The basis for the belief in ancestors lies in the general worldwide belief that communication takes place between the living and the dead and that the dead are able to be of help or otherwise to the living. Before any elaborate discussion of this topic, you have to note that for the Africans there is a clear-cut demarcation between the Supreme Being and the divinities on the one hand and the ancestors on the other hand. To them, the Deity and the divinities belong to the supra-sensible world while the ancestors are part of the existence of the living.

In other words, the ancestors are related to the living in a way that Deity and divinities are not. The ancestors are still regarded as part of the family or community they belonged to while they were on earth. The ancestors, though still related to the living are no longer mortals. It is believed that since they have crossed to the supernatural world, they have been freed from all the restrictions of the physical world and can therefore be of help to their kith and kin who are still bound by these physical restrictions. It is also believed that for some reasons they can prove to be against their own family. By the reason of their having crossed to the other world, they can serve to some extent as intermediaries between the living and Deity and the divinities. In this way, they continue their role as leaders of the family –the role they have played while living. This is because while they were on earth they have been the priests or priestesses of the family.

You have to note that in Africa, the ancestors are factors of cohesion or unity. For example, the Akan sacred stools are the symbols of national unity. Again when serious disputes are to be settled in the families, the ancestors are called upon and as such it is easier to reach agreement. Again, ancestors are approached as spirits in cognizance of the fact that they are no longer mortals. As a result of the enormous responsibilities and the basis of elevation to a spiritual status, it is not just anybody that can be qualified to be an ancestor in Africa. The following are required for those who will qualify ancestors:

They must have lived to old age

They must have had children while on earth

They must have died natural death

They must have lived lives that are worthy of emulation

It has to be noted that the cult ancestors in African religion is a means of communion and communication between those who are living and those who have departed the land of the living. The belief in the continued existence of the departed souls is symbolized by various cults such as the Egungun (masquerade), Oro, Mmo and Ayaka. Some of these would be discussed in details later o

3.5 Belief in Magic and Medicine

Medicine in African Religion transcends of healing and encompasses wellness and wholeness. It may include the use herbs, water, or oil to effect healing. However, it could also include offerings, prayers, and sacrifices to divine super-sensible powers. The state of the mind is closely related to the health of the body in African medicine, both the psychological and the physical are intertwined. Magic is the deliberate appeal to metaphysical forces in the universe towards a chosen agenda. This often involves recitations of specialized formula by specialist in African mysticism. It has been universally acknowledgement that human beings are aware that they needed to be aided by supernatural powers in order to cope with the complexities, complications and the riddles of their existence. There is the need for succour, deliverance and the mastery of environmental circumstances. To meet the needs of this existence human beings have recognized two principal powers.

The first is the divine power, which is approached via submission and appeal, and the other is the power of the elemental spirits, which is approached by harnessing and tapping it to use for their own ends. In tapping the elemental power, the technique through which the

elemental powers can be controlled is sought out. This is what is called magic. You have to note that in approached by harnessing and tapping it to use for personal ends. As it has been in the ancient world, medicine has been closely associated with religion basically because the priest in most times doubles as the divine healer. For example, among the Babylonians, Ea who is the father of Marduk is the father of all physicians. Medicine in Africa is also seen as having its root in religion. Medicine is seen as having its source in God and operated through a tutelary divinity. Most traditional doctors in Africa often claim to have been taught the art of medicine by the divinities or in a dream or trace. Some claim to have been carried away by the whirlwind for a period of time ranging from seven days to seven years to be taught the art of medicine. Finally, in Africa, magic and medicine often go hand in hand because:

- The same divinity has both magic and medicine under his portfolio. For example, Osanyin and Agwu among the Yoruba and the Igbo respectively
- The same word is usually used to cover the two phenomenon.
- Medicine often involves specifications of time and rituals

4.0 CONCLUSION

The structure of the African Traditional Religion is fivefold: belief in God, belief in divinities, belief in spirits, belief in ancestors, and belief in magic and medicine.

5.0 SUMMARY

Five main issues made up the structure of African Traditional Religion

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. What do the Africans believe about God?
2. Who, according to African Traditional Religion, are the divinities?
3. Discuss the classification of spirits in African Traditional Religion.
4. Why do Africans believe in ancestors?
5. What is African understanding of magic?
6. Explain the African belief in medicine.

7. Explain the African understanding in magic and medicine

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UNIT 4 TRENDS IN THE STUDY OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, you have studied the general introduction to religion and general introduction to African Traditional Religion. In this unit, you will now study the trends about the study of African Traditional Religion.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Discuss the trends in the study of African Traditional Religion
- List some of the scholars that have been involved in the study of the religion.
- Evaluate the current trend in the study of African Traditional Religion.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Early European Christian Missionaries

The Early European Christian missionaries, colonial soldiers, and administrators who worked in Africa are credited with having made the first real effort to study African Religion and culture. They were motivated largely by curiosity, personal interest and by the practical objective of gaining some knowledge about Africans in order to work and communicate with the host groups. Christian missionaries, in particular, needed to understand the language, basic ideas, and concepts of the host groups in order to proclaim and preach the Gospel and thereby convert the people. A couple of them, especially those of the British and North American extraction, did in fact, spend sometimes with liberated African slaves in an effort to acquire a working knowledge of the culture and religion of their respective groups.

With the help of local interpreters and assistants, some were able to translate hymnbooks and catechism texts in local African languages. Rev. Thomas Jefferson for example, compiled a dictionary of the Yoruba language and wrote sympathetically about the traditional religion of the people in 1957. Other missionaries who did not publish works supplied descriptive accounts of traditional religious materials in the periodic reports they sent back to the headquarters of their religious congregations, or sponsoring agencies. Most of those reports are still available in archives in Europe. Besides the missionaries, many pioneer colonial soldiers and administrators also studied aspects of the tradition of different African groups.

Major Arthur G. Leonard, Percy A. Talbot in Nigeria, and Captain R.S. Rattray in Ghana are typical examples. Major Leonard for instance, was a British colonial soldier from Scotland who spent about ten years mainly in South Eastern Nigeria, 1895-1905. A year after his departure from Nigeria, he published a book titled; *The Lower Niger and Its Tribes* (1906). It was a detailed discussion of aspects of the religious beliefs, rituals practices, and customs of the peoples of the lower Niger River area.

Trained and Government-Sponsored Ethnographers

The challenges of governance prompted several local colonial administrators to seek the assistance of trained ethnographers and anthropologists. They were needed to provide vital data and information about the culture and customs, institutions, beliefs and values of indigenous groups to aid administration. In some territories like Nigeria, Kenya, and Sudan, colonial officials were struggling hard to contain actual revolts and violent conflicts. The women of Aba in southeastern Nigeria had actually revolted against the imposition of taxation in 1929. There was therefore, a felt-need in many parts of the Continent for accurate information about the people and their cultures to help in the formulation and implementation of appropriate policies.

A strong impulse in favour of engaging the services of experts in the colonial field was equally felt at the international level. After the First World War the focus of colonial interest shifted from the acquisition to the maintenance of control, and there began the first stirrings about development as a consciously-induced policy. In addition, the respected anthropologists and propagator of the field work approach in social anthropology; Bronislaw Malinowski had insisted that people concerned with developments in Africa must first understand the workings of the societies with which they were in contact. A number of institutions were inaugurated for these purposes. One of such institutions include The International Institute of African Languages and Cultures in 1926 which was later known as the International African Institute (I.A.I) by representatives of scientific, missionary and official bodies.

It had Lord Lugard as its first chair. Its defined objective was to bring about a closer association of scientific knowledge and research with practical affairs. Several trained ethnographers and anthropologists were either recruited or financially sponsored by the Colonial Office to provide accurate information to bolster the effort of local colonial governments. The development greatly benefited the study of African Traditional Religion.

Some ethnographers delved specifically into certain aspects of the indigenous religion, particularly those provoking debate at the time. M.D.W. Jeffreys and W.R.G. Horton for example, contributed their findings on the origin of certain African traditional beliefs and symbols as well as the debate on the belief in God respectively.

Some other discussed issues like witchcraft and the belief in the ancestors. Researchers like S.F. Nadel, K. Little, Monica Wilson, Mary Douglas, and Godfrey Lienhardt incorporated substantial materials from the indigenous religious tradition in their respective works on other aspects of the indigenous culture of Africans they had worked on. Charles K. Meek, one of the official ethnographers who researched into traditional Igbo social, political institutions and legal systems published a book titled *law and Authority in a Nigeria Tribe* (1957). The work of the anthropologists affected Christian missionaries in many ways. First, it helped to improve their attitude towards African traditional religion in general. A clear evidence of the better appreciation of traditional beliefs and practices was the incipient effort made to adapt certain local elements by a number of missionary church groups.

More relevantly, several expatriate missionaries who had spent many years in Africa like Rev. George T. Basden (spent about forty years in Igbo land), were encouraged to publish their studies of the beliefs and customs of the various groups and areas where they had lived and worked. Interestingly, the approach of the search of most of these missionary writers resembled very much the method of the ethnographers and anthropologist. The essays on the traditional African ideas and beliefs about God published in the edited anthology by Rev. Edwin W. Smith; *African Ideas of God* (1950) is a typical example.

3.2 The Effort of Early African Writers and Scholars

The entry of indigenous African writers and scholars into the study of African traditional religion was a significant development in the evolution of the subject. The group includes African writers and scholars of the pre-independence era as well as ordained ministers and clerics with Christian theological background of training belonging to both the Francophone traditions. Given the prominent place of religion in traditional African life and culture, it was not a surprise that many early western-educated Africans should discuss and incorporate aspects of it in their publications. Most of them were strong nationalist writers and include people like Mbonu Ojike, J.B. Daquah, and Kenneth Kaunda. They were keen to disabuse the minds of Europeans concerning the widely publicised inferiority of the black

race and the distortion of their culture in the writings of colonial writers and some Christian missionary authors.

Danquah in particular, was furious with those European authors who sought to discriminate against the belief of indigenous Africans in God. He strongly contended that Africans have as much genuine belief in God as Europeans. The aim of the first and second generations of ordained African cleric scholars with Christian theological background of training may be more religious than political. Nevertheless, like the nationalists they also tried to correct mis-presentations of the indigenous culture in western scholarship, as well as show that Africa has visible traditional religious ideas, ritual practices, institutions, and values that could be adapted to benefit Christianity in the Continent.

Vincent Mulago and A. Kagame were among the first generation ordained African cleric-scholars of the Francophone background who took up the study of Bantu cosmology from where the Belgian missionary author, Placide Temples left off. They tried to present the traditional worldview along the lines of scholastic philosophy. Their theory of vital force and hierarchy of beings drew mainly on the indigenous religious traditions of the peoples of Central Africa. mulago for example, suggested that Bantu traditional religion is based on the belief in two worlds, one visible and the other invisible, the belief in the communitarian and hierarchic character of these two worlds; the interaction between the two worlds, and the belief in a Supreme Being, Creator and Father of all that exists.

African cleric-scholars of the Anglophone tradition like Mujinya .N have been more theological than philosophical in their approach. Between late 1950s, a number of these scholars including, Harry Sawyerr, E.B. Idowu, .N. Ezeanya, and E.C. Ilogu worked on a wide range of issues in African religion. Mbiti and Idowu wrote general texts to guide the systematic study of African Religion. Others including Sawyerr; Arinze, Ezeanya investigated important aspects of the subject like the belief in ancestors, ritual sacrifice and traditional morality. In addition to their individual writings, many of these early African cleric-scholars played notable roles, in the footsteps of a handful European pioneers scholars like E.G. Parrinder, in promoting the study of African Religion in institutions of higher education, including universities and theological faculties in different parts of Africa; Ghana, Nigeria, Congo and Kenya among others.

Idowu, Mbiti, Ezeanya, Mulago, and others designed and taught courses in African Religion in departments of religious studies and theological faculties. They trained successive groups of graduates and scholars to carry on research on different aspects of the traditional religion. The interest and effort of anthropologists and sociologists did not completely cease

in the study of African religion. Rather, with the ever-growing success of the missionary religions, mainly Christianity and Islam in many parts of Africa, a number of Western scholars diverted their attention to the study of religious change and conversion as well as new religious movements in Africa. Interestingly, their investigation of the case, course, and consequence of religious change often bring them face to face with the traditional religious culture of the people. It is pertinent therefore, to note that many of the published works, including those of R. Horton, J.D.Y. Peel, R. Hackett on the themes of conversion and new religious movements in Africa often incorporated considerable materials from African religion.

3.3 The Contemporary Stage

The cumulative effort of researchers and writers finally led to the emergence of African traditional religion as a full-fledged academic discipline about four decades ago. African religion has since become part of the world. It is a major course offered in departments of Religious Studies in Universities, Colleges of higher education and research institutes. Students are free to major in African Religion at diploma, bachelor, masters, and doctorate degrees. In Nigeria for example, the “Minimum Academic Standards of the National Universities’ Commission” places African traditional religion on a similar pedestal as Christianity and Islam, that is, weighted one third of the total credits required for a bachelor’s degree in religious studies. African religion is also a favoured area for research students, as several candidates register for their graduate programme on the subject.

The systematic study of African Religion has achieved a measure of acceptability as an academic discipline. It is generally classified in the group of indigenous religions or primal worldviews of humankind. The general aim of the study is to present systematically the authentic experience of the sacred by the peoples of sub-Saharan Africa (within the Continent and in Diaspora), in their different socio-historical circumstances and backgrounds. African religion is essentially an oral and folk religion. A persistent effort is currently being made by scholars of different intellectual hues and backgrounds to push forward the frontiers of the subject through a critical approach to certain important issues of methodology and conceptual scheme that are adopted for the study.

3.4 Key Issues in Contemporary Scholarship

Notwithstanding the progress already made in the systematic study, African religion is still a relatively young academic discipline. It is barely forty years old as a subject in its own right. The volume of literature that has accumulated is sizeable, although this says nothing about the quality of the publications. The subject has no doubt, surmounted certain teething problems, including long-standing prejudice and discrimination to bring it to the present status. However, there are a number of key issues, many of them deriving from the historical roots of the subject, while others are part of the rigorous requirements of the subject as a serious academic discipline. For purposes of our discussion, I shall group these issues into three broad categories, namely; issues of nomenclature and terminology, issues relating to methodology and theoretical presuppositions as well as schemes of interpretation, and finally issues connected to the content of African Religion.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The study of the African Traditional Religion had been in successive stages beginning from the early European Christian missionaries. These were in turn followed by colonial soldiers and administrators. After this, the colonial government sponsored and trained some ethnographers to study the African culture including the religion. This yielded better results but we still tainted by racism. It was after this that the early African writers and scholars who incidentally were defensive of their culture and religion came and this eventually led to the contemporary stage in the study of the African Traditional Religion.

5.0 SUMMARY

The following are the major points that you have learnt in this unit:

- The first effort to study African Traditional Religion started from the early European Christian missionaries.
- The effort to missionaries was complemented by the colonial soldiers and administrators.

- These were followed by colonial government trained and sponsored ethnographers.
- These were also followed by early African scholars and writers.
- The emergence of the African writers and scholars led us to the contemporary stage.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Discuss the contributions of each stage in the study of African Traditional Religion to the development of the study of the religion.
2. What are the contributions of the early Christian missionaries to the study of African Traditional Religion?
3. Evaluate the contribution of the early African writers and scholars to the study of African Traditional Religion.
4. Discuss the factors that have led to the contemporary stage of the study of the African Traditional Religion.
5. What are the key issues in contemporary African Traditional Religious scholarship?

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UNIT 5 METHODOLOGY FOR THE STUDY OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this last unit of module one, you are going to focused more on the methodology approaches that have been used in the study of African Traditional Religion. All this methodological perspective would be examined one after the other with the view of showing their relevance in the study of African Traditional Religion.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- List all the methodological approaches that have been used for the study of African Traditional Religion.
- Evaluate the appropriateness and otherwise of these methodological approaches.
- State applicability of all the various methodological approaches for the study of African Traditional Religion

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Approaches for the Study of African Traditional Religion

There are various approaches to the study of religion. For the study of African Religion, author are yet to agree on the methodology for it .This is because, the systematic study of African Religion is confronted with many problems quite inherent in the African Religion itself, while others derive from the historical development of the religion. For example, African Religion has no sacred books, it is ethnic based, and highly influenced by evolutionism, colonialism, the British Anthropological School, African Nationalism, etc. It is because of this that, different categories of people, such as missionaries, historians, anthropologists, sociologists, and theologians, have claimed to have authentic interpreters of African Religion and have approached its study in various ways. We shall look at the Evolutionalist, Anthropological, Philosophical, Descriptive, Historical and Comparative Thematic approaches for the study of African Religion in spite of thee other numerous approaches people have proposed.

3.1.1 Evolutionist Approaches

The study of religion in the later part of the 19th century was influenced by the doctrine of evolutionism. This had far-reaching effects on the study of African religion. Under the spell of evolutionism, the study of religion for the most part concerned itself with the search for the most primitive form of religion, and the stages of its development to its highest form. This they assumed was monotheism, the form of religion practiced in Europe. African religion was very in focus at this time, not because it was thought that, it deserved study for its own sake, but because, the evolutionist authors believed that it examples of primitive forms of religion, which they were looking for, had survived in Africa. What African religion gained from the evolutionists is a large collection of derogatory terms supposed to designate primitive forms of religion-fetishism, animism, totemism, polytheism.

These terms unfortunately are still widely used to designate African religion in literature and in some books about Africa. Another legacy left by the evolutionists, who dominated the study of African Religion at that period, was the assumption that any higher forms of beliefs, concepts, institutions, art, or any item of culture found in Africa must have been imported from outside Africa. Consequently, all kinds of theories and explanations were put forward on how different religions traits had reached African societies usually from Egypt, Middle East, or Europe. One of these theories is the called "Hamitic Theory" according to which, higher religions of civilization like iron working, sacred kingship, the notion of the Supreme Being were brought by the Hamites- a branch of European race who was indigenized.

It is true that Africa has been in contact with the outside world especially North Africa and the Middle East for several centuries. It must therefore have imported from but also have exported ideas to these areas. Therefore, the attitude of training the outside source of whatever is noble and of some worth in Africa is unscientific and racist in the sense that it denies Africans any inventive capabilities. Evolutionist approach lost its appeal when it was discovered that monotheistic concepts existed side by side with animistic and fetishistic beliefs among many so-called primitive peoples, put forward the opinion that monotheism, not fetishism or animism, was the earliest form of religion, and polytheism, animism, and fetishism were later degenerations. This opinion was not popular with evolutionists. It in fact makes the beginning of the decline of the evolutionist approach in the study of African religion. However, Schmidt's work did focus attention on the significance of the Supreme Being in African religious traditions.

3.1.2 Anthropological Approaches

The colonial occupation of Africa in the 19th century and the establishment of colonial rule in most parts of Africa created a favourable atmosphere for anthropologists to carry out extensive fieldwork and documentation of traditions, customs, beliefs, and practices of the people before they were contaminated by foreign influences. For this reason, anthropological writings still constituted an important documented source of African Traditional Religion today. Anthropologists of course were primarily concerned with the study of small-scale societies. They studied religion as one of the many cultural items in each small-scale society. Consequently, social anthropologists have all along insisted that the religious beliefs of different peoples must be studied in the social context in which they are found.

On the one hand, this particularist approach has shed new light on the various symbols, values, significance, and functions of different traditional beliefs. On the other hand, the refusal of only anthropologists to go beyond this, and their insistence on seeing religious beliefs only through the binoculars of their social and psychological functions, has given rise to the charge of reductionism- reducing African religion to merely psychological, sociological, or political devices. A move within the anthropological camp imitated by Evans Pritchard sought to counter balance particularism with comparative approach, and functionalism with a quest for meaning. On particularism/comparism, he suggests:

A number of systematic studies of primitive philosophies have to be made. When that has been done a classification can be made on the basis of which comparative studies can be undertaken which possibly may lead to some general conclusions”.

The comparative approach, which Evans-Pritchard is proposing here, presumes the study of the philosophy, i.e., the meaning of religious belief and practices of each group as a system of ideas and practices in its own right. In other words the comparative approach presumes the thorough study of the meaning of religious beliefs and prerequisite for the comparative approach.

3.1.3 Philosophical Approach

In contrast to the early British anthropologists who focused on the social order and studied African traditional religion from the point of view of its functions in the social order, the French focused on the symbolic- philosophical order, and regarded this as the determinant of both social structure, and other aspects of African life- their law, ethics, psychology and ritual. This approach seeks to demonstrate that African religious systems form coherent systems of ideas and practices in their own right, supported by an underlying philosophy or worldview. In pursuit of this belief, the French anthropologists made great advances in elucidating African cosmological systems and the philosophies implicit in their belief systems. Thus, the anthropological research mission led by Griaule discovered a fascinating cosmogony and a set of cosmological ideas among the Dogon people of Mali, which shape their beliefs and habits.

This led Griaule to observe that in fact, the Dogon live by a cosmogony, a metaphysics, and a religion, which Christian theology might study, with profit. The approaches and conclusions of the British and French are so diverse that one is sometimes inclined to inquire how far the assumptions and approach of each group influenced their findings. At a seminar on “African Systems of Thought”, in 1960, at which both parties were represented, there was general agreement that both approaches were convergent and complementary as shown below:

What was required was a theoretical frame, which would take full account of both the structural, functional, and logico-meaningful modalities of religion and would reveal their hidden interconnections.

True to their philosophical traditions, several French-speaking authors (European and African) have tried to identify the unifying philosophical principles, which underlie African religious systems. The most influential of these attempts is Placide Temples’ use of the Bergsonian concept Vital force (which he claims to be an authentic Bantu traditional concept) to explain every aspect of their life and beliefs- their psychology, epistemology, ethics, jurisprudence as well as their religious beliefs. According to Temples, the Bantu see beings primarily as vital force or living, which is capable of growth or weakening. At the head of the hierarchy of all vital forces is God, “the Supreme Force”, next come the deities, then the ancestors, founders of the clan and finally man, followed by animals, trees, and mineral forces while a network of relationships links beings to one another.

Harmonious interaction of beings results in the mutual strengthening of their vital forces, while any pernicious influence emitted by any of the forces results into evil. His theory which is in the nature of a hypothesis so well argued and illustrated that some writers who may have some reservations about some of his conclusions would still agree that overall, his theory is on the right lines. Less successful perhaps is the attempt of Alexis Kagame, followed by Jan Jahnheinz to use Aristotelian categories to classify African concepts of being. They retained Tempel's basic concept that essence of being is force (Ntu) and identified four categories of Ntu (forces).

Mu-ntu forces endowed with intelligence and will like God, Spirits, Man; Ki-ntu visible beings without intelligence like animals, trees and mineral; Ha-ntu, beings of space and time category; Ku-ntu, modality or qualities of being like beauty, happiness, size, etc. There is no doubt that Kagame's theory as that of Tempel's has been inspired by European philosophy. Kagame in particular, openly admitted that he was inspired by Aristotle because as he said his philosophy has a universal application and relevance. However, the impression one gets is that it is an attempt to work our African equivalents of Aristotelian categories and the two slot in African concepts forcibly into these categories whether they fit or not.

3.1.4 Descriptive Approach

This approach tries to make a systematic presentation of African Traditional Religion by describing its major tenets as found in different African societies. The description centers around the main items of belief common to most African societies- the supreme being, the Deities, Ancestors, Worship, and the system of morality. However, variations and divergences of the beliefs are pointed out where they exist. Representatives of this approach include such big names as Parrinder in two of his famous books, "African Religion" and "Religion in African" and Mbiti in his "African Religions and philosophy". The big name on the French side is decamps in his book, "Les Religions De L'Afrique Noire".

Mbiti's description of his method is typical of this approach; "my approach here is chiefly descriptive interpretative, bringing together in a comparative way those elements which are representative of indigenous religions from all over Africa". The weakness of this approach is in fact that it tries to cover too many societies and too many religious phenomena. This weakens its attempts at making comparisons, and it often ends up making enumeration of different items of beliefs and traditions from a large collection of societies. Furthermore, it has been criticized for ignoring the socio-cultural contexts and the historical

dimensions of African religion. Consequently, its analysis is lacking in depth and often paints a larger-than-life picture of African religion.

3.1.5 Historical Approach

The neglect of the historical dimension of African religion was not restricted to the protagonists of the descriptive approach. In fact until recently most writers on African Religion paid no attention to this aspect partly because of the anthropological bias against history, but more so because of the lack of documentary sources and archaeological materials. No writer would of course deny that African religion has a history. Many writers like Evans-Pritchard were sceptical. He wondered whether Nuer religion, like any other, has a history, which survives in the memories of the Nuer themselves. Consequently, his anthropological and descriptive accounts continued to present an image of an African religion that was not subject to historical changes.

The conference on the historical study of African religion organized recently by African scholars in collaboration with some American colleagues reviewed that there has been a high degree of cultural interaction between different African ethnic groups, and this has resulted in the introduction of new cults and modification of new ones. The research demonstrated that the study of the history of African religion is not only possible but also that no study of African religion which ignores this dimension can be said to be objective.

3.1.6 Comparative Thematic Approach

This approach seeks to remedy some of the shortcomings of the descriptive approach, which as we have seen is that its coverage tries to span the whole Africa and too many themes. Geographical continuity and environmental and cultural affinity will facilitate the comparative work and is more likely to lead to historical conclusions about the factual interactions of people. This has been called the Limited Comparative Approach. The thematic approach aims at limiting the scope by selecting specific themes and studying them in details, in the contexts of two or more societies, and comparing them the findings in order to identify the similar and dissimilar features. In other words, each theme is developed and illustrated with examples from two or more societies whose beseech of the themes in dept and in its various dimensions, and at the same time, draw examples from all over Africa.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The methodology for the study of African Traditional Religion is six fold: evolutionist approaches, anthropological approaches, philosophical approach, descriptive approach, historical approach, and comparative thematic approach.

5.0 SUMMARY

Six main approaches made up the methodology of African Traditional Religion. These approaches help in systematic study of any religion, including African culture.

6.0 TOTUR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. List and discuss the different methodologies for the study of African Traditional Religion
2. How appropriate are these methodologies in the systematic study of African religion and culture?

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Unit 6 THEORIES FOR THE STUDY OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

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1.0 Introduction

The need to understand the theories of the origin of African Traditional Religion cannot be under stressed. Man from his origin is born to worship God in the way his conscience and ability directs him to do so. The study of the theories and origin of religion aimed at understanding the truth about God and the relevance of religion to the human society. Africa with its diverse culture has religion as a factor that helps people to live in harmony and work towards corporate development of the environment and the people. Therefore, an understanding of the origin of African Traditional Religion will create rooms for a clear understanding of the African people contextually within the framework of their belief system.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- States the different theories of the origin of religion
- Describe the Naturalistic Theories
- Explains the Theological Theory
- Examine the Speculative Theory
- Highlight the Mythological Theory
- Explain the Psychological Theory
- Discuss the Fetishism Theory
- Examine the Monotheistic Theory
- State the Psychoanalytic Theory
- Describe the Dreams Theory
- Treat the Magico-Religious Theory
- Narrate the Anthropological Theory
- Highlight the Sociological Theory

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Naturalistic Theories

The naturalistic theories seek to explain the origin of religion from natural factors. Anthropologists in the past have generally considered all religions as an illusion. They do not accept the super natural development of religion. Evans Pritchard for example, wrote an

excellent book entitled “Theories of the primitive religion”, to explain the origin of religion. His naturalistic theories of the origin of religion were developed by men who were brilliant, to illustrate the vanity of men apart from the gracious revelation of God. These theories are mere guesses, without proof to support their opinions. They took the field data and fashioned their own interpretations, conjecturing and theorizing religion from agnostic or atheistic perspective.

3.2 Theological Theory

The word theology is from two Greek words: *Theos* means “God” and *logos* mean “word”. Theology is thus said to be God’s words. Theology is, therefore, a study of God. Theology is divided into six broad areas: the doctrine of God, the doctrine of man, the person of Christ, the work of Christ, the doctrine of the Church and the doctrine of the last things known in Theological language as eschatology. The theologian in the study of these areas uses information from both the old and New Testaments to produce acceptable explanation (i.e. a theory). The essential ingredient in theology is faith in God. The Theologian begins with his personal faith in God and tries to work out the implications of God for human life. He tries to show how human experiences can assist us to understand the nature of God.

The emphasis of a Theologian is on the spiritual aspects of religion rather than the political, economic, and social aspects of religion. The life to believe beyond (in heaven) is the main concern of the Theologian rather than the affairs of the here and now (this world). According to Christianity, God revealed himself to humanity. Therefore, the transcendental being of God has been broken and has become a part of human history. The history of the Hebrews and of the Christian Church is from this standpoint. It is seen as a dialogue between God and his people. According to O’Dea (1966: 34), God has called the people and they have responded to His call.

In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days has spoken to us by a son whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world’ (Hebrew, 1: 1-2). Based on this view, from Abraham to Jesus Christ, God has established a relationship with the people and that relationship has continued. The Christian experience involves the relationship with the supernatural beings. The structure of religious experience examined here is a phenomenological analysis of the religious experience of Christianity.

3.3 Speculative Theory

Speculative Theory is based on critical and reflective thinking. Many people after the mythological theory of the origin of religion began to question the origin of religion. This approach is called speculative because they did not have sufficient knowledge about the origin of religion. Their ideas were merely based on guesswork. They did not use effective methods of research. Brandon said they only used the logical reasoning method, which had no valid opinions.

3.4 Mythological Theory

This was almost the first known theory of the origin of African religion. In this early period, the origin of religion was linked with the gods and goddesses. The priests of the various religious persuasions taught their believers that the gods were the original creators of the world. According to them, (priests) religion came because of the handiwork of their respective gods. That means a divine being created the world, human beings, and all the things in the universe. Because of this explanation, the followers of this beliefs started building temples and shrines for the gods. Sacrifices were also made to the gods for protection and blessings. Brandon says the myths of the ancient people across the world say their gods were the originators of religion.

3.5 Psychological Theory

This theory is largely based on the cognitive need theory, which says that religion evolved from man's need to find solutions to the uncertainties of his world. This came because of the solution to questions which early man asked such as: what is the value of life? What is the purpose of life? Why are there illness, disease, hunger, and thirst? What accounts for the vegetation cover? Why do people die? Man needed basic answers to these questions and other aspects of life. This theory of religion was thus developed to provide a rational explanation to these questions. The projection theory, which is an aspect of the psychological theory, says religion was the projection of man's highest aspirations.

Sigmund Freud observed a psychological element in religion. He saw that it resembled the behaviours of neurotic patients (i.e. patients with mental disorders)., Freud felt that religion was an expression of psychological processes which were brought out from the inner self. The Freudian theory was based on the concept animism. This was to cope with the problems of this world, the need for security and power. The second strand of Freud's theory of the origin of religion is called *Oedepus* complex. He said in prehistoric society, due to marriage problems, the father expelled some of his sons. Therefore, those expelled conspired, killed their father, and ate his body. Later, due to the fear of further killings within the family, the children decided to deify their father. They set up a pattern of worship from where religion emerged.

Freud opines that African traditional religion began from a human fatherhood to a spiritual fatherhood. One can also see from this theory that fear, anxiety, awe, emotions, feelings and despair are all features of religion. This could be described as the emotional theory of the origin of religion. Man in his inexplicable experiences of life, which are fascinating and terrifying, gave rise to a great feeling and non-rational response to the unseen source of the agent of the experience God. Thus, the psychological theories of origin of religion find their explanations of religion in human intellect as "primitive" people pondered, reflected, and thought upon various experiences, which gradually involved religious beliefs. His theories are categories into five groups namely; fetishism, Dream theory, Monotheistic theory, magic religious theory and psychoanalytic theory of origin of religion.

3.6 Fetishism Theory

The most popular adherent of this theory is Charles de Brosses who in 1760 contended that religion originated in fetishism, the worship of inanimate things and animates. He observed that every external object in nature poses life and magical powers and the Portuguese who came to African found them venerating trees, plants, pebbles and claws of animals, these revered objects formed the most basic and elementary form of religious belief which we are thought to be "*factitus*" or magically artful". Auguste Comte, a 19th century philosopher, also used the term "*fetico*" to refer to a general theory of religion. In 185-0, he wrote that the religious period of humanity began with fetishism, theorized that religion evolved from fetishism, polytheism, and monotheism, which were the prevalent naturalistic explanations from the middle of the 18th century until the middle of the 19th century. His theory is also faulty because religion cannot be reduced to fetish practices alone.

3.7 Monotheistic Theory

The monotheistic perspective of the origin of religion was presented by Andrew Lang, a student of Edward Tylor, who was a confirmed animist. Lang thought that belief in souls and spirits might have arisen from psychological phenomena such as dreams. In 1894, he wrote a book titled "The making of religions". In addition, he criticized his teacher, Edward Tylor for refusing to admit that primitive people were monotheists. He also tried to demonstrate that preliterate people had a concept of a high God, which Tylor dismissed as missionary idea. He further stated that beliefs in a creative, moral, omnipotent, and omniscience God probably arose among "primitive people" from observing the design of the universe. The weakness of his theory lies in explanation of the origin of religion of the primitive people, which he based on monotheistic conception thereby rejecting other people belief in the existence of the supreme deity.

3.8 Psychoanalytic Theory

The psychoanalytic theory of the origin of religion was propounded by Sigmund Freud, a "stay at home investigator" who never saw the primitive people on whom he wrote. Freud who got his inspiration from Frazer's book titled the "Golden Bough" and Roberson Smith's book "Religion of the sanities" all of which are the study of the primitive people, firmly based his theory of origin of religion on relationship between the son and the father which according to him best explains how religion came into existence. He noted that religion came into being because of the guilt done to the illusory heavenly father, and as humanity puts away childish things, so will he put away the child neurosis, when he grows to full maturity. Religion for him is a projection of human wishes. Mankind in his/her projection created demons out of hostility of the salvage, the same hostility a son shows towards his father due to his father's sovereignty and unfairness.

Freud further stated that this mental illness and infertile attitude of the son toward his father makes the son to begin to rejoice over his father's death. He mourned the father and turned him into a wicked demon, ready to gloat over his misfortune. This problematic situation compelled humankind to project the forces of nature into a god and exercising the terrors of nature, reconciling humanity to the cruelty of fate and compensating of human existence. More so, Freud proceeded in his psychoanalysis of the "future of illusion" by

saying that, religion originated because of the powerful dreaming of humankind, which enabled him/her to create God for himself/herself in the blue field of nothing.

Religions ideas are illusory objects which humankind fear and worship as a father. God for Freud is a mere creation of dreaming. A child needs a father because of his helplessness. He needs a father who will be faithful and not subject as weakness or frustration by death. Moreover, humanity as an intellectual and psychological infant produced this father for himself/herself through projection of an illusory God. This psychological ailment which makes mankind to fashion religion can be referred to as "Child Neurosis" or "father's comp" Freud noted "just a healthy minded person outgrown childish thinking, so also will healthy minded person outgrown the illusion which brought religious. He therefore summed up the psychoanalytic theory of the origin of religion as a derailment arising from a "mere delusion belief in eternal life and its illusory rewards.

The weakness of Freud is that religion does not owe its origin to mere search for security even though we seem to agree that when man is hard pressed, he seeks for security. Humanity whether hard-pressed or unheard pressed is often given an imaginary wishful and day thinking in every moments of difficulties and frustration. He/she takes imaginary wings and fly to a dream world where all is well for the best smooth sailing. Humanity is also an adept builder of "castles" in the air and this happens to every person by a trick of the mind and inducement. Besides, it is wrong to say that the origin of religion is simply the search for security since history has shown that the ever recurring element in religion enable mankind to say with conviction "though HE slay me, yet I will trust Him and who shall separate us from the love of Christ?, Tribulation or peril? In all these we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us". If the root of religion is a disease of mind as Freud has rightly said, then, its disease virus has to be universally potent, since religion is persistent as the most stubborn of all human activities. Religion is vital to life and if it is suppressed, repudiated, and rejected in one form or the other, it can go on with its original nature without changing. Moreover, this is the major weakness of Freud's theory.

The second weakness in Freud theory is that it has no place in the sociology of religion due to its psychological character. At best, it explains some general characteristics of all religions. For him to say that "all gods are parent figures" is a mere postulation why the balance between male and female distils is different in the system. Why are some gods personal and immanent? Why is sacrifice so important in some religious and yet nonexistent in others? Freud theory therefore failed to provide adequate answers to the above questions and this makes it faulty. It does not explain the various religious experiences, which

characterizes religious traditions of the world. Although religious experiences and feeling go beyond “mere delusion” or “illusion” as the current craze towards religious expressions exemplified, the upsurge towards religion in the last decade of this century pointed to the potency of religion, which goes beyond mere human imaginations and fabrications.

3.9 The Dreams Theory

This theory of the origin of religion was put forward by Tylor who got his conviction from the evolutionary theory. He noted that animism was humanity first religion, which he/she assumed in early stages of life. Tylor opined that as soul in all things continued to exist, humanity began to venerate certain souls (spirits) as personified objects. This eventually led to the worship of ancestors. In Tylor’s view, the belief in spirits and gods arose from human experiences of dream, vision, disease, and death. Whenever humanity sleeps at night he/she dreams that, he/she was on safari (hunting or visiting in some distant places) and yet, his body remained in the house during sleep. He concludes by saying that he human personality is made up two parts. The material body and the immaterial soul, the immaterial soul (spirits) could leave the body in spiritual form at night and travel for sadistic mission. While the material body remains lifeless.

At death, the immaterial soul departs from the physical body to become an ancestral spirit. Sometimes, these spiritual souls are inhabited by the inanimate objects (non-living things). This earliest belief of humanity originated from the idea of non-human spirits and eventually a believer in the existence of gods. Though it is difficult to agree with Tylor that mankind with intelligence can decide to hold fear, propitiate and worship that which himself/herself had created, yet recognition of a spiritual world becomes necessary when mankind realizes that there is a greater power superior to his/her own human nature and powers which he/she must worship.

3.10 Magico-Religious Theory

This theory of origin of religion maintained that evolutionary development of religion must have been magical. James Frazier, in his book titled “the Golden Bough” affirmed that there are three stages of evolutionary development of humanity. He asserted hunting trips. However, when intelligent people saw that magic did not always worked, they later turned to religion and began to believe in spiritual beings that might aided them. This led to the belief

that religion developed from spirits and gradually evolved into belief in many gods. The last stage in the development of humanity is the age of science when humanity advanced beyond the needs of magic and religion. Marett further observed that magical religion practices, which previous scholars including Tylor and Frazer conceived as magic, were less intellectual, reflective and more emotional appealing. In his book titled “Threshold of religion” published in 1909, Frazer dwelled on the origin and nature of religion. He clearly opined that awe, fear, wonder, and admiration are the roots of every religion.

3.11 Anthropological Theory

One of the earliest known theories of religion is that of animism. This theory was propounded by E.B. Taylor in his book *Primitive Culture*. This theory tried to explain the origin of religion. Taylor sees religion as belief in Spiritual Beings”. For Taylor, the primitive man’s first experience of the idea of spirit was from his sleep, dreams, shadows, breath, and death. He argued that the primitive man conceived that the spirit was an invisible being that could animate as a soul even in natural objects such as stones, trees and the celestial bodies like the stars, sun, moon, and water.

Thus, the primitive man believed that natural objects had souls. This was because he could not comprehend the power of natural phenomena such as the stars, moon, sun, clouds, wind, rain, rivers, thunder, lightening, etc. Due to the fear of these inexplicable natural phenomena, primitive man decided to worship the natural phenomena. This lead Taylor to conclude that the idea of animistic souls give birth to the beliefs in celestial gods and thus the origin of religion. The theory of animism says that the primitive man believed that the world was animated by impersonal powers. For James Frazer however, magic was the first known form of religion. Man first tried magic. When magic failed, he tried religion learning to seek favour from the natural power by means of prayer and sacrifice.

3.12 Sociological Theory

The sociological theories traced the origin of religion to sociological factors. According to these theories, religion originated as a product of the social structures of the society. It involved in the minds of people as they thought and reflected upon life, which make them to create their own gods in the image of their society. Thus, religion as an institution is a functional part of every culture, intimately linked with the rest of the culture. It is a reflection

of the social structures, and it has values because religion provides securities, and assurance in the midst of problems. For a long period, the sociological theories, which stressed the intellect and reasoning aspect of the origin of religion, were regarded as vain fantasy and an illusion, which have produced universal laws of religion. Various scholars expounded their theories to show that religion originated as reflection of the society. Max Mueller suggested that, henotheism (a belief of one dominant god among gods), arose among people before the development of the nations.

Robertson Smith theorized that religion among the Hebrews and the Semitic societies arose out of a sacred relationship with certain totemic animals. Robertson Smith contended that religion began for sociological reasons. The clan thus became idealized as a god and as the clan idealized and divinized itself periodically, the members expressed in their unity by sacrificing to their totemic animal and eating their feasts together, to shape their culture. The functionalist who promoted the sociological explanations controls beliefs and ritual actions to show logically those religious beliefs are born out of social behaviours. Hence, it will be wrong to assume that totemism as a kind of on-rational social movement can consolidate a tribe.

Euchemurus, a Greek scholar writing about 280BC, attributed the origin of religion to the deification of theories of heroes and ancestors. His theory is fortified since deification of ancestors is common amongst the Greek, Romans, and Africans. However, this theory has said, nothing specific about the origin of Religion. Emile Durkheim in 1912 presented his classical theory of the origin of religion. He published a book titled “the elementary forms of the religious life”, which remains the best-known manifest of the sociological position and the most influential interpretation of religion from the functional perspective. His thesis emanated from his studies of the Aborigines of Trinidad and Tobago. He rightly observed that, religion cannot be defined except by its characteristics, which are expressed through the society and which according to him can be conceived as a creative matrix of collective values”.

For Durkheim, therefore society is the canopy of morals and conceptual categories, ideas, and sentiments, which exist prior to individual experiences. The society gives them the lenses through which the world takes on shape and symbolic meaning. Each society creates a culture built up the system of beliefs and behaviours representing the social order. However, Durkheim’s theory attempts to give us the sociological explanations of the origin of religion, it failed to explain the mystery of religion. In fact, the theory failed to recognize the awareness of man irreligion, or the mysterious element, the supernatural or an “ultimate

reality”, which Durkheim impersonalized as “society”. This therefore reduces each living person to a mere cog in the wheel of societal machine. Besides the theory does not provide explanations to the pluralism of religious traditions within a single societal set up, which has become characteristic of our religious world terrain today.

However, Durkheim’s theory recognized that societies create their own symbols and their own “gods”. His assertions that “as many societies exist, so are the gods” and that “once societies die out religion vanishes”, is ultimately a false maxim which do not fit human experiences. Emile Durkheim says man’s dependence on society gave birth to religion. Thus, for Durkheim, the origin of religion can be traced to society. Durkheim maintained that the rules and values of society exist for its members as something beyond and above them. Each member of the society believes that the rules and values of society go beyond and are more lasting than his/her own existence. Durkheim therefore, defined religion as an acknowledgement of man’s dependence on a superior power.

This acknowledgement is put into action by means of rituals, which enables a person to put his/her self in the right relationship to this power. Thus, he/she can receive rewards and punishment from this power. For Durkheim society is far and above man. That man respects and worships the symbols of society, which are seen as sacred things of religion. On the other hand, Spenser states that religion started with animism to polytheism to monotheism. Animism is the belief that all things both animate and inanimate have souls. While polytheism is the worship of many gods, monotheism is the worship of only one god or deity. Spenser is of the opinion that religion is a mistake and in fact an illusion that has surrounded humanity. That sleep, dreams, and death gave rise to the idea that the soul can live independent of its body. Thus, sacrifice came because of the worship of the souls of the departed persons.

In addition, natural phenomena, which possess power, were adored and were believed to have indwelling spirits in them. These include the sun, moon, stars, storms, thunder, lightning, rain, etc. This theory was essentially shared by E.B. Taylor. According to this theory, the primitive man created religion out of his intellectual ability and ignorance of the workings of the natural phenomena. Marx’s idea of the origin of religion can also be classified under a sociological theory. Marx says men were the ones who created religion and not religion that created man. Karl Marx sees religion as a creation of the rich. According to Uchegbue, the rich created religion in order to calm and control the poor people’s thinking, behaviour aspirations, and reactions. Marx actually sees people becoming religious to improve on their poverty situation. By fitting everything into a beyond, man believes that all

his frustrations, fear, and anxieties would be overcome. This Marxian theory is almost similar to that of Freud who sees religion as a solace of man in his helpless confrontation with the terrible nature. Man is afraid of the deities but he is sure that they would provide him security against all dangers. Marx interpretation of the origin of religion is similar and compatible with the sociological theories of Engel's Lenin and others.

The proponents of Marxists theory attempt to prove that religion is eternal and it arose at a definite stage in society's development Karl Marx who spearhead Marxists theory believed that mankind evolved religion as a result of his/her inability to explain the natural spontaneous forces, which seems to overpower him/her amidst social control. Humanity in his/her helplessness has evolved as being in a better life (hereafter as "God which becomes" a status enhancing and manipulating symbol of authority" of oppression. He also stated that religion is a "delusion" something which arose from the needs for a better world due to social conditions of life. It is an imaginary solution of the despair over the unhealthy conditions of life which humanity must find in religion. Religion more than anything else has always been used as an instrument of spiritual oppression subordinating the working people to their interests and buttressing their own dominant place in the society.

Marx summed up his theory of the origin of religion in one "the opium of the people". He observed that religion as a sign of the oppressed creature, the heart of the heartless world and the spirit of spiritless situation, makes people to sleep with faith in God and future hope of heaven. It is only when people reject religion and overthrow the ruling class that the working class can gain justice. He therefore concluded by saying that religion is an "invented" duplicate of the world mirroring in reverse the human condition and an imaginary realm which humanity can seek, solace and compensate for all human trials on earth. This seems to be the cornerstone of the completely Marxist outlook of religion. In the same vein, Lenin opined that religion paralyses people revolutionary energy, giving them passivity and patient for everything to be done by God's will. He also noted that, religious beliefs are made of stuff which alienate humanity from problem on earth becomes liveable and harmonious.

Marxists claim they are the creators of the real kingdom of justice here on earth and good Samaritans, treating those that need to be cured. Karl Marx affirmed this when he wrote thus: The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is required for their real happiness. Creation of a paradise on earth is more important than unity of proletarian opinion on the paradise in heaven. Religion is a "tool of providing imaginary flowers which decorate and camouflage the chains human servitude" which needs to be redeemed. Marx's presupposition above is religious projections are not just errors, or mistakes in reasoning but

compensating symptoms and statements about every specific social reality. This Marxist position forms the Judea Christian philosophy of history and eschatology. Its false humanism, which seeks to make men the center of all creation and of its god, rejected every effort to impose moral dogma as an internal and ultimate love.

In addition, Marx concluded that moral theories are the result of the economic stage which society has reached and that religion is only used by the capitalist societies to defend the landowners from the poor peasants under their control is but a negation of absolute truth of Christianity. Thus, religion can be said essentially to be a tool used in controlling cultural relativism. It is an outcome of clan struggle, which reflects the antagonistic contradiction of clan societies. This suggests that before and after clan societies, there have been or would be societies without religion. This assumption however, agrees with Marxist's hope that religion will vanish in future communist societies.

The problem with Marxist theory therefore is that, it is not so clear on why the ruling class should be alienated in terms of religious faith. For according to the Marxist's, the social order they dominate was God given and not human creation. Thus, for Marx to deny that the ruling class is truly religious will only be a partial way of answering the question. The religion that the ruling class practiced is only to keep the essential faith alive in the lower orders and not the means of alienating other people or themselves from human conditions of life. Religion is "the sign of the oppressed creature, the soul of the soulless and opinion of the people" is a vague projection of religious idea. Furthermore, Marx's view that "Religion like art can only be explained from the viewpoint of fields is in fact a way of narrowing down the definition of religion". His explanation of the origin of religion in Marxist perspective is also the reactionary role religion has historically played in maintaining class rejection of caste divisions from legitimating racial, nationalist superiority and imperialism. Their assumption that religion is essentially an illusion or an empty dream further denied the existing of religion and this of course, is prejudice and bias against African religiosity.

4.0 CONCLUSION

This unit provides general information on the origin of African Traditional Religion. It also introduces you to the theoretical framework of African Traditional Religion that still been practiced in Africa with the advent of Christianity and Islam. The aim is not to turn you to traditional religionist but to give you an inside into the religious worldview of the adherents of this religion.

5.0 SUMMARY

The following are the major points that you have learnt in this unit:

There are various theories for the study of the origin of African Traditional Religion. These include the naturalistic theories, theological theory, speculative theory, mythological theory, psychological theory, fetishism theory, monotheistic theory, psychoanalytic theory, the dreams theory, magico-religious theory, anthropological theory, and sociological theory.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. List and discuss the various theories of the origin of African Traditional Religion.
2. What is the difference between the Naturalistic theories and fetishism theory of African Traditional Religion?
3. How does psychological theory relate to psychoanalytic theory of African Traditional Religion?

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UNIT 7 TABOOS AND TOTEMS IN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In unit six, you learnt about theories of the origin of African traditional religion. You learnt some theories about man (taboos), animals (totems). In this unit, you will study in detail about totems and taboos as they relate to African traditional religion and culture. Taboos are subsets of totemism. These two terms are used in African traditional religion because religion is defined as and seen as a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things or forbidden beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community all those who adhere to them.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Define totem and taboo
- Explain the relationship between totems and taboos in African traditional religious beliefs
- Discuss the typology of taboos
- Explain the role of taboos in African religion and culture
- Examine the significance of taboos in African religion and culture

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Definition of Totem and Taboo

Colman defines totems as a physical object having ritual significance or a symbolic representation of such an object, especially a type of animal plant or natural structure representing a clan in certain cultures such as those of North American Indians. Durkheim argued that totemism consists in complex religion by which man's relation to his fellow men and to nature is organized. Thus, totems such as lizards and flags are important symbols of unity. Taboos on the other hand, are cultural and religious phenomena, which help in

maintaining order, cohesion, and integration in traditional African religion. They are obeyed because apart from being sanctioned by God, and the deities, they are guarded by the society as well. This is because African societies are corporate in nature.

According to Parrinder, the word taboo originated from the Polynesian term “tabu” meaning forbidden thing or person or place. It applies to special prohibitions. In many societies, certain actions and behaviours are prohibited or tabooed. In this case, one is not free to do his/her wish always. A person is expected to exercise some restraints in order to conform to the laws of the land. Many taboos are associated with the divinities, religious functionaries, ancestors, trades and crafts, agriculture and many other departments of life.

3.2 Typology of Taboos

Taboos are cultural phenomenon, which help in maintaining moral standards in traditional societies. Since the deities are believed to be the custodians of morality in traditional societies, the people obey taboos. Thus, to run away from sin, most Africans not deviate from these taboos. Among the Africans, there are different types of taboos. These include:

3.1.1 Taboos and Totems in African Society

In African society, taboos are subsets of tetemism. These two phenomena are synonymous and they are used interchangeably in African Traditional Religion as a unified system of beliefs and practices relatives to sacred things. That is to say, this set apart, forbidden-beliefs, and practices, which unite into one single moral community and all those who adhere to them. According to Durkheim, cited in Otite and Ojionwo, taboos are cultural and religious phenomenon, which helps in maintaining order, cohesion, and integration in African Traditional Religion. They are obeyed because apart from being sanctioned by God, and the deities, taboos are guarded by the society as well. This is so because African societies are corporate in nature. Parrinder noted that the word “taboo” originated from the Polynesian term “tabu”, which denotes “forbidden things or person or place. The term “taboo” also applies to special prohibitions.

Thus, in many African societies, certain actions and behaviours are prohibited or tabooed. In this case, one is not free to do his or her wish always. A person is expected to

exercise some restraints in order to conform to the laws of the land. Many taboos are associated with the divinities, religious functionaries, ancestors, trades, and crafts, agriculture and many other departments of life. Totem on the other hand is physical objects having ritual significance or symbolic representation of such objects, especially the type of animal, plant, or natural structure representing a clan in certain culture such as those of North American Indians. Thus, Durkheim posited that totemism consist in complex religion by which man's relation to his fellow men and to nature is organized. Totems such as species of lizards, animals, of plant are like flog which are the important symbols of unity in African society. Totemism involves the physical and ritual relationship between such a class of species of animals and a social group.

Such relationships include taboos, projected kinship, and saviour saved complexes, among others. Hence, totemism is a basic organizational principle relating man to nature and super human forces in his environment. It is a sacred symbol and emblem of the clan, which distinguishes it from others. Ikenga-Metuh asserts that taboos are an aspect of totemism, which the society sets things apart. It is one of the instruments of social control in African traditional society, for maintaining shared values and moral beliefs, which form the collective conscience. In his or her absence, there would be no social order, social control, social solidarity, or cooperation. Infact, there would be no society at all. Thus, Durkheim uses the religion of various groups of Australian aborigines to develop his argument. He sees the religion, which he calls totemism as the simplest and most basic form of religion. Aborigine society is divided into several clans. A clan is like a large extended family with its members sharing certain duties and obligations. Each clan has a totem, usually an animal or plant symbolizing the outward and visible form of the totemic principle of god.

3.3 Taxonomy of Taboos

In African society, taboos are of different types. This is because taboos are a phenomenon, which helps to maintaining moral standard in traditional societies. In addition, since the deities are the custodians of morality in African society, taboos are obeyed. Thus, to run away from sin, most Africans do not deviate from these taboos, namely: Sex taboos, food taboos, religious taboos, cultural taboos, death taboos, royal taboos, taboos for pregnant women, and taboos for mothers.

3.3.1 Food Taboos

Food taboos are prohibitions that regulate our eating and eating habits. Ikenga-Metuh (1985) states further the following prohibitions:

- (i) To eat horses-certain parts of internal chest organs may cause madness
- (ii) To eat bush rat *edu ewi*. Other Igbo towns have their own animal prohibitions.
- (iii) To eat food prepared or touched by a monstrous woman.
- (iv) Nobody may eat new yams until sacrifices are made to the ancestors and Ala. Breaching this was punished by one-year exile and sacrifices of a ram to Ala and to ancestors.

3.3.2 Sex Taboos

Sex taboos are prohibitions that regulate the use of the male and female reproductive system. In Tiv society, sexual offences are serious crimes because they could result to death and grievously hurt the feelings of the members of the community. Thus sexual aberrations such as fornication, incest, homosexuality, lesbianism, and inter-course with animals, mother, daughter, menstrual woman, adultery, and the like are sex taboos in Tiv society. The Tiv are always forthright in attacking defaulters who indulge in these acts. Other sex taboos outlined by Shishima in Tivland include: (i) To have sex in the bush, field or farm (ii) To have sex with a virgin girl before marriage and (iii) To have sex with a close relative (incest). Anyone who is caught in having sex with his blood sister or family relation is required to perform the rites of separation known in Tiv language as “*nande ken ityumbe*”.

In this ritual, a thatch hurt is prepared, after which the young man and lady caught in the very act are put inside the hurt and the ritual specialist sets fire to it. The culprits are then required to run out in separate directions saying, “I have separated from you as blood relations”, *m pav anigbian awe*. This ritual is done to restore them back as brothers and sisters of the same family. Among the Yoruba, Alajubu listed sex prohibitions as follows: (i) Sexual inter-course immediately before worship (ii) Sexual relationship with a pregnant woman to avoid perennial poverty (iii) For a pregnant woman to have sex with another man apart from her husband. The consequences for such an act are that the child will be born dumb until the woman confesses for sins and proper cleansing rituals take place and (iv) For a mother to resume sex after delivery before the child is weaned. This will hinder the growth of the child.

3.3.3 Death Taboos

Death taboos that have to do with the departed loved ones, their corpses, grave, and ceremonies. Among the Tiv, for example, death are listed by Shishima to include:

- (i) A woman is not to see a corpse on its way for burial
- (ii) A woman to touch the corpse during burial rites
- (iii) A woman cannot see a grave, while it is being prepared, until the person is buried
- (iv) A woman cannot kill a dog nor walk across its blood
- (v) To mourn the death of one of the twins, and
- (vi) To mourn the death of a young child or person

Among the Igbo, Ikenga-Metuh (1983) listed death taboos as follows:

- (a) To burry a woman with an unborn child in her womb
- (b) To mourn those who die of infectious diseases, especially small pox, leprosy or elephantiasis of the scrotum.
- (c) To bury those who died during the month of sacred to Ala.
- (d) For a woman to go outside the compound during mourning period

3.3.4 Royal Taboos

These prohibitions surround the conduct of social etiquette of the royalty that is the king, queen, prince of princes and the like. Olajubu lists royal taboos to include:

- (a) King in Yoruba land must not eat publicly because they are second in command to the "Orisas".
- (b) A king must not see or touch corpse such king becomes defiled until cleansing is ritually performed.
- (c) It is forbidden for kings to see the hair on the newborn baby's head when he or she is born.
- (d) A king is forbidden to course, except in rare deserving cases. The duty of the king is to bless all the time. This is to ensure and maintain the well-being of the society.

- (e) A king must not see the inside of his crown, to avoid death. This explains why the crown is placed on the king's head from the back of his head.

3.3.5 Taboos for Mothers

Taboos for mothers are prohibitions that surround the children Ushe enumerated these prohibitions for mothers as follows:

- (i) It is a taboo to abuse, ridicule, or beat one's mother. The child can never prosper.
- (ii) It is a taboo for a mother to curse her children, touching their breasts and/or private part, because such a curse is irrevocable, even by the mothers themselves.
- (iii) An infant is forbidden to grow the upper Jaw milk teeth before the lower jaw milk teeth, because it is a sign of authority.
- (iv) A baby must not knowingly or by accident drop from the mother's back, else she will have seven spouses, each would die after the other until the seventh time before it will stop.

3.3.6 Taboos for Pregnant Women

In Yoruba land, prohibitions for pregnant women are listed by Olajubu as follows:

- (i) A pregnant woman is forbidden to walk in the hot sun or at night to avoid having her baby exchanged with an evil spirit.
- (ii) A pregnant woman must not sleep on her belly or else the baby will die.
- (iii) It is forbidden to flog or beat a pregnant woman for any reason to avoid the marks of the Cain showing on the baby's body at birth.
- (iv) It is forbidden for a pregnant woman to sit or stand at the doorpost of a house to avoid difficulties during delivery.
- (v) The pregnant women are tabooed to eat snails in order to avoid them giving birth to children who spite all the time.

3.3.7 Cultural Taboos

Cultural taboos are prohibitions that deal with the everyday living of a particular people of society. Some of these taboos regulate how we eat, what pregnant women should not do, what the royalty should not do, prohibitions about sex and so on. Cultural taboos

emanate from particular peoples' worldview, which through a divinity or deity imposes prohibitions to regulate life according to the peoples' beliefs, and worldview.

3.3.8 Religious Taboos

Religious taboos are prohibitions that deal with ones practice of his or her religious duties or obligations. Olajubu citing instances of religious taboos in Yoruba land states:

Palm kernel oil is a taboo to Esu. It must not be taken near his shrine to avoid the wrath of Esu-laalu. Palm wine is a taboo to Orisan-la. It must not be taken near his shrine neither should worshippers consume it to avoid incurring the wrath of the divinity. Madincines used for wickedness are taboos to Soponna, the small pox divinity. Nobody is allowed to hunt fish or cultivate land in the Osogbo grove violation of which will result in grievous consequences. No worshipper of Oya, a finer divinity, must eat ram meat to avoid death. Osun worshippers must not eat fresh fish from the Osun River to avoid destroying the children of Osun.

All these taboos discussed above, are obeyed in African society in varied forms and covered many facets of human endeavours to reinforced moral standards in traditional society.

3.2 Relationship between Totems and Taboos in African Traditional Religion

Totemism involves the mystical and ritual relationship between such a class of species of animals or plants and a social group. Such relationship includes taboos, projected kinship, and saviour saved complexes and so on; hence, totemism is a basic organizational principle relating man to nature and to super-human forces in his environment. Taboo is therefore, one of the instruments of social control in the society, for maintaininf shared values and moral beliefs, which form the collective conscience. Taboos are an aspect of totemism, which the society sets things apart. In his or her absence, there would be no social order, social control, social solidarity, or cooperation. In short, there would be no society.

Durkheim uses the religion of various groups of Australian aborigines to develop his argument. He sees their religion, which he calls totemism, as the simplest and most basic form of religion. Aborigine society is divided into several clans. A clan is like a large

extended family with its members sharing certain duties and obligations. Each clan has a totem, usually an animal or plant. The totem is a symbol. It is the emble of the clan, it is its flag, and it is the sign by which each clan is distinguished from others. However, the totem is more than this, it is a sacred symbol. The totem is ‘the outward and visible form of the totemic principle of god’.

3.3 The Role of Taboos in African Religion

African societies, taboos are in different forms and they play significant roles in maintenance of cultural, moral, and social values. They are religious and cultural tools for social integration. Taboos strengthened the value system and moral beliefs that form the basis of social life. In addition, by terming them as sacred or divine in junctions, taboos have the greater power to direct human actions and sayings. Another role of taboos in African Traditional religion is that, they help in maintaining law and order in traditional African societies. They ensure the peaceful ordering of the society. A person maintains a harmonious relationship with God, ancestors, deities, divinities, clan, tribe, family, and the whole of nature guaranteed by taboos in the society. For the African then, taboos consist of morality, which is difficult to separate from religion. African morals lay a great emphasis on social conduct. The basic moral principles and practices in form of taboos-the does and don'ts of society therefore, guide people's activities and help them to choose between rights and wrong.

As moral laws, taboos help in maintaining law and order in traditional African societies. They are societal laws because taboos perform the function of the constitution in today's society. Thus, in many African traditional societies, like Nigeria, taboos are called “social laws” and punitive measures are applied to check the offenders of such laws both in pre-colonial and post- colonial times. These taboos have been handed down from generation to generation, in different African societies orally and through practice.

From the foregone discussion, it is clearly seen that taboos have moral, religious, and communal sanctions, which are useful tools for the development of African societies. The moral sanctions has to do with the moral values that help the individuals to determine between what is good and bad, right or wrong, what is acceptable or unacceptable as earlier stated in this chapter. Their guiding principle is based on the recognized authority whose sanctions is accepted and obeyed. The religious sanctions of the taboos deals with the moral laws, customs and behaviours, which flow from religious doctrines and through them,

regulate the conduct of the individual members of African society. Any breach of the moral code is regarded as a violation of the society's acceptable norms and is punishable by the ancestors who are the invisible guardians of the family. On the contrary, those who obey such customs are blessed and protected by the ancestors. While the social sanctions concerns the community living.

The African people believe that a person is not an island, and to be human, he/she must relate or be in communion with the society. This is captured in Tiv social maxim that "war sen tswen hule", which means, "the river that chooses to be alone meanders". Thus, one must belong to a community and contribute to its development and transformation because unity is strength. To relate with others healthily in the society, certain social vices are to be avoided, for instance, theft, cheating, backbiting, unjust quarrels, and many others. These sanctions are no longer adhered to in African traditional society due to the advent of western civilization. Thus, in the next chapter, we shall try to more light on, yet another misconception, this time around; we shall endeavour to debunk the claim that modernisation brought changes on African attitudinal orientation and cosmological viewpoints.

3.4 Significance of Taboos in African Traditional Religion

In African pre-colonial and modern society, taboos served as moral laws and they help in the maintenance of law and order. During the post-colonial and post-colonial era, taboos were significance in this aspect but with the impact of change in African traditional societies ranging from the infiltration of Christianity, modernity, westernization and the likes on African worldviews, the belief in totems and taboos have adversely been affected. Many Africans no longer believe in their societal taboos and totems because of their beliefs in Christianity and the impact of western civilization. However, it is important to note that these beliefs have been handled down from generation to generation-in different African societies orally and through practice by their forbearers.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Totems and taboos have occupied centre stage in this unit. Totems are animals, plants and other natural phenomena that are deified and held sacred whereas taboos are the moral laws of traditional African societies. The terms were defined, the relationship between the

two terms were established. The typology of taboos was discussed together with the role and significance of taboos in African traditional religion.

5.0 SUMMARY

Totems are animals, which are seen as sacred in African traditional religion. Taboos are moral laws, which regulate the behaviour of people in traditional African societies. Totems refer to the mystical realm but taboos perform the role of social control and adjustment in different African societies. There are taboos on different aspects of life: Religious taboos, cultural taboos, sex taboos, death taboos, food taboos, royal taboos, etc. At present, taboos and totems do not have a strong hold on African societies. This is due to the advent of Christianity, civilization, education, modernity and urbanization.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Define taboo and totem
2. List and discuss three types of taboos known to you
3. Discuss the main roles of taboos in African traditional religion
4. What is the relationship between totems and taboos in African traditional religion?
5. Explain the significance of taboos in African traditional religion

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MODULE 2

Unit 1 Definition of African Religious Mythology

Unit 2 Nature and Origin of African Religious Mythology

Unit 3 Religious Concepts in African Mythology

Unit 4 African Theism and Concept of God

Unit 5 Nature and Concept of Humanity in African Traditional Religion

Unit 6 Mystical Powers in African Traditional Religion

Unit 7 Spirits Forces in African Traditional Religion

UNIT 1 DEFINITION OF AFRICAN RELIGIOUS MYTHOLOGY

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1.0 Introduction

2.0 Objectives

3.0 Main Content

 3.1 Definition of African Religious Mythology

 3.2 Characteristics of African Religious Mythology

 3.3 Functions of African Religious Mythology

 3.4 Distinctions between Mythology, Legends, and Traditional Stories

4.0 Conclusion

5.0 Summary

6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment

7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the earlier module, you have studied the preliminary issues surrounding African Traditional Religion. This has to do with issues like errors of terminologies for the study of African Traditional Religion, the structure of the religion, basic rules to the study of African Traditional Religion, obstacles encountered in the study of African Traditional Religion, and the sources of information for the study of African Traditional Religion. In this unit, understanding the definition of African religious mythology will be the focus point. This is because how to explain or even define African religious mythology has probably yielded scholarly agreement than almost any other matter studied. African religious mythology is so diverse in nature, so culturally varied that definitions developed from either our African or Western experience often fail to encompass it adequately.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Define the term African Religious Mythology
- Give the characteristics of African Religious Mythology
- State the distinction between mythology, legend and traditional stories
- Explain the various theories of the origin of African Religious Mythology
- Discuss the different approaches for the study of African Religious Mythology
- Enumerate the types of African Religious Mythologies

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Definition of African Religious Mythology

Before defining the term “African Religious mythology”, one needs to define first the word “myth”. Etymologically, the word myth comes from the Greek term “mythos”, which originally meant “speech” or “discourse”, but later came to mean “fable” or “legend”. It is a story of forgotten or vague origin that is religious or supernatural in nature and seeks to

explain or rationalize one or more aspects of the world or a society. All myths are believed to be true by the peoples of the societies that used or originated the myth. This definition of myth distinguished it from the daily use of the word in everyday speech, which usually refers to an unreal or imaginary story.

Mythology can also be defined as the study of myths or a body of collection of myths. It is a story that serves to define the fundamental worldview of a culture by explaining aspects of the natural world and delineating the psychological and social practices and ideals of a society. For example, landscape mythology studied landscape features in terms of totemistic mythology, whereas Hittite mythology is the body of myths of the Hittites. Alan Dundes defines myth as a sacred narrative, which explains how the world and humanity evolved into their present form.

Many scholars in other fields use the term "myth" in somewhat different ways; in a very broad sense, the word can refer to any traditional story or, in casual use, a popular misconception, or imaginary entity. Because the folkloristic meaning of myth is often confused with this more pejorative usage, the original unambiguous term *mythos* may be a better word to distinguish the positive definition from the negative.

However, in the context of this study, the word mythology is used in two related senses: (1) myths is defined as a collection that form a mythological system (a *mythos*, e.g Inca mythology) and (2) myth is described as a study of mythologies (e.g comparative mythology). A myth in the sense of a collection of mythological systems is an important feature of many cultures. According to Alan Dundes, a myth is a sacred narrative explaining how the world and humankind assumed their present form. In a very broad sense, the word can refer to any traditional story. Bruce Lincoln defines myths as the ideology in narrative form. Myths may arise either as truthful depictions or over elaborated accounts of historical events, as allegory for or personification of natural phenomena, or as an explanation of ritual. They are used to convey religious or idealized experience, to established behavioural models, and to teach.

Myth in the sense of the study of mythologies (e.g comparative mythology) dates back to antiquity. Early rival classifications of Greek *mythos* by Euhemerus, Plato's *Phaedrus*, and *Sallustius* were developed by the neoplatonists and revived by Renaissance mythographers. Nineteenth-Century comparative mythology reinterpreted myth as a primitive and failed counterpart of science or misinterpretation of magical ritual. By contrast, many later interpretations rejected a conflict between mythology and science, sometimes viewing mythologies as expressions of, or metaphors for, human psychology. Tension between the

search for a monomyth or Ur-myth and skepticism toward such comparativism has marked scholarship on mythology. Thus, one can speak of various categories of mythologies such as “Egyptian mythology”, “Indian mythology”, “Maori mythology,” or “Greek mythology”.

In this sense, one is describing a system of mythologies, which were used by a particular society at some particular time in human history. It is also possible to group mythologies in other ways. For example, one can group them geographically and then speak of “Oceanic mythology”, “Oriental mythology,” and “African mythology”. Broadly speaking, therefore, mythologies seek to rationalize and explain the universe and all that is in it. They have a similar function to science, theology, religion, and history in modern societies. Systems of mythologies have provided a cosmological and historical framework for societies that have lacked the more sophisticated knowledge provided by modern science and historical investigation. This shows that mythologies help in explaining aspects of the natural world and delineating the psychological and social practices and ideals of a society.

Many scholars in other fields used the term “myth” in somewhat different ways, in a very broad sense as any traditional story or, in casual use, as a popular misconception” or imaginary entity. Because the folkloristic meaning of myth is often confused with this more pejorative usage, the original unambiguous term *mythos* may be a better word to distinguish the positive definition from the negative. Mythologies are closely related to legends and folktale or traditional stories. Mythologies, legends, and folktales are different types of traditional story. Unlike mythologies, folktales can be set in any time and any place, and they are not considered true or sacred by the societies that tell them. Like mythologies, legends are stories that are traditionally considered true, but are set in a more recent time, when the world was much as it is today. Legends generally feature humans as their main characters, whereas myths generally focus on superhuman characters.

3.2 Characteristics of African Religious Mythology

The main character in myths is usually gods, heroes, and humankind. As sacred stories, myths are often endorsed by rulers and priests and closely linked to religion or spirituality. In the society in which it is told, a myth is usually regarded as a true account of the remote past. In fact, many societies have two categories of traditional narrative, "true stories" or myths, and "false stories" or fables. Creation myths generally take place in a primordial age, when the world had not yet achieved its current form, and explain how the world gained its current form and how customs, institutions, and taboos were established.

3.3 Functions of Myths in African Society

Mircea Eliade argued that one of the foremost functions of myth is to establish models for behaviour and those myths may also provide a religious experience. By telling or re-enacting myths, members of traditional societies detach themselves from the present and return to the mythical age, thereby bringing themselves closer to the divine. Lauri Honko asserts that, in some cases, a society will re-enact a myth in an attempt to reproduce the conditions of the mythical age. For example, it will re-enact the healing performed by a god at the beginning of time in order to heal someone in the present. Similarly, Roland Barthes argues that modern culture explores religious experience. Because it is not the job of science to define human morality, a religious experience is an attempt to connect with a perceived moral past, which is in contrast with the technological present.

Joseph Campbell listed four essential functions of myths in human society. These include first, eliciting and supporting a sense of awe before the mystery of being. Second, it renders cosmology an image of the universe that is supported by the sense of awe before the mystery. Third, it supports the current social order to integrate the individual organically with his group. Fourth, it initiates the individual into the order of realities of his own psyche, guiding him toward his own spiritual enrichment and realization. Campbell further explains the relationship of myth to civilisation thus:

The rise and fall of civilisations in the long, broad course of history can be seen largely to be a function of the integrity and cogency of their supporting canons of myth; for not authority but aspiration is the motivator, builder, and transformer of civilisation. A mythological canon is an organisation of symbols, ineffable in import, by which the energies of aspiration are evoked and gathered toward a focus. Yet the history of civilisation is not one of harmony: "There are two pathologies. One is interpreting myth as pseudo-science, as though it had to do with directing nature instead of putting you in accord with nature, and the other is the political interpretation of myths to the advantage of one group within a society, or one society within a group of nations.

Campbell above explanations thus answers the question of what is the function of myth today in the traditional African society.

3.4 The Distinction between Mythology, Legend, and Traditional Stories

The distinction between myth, legend, and folktale is meant simply as a useful tool for grouping traditional stories. In many cultures, it is hard to draw a sharp line between myths and legends. Instead of dividing their traditional stories into myths, legends, and folktales, some cultures divide them into two categories, one that roughly corresponds to folktales, and one that combines myths and legends. A myth is distinctly different from an allegory or parable which is a story deliberately made up of to illustrate some moral point but which has never assumed to be true by anyone. Myths also describe some actual historical events that have been embellished and refashioned by various storytellers over time so that it is impossible to tell what really happened. In this aspect, myths have a legendary and historical nature.

According to Alan Dundes, a myth is a sacred narrative explaining how the world and humankind assumed their present form, although, in a very broad sense, the word can refer to any traditional story. Bruce Lincoln defines myth as "ideology in narrative form". Myths may arise as either truthful depictions or over elaborated accounts of historical events, as allegory for or personification of natural phenomena, or as an explanation of ritual. They are used to convey religious or idealized experience, to establish behavioural models, and to teach. Myths and folktales are not completely distinct. A story may be considered true (and therefore a mythos) in one society, but considered fictional (and therefore a folktale) in another society. When a myth loses its status as part of a religious system, it often takes on traits more typical of folktales, with its formerly divine characters reinterpreted as human heroes, giants, or fairies. Myth, legend, and folktale are only a few of the categories of traditional stories. Other categories include anecdotes and some kinds of jokes. Traditional stories, in turn, are only one category within folklore, which also includes items such as gestures, costumes, and music.

4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit, you have learnt about the various aspects of mythology and the reasons for its study in African Traditional Religion. Apart from this, you were exposed to the functions of mythology in African traditional society. The study of African mythologies aimed at

understanding the similarities and differences in religion, and its relevance to the human society.

5.0 SUMMARY

The following are the major points you have learnt in this unit:

- Mythologies are vital ingredients in the understanding of African belief system and culture.
- African with diverse culture has mythologies that help people to understand the environment and origin of humankind.
- African mythologies attributed the creation of the cosmos and humanity to God.
- The different types of African mythologies include myth of the origin of humanity, the coming of death myth, myth of the divine, myth of after-life. Myth of human destiny and the lost of Paradise myth

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. What is African Religious mythology?
2. Discuss the main characteristics of African Religious Mythology.
3. Explain the distinction between myth, legend, and traditional stories.

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UNIT 2 THE NATURE AND ORIGIN OF AFRICAN RELIGIOUS MYTHOLOGY

CONTENTS

1.0 Introduction

2.0 Objectives

3.0 Main Content

3.1 History of African Religious Mythology

3.2 The Theories of the Origin of African Religious Mythology

3.3 Taxonomy of African Religious Mythology

3.4 Myths of the Origin of Death

4.0 Conclusion

5.0 Summary

6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment

7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the first unit, you have studied the concept of African religious mythology. You learnt the preliminary issues surrounding African religious mythology such as the definition, taxonomy, functions, and significance of African religious mythology in the society. In this second unit, you will be studying about the nature of African religious mythology. In addition, to do this, the theories of the origin of African religious mythology and the mythologies of the origin of death will be studied.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Discuss the history of African religious mythology
- Examine theories of the origin of African religious mythology
- Give the taxonomy of African religious mythology
- Discuss the myths of the origin of death in human society

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 History of African Religious Mythology

Myths in African society developed over thousands of years south of the Sahara. A vast and geographically varied continent, Africa is the home to a great many cultures and to a thousand or more languages. Although no single set of mythologies unites this diverse population, different groups and regions share some common elements. Like mythologies and from other parts of the world, those of the African peoples reflect belief systems and values in the continent. However, while the mythologies of many cultures are carefully preserved relics of ancient times, African mythologies are still a meaningful part of everyday life. Some African mythologies deal with universal themes, such as the origin of the world and the fate of the individual after death. Yet many spring from the continent's own settings, conditions, and history.

Among the influences of development on Africa South of the Sahara was the mass migration that took place from time to time. About 7,000 years ago, the ancestors of the Hottentot and the Bushmen began moving from the Sahara toward Southern Africa. Five thousand years later, people who spoke Bantu languages began spreading out from Cameroon, on Africa's West Coast until they eventually inhabited much of Sub-Saharan Africa. Such migrations caused mythologies to spread from group to group and led to a mixing of mythologies. The migrations also gave rise to new stories about events in the history of those peoples. For instance, as Bantu groups settled in new homelands, they developed legends to explain the origins of their ruling families and the structure of their societies. The peoples of Africa did not use written language until modern times.

Myths possessed rich and complex oral traditions that are passed from generation to generation in spoken form. In some cultures, professional storytellers called *griots* preserved the oral tradition. Written accounts of Africa mythology began to appear in the early 1800s, and Africa believe that the world was formed from the body of an enormous snake, sometimes said to span the sky as a rainbow. The Fon peoples of Benin tell of *Gu*, the oldest son of the creator twins *Mawu* (moon) and *Lisa* (sun). *Gu* came to earth in the form of an iron sword and then became a blacksmith. His task was to prepare the world for people. He taught humans how to make tools, which in turn enabled them to grow food and build shelters. The San people (Bushmen) of the South sat that creation was the work of a spirit named *Dxui*, who was alternately a man and many other things, such as a flower, a bird, or a lizard. Mythologies from across Africa tell how death came into the world. The Supreme god meant for humans to be immortal, but through an unlucky mistake, they received death instead of eternal life. Some stories relate that the god told a cautious chameleon to carry the news of eternal life to earth, but a faster lizard with news of death arrived first. The Mende people of Sierra Leon say that a toad with the message “Death has come” overtakes dog with the message “Life has come” because the dog stops to eat along the way.

The myths of people living along the Nile and on the fringes of the Sahara, as well as the Bantu around the Niger and Congo Rivers, are generally concerned more with the origins of social institutions such as clans and kingships than with cosmic themes such as the creation of the world. In contrast, the non-Bantu groups of the Niger River area, especially the Dogon, Yoruba and Bambara, have complex and lengthy cosmologies, fables and folklore about tricksters and animals found in nearly all African cultures. Many mythologies explain how the world came into existence. The Dogon say that twin pairs of creator spirits or gods called *Nummo* hatched from a cosmic egg. Other groups also speak of the universe beginning with an egg. People in both Southern and Northern Africa believes that the body of snake, sometimes said to span the sky as a rainbow as earlier pointed out.

3.2 The Theories of the Origin of African Religious Mythology

There are many theories of the origin of African religious mythology. Some of these are:

Euhemerism

One theory claims that myths are distorted accounts of real historical events. According to this theory, storytellers repeatedly elaborated upon historical accounts until the figures in those accounts gained the status of gods. For example, one might argue that the myth of the wind-god Aeolus evolved from a historical account of a king who taught his people to use sails and interpret the winds. Herodotus (5th century BC) and Prodicus made claims of this kind. This theory is named "euhemerism" after the mythologist Euhemerus (c.320 BC), who suggested that the Greek gods developed from legends about human beings.

Allegory

There are theories, which proposed that myths began as allegories. According to one theory, myths began as allegories for natural phenomena: Apollo represents the sun; Poseidon represents water, and so on. According to another theory, myths began as allegories for philosophical or spiritual concepts such as Athena, which represents wise judgment, and Aphrodite, which represents desire, etc. The 19th century Sanskritist Max Müller supported an allegorical theory of myth. He believed that myths began as allegorical descriptions of nature, but gradually came to be interpreted literally: for example, a poetic description of the sea as "raging" was eventually taken literally, and the sea was then thought of as a raging god.

Personification

Many thinkers believe that myths resulted from the personification of inanimate objects and forces. According to these thinkers, the ancients worshipped natural phenomena such as fire and air, gradually coming to describe them as gods. For example, according to the theory of mythopoeic thought, the ancients tended to view things as persons, not as mere objects; thus, they described natural events as acts of personal gods, thus giving rise to myths.

Myth-Ritual Theory

According to the myth-ritual theory, the existence of myth is tied to ritual. In its extreme form, this theory claims that myths arose to explain rituals. This claim was first put

forward by the biblical scholar William Robertson Smith. According to Smith, people begin performing rituals for some reason that is not related to myth; later, after they have forgotten the original reason for a ritual, they try to account for the ritual by inventing a myth and claiming that the ritual commemorates the events described in that myth. The anthropologist James Frazer had a similar theory. Frazer believed that primitive man starts out with a belief in magical laws; later, when man begins to lose faith in magic, he invents myths about gods and claims that his formerly magical rituals are religious rituals intended to appease the gods.

Pre-Modern Theories

The critical interpretation of myth goes back as far as the Presocratics.¹ Euhemerus was one of the most important pre-modern mythologists. He interpreted myths as accounts of actual historical events, distorted over many retellings. Sallustius, for example, divides myths into five categories-theological, physical (or concerning natural laws), animastic (or concerning soul), material and mixed. This last being those myths which show the interaction between two or more of the previous categories and which, he says, are particularly used in initiations. To ones who are even trying to change content of the myth according to probability would be found criticism in Plato *Phaedrus* (229d), in which Socrates says that it is the province of one who is "vehemently curious and laborious, and not entirely happy . .

Although Plato famously condemned poetic myth when discussing the education of the young in the *Republic*, primarily because there was a danger that the young and uneducated might take the stories of Gods and heroes literally, nevertheless he constantly refers to myths of all kinds throughout his writings. As Platonism developed in the phases commonly called 'middle Platonism' and neoplatonism, such writers as Plutarch, Porphyry, Proclus, Olympiodorus and Damascius wrote explicitly about the symbolic interpretation of traditional and Orphic myths. Interest in polytheistic mythology revived in the Renaissance, with early works on mythography appearing in the 16th century, such as the *Theologia mythologica* (1532).

19th-Century Theories

The first scholarly theories of myth appeared during the second half of the 19th century. In general, these 19th-century theories framed myth as a failed or obsolete mode of thought, often by interpreting myth as the primitive counterpart of modern science. For example, E. B. Tylor interpreted myth as an attempt at a literal explanation for natural phenomena: unable to conceive of impersonal natural laws, early man tried to explain natural phenomena by attributing souls to inanimate objects, giving rise to animism. According to Tylor, human thought evolves through various stages, starting with mythological ideas and gradually progressing to scientific ideas. Not all scholars—not even all 19th century scholars — have agreed with this view. For example, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl claimed, "the primitive mentality is a condition of the human mind, and not a stage in its historical development."

Max Müller called myth a "disease of language". He speculated that myths arose due to the lack of abstract nouns and neuter gender in ancient languages: anthropomorphic figures of speech, necessary in such languages, were eventually taken literally, leading to the idea that natural phenomena were conscious beings, gods. The anthropologist James Frazer saw myths as a misinterpretation of magical rituals; which were themselves based on a mistaken idea of natural law. According to Frazer, man begins with an unfounded belief in impersonal magical laws. When he realizes that his applications of these laws do not work, he gives up his belief in natural law, in favour of a belief in personal gods controlling nature—thus giving rise to religious myths.

Meanwhile, man continues practicing formerly magical rituals through force of habit, reinterpreting them as re-enactments of mythical events. Finally, Frazer contends, man realizes that nature does follow natural laws, but now he discovers their true nature through science. Here, again, science makes myth obsolete: as Frazer puts it, man progresses "from magic through religion to science". Robert Segal asserts that by pitting mythical thought against modern scientific thought, such theories implied that modern man must abandon myth.

20th-Century Theories

Many 20th-century theories of myth rejected the 19th-century theories' opposition of myth and science. In general, twentieth-century theories have tended to see myth as almost anything but an outdated counterpart to science. Consequently, moderns are not obliged to abandon myth for science. Swiss psychologist Carl Jung (1873–1961) tried to understand the psychology behind world myths. Jung asserted that all humans share certain innate

unconscious psychological forces, which he called archetypes. Jung believed that the similarities between the myths from different cultures reveal the existence of these universal archetypes. Joseph Campbell believed that there were two different orders of mythology: myths that "are metaphorical of spiritual potentiality in the human being, and myths that have to do with specific societies. Joseph Campbell's in his book *Primitive Mythology*, outlines clearly his intention thus:

Without straining beyond the treasuries of the existing evidence on our scattered subject, but simply gathering from them the membra disjuncta of a unitary mythological science, I therefore, attempt to provide a sketch of natural history of the gods and heroes in its final form to include its purview of all divine beings, just as zoology and botany includes all animals and plants, regarding any as sacrosanct or beyond its scientific domain. For, as in the visible world of the vegetable and animal kingdoms, so also in the visionary world of the gods: there has been a history, an evolution, a series of mutations, governed by laws; and to show forth such laws is the proper aim of science.

Joseph Campbell however coins the phrase, *creative mythology*, which he explains that in the context of traditional mythology, the symbols are presented in socially maintained rites through which the individual required experience, or certain insights, sentiments, and commitments, that have the force and value of living. He states:

In what I am calling creative mythology, the individual has had an experience of his own order, horror, beauty, or even mere exhilaration-which he seeks to communicate through signs; and if his realization has been of a certain depth and import, his myth-for those, that is to say, who receive and respond to it of themselves, with recognition, un-coerced.

Claude Lévi-Strauss believed that myths reflect patterns in the mind and interpreted those patterns more as fixed mental structures-specifically, pairs of opposites (i.e. good/evil, compassionate/callous)-than as unconscious feelings or urges. In his appendix to *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries*, and in *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, Mircea Eliade attributed modern man's anxieties to his rejection of myths and the sense of the sacred. In the 1950s, Roland Barthes published a series of essays examining modern myths and the process of their

creation in his book *Mythologies Prometheus* (1868) by Gustave Moreau. In the Prometheus mythologies of Hesiodus and possibly Aeschylus (the Greek trilogy *Prometheus Bound*, *Prometheus Unbound* and *Prometheus Pyrphoros*), Prometheus is bound and tortured for giving fire to humanity at its creation.

3.3 Taxonomy of African Religious Mythology

African religious mythologies are broadly categorized into four groups. These include the following:

Creation Myths

Creation myths are those stories of creation that took place in primordial age, when the world had not yet achieved its current form. They explained how the world gained its current form, and how customs, institutions and taboos were established creation mythologies provided an explanation of the origin of the universe in all its complexity, and are an important part or most mythological systems. Creation mythologies often invoke primal gods and animals, titanic strangles between opposing forces or the death and/or the death and/or dismemberment of these gods or animals as the means whereby the universe and its components were created. Apart from an explanation of the creation of the universe, mythologies also seek to explain everyday natural phenomena.

The Egyptian Scarab god Khepri, who rolled the ball of the sun across the sky each day, thus provided an explanation of the rising of the sun each day, its progress across the sky and its setting in the evening. Similarly, the Maori of New Zealand attributed the morning dew to the tears of the god Rangi (Heaven) for the goddess papa (Earth) from whom he was separated. This class of mythology is sometimes called “Nature mythology”. Mythologies are also often used to explain human institutions and practices as well. For example, the Greek hero Pelops was reputed to have started the Olympic Games after Poseidon helped him win the hand of Hippodameia in a chariot race. This type of mythology is thus etiological. It seeks to account for some human institution through a mythology.

Theogonic Myths

The theogonic myths set out to delineate the relationships between various gods and other mythical personages and beings that are mentioned in previous existing myths. Theogonic mythologies are thus secondary in their purposes. Myths and systems of mythologies have been created by human beings for many reasons over thousands of years. They are superb products of humanity collectively and rich resources for the enjoyment of all humankind. Their fantastic and unreal nature to our modern eyes should not prevent us from enjoying them.

Comparative Myths

Comparative myth is the systematic comparison of mythologies from different cultures. It seeks to discover underlying themes that are common on the mythologies of multiple cultures. In some cases, comparative mythologists use the similarities between different mythologies to argue that those mythologies have a common source. This common source may be a common source of inspiration (e.g. a certain natural phenomenon that inspired similar mythologies in different cultures) or a common “protomythology” that diverged into the various mythologies we see today.

Nineteenth-century interpretations of myth were comparative, seeking a common origin for all mythologies. However, modern-day scholars tend to be more suspicious of comparative approaches, avoiding overly general or universal statements about mythology. One exception to this modern trend is Joseph Campbell’s book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), which claims that all hero mythologies follow the same underlying pattern. This theory of a “monomyth” is out of favour with the mainstream study of mythology.

Modern Myths

In modern society, myths are often regarded as historical or obsolete. Many scholars in the field of cultural studies are now beginning to research the idea that mythology has worked itself into modern discourses. Modern formats of communication allow for wide spread communication across the globe, thus enabling mythological discourse and exchange among greater audiences than ever before. Various elements of mythology can now be found in

television, cinema, and video games. Although mythology was traditionally transmitted through the oral tradition on a small scale, the technology of the industry has enabled filmmakers to transmit mythologies to large audiences via film dissemination (Singer, “Mythmaking: Philosophy in Film”, 3-6).

In the psychology of Carl Jung, myths are the expression of a culture or society’s goals, fears, ambitions and dreams (Indick, “Classical Heroes in Modern Movies: Mythological Patterns of the Superhero”, 93-95). Film is ultimately an expression of the society in which it was created, and reflects the norms and ideals of the time and location in which it is created. In this sense, film is simply the evolution of myth. The technological aspects of film changes the way the myth is distributed, but the core idea of the mythology is the same.

The basis of modern storytelling in both cinema and television lies deeply rooted in the mythological tradition. Many contemporary and technologically advanced movies often rely on ancient mythologies to construct narratives. The Disney Corporation is notorious among cultural study scholars for “reinventing” traditional childhood mythologies. While many films are not as obvious as Disney fairy tales in respect to the employment of mythology, the plots of many films are largely based on the rough structure of mythology. Mythological archetypes such as the cautionary tale regarding the abuse of technology, battles between gods, and creation stories are often the subject of major film production.

These films are often created under the guise of cyberpunk action movies, fantasy dramas, and apocalyptic tales. It is clear that mythology continues to be a pervasive and essential component of the collective imagination. Recent films such as *Clash of the Titans*, *Immortals*, or *Thor* continue the trend of mining traditional myth to create a plot for modern consumption. With the invention of modern mythologies such as urban legends, the mythological traditional will carry on to the increasing variety of mediums available in the 21st century and beyond. The crucial idea is that mythology is not simply a collection of stories permanently fixed to a particular time and place in history, but an ongoing social practice within every society.

3.4 Myths of the Origin of Death

African peoples have different accounts of the origin of death. However, the most prominent two myths about the origin of death stand as a fresh departure from the other previous tales of the whence and wherefore of death. The first account maintains that God gave to people a bundle of sealed bag containing a secret object believed to be death. God

forbade them to open it. However, due to curiosity or through a mistake, someone opened the sealed bag, and the product of this curiosity of mistake hatched death in African society. It is argued by Tiv scholars and other African writers that the opening of this sealed bag could have been done through witchcraft and not just by physical means. Many African peoples subscribed to this view because humankind would have not opened the sealed bag ordinarily knowing fully the consequences such a mistake would be.

The second account maintains that as the human population increased and people became more disobedient, God the creator said, "Let us put mankind to the test". God first called Chameleon and said, "Go and tell mankind that he will not die". However, the Chameleon set out slowly, sluggishly loitering on the way. He went off to eat the tender roots of a riverbank, creeping shrub, his favourite food. Not long, God sent the Lizard as his second messenger. He said, "Go and tell mankind that he will die". In no time, the lizard arrived to humanity's abode. The lizard said to humankind, "God said you are to die". Then the Chameleon eventually arrived too, with the message that, "God said, you are not to die". Nevertheless, humankind all should back their disapproval, No, we have already accepted the message sent to us through the lizard. We will not obey your own word. Humankind in ignorance, accepted death and that is why death came into the existence.

The two accounts of the origin of death presented above give a clear picture of how death came visiting the towns and villages of human beings. These mythologies are similar to those of the Tiv, Kikuyu, Nuer, Kano, Malagasian, Urhobo and Kranchi peoples of Africa. Take Kikuyu mythology of the origin of death, for example, if an old Kikuju is asked by his grandson, "Why do we have to do?" he explains thus:

God has created the entire world and had people immortal. However, they wanted to know if they would never die. God thought he would send the Chameleon to carry the good news, but then he changed his mind, and said to himself: "why should men not die. Since they had a beginning, it is right that they should have an end. Moreover, he sent the Siskin, a swift and intelligent bird, to carry the news. He taught: we shall see which of the two arrives first, the Chameleon or the Siskin. The first to arrive will be the one to give the news. The Chameleon and the Siskin arrived almost at the same time. The people were anxious. The Chameleon opened its mouth and said: "God has chosen me as a messenger to tell you..." and here, he took another breath. And in that moment, the Siskin opened its breath and finished the sentence that you will all die,

and never come back to earth again after death.” From up above, God saw and heard everything and said: “So shall it be forever and ever”.

In the mythology of Nuer of Southern Sudan, the sky and earth were said to be originally connected by a rope attached to the tree of creation through which humankind came into the world. When people died on earth, they ascended to the sky to obtain their food. However, when people died on earth, they ascended to the sky through the rope for a short time and returned rejuvenated to earth. Another version of Nuer mythology of the origin of death states that a mischievous hyena and a sparrow climbed to the sky, but the KWOTH (the creator) ordered them guarded so that they would not cause trouble. At night, they eluded their guards and escaped to earth through the rope. Then, as a branch, the hyena cut the rope at the bottom, whereupon, the remaining segment withdrew to the sky never to return.

In the same vein, the Urhobo version of the origin of death holds that humanity has not come to earth to live forever. Humankind must go back home where he came from. We are sojourners on earth and not permanent settlers. Life after fulfilling its predestined tasks must finally return to where it really belongs. This Urhobo’s mythology of the origin of death corroborates with the Malagasian’s mythology, which gives a subtler, and conviction of the origin and nature of death. According to the Malagasians:

The big lump he first saw suddenly became a giant covered with long silky hair-his name was the earth. After staying with death (the Giant), he became lovesick. He was permitted to go home but he decided to send his young brother back to death as a servant. On his return, the wandering man did not see his brother. When asked, death claimed that he had gone on business. The young man’s second “home-going” was to bring a girl back to death for marriage. The Giant became bothered to the land who later invited the villagers and fire was set to death’s long hair. After death got burnt, a magical power was discovered and spread on the bones of those whom death had eaten, and they all rose to life. When a little of it was poured on death’s eye, it opened wide and people all ran away. Since then, whenever death opens his eyes wide, some must die.

Like the Malagasians, Dogon, Buganda and the Lugbara myths of history, the Tiv mythology of the origin of death explains the origin of things, teach moral truth, and invite thoughts about the significance of human behaviours and social values. The Tiv story of the

disobedience of humankind, which is asking to the Biblical disobedience of Adam and Eve to God's instructions in the Garden of Eden, exhibits the typical hugero dramatic foam of adventure, predicament, traditional laws, and norms of morality. The elements of disobedience, accidental behaviours, and pranks point to the fact of death occurring from a sharp breach of an agreement between a supplicant and a master.

The story tells us about the establishment of the rules of friendship and official relations, the basic elements of other African ethnic groups and Tiv social structures. It is both etiological and morally didactic and it is open to variety of interpretations. Like many Africans and Negroes, the story of Tiv origin of death illustrates a moral lesson by a negative example. It makes clear the norm of obedience by sowing the disastrous result that followed from a breach of the norm. This portrays humankind as the bringer of death, and it suggests that he was ultimately responsible for human mortality. Hence, the meaning of the story is often said to be about humanity's disobedience and rebellion against authority.

The story of the Tiv origin of death is therefore, related to the story of the fall of man in the Book of Genesis, which tells us that disobedience came first from mankind. This rebellion of humankind against the Supreme Being points out that both humankind and Eve yielded to temptation by refusing the instructions given to them by God, and that caused death to come into the world. These resemblance and parallels in Tiv account of the origin of death, which contains divine revelation clearly shows that the Tiv possess a genuine knowledge of God as the one who permits death even in preliterate society. The personality of God becomes identified with that of the Biblical God who the missionaries and the Tiv call "God the creator". By equating Aóndo with God, the Tiv could not only interpreter the story of the origin of death in the light of the book of Genesis, but also adapt more closely to the Genesis account in order to imbibe the story with Christian meanings.

4.0 CONCLUSION

You have learnt in this unit that African understanding of the history of their origin, environment, social organizations, geography, and religious ideas are essentially revealed in myth, which is said to be the pragmatic character of primitive faith and moral wisdom. Myths as historical records of people, the collective experience of the people preserved for the younger generations, provides the basis for a scriptures of African traditional religion. They are not mere superstitiously combined truths, and falsehood, but imaginary, fictitious and invented stories handed down from generation to generation. They are folktales and sacred

tales, which are mainly devised for entertainment and resolution told in the instance of life, death, and burial.

5.0 SUMMARY

- Myths in African society developed over thousands of years in Africa South of the Sahara and they reflect belief systems and values in the continent.
- There are many theories of the origin of African religious mythology. Some of these theories include Euhemerism, allegory, personification, and myth-ritual theory.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Discuss the theories of the origin of African religious mythology
2. Examine critically the four types of African religious mythology
3. Discuss the history of religious mythology in African society
4. Give different accounts of the origin of death in human society.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 3 RELIGIOUS CONCEPTS IN AFRICAN MYTHOLOGY

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The African people have as pattern of thought many myths, which tell them about the realities surrounding their world. Hermann Baumann's conclusion after studying some 2,500 African myths was that central to the African myth stands religious concepts which is in most instances formed his creative universe. These religious concepts speak about creation of the

world, human beings and animals, evil, salvation, death and after-life, among others. In this unit, we shall discuss some of these concepts in details.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Discuss the concept of salvation
- Discuss the African concept of divine
- State the concept of human beings and animals
- Explain the African concepts of death and after-life
- Discuss the concept of human destiny
- Discuss the concept of evil in African worldview

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Concept of Salvation

Salvation is a common element of African traditional religion. A belief system explains the concept of hereafter and the reward the Supreme Deity will give to those who live virtuous lives. African people believe that the Supreme Deity rewards good life, while bad life is punished by the wrath of the Supreme Deity. Thus, the African people strongly held that the core of the religious ideas of salvation is indeed the fundamentals of the traditional African perception of reality as a whole. Thus, Central to the African religious ideas is the beliefs in the deities who are the guardians and custodians of morals in the society and can punish those who violate such laid down norms. The African cosmos is divided into two parts: the world of spirits and the world of humans.

The African understanding of the spirit world conveniently falls within Parrinder's fourfold classification of categories within West African religions, namely, the Supreme God, divinities or gods and the ancestors. These nature spirits are of three categories: state gods, family or clan gods, and gods of the medicine man. Some of the most famous gods are associated with lakes, rivers, rocks, mountains and forests. The continued featuring of a particular god (*obosom*) in the religious pantheon of the African largely depends upon the

ability of that *obosom* to function to the satisfaction of supplicants. The Africans esteem the Supreme Being and the ancestors far above the *abosom* (gods). Attitudes to the latter depend upon their success, and vary from healthy respect to sneering contempt and rejection. Patrick Ryan makes the same categorization of African spirits in his article on the distinction of God from gods by the Yoruba and the Akan. He concluded that before the advent of the European missionaries, the Akan and Yoruba held to the absolute uniqueness of the Supreme God. He writes:

Finally, it should be noted, in the process of dismantling the category of 'God and the gods' in West Africa, that both the Yoruba and Akan populations of West Africa are better equipped linguistically than are Semites, Greeks, Romans and their inheritors to press the absolute uniqueness of God. There is no need for *Olodumare (Olorun)* or *Onyame (Onyankopon)* to arise above the "other gods", as Psalm 82 bids Him. It would seem, in fact, that even before Muslims and Christians arrived in the West African forest zone... speakers of Yoruba, and Akan people who are assured of supremacy of the One Whom a modern theologian calls the incomprehensible term of human transcendence.

Patrick Ryan's presentation above pointed out the fact that the ancestral cult is one of the strongholds within the religious universe of the Akan people. This has been made possible because of the Akan understanding of humans and the community. Since survival of humans and their community is dependent upon the help given by the ancestors and the divinities, how humans relate to the spirit force is crucial to his well-being. African people believe that the hereafter life is full of everlasting enjoyment. The religious person is aware that much as he or she works hard to experience salvation in its full manifestations, there comes an overwhelming realisation that there are powerful forces that are fighting against the individual and his or her community. Abundant life can only become available to him or her through the mediation of the spirit beings-divinities and the ancestors. Unto these beings, therefore, the supplicant constantly lifts up his or her eyes in an expectation of divine aid. The following sample of a traditional prayer, normally said by the head of family during an occasion like New Year or Christmas, is illustrative of this motif thus:

Almighty God here is drink; Earth god here is drink; Great ancestors come and have a drink. We are not calling you because of some evil tidings. The year

has come again and you did not allow any evil to befall us. We are offering you drink; beseeching that the coming year will be prosperous. Do not allow any evil to come near our habitation. Bless us with rain, food, children, health, and prosperity.

Rattray gives us another example from the prayers of an Ashanti king at an annual festival thus:

The edges of the years have met, I pray for life, may the nation prosper, may the women bear children, may the hunters kill meat, we who dig for gold, let us get gold to dig, and grant that I get some for the upkeep of my kingship.

These prayers, like many other prayers found among the various ethnic groups of Africa, illustrate the concerns of the African people, especially the Akan the need for vital power, which subsists in the Supreme Being and the non-human spirit entities. Beckmann, commenting on the Ashanti king's prayer cited above, states:

There was no self-abnegation in the king's prayer. He called for power, life, prosperity, fertility, success, and wealth. The vitality of West African religion may have been one reason why Afro-American slaves were able to survive capture, brutal transport to the Americas, slavery – and still keep dancing.

The point Beckmann is making here is that the ultimate end of one's existence is the enjoyment of multifaceted salvation but it is also clear from one's experience that left to the individual alone, it will only remain an illusory dream for the obvious fact that there are some forces, fighting hard to remove salvation from his reach. The uncertainties and anxieties one faces range from those which originate from the day to day problems of life to those which are born of the fear of evil spirits and malicious persons, witches and sorcerers. To maintain and reactivate the protective presence of the benevolent divine force, the individual, and his community maintains the cosmological balance through protective and preventive rites.

These rites are designed to cleanse the tribe, the clan, the family, and the individual, and to secure the much-needed protection from the spirit force. Protective rites immunise potential victims from witches, and sorcerers, charmers and bad medicine men and evil spirits on the one hand; on the other, purification rites remove the danger-radiating pollution, which

would ordinarily destroy the personhood of the individual concerned, and thus prevent him or her from fully participating in salvation. The ancestral rites seem to fulfil both protective and purification categories. The ancestors are both appeased in case they are offended, and petitioned to support as well as protect their descendants. The societal equilibrium is thus maintained and preserved through the purification and protective rites and the observance of certain prescribed taboos. Violations of these demands may cause serious consequences to the individual, his family, or an entire community.

The individual realises that, in spite of the constant efforts he or she makes in order to bring meaning into his life, things do go wrong. When this happens, those involved go to consultation with the shrine priest. The intention is to contact the spirit force in the spirit realm to find out what might have caused the problem. It is through the consultation that one is able to remove what would likely prevent the person from enjoying salvation, which embodies wealth peace and tranquillity. It is to the religious specialist, the diviner that one goes for consultation. One needs to know the forces behind the problems or the factors that might have occasioned his or her woes. This information is relevant to the individual in order to be able to arrest the situation. The information one obtains from the diviner may require that he or she perform some protective rites to secure protection against one's enemies. It may also require that some purification rites be performed in order to appease the ancestors or the divinities for some particular reason.

Some purification and protective rites may be very elaborate and expensive. These expensive cases particularly involve matters that have been taken to the court of the gods in seeking for vengeance or vindication. The more powerful the particular deities are the more expensive and elaborate the processes for disentanglement. In spite of the costs, victims do everything possible to raise the required money for it. If, for one reason or the other, one fails to do this, the "curse", it is believed, will still be hanging over the upcoming generations of the family. This ancestral yoke will remain in the family until a relative eventually removes it. It is only then that salvation could become theirs. Salvation means vital life, vitality, vigour, health, happiness, and felicity. In short, *nkwa* means abundant life, that is, "life in all its fullness". However, when used in the salvific sense it means to rescue, retake, recapture, redeem, ransom, buy out of servitude or penalty; it also means to release, to free, to deliver, to liberate, to save. It could also mean to lead, to conduct, to guide, to take along with; or to protect, to defend; or to preserve. It also means the "liberation or preservation of abundant life" or the "saving of abundant life". It is the liberation and preservation of life and all that goes with it.

The African concept of salvation therefore, has to do with concrete realities, things one can identify with in the day-to-day life. It has to do with physical and immediate dangers that militate against individual or communal survival and enjoyment of salvation, that is, life in all its fullness. It embodies good health, general prosperity, safety, and security; it also embodies the state of being which radiates peace and tranquillity. Salvation is perceived and appropriated within this general context. Christianity encountered this worldview. Search for Salvation is recorded in the very dynamism of the human mind, indeed it appears as the fundamental and universal aspect of it. Whatever else religion may or may not be, it is essentially a reaching forward to the ideal of salvation.

In the primal religion, the followers are reaching out to a form of salvation that relates to the existential here and now. Their concept of salvation embodies the enjoyment of long life, vitality, vigour, and health; a life of happiness and felicity; the enjoyment of prosperity: that is, wealth, riches, and substance, including children; life of peace, tranquillity; and life free from perturbation. The concept of salvation in the primal world is single-faceted, relating solely to the here and now. There is no concept of heaven tomorrow. The charge made by Oosthuizen that “the most difficult theological problem in Africa, namely, the confusion that exists with regard to the ancestral spirits and the Holy Spirit” could therefore not be sustained in the African situation as far as the Pentecostals are concerned. Neither can they be charged that the “traditional beliefs about possession by an ancestral spirit ... have been transferred to the idea of being filled with the Holy Spirit”.

The story of the incarnation is thus their good news of salvation from fear of evil spirits, from sickness and disease, from economic and social deprivation, from ignorance of who they are, and, above all, salvation from total and complete alienation from the Father of all flesh: God. The Pentecostal presupposition of biblical infallibility and biblical literalism finds its logical conclusion in what may be considered as a dualistic worldview: a spiritual universe in which the devil and his fallen angels are constantly at enmity with God and His holy angels. Human beings are grouped into two in this cosmic arena: those who belong to God and those who belong to the devil. Pentecostals do not see any “demilitarised zone”. You belong to either the “kingdom of light” or the “kingdom of darkness”. The primal cosmology and the primal view of life are the main factors here. The primal cosmology postulates external hostile agencies more powerful than man does. Man sees himself as constantly exposed to the influences of evil supernaturalism. In the terrestrial realm are found men and women who manipulate the spirit force in the celestial realm for evil purposes.

The activities of charmers, enchanters, sorcerers, and witches are directed against man in order to prevent him from enjoying abundant life, or to prevent him from fulfilling his destiny. The central focus of his religious exercises is thus directed towards the harnessing of power inherent in the spirit force for his own advantage. The concept of power thus reigns supreme in this spirit-filled universe. Every event here on earth is thus traceable to a supernatural power in the spirit realm. From the same source, therefore recourse is made for the ultimate succour of man. It is from this background that salvation is defined and experienced.

3.3 The Concept of Divine Being or God

A complete view of the nature and attributes of the creative principles in African religious myths shows that with the exception of the Bambara myth, none of the mythologies discusses the origin of the creative principle. The Abaluyia myth simply says that Wele Xakaba, the giver of all things created the world. The Fang myth says that Nzame was at the beginning of all things. Similarly, the Yoruba and the Dogon myths tell us that *Olorun* and *Amma*, the creative principles, were there at the beginning, but do not attempt to explain how they came to be there. So that, some of the questions usually asked by Western philosophy of religion and theology about the origin of the creative principle such as: Is it a 'self-existent being? Is he the uncaused cause, remains unresolved.

The Bambara myth does attempt to probe the origin of the creative principle. In the beginning, it says, was the void, and from the void came the voice which desiring to create, produced, its double and joined itself to it. From the union came unorganised matter. This statement can be interpreted in two ways: (i) It could mean that the void, (which is emptiness or nothing) pre-existed the voice. That is to say, the creative principle came into existence at a point in time. It also means that the 'voice' had always existed, and its sound emerged from the void when it expressed its willingness to create. It is creation and not the creator that took place in time and (ii) That the principle that 'something cannot be produced from nothing' is universally valid. In other words, the Bambara myth is effectively saying the same thing as the other four African mythologies that the origin of the creative principle is wrapped in mystery. It was there at the beginning and it has always been there.

Even though, the myths are unable to tell us whether the creative principles were 'uncaused cause', yet each of them affirms that it was the 'first cause'. It created or produced every other thing. Whatever exists derives from it as its ultimate source. The universe, the

deities, the animal and plant kingdom, especially man, all derive immediately or ultimately from the creative principle. According to the Bambara myth, matter, the spirit *Yo*, and *Faro*, the creator of the world and water deity, were all offspring's of the creative principle conceptualised as 'The Voice'. *Amma* is the creative principle of Dogon myth. *Nommo* the divine beings and the *Nommo* who became the founding ancestors of the Dogon, all came from *Amma*. The infertile earth came from a rebellious *Nommo*, but was later purified and transformed by *Amma*. In the Yoruba myth, the organised world was produced by *Orishanla* himself. Both the Fang and the Abaluyia is firm in asserting that the creative principles *Nzame* and *Wele Xakaba* created everything the heaven, the earth, the deities, man, animals and plants. The two assistants, who live with them in heaven, were also their creatures.

The creative principle, is therefore, as far as can be derived from the myths, the first cause and the supreme principle from which all other realities known to man trace their origin. He has precedence over all other beings in both time, and perfection. He depends on no other being for its existence but all other beings derive their existence from him. In view of these facts, such creative principle in African myths, has often called the Supreme Being, and identified with the Christian concept of God. Some authors object to the use of term 'Supreme Being' as a general term applicable to African creators as a case of hellenization of African deities along the lines of the Christian God. They argue that the term 'Supreme Being' as applied to the Christian God, means that no other being can be greater than he and therefore he is an 'uncaused cause'.

Many African myths emphasise the universal lordship of the Supreme God over the universe. All beings in the universe find their meaning and purpose in the creative plan of the Supreme Being. They are still his control because he made them and continues to direct their actions to achieve his divine purpose. The heavenly realm of the deities, the earth, and even the deities themselves has their purpose in God's providence. This explained by the Dogon myth, which states that, the creative plan, was well mapped out by *Amma*, long before its actual execution. The creative sign received the creative word pronounced by *Amma*. This engendered the creative seed which in turn produced the womb in which were contained the *Nommo* 'Son of God'. However, the divine plan to create the womb does not allowed to attain its full development. The rebellion of '*Yurugu*', the 'pale fox' introduced the principle of disorder, confusion, imperfection, and sterility in the created order.

The world, which was the direct result of this revolt, had to be restored by God's intervention by sacrificing another of his sons. This '*Nommo*' along with others were sent by God to found the human society, and rules the world in God's stead. Thus, the order in the

world, the seasons, water, light, fertility, the framework of human institutions and civilization came from God. The divine in the Bambara myth is demonstrated not only by creation, but also by divine interventions, first to curtail the powers of Balanza the tree of life, and later by the reorganisation of the universe and the delimitation of the different realms of being, the vegetable, animal, and human orders, and the introduction of technology. The Fang myth says that God in his providence made the first humankind from full of life force, beauty, and immortal. When humankind proved insubordinate, God destroyed the world by fire and created the second man Sekume mortal.

God in the Abaluyia myth created the heavens and supported them with pillars to prevent them from falling. He made clouds to produce rain and rainbows to stop rain. He created the earth to provide the deities and men where to work. He gave man a wife, domestic animals, and food and taught men the art of animal husbandry. African myth generally try to trace the origin of the most cherished items in human experience like right, water, order, the seasons, the sexes, animal, vegetable, kingdoms; and some revered human institutions like marriage, kingships, the priesthood and human industry to God. This is a recognition that divine providence extends to every sphere of the created order. Mention is sometimes made in some African myths of some other divine beings other than the Supreme Being. These beings are held to be superior to man and yet are subordinate to the Supreme Being. Some are associated with the Supreme Being in the act of the creation or governance of the world.

In many respects, they share some aspects of the nature and some of the attributes of the Supreme Being. Some are said to live with the Supreme Being in the heavenly realm and to act as his counsellors and collaborators. Others are associated with some natural phenomena like the sky, the earth, thunder, rivers, forests, mountains over which they exercise a measure of control. They are personal, spiritual, and powerful beings, and exercise immense power over human life and destiny. They have powers to kill or save, reward or punish, bring fortunes or cause misfortunes to man. The origin of these divine beings, for which we shall use the name deities, is wrapped in mystery. Some African myths try to throw some light on their origin and position in African world-view. For example, Faro, described in the Bambara myth as God of Water and master of the world, originated from the 'voice', which is the Supreme Being by a process of emanation. He is a demiurge who is said to have created the world, and later on reorganised it after the disorder caused by the first woman.

The *Nommo* in the Dogon myth is divine beings. They are also described as emanations of *Amma* the Supreme Being. One of these *Nommo*, *Yurugu*, is a demiurge. His attempt to create the world ended in a failure, but he is still an active principle of disorder and confusion

in the world. Under the direction of *Amma*, they continue to have transforming influence on the world. Some *Nommo* appeared on earth as the ancestral founders of human societies and human civilization. The Yoruba and Fang myths present a slightly different picture of the origin of the deities. Long before the creation of the world, the deities lived with the Supreme Being in heaven. Neither myth suggests that they are eternal nor do they explicitly that they were created by God. Nevertheless, from the general run of the myths, there is no doubt whatsoever that they owe their powers, influence to God, and operate under His direction. 'Orishanla', the arch-divinity of the Yoruba myth who was to create the world received the mandate from Olorun the Supreme Being. *Oduduwa* who turned out to be the demiurge was confirmed in his position by *Olorun*'. *Oranife*, the god of thunder, *Ifa*, god of divination, *Eleshije*, the god of medicine all received their charge from the Supreme Being.

A similar myth found among the Fon of Dahomey (a neighbour of the Yoruba), clearly says that the Supreme Being, *Mawu-Lisa* gave birth to all the deities (*Vodu*) and assigned to each a part of the universe to govern. *Sakpata* was given the earth, *Sagbo* received atmospheric phenomenon, 'Agbe-Naete was assigned the sea, while 'Age' was charged with the waters and the wild fields. The Abaluyia myth, unequivocally says that God created his assistants *Wele Muxove* and *Wele Murumwa* along with other creatures. The Fon of Dahomey tell of the creation of gods and men from an original pair, called *Mawu* and *Lisa*. *Lisa* is the male, like the sun, fierce and strong. *Mawu* is female and mild like the moon. However, the myths are not always consistent and *Mawu* often appears alone as a male or sexless creator. From the original twins seven other pairs of gods were born, and ruled over the different departments of nature, storm, earth, sea, and so on. *Mawu* travelled around with a great snake, forming mountains and tracing out the courses of rivers. The snake is the principle of life and motion, and on its coils, the earth is supported so that it does not sink into the ocean that surrounds it.

Another symbol is the calabash, the top half of which represents heaven and the bottom the earth, with the horizon where the two meet. Thus, calabashes decorated with abstract and pictorial designs are placed in Fon houses and temples and they contain offerings or symbolical objects to the gods. Luyia cosmology, in Kenya, says that God (*Wele*) created the world in several stages. He made heaven first, supporting it by pillars like a hut to stop it falling. God created it like lightening and it is always bright through his presence. Then he made the sun and moon, but they quarrelled and the moon is darker than the sun and only shines at night for thieves and witches. Then God make the clouds and a red cockerel which crows whenever it thunders. He made rain and two rainbows, the male being narrow and the

female wider, *Wele* made two assistants miraculously and gave them the earth as a place for their work, creating mountains and valleys, and sending rain to form rivers and lakes. Then he made a man, a woman and animals. Many myths then go on to say that having created the world and having lived here in olden days, God retired to the heavens where he is now.

The stories are not unlike the Biblical narrative of the Garden of Eden, since man is blamed for the separation of God from men. However, in African mythology, God withdrawn and is expelled, and the parallels are closer to other myths of the Near East, which told of a separation of heaven and earth by their children. It is noteworthy that there are similarities between these African stories in widely separated countries. The Mende of Sierra Leone says that God was formerly nearer to men than he is now and he gave them whatever they needed. However, they troubled him so often that he decided to make a dwelling place far away. He went off while men were asleep and when they woke up, they saw him spread out in all directions in the sky.

A commoner story, told in the Ivory Coast, Ghana, Togo, Dahomey, and Nigeria, says that God was formerly so near to men that they grew over-familiar with him. Children wiped their hands on the sky after eating and women tore pieces off it to put in the soup. Women knocked against the sky when they were pounding grain, and finally one woman hit it so hard with her pestle that the sky moved away in anger to its present distance. A Pygmy mythology, perhaps under the influence of a Negro story, says that God (*Mugasa*) used to live on earth with his family, two boys and a girl. Nevertheless, they did not see him for he lived in a big house where he worked at a smithy. The girl brought firewood and water to God every day and left them outside the house, but at last, she was curious to see God and hid herself to watch. She saw a big arm, covered with metal bracelets, come out and take the spot of water.

However, God saw the girl, and being angry at her disobedience he went off, but he left behind weapons and tools for his children. The girl married her brothers but her first child died, and so death came to the world. These mythologies explain creation and the separation of man and God. The people look back to a golden age when God lived among men and there was no pain or death. Some writers consider that they depict an original fall of man from a state of innocence, as in the Bible. This myth seems to be forcing a theological explanation into stories that are more concerned to explain the distance of the sky and God from man, rather than the expulsion of man from paradise.

The Nilotic of Kenya, Uganda, and Sudan myths of the divine is hinge on *jok*, a word, found with variations in all the Nilotic languages. The term renders *Jwok*, *Juok*, *Joagh*, *Joghi*, or *Joogi*. It is not always translated with the same English word, because the dictionary

writers had different philosophical ideas themselves, which demonstrates the power of the spirit that we call *Jok*. *Jok* is God and the spirits, the gods, the Holy Ghost, the beings from the other world. It can be vague and precise, good or frightening, beneficent or dangerous, one or a multitude, legion. If a missionary had chosen the word *Jok* to denote God in his Bible translation, he would defend the notion that the Nilotes knew the One God. If he had taken another word to mean God, then he might use *Jok* to mean the 'spirits', or 'gods', or 'devils', thereby embarrassing those missionaries of another denomination who had used *Jok* to mean 'God'.

This might be the origin of the confusion over *Jok*. This word incorporates all the contradictory ideas of the spiritual beings, which in the minds of Europeans must be kept carefully separated. *Jok* is the unified spirit of God and the gods, personal and impersonal, local and omnipresent. The Kikuyus are a large Nilotic tribe that speak a beautiful Bantu language and have lived on the slopes of Mount Kenya and surrounding districts for a very long time. The first Kikuyu was called Kikuyu and lived in a village called Kikuyu, which is still there. The word *kuyu* means 'a fig', and *kikuyu* is a fig tree, a fertility symbol in Africa as well as in Asia. Kikuyu had nine daughters, who became the ancestral mothers of the nine major clans of the Kikuyu nation. The Kikuyu word for God is *Ngai*, which means the Apportioner.

Thus, during creation, God apportioned his gifts to all the nations of the earth. To the Kikuyus he gave the knowledge of, and the tools for, agriculture, at which the Kikuyus have always excelled. God controls the rain and the thunder, with which he punishes evildoers when necessary. Every person has a spirit, *ngoma*, which after death becomes a ghost. The *ngoma* of a murdered man will pursue his murderer until the latter has to come out of hiding and give himself up to the police, which is better than being haunted by a vengeful, persistent spirit. Burial rituals for the elders are executed meticulously, because their spirits are feared; the spirits of lesser members of society are less dangerous. Certain trees are inhabited by spirits, which may have to be propitiated with food offerings. Like Jupiter, *Ngai* punishes those who do not keep their oath sworn in his name, by striking them with lightning. It seems that the people also believed that a man's character was decided by God, so that his life, too, was predestined. The Kikuyus have a strong feeling of propriety; they will abstain from whatever they feel is untoward. During the 1920s, there was a prophet, *Thiga wa Wairumbi*, who received direct messages from God for his people.

3.4 The Concept of Human Beings and Animals

Human beings and animals appear in stories sometimes explaining things in nature or just do heroic deeds. Numerous myths are told in Africa about its biggest animal, the elephant, whose very size makes it unassailable in nature, except by man, who has weapons and magic to kill it. In the African fables, the elephant is always the wise chief who impartially settles disputes among the forest creatures. A hunter in Chad found an elephant skin near Lake Chad and hid it. Soon he saw a lovely big girl crying, because she had lost her good 'clothes'. The hunter promised her new clothes and married her. They had many big children, for the son of an elephant cannot be a dwarf.

One bad day when the grainstore was empty, his wife found the elephant skin at the bottom, where the hunter had hidden it. She put it on and went back to the bush to live as an elephant again. Her sons became the ancestors of the clan whose totem was the elephant. They do not have to fear elephants. A myth of the Kamba in Kenya tells us how elephants originated. A very poor man heard of *Ivonya-Ngia*, 'He that feeds the Poor'. He decided to go and find *Ivonya-Ngia* but it was a long journey. When he finally arrived, he saw uncounted cattle and sheep, and there, amidst green pastures, was the mansion of *Ivonya-Ngia*, who received the poor man kindly, perceived his need, and ordered his men to give him a hundred sheep and a hundred cows. 'No', said the poor man, 'I want no charity; I want the secret of how to become rich.' *Ivonya-Ngia* reflected for a while, then took a flask of ointment and gave it to the poor man; asking him to rub it on his wife's pointed teeth in her upper jaw and wait until they have grown, then sell them.

The poor man carried out the strange instructions, promising his wife that they would become very rich. After some weeks, the canine teeth began to grow and when they had grown into tusks as long as his arm the man persuaded his wife to let him pull them out. He took them to the market and sold them for a flock of goats. After a few weeks, the wife's canine teeth had grown again, becoming even longer than the previous pair, but she would not let her husband touch them. Not only her teeth, but her whole body became bigger and heavier, her skin thick and grey. At last, she burst out of the door and walked into the forest, where she lived from then on. She gave birth to her son there, who was also an elephant. From time to time, her husband visited her in the forest, but she would not be persuaded to come back, although she did have more healthy children, all elephants. It was the origin of elephants and it explains why elephants are as intelligent as people are.

In Southern Africa there is told the tale of the girl who grew up so tall and fat that no man wanted her as a wife because she was accused of witchcraft. She was exiled from her

village and wandered into the wilderness on her own. There she met an elephant who began speaking to her politely in good Zulu. She agreed to stay with him and he helped her to find wild cucumbers and other fruits of the forest. She gave birth to four human sons, all very tall and strong, who became the ancestors of the Indhlovu clan of paramount chiefs. In the African fables, the elephant is usually described as too kind and noble, so that he feels pity even for a wicked character and is badly deceived. The Wachaga in Tanzania relate that the elephant was once a human being but was cheated out of all his limbs except his right arm, which now serves as his trunk. He paid for nobility.

The Ashanti of Ghana also states that an elephant is a human chief from the past. When they find a dead elephant in the forest, they give him a proper chief's burial. In July 1905, rebellion broke out in the area south of Dar es Salaam (Tanzania), against the newly instituted recruitment for compulsory work on the German cotton and sisal plantations. The senior German officer in command, Major Johannes, set out from Dar es Salaam and on 5 August captured Mohoro, where he arrested the two men who were locally regarded as the instigators of the rebellion. They were Zauberer, sorcerers, of the Ikemba tribe and one of them who was known as *Bokero*, had been selling to his fellow Africans a *maji* (this word can mean water, sap, juice, anybody liquid or vegetable extract) which, he claimed, had been given him by the Snake God to whom he referred as *Koleo*. The word *Koleo* literally means 'a pair of tongs', suggesting that this serpent was a python, well known for squeezing its victims to death; the worship of the python is widespread in Africa.

Bokero, whose real name was *Kinjikitire Ngwale*, came from *Ngarambi Ruhingo* in the Rufiji Valley. He was well known for his magic powers, particularly for his ability to raise the spirits of the dead so that a man could see his own ancestors. *Bokero* and his colleague were hanged by the Germans. *Bokero's* last words were that it did not matter, for his *dawa* had already spread to other parts of the country and with it the spirit of independence. This *dawa*, the famous *maji*, was composed of water, matama (*sorghum*) and perhaps other millet as well as roots and various secret ingredients. It could be sprinkled over a man, or carried on his chest on a string round his neck, in a bottle made from bamboo, or it could be drunk as medicine. In whatever way it was taken, the man who had taken it was supposedly immune to German bullets: they would become muddy, *majimaji* (*Matschi Matschi*), before hitting his body, and be harmless. Some women also took it, notably the Jumbess Mkomaniira. The rebellion affected almost a quarter of the country and lasted for two years, until the summer of 1907, when the Jumbess Mkomaniira was captured and hanged. Over a hundred thousand people died in the war, most of them from starvation.

A Swahili poet, Abdul Karim Bin Jamaliddini, wrote an epic on the Majimaji rebellion in Lindi, in which we see the rebellion as a justified rising against the oppressors. It was published in Berlin in 1933, with a translation. In the story concerning Mokele, he is grown and wants to know why the sun does not rise in his village. He decides to go and purchase the sun for his father. While he is preparing for his journey, many of the animals ask to go with him for they have powers he can use. Therefore, he sets off with the tortoise, kite, wasps, etc. in his boat. When he reaches the village where the sun is hidden, he asks the chief if he can buy it. The chief does not want to say no, fearing the animals, so he gets Mokele to stay while they figure out a fair price. The chief has one of his daughters brew up a poisonous drink. He then tells her to give it to Mokele. Meanwhile, the wasps heard the conversation and warned Mokele. The chief's daughter is in love with Mokele and cannot kill him, so she throws away the poison. The tortoise and kite steal the sun from its hiding place and the kite takes the sun up into the sky. Mokele and the chief's daughter escape just in time from the village and return to Mokeles home where they are married. Mokele is hailed as a hero.

This is one of many myths where the main character goes on a quest. What makes Mokele a hero? Would he have survived without the help of the animals? What characteristic of each animal helped Mokele in the story? Why do you think the animals help Mokele? Why is Mokeles journey necessary? Why would someone want to keep the sun from shining on other villages? The Finding of Fire is another story in which a human being gains knowledge that indeed is crucial to all other beings. In this story, a hunter notices a light in the woods, which he has never seen before. He goes to discover what it is and finds a fire, which speaks to him and tells him he may stay but the hunter must feed him limbs and branches from trees nearby. After feeding the fire, the man is helped to catch a hare and then fire tells him how to roast his dinner. The man is impressed and vows never to eat raw meat again. He also decides that he wanted to take the fire home with him. The fire refuses and tells the hunter that he cannot travel and must stay there.

When the hunter leaves, he returns home and tells his wife about what happened. She asks him for more of the meat and so the hunter makes frequent trips back to the fire. The wife tells another man about the fire and he goes to watch the hunter and sees how he feeds the fire. The man grabs a burning branch that is on fire determined to take it with him. As he runs, the fire scorches his hand and he drops the branch. A large fire destroys much of the village. The people escape across the river. When they return they discover the roasted meat, and that their clay pots have hardened from being in the fire. The hunter after hearing what happen went back to the original fire, which tells him that fire can be useful if used properly

and that he will help people by cooking their food, pots, baking their porridge so they can have pancakes and melt iron so they can make weapons. This story tries to explain where the habit of cooking food and cooking clay pots comes from. In this story, as well as that about thunder and lightning and the Yao creation myth, there is the mention of the destructive force of fire. Students might compare how fire is used in the three stories. It is important to realize that like drought, a fire can have a devastating effect on animal and plant life especially in the plains areas of Africa.

The sunbirds are two golden birds, which were found among the ruins of Zimbabwe about a century ago by one of the first explorers. They were probably discovered in the remains of a building, which may have been the sun-temple of the ancient Bantu religion of the Shona people of Zimbabwe. These birds which form a pair, represent, it appears, two swallows, whose high and swift flight is praised by many poets of the old Bantu tradition, and about which the story-tellers relate that they can fly better even than the eagle. The swallows, as is well known, are migrating birds. They arrive in southern Africa from Europe around the beginning of October, when spring is at its most beautiful and thousands of flowers are blooming. The sun is on its way up. The myth of the Shona people relates that the sunbirds belonged originally to the goddess Dzivaguru, the goddess of the earth, of the darkness of night, and of the rain clouds, of the pools and streams. Africans also know they depend on trees for firewood, without which their wives cannot cook their food.

In some areas, the goats can climb trees to eat the green leaves. The leopard lurks in a leafy tree to fall upon the lonely traveller at night, and vipers do the same in Uganda. In some trees, the bees make their nest where they store honey. Every big tree has a spirit. Some trees house many spirits. Whether a tree is a spirit or is inhabited by a spirit is not an easy question. The people will say the tree has a spirit, or in the tree, there is a spirit. The spirit has a voice, which the careful listener can hear and even understand if he knows the language of the spirits. This voice has to be preserved carefully by the drum maker. The boat-maker too, wants to keep the spirit of the tree in the wood so that it will protect the boatman against drowning in the treacherous rivers, when the tree has become a boat. Together in a forest, the trees have a collective spirit, powerful enough to be revered as a god. Trees can be tricky. With their roots, they can trip up the unsuspecting traveller, who will often believe that his enemy bewitched the root to do that. Thorny branches have the same function.

Among the people of Namibia, a tree eats peoples and it catches them with its branches, opens its bark, and swallows them up. Inside the tree, the victim can be heard singing a goodbye song to their relatives and friends. Only the Woodpecker can save them, for it

possesses magic powers. For a fee, it will open the tree with its sharp bill. A man in Zaire was married to a tree. It gave birth to his children, a healthy boy, and a girl who were human but knew the spirits of the forest and so became famous herbalists.

3.5 The Concept of Human Destiny

The Yoruba (Nigeria) believe that the success or failure of a man in live depends on the choices he made in heaven before he was born. If a person suddenly becomes rich, they will say that he chose the right future for himself, therefore poor people must be patient because even if they have chosen the right life, it may not have arrived yet. We all need patience. The word *ayanmo* means 'choice', and *kadara* means 'divine share for a man'; *ipin* means 'predestined lot'. The Yoruba believe that there is a god, *Ori*, who supervises people's choices in heaven. Literally, *Ori* means 'head' or 'mind', because that is what one chooses before birth. If someone chooses a wise head, i.e. intelligence, wisdom, he will walk easily through life, but if someone chooses a fool's head, he will never succeed anywhere. *Ori* is a personal god, a sort of guardian angel who will accompany each of us for life, once chosen. Even the gods have their *Ori*, which directs their personal lives. Both men and gods must consult their sacred divination palm-nuts daily in order to learn what their *Ori* wishes.

Ori is both an individual and a collective concept, a personal spirit directing each individual's life, and a god in heaven, feared even by *Orunmila*. In heaven, there is a curious character called *Ajala*, a very fallible man whose daily work is fashioning faces (*Ori*) from clay. Sometimes he forgets to bake them properly, so they cannot withstand the long journey to earth prior to the beginning of life; especially in the rainy season, where the clay might wash away and there would be a total loss of face.

3.5 The African Concept of Death and After-Life

Death in Africa is the inevitable end of all human beings. It is the most disrupting phenomenon of all. Death to the Africans stands between the world of the living (human beings) and the world of the spirits or between the visible and the invisible world. The African concept of this world is that the world is like a voyage and that everyone will go home one day. Therefore, death is that event that returns everyone back home. Hence, the

idea is that no matter how long one may stay put on earth, one will eventually return to where he/she comes from through the agency of death. However, though death is in true sense the end of human beings, African does not see it as the end of life. Death is a transition from the present earthly life to another life in the land of the spirits. Africans believed that death is a journey which humanity must take in order to reach the land beyond where they would be elevated to the position of an ancestor. They also believed that death does not sever human beings relationship with their family but on the contrary, it extends the family relationship into infinity.

The basis for the continual followership and communion between the living and the dead in African society is that both living and the ancestors (the living dead) have a role to play in fulfilling family obligations and ensuring the continual existence of the family. In most African societies, death is a wicked person, a destroyer and a curse that frustrates human efforts. Death brings about physical separation of loved ones and constitutes a great loss to the immediate family where it has occurred and to the community at large. Several mythologies in African seem to explain the origin of death. The most acceptable is the one that sees death as the messenger of God himself. It then confers on death the status of debt that all the living must pay one day no matter how long they live on earth. African people classified death into two categories: (i) Good or natural death and (ii) Bad death. The death of young adults is bad death. This is the basis for such not enjoying the privilege of full funeral rites. Other types of bad death include those who died of leprosy, accidents such as falling down from the palm tree, suicide, murder, drowning, burns, and those who died with pregnancy or in labour. People who died accidentally are without formal rites.

Good death is the death that comes to human beings at a ripe old age. Consequently, the death of an old person in the African community is an occasion for much rejoicing and ritual ceremonies. Most good death actually falls into the category of natural death. This death comes because of old age. At times, stories of old people who are ready to die but sent for all their children and give them final instructions before passing on finally. When a person stopped breathing, he is dead. The general belief is that the spirit or the soul of the person returns to God but the physical body is left there. The soul on arrival before God will give an account of how the person has lived in this world and this would determine the person's final home. It is generally believed that the thereafter is another world or a distant place where life may resemble this life. For this reason, articles such as

clothing sponge, towel, food and in the case of the wealthy or the royal household gold trinkets and precious ornaments are buried alongside to help the dead on the way to the next world. It is the same belief that makes the Africans bury slaves and wives along with deceased rulers so that they will continue to assist them on the way to the eternal home.

All traditional African peoples agree that the soul of an individual lives on after death. Some people distinguish more than one spiritual essence living within one person, the life-soul, or bio spirit, which disappears now of definitive death, and the through soul, which keeps, his individual identity separated from the body. The life-soul can, according to some peoples in Africa and Asia, be separated during a person's life, in times of danger, and be kept hidden in a safe place, so that its owner can be harmed, mortally wounded even, but not killed, as long as his life-soul is safe. When the danger is past, the life-soul restored to the body and the person is healthy again. The thought-soul lives on after death, but not forever. It may gradually die and be forgotten. Souls of little children who died young, those of weak minds and insignificant persons will fade away after some years lingering.

If, however, an individual had a strong personality, a rich and famous man, a mother of many children or a chief, that soul will live on for many generations. Evil souls, too, may have a long afterlife: witches, sorcerers, the souls with a grudge, who have a score to settle, will wait for their revenge, and haunt the living for years. The oldest concept of the place where the dead continue their existence is the forest. The impenetrable depth of the great forests of Africa is the heartland of the spirits and of all magical beings. Where there are steep rocks, the dead reside in deep, dark caves, where their souls flutter about disguised as bats. Below the surface of rivers and lakes is the habitat of many souls. Many others linger on near the graveyards. The good souls of the loved ones who have died, the wise parents' souls still accompany their living children and grandchildren.

The Yoruba (Nigeria) believe that each person has at least three spiritual beings. Firstly, there is the spirit, *emi*, literally 'breath' that resides in the lungs, heart, and is fed by the wind through the nostrils, just as the fire is fed through the twin openings in the blacksmith's bellows. This *emi* is the vital force, which makes a man live, breathe, rise up, walk, be aware, be active, work, speak, see, hear, and make love. There is also the shadow or shade, *ojiji*, which follows its owner like a dog. When he dies, it awaits his return in heaven. The third is the *eleda* 'spirit' or *ori* 'head', also translated as 'guardian soul'; from time to time, it has to be 'fed' by sacrifices. At death, these spiritual aspects of

a person leave the body and wait for him or her in heaven. An individual is expected to return to his clan as a newborn baby.

Babatunde, 'Father returns' is a name which is given to a child when it resembles his father's father; *Yetunde* 'Mother returns' for a girl. Physical resemblances determine the identity of the baby. Before death, the emi-spirit may visit relatives, clan-members who will thus learn in a dream that their relative or -woman is going to die soon. Even in daytime, the cold presence of a dying relative felt from far away, as if he were close by. The ghosts of those who died in mid-life may go and live in distant towns and assume a quasi-physical existence there. A man who died early in life might even marry, his wife would not even know that her husband was dead already, a mere ghost. When the final hour arrives, the man dies a second time. After death, the guardian soul arrives in heaven and confesses to the Supreme God Olorun what it has done on earth.

The good soul goes to Heaven (*Orun Rere*), but the souls of the wicked, those who are guilty of theft, murder or cruelty, poisoning, witchcraft or slander, is sent to Bad Heaven (*Orun Buburu*), as punishment.

3.6 African Concept of Virtue and Vice

Virtue (good behaviour) in traditional African religion is the communal aspect of life. Examples include social behaviours such as the respect for parents and elders, raising children appropriately, providing hospitality, and being honest, trustworthy, and courageous. In some traditional African religions, morality is associated with obedience or disobedience to God regarding the way a person or a community lives. For the Kikuyu, according to Mbiti, God, acting through the lesser deities, speak to and is capable of guiding the virtuous person as one's conscience. However, so could the Devil and its messengers. In indigenous African religions, such as the Azande religion, a person has good or bad conscience depending on whether he does the bidding of the God or the Devil.

4.0 CONCLUSION

You have learnt in this unit that cosmogonic mythologies have themes that are features of African traditional religion. These themes include: the concept of creation of the earth, concept of the divine, concept of salvation, concept of human beings and animals, the lost of

paradise/withdrawal of God, the concept of death and after-life, and the concept of virtue and vice, among others. Our study of these concepts has helped in understanding the cosmological and cosmogonic worldviews of African peoples.

5.0 SUMMARY

The following are the major points you have learnt in this unit:

- God created the universe by his own wisdom
- Mankind brought death and evil into the world
- Death in Africa is seen as the inevitable end of humanity
- Death however, is not seen as the end of existence, but leads existence in the spiritual world
- Those who died are punished, while the Supreme Deity rewards those who lived good lives.
- Funeral rites induction to the cult of the ancestors is for those who lived to old age and died peacefully or naturally.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Discuss the African conception of death and hereafter
2. Explain African concept of good and evil
3. Examine briefly the African concept of salvation
4. Give African understanding of the Divine Being or God
5. Describe African concept of humankind and animals
6. Narrate the African concept of human destiny

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UNIT 4 AFRICAN THEISM AND CONCEPT OF GOD

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

God is an essential element of African traditional religion. The Africans have notions of the God before the advent of Christianity and Islam, which was mixture of polytheism and monotheism. However, with the advent of modern science, a modern anthropological notion of God proposed gives an explanation of the origin and existence of the God. In this unit, you will be studying about the non-Christian notions of God, the modern anthropological perceptions of the God, the European notions of the God and African understanding of the God ity. This will help in correcting the mis-conceptions of the western scholars concerning the African belief in God.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this study, you should be able to:

- Discuss the Western conception of God
- Explain the modern anthropological notions of the Deity
- Examine Europeans mis-conceptions of African ideas of the Deity
- Give the African conception of the Deity
- Discuss the anthropological attributes of the Deity

3.0 MAIN CONTENTS

3.1 Western Conception of God

Before the influx, African scholars in the study of African traditional religion, the field was dominated by western scholars whose aim was to influence the interpretation of the religion and to advocate conversion to Christianity. Thus, they derogatory mis-represented African traditional religion and their beliefs in the Supreme Deity. The famous scholars that belong to this group include Baudin, a Roman Catholic priest published a book in 1985 titled “*Fetishism and Fetish Worshippers*” where he made the following observations:

The religion of the blacks (African Traditional Religion) is a mixture of monotheism, polytheism, and idolatry. In this religious system, the idea of God (the Supreme Being) is fundamental. The Blacks believe in the primordial being who is the Lord of the universe. In spite of the abundant testimonies of the Blacks in the existence of God, the whole system is practically of vast pantheism. In their thought, God alone escapes androgynism and conjugal associations. The Blacks have no statute to represent him. God is considered the Supreme primordial being, the author, and father of the spirits. Nevertheless, the idea Blacks have of God is most unworthy of his divine majesty. They represent God as someone who has commenced the organization of the world, left the completion and the government of it to an arch-divinity. Having done this, God himself retired and entered occupying Himself only with his own happiness, too great to interest himself in the affairs of the world. He remains a Negro king in a sleep of idleness. The Blacks could render no worships to God. They

completely neglect Him and occupy themselves with gods, goddesses, and spirits. The Blacks believe to be indebted for their birth and faith in this life and the next. They address themselves only by instincts to God and invoke him in sudden anger or offence. If the Blacks forget God, they never ceased to invoke fetishes. These they constantly address themselves in all circumstances of life directly and not as mediators or intermediaries between God and man.

Baudin's observation above is criticized for its illogical conclusions for the following reasons: First, he holds that the black person's idea of God is confused and obscure; that God charged Obatala (the Yoruba divinity) with the government of the world, while he retired and did not interest himself in the affairs of this world. Baudin by this conclusion is unwillingly giving the people he describes as the Blacks more credits than can be given to a group of people in the civilized world of today. Second, Baudin is making what is universal phenomenon a monopoly of the Africans. There is a tradition of systematic thinking which has been reduced to writing and a long tradition of thinking which remains in the oral traditions of the race. Third, Baudin is also criticised for his assertion that the black person's idea about God is most unworthy of His Divine majesty; and that the Blacks represents God as someone who retired and entered into eternal rest, engaging himself in a sleep of idleness.

These statements need more explanations because according to Leo Frobenius, God by creating the world leads the entire platonic mythological existence (Ikenga-Metuh, 1985). It is therefore, certain that Baudin has given his imagination as conditioned by the preconceived notion the vein interpretation of the minds of Africans on the subject. He was attributing to Africans something that is very far about God. There is a definite reading of the western deistic idea into African beliefs. Here, we have the usual pre-conceived idea of a withdrawn God (Deus Otiosus) coming to us in a new dress. Diettrich Westerman also wrote in his book "*African and Christianity*", published in 1937, Westerman observed thus:

In the centre of African beliefs, there is a creation principle, which in most cases is identified with a high God. He is a whole, and not the object of a religion cult. He is of no significance in practical religion and people acknowledged him but neither fear nor love, nor serve him. The feeling towards him is that of thoughtful, not of the crowd. The matured worship him by instincts and addressed him only, in times of troubles. He is a great power, which is not to be comprehended by men. Anything extra-ordinary they ascribe to as God, but he is a reality to African

people. What they know about him is pure expression of religious thinking of a God whose ideas are unknown.

Westerman's conclusion have been found faulty and illogical for a good number of reasons. First, he said that the African God is the God of the thoughtful few, not of the crowd and that sometimes, a feature of God assumes features of a truly personal and purely divine God. In saying this and making it apply to, Africa with a depreciative intent, he conveniently ignored the history of religious doctrines, which shows that in every religion the role of the masses have always had their lines of demarcation. Second, Westerman because of map reading about Africans overlooked the established universal fact that in every locality, the prophet is a head of his community in idea and insight. In every age and generation, the thoughtful prophets, theologians, philosophers, and mystics are in minority. This is an unshared reality with the Africans because everywhere, it the minority that conceives and bring forth ideas and concepts in systematic forms. The rest of the community usually accept and practiced faith with little questioning or search for explanation.

Third, Westerman's statement that the African God is a "*deus remotus*" (a withdrawn God) creates an atmosphere of indefiniteness about him, which betrays a careless thinking. There is no being like African God, except in the imagination of those who used the term, be they Africans or Europeans. There is only one God, and while there may be various concepts of God according to each people's indigenous capabilities, it is wrong to limit the God with an adjective form from the name race. "*Deus incretus*", will apply everywhere in the world because of the fact of "*deus absconditus*" which must be accepted as man's predicament in his approach to mystery of the sacred and the transcendent. "*Deus remotus*" is another way of saying "*deus ostionsus* (a withdrawn God). Therefore, when used without graphic actions, it is most appropriate that the western idea is showing its face.

The "*incretus*" or "*remotus*" is one concept that is never recurring in anthropological writings. Westerman goes on to say that, the alpha and omega of a pagan belief is "my will be done". This is just too much, because the term "pagan" or "paganism" is unsuitable as a descriptive as a descriptive term with reference to the adherents of African traditional religion. About "my will be done", Westerman is by this statement confusing religion with magic, whereas, the two can mingle together but should not be confused. He is confusing the mere appearance of religion with reality. He is not been well acquainted with the situation of things. The petitioner character of African prayers appears to show the fulfilment of man's desire rather than the will of deity. It appears to be my will be done rather than thy will be

done. Herskovit, another western scholar also published a book called “*Dahomey*” in 1938 in two volumes. The silent points of his observations may be summarized as follows:

The assertion made by the Europeans that God to West African beliefs is a withdrawn God and a thing, which occurs in the imagination of the writers, is defining the European approach to African religions. Herskovits himself finds it difficult to say whether there is any central concept of one God who is supreme above all among the Dahomians. He discovered that *Mawa* is the name of God and *Awu* is the creator whose will determines destiny. But he thinks it is a thing serious to be doubted if Africans have original concept of God. Herskovits recognized however, that beyond “*Mawu*” is “*Nana Buluku*”, a being that brought “*Mawu*” into existence.

Herskovit observations above may be regarded as illogical conclusion for many reasons. First, his statement that the African idea of God is “*deus otiosus*”, registers serious doubts as to whether African traditional religion, African traditional religion in particular, has original belief in one God. Thus, he defined African concept of God into European approach. Herskovits and all other authors who wrote on African concept of God had at the back of their minds that in the western world, and in great monotheistic religion, the concept of God is very clear. This is conveyed in the western world where there are written systematic statements backed by scriptures on the subject.

There is also a long tradition, which assumes that in consequence of such sources of information, the concept of God must be clear. The serious tendency therefore, is to take such a thing for granted in forgetfulness of the fact that dogmas or systematic statements have been reached as a result of spiritual or intellectual pilgrimages which shows that there were stages in the development with the shifting scene of physical universe and the progress in man’s knowledge of the universe. This indicates that the established forces of beliefs have undergone changes either radically or in their formulations. If you take the spiritual journey of the Hebrew mind, we shall see stages of shadow of a henotheism, which was deeply tinged with ethnocentrism, and ethnical monotheism of Deutro-Isaiah. The prophetic insight regarding the nature of God has always been far in advance of the general concept held by the generality of the people.

Rattary also wrote a book titled "Ashanti", first published in 1923 and the second edition in 1955. His silent points of conclusions about African idea of religion and Deity (God) are quoted as follows:

The idea of Deity (God) in West Africa minds and its place in their religion were due to other causes, which were not indigenous to West African people. That is, the idea of God in West African minds has nothing to do with missionary influence or Islamic influence. He said that his extensive researches into Ashanti beliefs have convinced him that among the Negroes, the belief in Deity (God) is indigenous. The Negroes people ascribe to Deity (God) the attributes of omnipotence, omniscience, and indivisibility. They believed that Deity (God) governed all things by providence. He is invisible and is abjured to make corporate representation of him. It is for this reason that Africans have subordinate deities who as they believed are mediators between Deity (God) and man. Rattary goes on to affirm the idea of a God in Ashanti mind has nothing to do with missionary influences, Christians or Muslims. He reminds his readers that the magnificent possession of one Deity was not the prerogative of the learned, intellectual minds of the world but it was a conception of the primitive who lived after the pyramids were built, before the advent of Greece or Rome and these were the wandering tribes of the desert. He concluded that, it is true this Deity (God), whose conception has been in the minds of the Ashanti is the Jehovah of the Israelites.

Rattary's arguments has been criticised by scholars on the following grounds. First, his conclusion that the idea of God in West African minds has been due to missionary teachings, and that his extensive researches into Ashanti beliefs convinced him that among the Blacks or negroes, belief in the Deity (God) is indigenous, are contradictory statements which needs more clarifications. Although Rattary does not disregard the fact that he was writing with a mind, which was reacting against pre-conceived notion and reading in of western idea into African concept of the Deity (God), however, he erroneously contradicted himself with international comparison. He categorically said that Africans have a queer concept of the Deity (God); and that this Great God is the Jehovah of the Israelites. We do not know however, why he is emphasizing the fact that Ashanti have the concept of one Supreme Deity (God). However, we must admit the fact that such a generation pre-clues a valid

interpretation of African beliefs in Deity (God). He committed a fallacy by using Ashanti belief as a standard of judging the belief of other African ethnic groups in the Deity (God). This fallacy can be referred to as “hasten generalization”.

The presumptuous notions of these scholars however, can be attributed to lack of written records on African traditional religion, unlike the western world whose religions are backed by scriptures. Hence, the people believed that the mere possession of these traditional resources is automatically tantamount to “clear” knowledge of the Supreme Deity (God). The most unfortunate thing is that those who studied African traditional religion came with pre-conceived idea of what they thought Africans should believe. They forgot that Deity (God) is a God of the whole universal who has revealed himself to various people at various levels of human development. Africans have not lost the idea of the true God neither is their idea of real confused or obscured. Supreme Deity (God) is real to the Africans because each people have a local name for God. Such names are uniquely His and no part of it is shared by any other being.

The Yoruba name *Olodumare*, for example, is an illustration of a name, which is unique to Supreme Deity (God). The Igbo name, *Chukwu*, illustrates the name of God, which adds a suffix to the generic name of God in general. This name is made up of “*Chi*”, and “*Ukwu*”. “*Chi*” means “Source Being” or “Spirit”. While “*Ukwu*” means “Great” and “Immense”. The Efik name for God is “*Abasi Iboh*” meaning “the great one above”. While the Tiv name for God is “*Aôndô*”, which means “Supreme God” (Ushe, 2010). Africans believe that God cannot be compared with anything. He is King with absolute Supremacy. His uniqueness implies his transcendence and this accounts for the wrong impression by some scholars that God is not directly worshipped or that Supreme Deity (God) is already withdrawn from the people. Supreme Deity (God) is believed to be the absolute controller of the universe. He creates the world and sustains it. The divinities derive their existence and power from Him. Thus, the Nupe has a song which says, “A being which Soko (the Supreme Being) did not create, neither did the world create it” (Imasogie, 1982).

Apart from misconception of African idea of the Supreme Deity by the western scholars, African writers and nationalists were also noted for mis-representing African religion. Fisher (1997) and Mbiti (1970) were famous in expressing their views on use of the correct title for African Religion. They were furious with European scholars who labelled the religion of African people as “tribal religion”, “pre-literate religion,” and “pagan religion”. However, they were faced with the problem of the correct title to be used for African

traditional religion. For example, Idowu (1973) insisted that one could legitimately speak of African Traditional Religion in the singular. Field (1960) argued that there was no basis for such a position. He maintained that the title of the subject should be in the plural; “African Traditional Religions”, because of the heterogeneous nature of African Religion.

Taylor (1963) pointed out that there is remarkable number of features as well as the fact of a basic world-view, which fundamentally is everywhere, the same in sub-Saharan African. As far as Idowu is concerned, a careful look through actual observation and comparative discussions with Africans from various parts of the continent will show, first and foremost, that there is a common fact which the coined word “negritude” will express aptly (Dickson & Ellingworth, 1969). There is a common Africanness about the total culture and religious beliefs and practices of Africa. Though Mbiti (Platvoet, 1996) accepted the existence of a single, basic religious philosophy for Africa, he was emphatic that there are as many religions in the sub-Saharan African background as there are distinct ethno-language groups (Mbiti, 1971). We therefore, speak of African religions in the plural, because there are about one thousand African peoples (tribes), and each has its “religious system”.

African Traditional Religion is not universal but tribal, each being bound and limited to the people among whom it has evolved. One traditional religion cannot be propagated in another tribal group. In addition, there is no conversion from one traditional religion to another (Adediran, 1994). The views of these scholars were for a long time split along the two positions, with authors like Ray (1976) and Ikenga-Metuh (1987) supporting opinion of Mbiti. However, scholarship that is more recent appears however, to favour the use of African Traditional Religion in the singular. The argument being that the existence of a common world-view as well as similarities in belief-systems, ritual forms, values and institutions across the various regions of the continent, provide a sufficient basis for keeping the singular form of the name. There is no reason to single out African Traditional Religion, while accepting as normal a multiplicity of denominations, even rival sects in other religions of humankind, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam Idowu, 1966).

Other works of African scholars, which played significant roles in clarifying the misrepresentation of African Traditional Religion, are Eliade (1987) who upheld primitive monotheism as the beginning of religion and maintained that the African conceived God as a being that lives far above the earth. Mulago & Kagame were among the first generation ordained African cleric-scholars of the Francophone background who took up the study of Bantu cosmology from where the Belgian missionary author, placid Temples (1969 left off

(Fola, 2008). They tried to present the traditional worldview along the lines of scholastic philosophy. Their theory of vital force and hierarchy of beings drew mainly on the indigenous religious traditions of the peoples of central Africa suggests that Bantu traditional religion is based on the belief in two worlds: visible and invisible.

These communitarian and hierarchic character of the two worlds show the interaction between the two worlds and the belief in a Supreme Being, creator, and father of all that exist. Parrinder (1974), Forde (1954), also contributed immensely in promoting African Traditional Religion in African continent. Many of his published works tried to correct misconceptions of African culture in western scholarship to show that African people have viable traditional religious ideas, ritual practices, institutions, and values that could be adapted to benefit Christianity in the continent. This however, debunked the fundamental questions generally advanced by European scholars who held that African Traditional Religion is a dead religion or has no relevance in contemporary Nigerian society. It is wrong assumption for the European scholars to say that the idea of God the Blacks have is an importation of the Christian understanding of God, as contended by western and Herskovits. This way of thinking was due to bias and prejudices against African people, otherwise, how can they think that Africans only claim to have the idea of God?

3.2 African Notion of God

The belief in God is a common feature of African Religion. The belief is so strong that various scholars who have carried ethnographic studies on the subject accepted the fact that belief in monotheistic God is a common feature of African worldview. This however, debunked the fundamental questions usually advanced by European scholars who argued that the idea of God is a foreign one to African people. It also shows that such thinking was due to European bias and prejudices against African people. Otherwise, how can they think that Africans only claim to have the idea of God? It is wrong assumption for the European scholars to conclude that the idea of God the Blacks have is an importation of the Christian understanding of God, as contended by Baudin, Westerman, Rattary, and Herskovits.

In African worldview, God has a number of divinities and ancestral cults that varies from culture to culture. They associated these spirits with physical features such as mountains, rivers, wells, trees and springs. Many Africans believe that human spirits exist after death. They also believe that the spirits of dead ancestors remain near their living

descendants to help and protect them as long as these relatives perform certain ceremonies and pay them due respect. Many Africans even trace their origins to their first ancestors. Some of these culture heroes performed great feats or embodied important values that featured a trickster. However, it has often been said that the idea of Supreme Deity among Africans has been influenced by the advent of Christianity and Islam, can say that this is not completely true as Africans have their own ideas of deity prior to the advent of the westerners. This fact is corroborated with the names given to the deity (God) by the various people groups. Among the Yoruba, for example, the Supreme Deity (God) is called by three distinct names, namely: *Olodumare*, *Olorun*, and *Olofin-Orun*. *Olodumare* is a word that is made up of three clear words: *Olo*, *Odu*, and *Are*. *Olo* means “owner” or “Lord of something”, *Odu* can mean of two things: either main heading or chief or principal heading.

The combination of these two words would then mean “the one who owns the principal thing” which in this case may be authority or power. *Are* mean “the symbol of uniqueness that is on the original crown of the king”. *Olodumare*, therefore, is the name that signifies that God is the Lord and Supreme owner of everything, including all power and authority (as symbolized by the sceptre). *Olorun* also is a combination of “*Do*” and “*Orun*”. *Olo* has been explained as in *Olodumare* above. The only word that needs to engage our attention is “*Orun*”, translated in Yoruba as “heaven”. The combination of these words literally means that God is the power of heaven. This name depicts the transcendence of God and his sovereignty. The last name, which is rare in the common parlance, is used more in liturgy. It is called “*Olofin-Orun*”. With this name, the highest office in heaven is thus given to God. It also has a literal meaning of the one who owns the place of heaven.

Thus, God is seen as the Supreme Ruler who abides in heaven. Like to Yoruba people, the Igbo names for the God is also indicative not only of their concept for God, but also of the attributes of God. The most common of their concept for God is *Chi*, a prefix that can be used with various suffixes to indicate the attributes of God. *Ene* suggested two names for the God and these are *Chineke* and *Chukwu*. *Cheneke* is a combination of “*Chi*” and “*eke*” with a connecting particle “*n*”. It literally means the “spirit that creates”. It however, has about four variant meanings:

- | | |
|------------------------|---|
| (a) <i>Chi na Eke</i> | God and the creator |
| (b) <i>Chi na-eke</i> | God who creates (God creates) |
| (c) <i>Chi 'Eke</i> | God in (the morning of) creation |
| (d) <i>Chi nne Eke</i> | God, mother of creation (God the true creator). |

Whichever applies, nothing should detract from the fact that in Igbo belief system, God is the genderless spirit that sits at the summit of the spectrum of all deities and spirits known and unknown. The other common durative of *Cheneke* is *Chukwu*. It is the combination of *Chi* and *Ukwu*. *Ukwu* is an Igbo word, which means “great”, hence *Chukwu* means the “Great source Being”. The Akan have a “high” reverence for God and He is commonly referred to as “Nyame”. Although God is considered omnipotent and omniscient, the Akan have several names, which vary according to His numerous attributes. God is perceived as an active Being who manifests Himself through what He does. Two prominent Akan names for God are *Onyame* or *Nyame* and *Odomankoma*. *Onyame* or *Nyame* is a combination of two words, namely: *nya* and *me*. *Nya* means, “to get” and “*me*” means “to be full”. Literally, *Nyame* would then mean, “if you get him you are satisfied”. Through this name, the Akan belief that God is the dependable one who satisfies all the needs of humanity both physical and spiritual stands out.

The second name is “Odomankoma”. This word is also a combination of *Odom* and *Ankoma*. It means, “God is the author, owner, and donor of an inexhaustible abundance of things. Africans also have many attributes that describes the nature of the God. To the Africans, God is knowledgeable. The Maasai of Kenya and Tanzania call God, *Engai* that can be translated “the unseen one, the unknown one”. Likewise, among the Tenda of Guinea, God is called Hounounga, which is another way of asserting that they do not know God in any physical form. Subsequently, nowhere in Africa do we find physical images or representations of God, the creator of the universe. God is also thought as self-existent. His unique nature and essence emerge in such a way as to be distinguished from all other beings. While these other beings are created and dependent on God, God is self-existent. The Zulu of South Africa and the Tiv people of North-Central Nigeria point this out clearly, when they call God “*Uzivelele*” and “*gba Aondo*”, meaning “He who is himself, the self-existent one”.

God is both distant and near. Despite the fact that he is wholly other, yet individually and collectively, people approach God and have communion with God. They speak of God in personal terms, as father, friend, giver of children, rain and all good things, God of our ancestors, great elder, great one, healer, helper, mothers, God of universe, saviour, the judge of all, the just one and the kind one, among others. This is an affirmation, that God is personal and unique. The many personal and attributes names of God make this point clear. Other attributives are expressed directly through prayers, invocations, and names of people and places. People also depict the God in ethical terms and express this (as well as other

attributes) in different ways, such as proverbs and short statements. The Akan people have a saying that “God is not asleep”. This proverb affirms the belief that God sees and knows everything; and the case of wrongdoing, the justice of God is unfailing.

In another proverb, the Akan people affirm God’s providence and mercy: “if God gives you sickness, God gives you its cure”. Equipped with such a word and assurance they take courage in the face of hardships (like sickness, failure, or danger). People are convinced that God loves them and some simply point out that, if God did not love them, God would not have created them.

3.3 The Anthropomorphic Attributes of God

Anthropomorphic is another way of expressing the African conception of God. Anthropomorphism is a doctrine, which ascribed to God human attributes as if he is a human being. In African society, the conception of God reflects organizational pattern of life and thinking. This way of describing God by giving Him human qualities is found in every religion of the world, and not only in African traditional religion. Thus, the African people conceived God as someone who listens, hears, eat, get angry to forth. They have in mind the conception of God who is anthropomorphically in nature and can relate very well with other creatures in the universe. However, it should be noted here that, in higher anthropomorphism, all that we try to do is to speak about the ineffable categories to avoid repetition of African conception of God. In addition, to understand this better, let us examine some of the attributes ascribed to God in African traditional religion.

God is Unique

God is a king with a unique incomparable attributes. He is unique and wholly orders. He is not of the regular members of the divinities who have no absolute powers of their own their existence from the God.

God is the Creator

This is a conception, which is found everywhere in the world Africa inclusive. Creation here implies the fact that God is the originator as illustrated in some of the African myths for example, in the creation myths of the Yoruba’s *Orisa nla* commissioned the chief divinity to

perform some works of creation. He also created a human body. However, there is no doubt that creation originated from the Supreme Being himself. He has absolute power over his creatures and no creature has reason to boast to himself. The capacity of God as a creator made the Yoruba has to call Him "*Eleeda*" which means "creator" or "owner of creation". The Igbo's calls Him "*Chineke*" meaning "the spirit that creates" or "source of being that creates". The Tiv call Him "*Gba-Aôndo*" which means "God the creator of the universe" while the Edo people call Him "*Osanobowa*" meaning the source being who carries and sustains the universe". Equally, the Akan of Ghana call Him "*Odomokoma*" meaning "the creator of the universe".

The Nupe illustrates this creative attribute of God in their song, which says that "Soko" is the creator of the cosmos and all that is in it. He is responsible for the ultimate issues of life and death and He is the only one responsible for the vital principle of life or the essence or personality in humankind. The Kulung people also believe that "*Yamba*" (God the creator), is the giver of life and preserver of all things, while the Sura of Pamyam says "*nam*", (God) is the maker of the world and the one who sends down rain to his people.

God is King

God is the king with unique and incomparable attributes. The Africans venerate Him with higher regard than any respect given to an earthly king. The Yoruba's call him "*Oba orun*, "*Oba-Aterere Kari aiye* or *Oba Asekaan Maku*" which means the king who does the work with perfection". The Igbo call God "*Eze Nde Welu*" or "*Ezeelu*" which means "the king in heaven". For the Mende, God is the head of the universe. The Nupe says that God is the "*Isoci*" which means He is the only one who reigns", owns us" or is "our Lord". The Akan people of Ghana put it in this way, "the earth is wide, but *Onyamse* is the head". As king, God is omnipotent and the sovereign ruler of the universe. He is also the father of all. For the Tiv, God is described as the one surrounding the whole world with moon, sun and stars under his control. Thus, the Tiv people call Him "*Aôndo u akuma a sha*" meaning "God the owner and king of the universe". The Idoma people believed that there is a strong cult of the earth but if God likes he can spoil the earth.

God is the Judge

When Africans talk of God as a judge as a judge they include everything in association with justice, punishments and retribution. He is the impartial judge who dispenses justice and punishes offenders (1 Kings 8:31-32). It is an inbuilt retributive principle which deals with dispensation of justice, reward and punishment in the now and hereafter. The Igbo's believed that God dispensation of justice and punishment are according to each person's offence in the daily occurrences of individual lives. As a king and judge, God inflicts several punishments on the hard hearted and un-hospitable ones in their societies. The Yoruba's call Him "*Oba Adakedejo*" meaning "the king whose judgment is executed in silence". The Idoma's refers to Him as "he who embodies retributive justice".

The Tiv call Him "a perfect judge who allots vengeance to wrong doers". Thus, in African traditional society, the judgment of God is a conception, which is real, and not just a matter of intellectual knowledge. However, there are cases of God's wraths in the world, which indicates that the judgment of God is just. He judges human beings as a creator in a pluralistic manner and His judgment starts here on earth and continues in the hereafter. The wrongdoers are punished, while, the good ones are rewarded by Him. The African people believe that God is an angry God who detests evil of all kinds. Hence, the Tiv people conceptualized the anger of God in the lightning and thunder that struck trees, buildings animals, and human beings. Among the Yoruba's the anger of God is demonstrated in the fight between "*Sango*" and "*Jakuta*" (the thunder and fire divinities of Yoruba land). The Nupe people described the anger of God as the "axe of God".

The Tiv described the anger of God as "*Nyiar I Aôndo*" meaning "the thunder of God". While for the Igbo's, name "*Amadioha*" expresses the anger of God as one who thunders. The Akan said that "*Onyame*" himself is one who bears the axe of punishment. He is judge because He is perfect, all wise, all knowing and all seeing. The Nuer people also believe that God punishes wrong doing and reward uprightness. While Evambo people believe that murder and stealing are punishable by God. All these concrete examples mentioned above show how African people conceive God as the supreme judge who acts without impartiality. He is said to have the sun, moon, and the firmament as His eyes that helps Him to see and know even the most hidden secrets of human thought and actions in the world.

God is Immortal

Immortality of God implies that He is eternal. The general belief of African people is that God never dies. He is always here and there and He is present with His creatures. God is

eternal because, if he ceases to be nothing else will remain. He lives forever to satisfy the human soul as an everlasting reality whose being stretches to eternity. Among the Yoruba's, there is a belief that God is Almighty, immovable and hard rock that never die he has no beginning or end. Thus, the Kono people call Him "meketa" which means "the everlasting one" or "the one who remains and does not die". The Nupe expresses his idea clearly, when they say, "soko is in front, and soko is at the back".

God is Transcendent

God is transcendent because he lives high above the earth. However, His transcendent does not in any way do not imply geographical location nor does it signify the car distance of God with His creatures. It rather shows the closeness of God to His creatures. He is present everywhere. This superlative and unique attribute of God raises God far above all other divinities and human beings. The transcendent nature of God shows his uniqueness as one who is "wholly order" and brought nature into being. However, God is not a nature God because He surpasses all things. He is imminent and operative in the world and there is no time when the world is outside the scope of His vigilance or He is not in control of the universe. The Yoruba's expresses the immanent and transcendent nature of God in an adage, which says, "*aterere-ka-aiye*" meaning "God is a Being whose nature spread over the whole earth". Thus, the people call Him "oba-oke" which means "the king who live above" or "the high up king". They also refer to Him as "*Oba-orun*" meaning "the king of heaven". The Akan of Ghana also praises God as: he who is there now as was from the ancient times" or "he who endures forever".

God is Supreme

The supremacy of God shows His omnipotent, which He exercises over the world. God is supreme because there is nothing that he cannot do. He is the absolute ruler of the world. In addition, His theoretic rulership of the world according to African belief has no dualism. The Yoruba's call Him "*Olodumare*" which means "the Almighty King" or "the most powerful ruler who is able to do all things, anything and everything". He is a king with a unique crown and absolute authority. He can do and undo things without questioning Him. The Akan people of Ghana said that God is the only Great King who alone does things at will without consulting any person. His decisions are final and no one can question His authority. He is

the only one all divinities, human beings and all created things derived their being. However, there are many African mythologies, which show occasional attempts or oppositions on the part of divinities to out weight God. However, these attempts always failed because God's authority is absolute and final.

God is Omnipresent

God is omnipresent because He is everywhere. God's universal presence, however, does not make people to build temples for Him. They believe that by so doing his omnipotence will be undermined. Hence, the African people especially the Yoruba's express the omnipresent nature of God in the saying: "*Oba-Aterere Kari aye*" meaning "God is the king who spreads everywhere". Given in above facts, one can conclusively say that the concept of God in African society is a multisided one. It reflects the organizational patterns of the African society despite the diversity in African cultures and ethnicities.

In some cultures of African such as Edo, Tiv, Yoruba's the Idoma's amongst others where the society is highly organized, God is seen as a supreme king whose theocratic government of the world is ministers by divinities who are appointed over each department of the world. Amongst the Igbo's, Akan and many other cultures of Africa, the divine ministerial system of government is no so elaborate. The concept of the ministerial system is not clearly defined or patterned according to the nature of their society. Thus, God is either seen as manifesting Himself through certain natural phenomenon. He is the overall king of the universe and He rules the world with the assistance of other mystical powers, which makes up the world as we can see in the preceding chapter.

3.4 Worship of the Deity among African People

The acts of worshipping God vary from society to society. It includes Sacrifices and Offering, Prayers, Invocations, Blessing and Salutations, expressions of worship, religious intermediaries, and specialists, and the occasion and place of worship. These have sought to address the issues of what, when, how and where on the worship of God in the traditional society. Let us look at two different approaches to the worship of God in the African society:

Yoruba Concept of God

The Yoruba is a typical example of an African society with no organized direct public worship of God. It has to be said however that elaborate indirect worship and private worship abound. Since the divinities are regarded as the messengers of Olodumare, the Yoruba believe that once these divinities have been worshipped and sacrificed to, they in turn will transmit what is necessary of the worship and sacrifice to Olodumare. This is because as it is known and accepted in their socio-political environment, the King cannot be approached directly except through the various ward chiefs who formed the King's cabinets. However, outside ritual contexts the Yoruba recognize Olodumare's readiness to intervene in human affairs and do make direct appeals to him. This is done especially in periods of personal crises and oppression or injustice. Redress is sought mostly in the courts of Olodumare.

The common form of direct worship of *Olodumare* among the Yoruba is that of pouring libation of cold water and praying with kola in the centre of a circle drawn with white chalk. This is reportedly done by a priest in the palace of the Ooni (King) of Ife on a daily basis while individuals can carry this out on instruction from the oracle. However as Bolaji Idowu opines, this direct of Olodumare is dying out gradually. Though it has been said that the idea of God among Africans has been influenced by the advent of Christianity, one has to say that this is not completely true as Africans have their own ideas of God prior to the advent of the Westerners. This fact can be corroborated by the names even to God by the various people groups. Let us begin by examining the Yoruba names of God.

Yoruba have three distinct names for God namely: *Olodumare*, *Olorun*, and *Olofin-Orun*. *Olodumare* is a word that is made up of three clear words: *Olo*, *Odu*, and *Are*. *Olo* in the actual sense is "*oni*" which because of the beginning of the next word with vowel 'o' has to change its form to '*olo*'. The meaning is 'owner' or 'Lord of something'. *Odu* can mean of two things; either main heading or chief or principal heading. This is why a full cell in the Ayo board is called '*odu*'. The combination of these two words would then mean "the one who owns the principal thing" which in this case may be authority or power. There is a little ambiguity on the last word. This is because of the presence of the letter 'm'. With this, the word could be taken as one word "*mare*" which means, "do not go", hence indicating the unchangeable nature of the Lord.

The presence of the same letter 'm' could also be taken as a particle indicating "plus" which would then indicate that the one who owns the principal thing and owns the '*are*'. *Are* in this sense would mean the symbol of uniqueness that is on the original crown of the King. If this is the case, as your teacher in this case holds, *Olodumare* is the name that signifies that God is the Lord and Supreme Owner of everything including all power and authority (as

symbolized by the sceptre). *Olorun* also is a combination of 'olo' and 'orun'. *Olo* has explained as in *Olodumare* above. The only other word that needs to engage our attention is 'orun'. 'Orun' is the Yoruba word translated 'heaven'. The combination of these words will literally mean that God is the owner of heaven. This name depicts the transcendence of God and his sovereignty. The last name, which is rare in the common parlance, is used more in liturgy. It is called "*Olofin-Orun*". With this name, the highest office in heaven is thus given to God. It also has a literal meaning of the one who owns the place of heaven. Thus, God is seen as the Supreme Ruler who abides in heaven.

Akan Concept of God

Akan is a typical example of an African society with elaborate public worship of God. According to S.R. Rattray, the Akan has shrines, temples, and priests that are dedicated to the service and regular worship of *Onyame*. Almost every Akan compound has an altar for *Onyame* at which private deotions and daily offerings are made to God. The private altar is made of a forked branch of a tree called God's tree. A basin or pot is placed in between the branches and it contains an axe called God axe that is used to bless the members of the house. Apart from these, private altars are also, what are called the personal altars. The weekly worship of God among the Akan holds on Saturday which known as *Onyame's* day.

Akan have a "high" reverence for God and He is commonly referred to as *Nyame*. Although God is considered omnipotent and omniscient, the Akan have several "praise names" which vary according to His numerous attributes. God is also perceived as an active Being who manifests Himself through what He does. Two prominent Akan names for God also stand out. The first name is *Onyame* or *Nyame*. This is a combination of two words namely *nya* and *me*. *Nya* means, "If you get" and "*me*" means "to be full". Literally, *Nyame* would then mean, "If you get him you are satisfied". Through this name, the Akan belief that God is the dependable one who satisfies all the needs of humanity both physical and spiritual stands out. The second name is "*Odomankoma*". This word is also a combination of *Odom* and *Ankoma*. It means God is the author, owner, and donor of an inexhaustible abundance of things. As indicated earlier, so many other names describe the attributes of God.

Igbo Concept of God

Igbo people also have altars and shrines. The Ikenye, the eldest member of the

community, directs the worship. *Aja Eze Emu* is one of such direct worship. It is observed during the dry and rainy seasons. This worship includes sacrifice, Offering, Prayers, Invocations, and Blessing, as well as the expressions of worship. These have sought to address the issues of what, when, how and where on the worship of God in the traditional society. The private altar is made of a forked branch of a tree called God's tree. A basin or pot is placed in between the branches and it contains an axe called God axe that is used to bless the members of the house. Apart from these, private altars are also, what are called the personal altars. The weekly worship of God among the Akan holds on Saturday which known as Onyame's day. Igbo people also have altars and shrines. The *Ikenye*, the eldest member of the community, directs the worship. *Aja Eze Emu* is one of such direct worship. It is observed during the dry and rainy seasons. Like the Yoruba people, the Igbo names for God are also indicative not only of their concept for God but also off the attributes of God. The most common Igbo name for God is *Chi*, a prefix that can be used with various suffixes to indicate the attributes of God. M.O. Ene, in his article titled "*Chi*" has this to say:

The concept of *Chi*, the Supreme Spirit or the formidable force of creation, is common in many religions and in scientific circle. The Igbo religion, *Odinani*, is no exception. The name and the nature of the Force differ in many known beliefs. The Igbo ancestors probably preoccupied themselves with the advuuous analyses of the nature of *Chi*. They tried to establish an acceptable notion of the nature of *Chi*. In the end, they mous humbly declared that *Chi* exists (*Chi di*), but to know the nature of the Force would be the end of knowledge, hence the name *Amaamaamachaamacha*. This attribute endures to this day. We know God to exist, but no one really knows the true nature of God. All claims to the contrary are deep delusions.

From this submission, it is clear that to the Igbo people, the concept of God as Creator, and as one who cannot be understood by man stands out prominent. Two names would be treated here and these are: *Chineke* and *Chukwu*. *Chineke* is a combination of 'chi' and 'eke' with a connecting particle 'n'. It literally means the "Spirit that creates". It however has about four variant meanings as suggested by Ene. The word "*Chineke*" can be broken down as follows:

(a) *Chi na Eke*

God and the Creator

(b) Chi <i>na-ene</i>	God who creates (God creates)
(c) Chi <i>n' Eke</i>	God in (the morning of) Creation
(d) Chi <i>nne Eke</i>	God, mother of Creation (God the true Creator)

Whichever applies, nothing should detract from the fact that in Igbo belief system, God is the genderless spirit that sits at the summit of the spectrum of all deities and spirits known and unknown. The other common derivative of *Chineke* is *Chukwu*. It is the combination of *chi* and *ukwu*. *Ukwu* is an Igbo word, which means 'great'; hence, *chukwu* means the Great Source Being. The Igbo third name, "*Osebuluwa*" also consists of two root words, "*Olisa*" which means the "immense being" and "*Buluwa*" meaning "carrier of the word". The name "*Osebuluwa*" therefore denotes "the immense being who sustains the world". The above stated names show that "the great providence who created and sustains the world".

Tiv, Nupe, Soko, and Kiba Concept of God

Tiv of Nigeria calls the Supreme Being *Aôndo*, which means "the supreme being who resides in the vault of Heaven" or "the whole complex of sky phenomena". *Aôndo* is the great unknown above that creates and rules all things. The Tiv popularly refers to him as *Gba-Aôndo* meaning "God the creator". While the Isoko name for God is *Oghene* and several derivations have been suggested for this name. For instance, "*ogho-no ane*" could literally mean "the gift that they press down", while the name "*Oghene*" simply denotes "he that is strong". The name *Oghene* therefore conveys the general meaning of the provider of all things and His praise name is "the white piece of cloth which is very ancient". *Osenobruwe*, which is another derivation of the Isoko name for God, denotes "the father who brings blessings" and His praise name is *Osonabwwa* meaning "the one who carries and sustains the world".

Among the Nupe God is called *Soko*, which means "the sky". It also has the meaning of "the Great God in the sky". The Ibibio of Nigeria called God *Abasi*, which means "the greatest God" or "the God who lives above the earth". The name *Abasi* therefore means "the immense being who is sustaining the world".

Mende Concept of God

Mende of Sierra Leone have two personal names for God. These include *Ngwawo aand Leve*. The name *Ngwawo* is derived from two words "Ngele" meaning "sky" and "Woo" which means: "that which is long ago or ancient past". Thus, the combination of the two terms suggests the meaning of "one who is high up". Although the name *Ngwawo* is the most common of all Mende names for God, *leve* seems to be the most ancient name of God and it is used today in ritual ceremonies, especially by the old Mende people. The Ewe of Togo and Dahomey also call God "*mawu*" meaning the "Greater one". The name *Mawu* is composed of two root words "*Ma*" or "*Nonu*" which means "most" and "*Nu*" which means "greater one". The name *Mane* could be translated to mean "the Greater one". The Kiba of Nigeria calls God *Hyel* meaning "God of the moon". According to Meek, was probably associated with the moon because the word for moon among the Kiba people is "*Hyu*". However, this is an exceptional case where, in Africa God is associated with the moon rather than the sun or sky.

Nilotics Concept of God

Nilotic people (the Nuer, Dinka, Koalib and the Nuba) of Southern Sudan call God by various names. For example, the Nuer people called the Supreme Being "*Kwoth*" which means "spirit who is in the sky". *Kwoth* is "the creator of the universe", that "great omnipotent one", the spirit of the universe" and "the creator of humankind". The Dinka also of Southern Sudan has similar names for God. They call God *Nhialic*, which also refers to "the sky" or "the above". The Nyimang people call the Supreme Being "*Abradi*" which means "the maker". *Abradi* derived from the verb "*abran she*" meaning "to make" or "to produce". This verb is used exclusively for the act by which God created the world. Thus, "*Bran she*" literally conveys the meaning of "causes which rise up" or "making a thing to sprout". It is also translated as "the creator" or the maker of all things".

The Koalib people of the same Nuba mountain region of Southern Sudan call God "*Bel Epit*" and "Elam". The former name has the meaning of "Hew who causes a thing to appear or to grow" while the later name has meaning of "the fashioner or moulder of things". The central and eastern Africa also calls God by different names. "*Nyombe*" people of Congo Democratic Republic for example call God "*Akongo*" which means "Creator God" and "Mononde O Sesa" meaning "Creator of my father". These names contain the typical imageries of the Congolese who live out their entire life in apparently endless forest. Among the Tusi and Hutu of Rwanda and Burundi, the Supreme Being is called "*Imama*" which

means, “to create out of the existing matter”. According to the people, no satisfactory translation of the name has been found.

However, it is believed that the root word of the name could have been derived from the verb “Manira” which means, “to create out of an existing matter”. If this name and its root is accepted, then, “imana” would be best translated as “the maker of all things”. The Baluba of Aire has many names for God, some of which they share with the neighbouring peoples. Their distinctive traditional name for God is *Vidye, Mukulu*, which means “Great Lord”. In today’s usage, the term *Vidye* refers to “ancestors”, “old” and “great”. It has been suggested by researchers that the name “*Vidye Mukulu*” could mean “the first father” and that “*Vidye Mukulu*” was the first ancestor. The Tumbuka, Kamaanga, and the Tonga people of Malawi have three personal names commonly used for God. These include *Ciuta, Malunga*, and *Leza*. The name *Chiuta* derives from two root words namely; “Chi” which means “Great” and “Uta” which denotes “bow”. The term “bow” as use here refers to “the rainbow or the sky dome”. Both words are connected with rain and are associated with God as “the being behind the rain bearing bow above” or simply put “the giver of rain”.

The name *Mulungu* is a derivative of the term “*Lunga*” and when these words are put together the name convey the idea of provident one who arranges everything rightly, while, the name “*Leza*” on the other hand, expresses the idea of thoughtful concern of God exemplified in his act of controlling the sky that brings rain. The name “*Leza*” therefore derived from the verb “*Lera*” which has the idea of nature of supreme power, which is concerned, with the nature of his creation. The Southern African groups such as the Zulu, Hottentots and the Zhosa speaking people (Xhosa-Thembu, Pondo, and Bomvana) have various names for the Supreme Being.

Zulu Concept of God

Zulu people for example, have two names for God: *Unkuluakulu* and *Umvelin Quangi*. The former name means ‘one who is very great or very old’. While the later is derived from the verb “vela” meaning, that which has come into being or originated from God. His praise names are *Kosi, Epezului* meaning, “Lord in heaven” and “*Undumaakade*”, which means “he who roars so that all nations be struck with terror” or “he who bends down even majesties”. Among the Hottentots, the Supreme Being is known as *Tsui* or *Goam*, which means, “wounded knees”. The people have a myth, which says that God sustains the wounded knees during an encounter between Himself and *Gaunali* (the destroyed one who

now identified as the devil). It is said that during this encounter, the devil was destroyed and for this reason, they often invoke God, as “the Lord, ruler, and He is the father of our fathers”. Furthermore, the Xhosa speaking people called God “Uthixo” which means “God the maker or creator”. The name is believed to be a modification of the Hottentots name for God. However, the claims living different from their frontiers have retained the *Xhosa* names for God such as “*Udali*” which mean “maker or creator” and “*Umenziu*” which implies “the being who produced the great works of nature.

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God is Unique

God is a king with a unique incomparable attributes. He is unique and wholly orders. He is not of the regular members of the divinities who have no absolute powers of their own their existence from the “Supreme Deity”.

God is the Creator

This is a conception, which is found everywhere in the world Africa inclusive,. Creation here implies the fact that God is the originator as illustrated in some of the African myths for example, in the creation myths of the Yoruba’s *Orisa nla* commissioned the chief divinity to perform some works of creation. He also created a human body. But there is no

doubt that creation originated from the Supreme Being himself. He has absolute power over his creatures and no creature has reason to boast to himself. The capacity of God as a creator made the Yoruba has to call Him "*Eleeda*" which means "creator" or "owner of creation". The Igbo's calls Him "*Chineke*" meaning "the spirit that creates" or "source of being that creates". The Tiv call Him "*Gba-Aôndo*" which means "God the creator of the universe" while the Edo people call Him "*Osanobowa*" meaning the source being who carries and sustains the universe".

Equally, the Akan of Ghana call Him "*Odomokoma*" meaning "the creator of the universe". The Nupe illustrates this creative attribute of God in their song, which says that "Soko" is the creator of the cosmos and all that is in it. He is responsible for the ultimate issues of life and death and He is the only one responsible for the vital principle of life or the essence or personality in humankind. The Kulung people also believe that "*Yamba*" (God the creator), is the giver of life and preserver of all things, while the Sura of Pamyam says "*nam*", (God) is the maker of the world and the one who sends down rain to his people.

God as King

God is the king with unique and incomparable attributes. The Africans venerate Him with higher regard than any respect given to an earthly king. The Yoruba's call him "*Oba orun*, "*Oba-Aterere Kari aiye* or *Oba Asekaan Maku*" which means the king who does the work with perfection". The Igbo call God "*Eze Nde Welu*" or "*Ezeelu*" which means "the king in heaven". For the Mende, God is the head of the universe. The Nupe says that God is the "*Isoci*" which means He is the only one who reigns", owns us" or is "our Lord". The Akan people of Ghana put it in this way, "the earth is wide, but *Onyamse* is the head". As king, God is omnipotent and the sovereign ruler of the universe. He is also the father of all and he is capable of doing everything. For the Tiv, God is described as the one surrounding the whole world with moon, sun and stars under his control. Thus, the Tiv people call Him "*Aôndo u akuma a sha*" meaning "God the owner and king of the universe". The Idoma people believed that there is a strong cult of the earth but if God likes he can spoil the earth.

God is the Judge

When Africans talk of God as a judge as a judge they include everything in association with justice, punishments and retribution. He is the impartial judge who dispenses

justice and punishes offenders (1 Kings 8:31-32). It is an inbuilt retributive principle which deals with dispensation of justice, reward and punishment in the now and hereafter. The Igbo's believed that God dispensation of justice and punishment are according to each person's offence in the daily occurrences of individual lives. As a king and judge, God inflicts several punishments on the hard hearted and un-hospitable ones in their societies. The Yoruba's call Him "*Oba Adakedejo*" meaning "the king whose judgment is executed in silence". The Idoma's refers to Him as "he who embodies retributive justice".

The Tiv call Him "a perfect judge who allots vengeance to wrong doers". Thus, in African traditional society, the judgment of God is a conception, which is real, and not just a matter of intellectual knowledge. However, there are cases of God's wraths in the world, which indicates that the judgment of God is just. He judges human beings as a creator in a pluralistic manner and His judgment starts here on earth and continues in the hereafter. The wrongdoers are punished, while, the good ones are rewarded by Him. The African people believe that God is an angry God who detests evil of all kinds. Hence, the Tiv people conceptualized the anger of God in the lightning and thunder that struck trees, buildings animals, and human beings.

Among the Yoruba's the anger of God is demonstrated in the fight between "*Sango*" and "*Jakuta*" (the thunder and fire divinities of Yoruba land). The Nupe people described the anger of God as the "axe of God". The Tiv described the anger of God as "*Nyiar I Aôndo*" meaning "the thunder of God". While for the Igbo's, name "*Amadioha*" expresses the anger of God as one who thunders. The Akan said that "*Onyame*" himself is one who bears the axe of punishment. He is judge because He is perfect, all wise, all knowing and all seeing. The Nuer people also believe that God punishes wrong doing and reward uprightness. While Evambo people believe that murder and stealing are punishable by God. All these concrete examples mentioned above show how African people conceive God as the supreme judge who acts without impartiality. He is said to have the sun, moon, and the firmament as His eyes that helps Him to see and know even the most hidden secrets of human thought and actions in the world.

God is Immortal

Immortality of God implies that He is eternal. The general belief of African people is that God never dies. He is always here and there and He is present with His creatures. God is eternal because, if he ceases to be nothing else will remain. He lives forever to satisfy the

human soul as an everlasting reality whose being stretches to eternity. Among the Yoruba's, there is a belief that God is Almighty, immovable and hard rock that never die he has no beginning or end. Thus, the Kono people call Him "meketa" which means "the everlasting one" or "the one who remains and does not die". The Nupe expresses his idea clearly, when they say, "soko is in front, and soko is at the back".

God is Transcendent

God is transcendent because he lives high above the earth. However, His transcendent does not in any way do not imply geographical location nor does it signify the car distance of God with His creatures. It rather shows the closeness of God to His creatures. He is present everywhere. This superlative and unique attribute of God raises God far above all other divinities and human beings. The transcendent nature of God shows his uniqueness as one who is "wholly order" and brought nature into being. However, God is not a nature God because He surpasses all things.

He is imminent and operative in the world and there is no time when the world is outside the scope of His vigilance or He is not in control of the universe. The Yoruba's expresses the immanent and transcendent nature of God in an adage, which says, "*aterere-ka-aiye*" meaning "God is a Being whose nature spread over the whole earth". Thus, the people call Him "oba-oke" which means "the king who live above" or "the high up king". They also refer to Him as "*Oba-orun*" meaning "the king of heaven". The Akan of Ghana also praises God as: he who is there now as was from the ancient times" or "he who endures forever".

God is Supreme

The supremacy of God shows His omnipotent, which He exercises over the world. God is supreme because there is nothing that he cannot do. He is the absolute ruler of the world. In addition, His theoretic rulership of the world according to African belief has no dualism. The Yoruba's call Him "*Olodumare*" which means "the Almighty King" or "the most powerful ruler who is able to do all things, anything and everything". He is a king with a unique crown and absolute authority. He can do and undo things without questioning Him. The Akan people of Ghana said that God is the only Great King who alone does things at will without consulting any person. His decisions are final and no one can question His authority.

He is the only one all divinities, human beings and all created things derived their being. However, there are many African mythologies, which show occasional attempts or oppositions on the part of divinities to out weight God. However, these attempts always failed because God's authority is absolute and final.

God is Omnipresent

God is omnipresent because He is everywhere. God's universal presence, however, does not make people to build temples for Him. They believe that by so doing his omnipotence will be undermined. Hence, the African people especially the Yoruba's express the omnipresent nature of God in the saying: "*Oba-Aterere Kari aye*" meaning "God is the king who spreads everywhere". Given in above facts, one can conclusively say that the concept of God in African society is a multisided one. It reflects the organizational patterns of the African society despite the diversity in African cultures and ethnicities. In some cultures of African such as Edo, Tiv, Yoruba's the Idoma's amongst others where the society is highly organized, God is seen as a supreme king whose theocratic government of the world is ministers by divinities who are appointed over each department of the world.

Amongst the Igbo's, Akan and many other cultures of Africa, the divine ministerial system of government is no so elaborate. The concept of the ministerial system is not clearly defined or patterned according to the nature of their society. Thus, God is either seen as manifesting Himself through certain natural phenomenon. He is the overall king of the universe and He rules the world with the assistance of other mystical powers, which makes up the world as we can see in the preceding chapter.

4.0 CONCLUSION

As we have stated earlier, it would amount to ignorance to say that Africans do not have an idea of God, prior to the coming of the Europeans. The Africans have their belief about God. However, these beliefs are not written down, but the names given to God and even their children express these truths about God. Manner of worship may also differ from locality but all the same, God is being worshipped.

5.0 SUMMARY

The following are the major points that have learnt in this unit:

- God is the common phenomenon of African traditional religion.
- The non-Christian notion of God before the advent of Christianity and Islam was a mixture of polytheism and monotheism.
- The anthropological modern perceptions of God pave way for contemporary understanding of God.
- Among the Africans, God is seen as the source of all things.
- The social political organization of the African society goes a long way to determine the worship of God.
- There is the indirect worship of God, which is more prevalent.
- There is the direct worship of God.

6.0 TOTUR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Discuss the Western conception of God
2. Give African notion of God
3. Discuss the worship of God in the African traditional religion
4. Give five anthropomorphic attributes of God
5. How is God worship in African society?

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UNIT 5 THE NATURE AND CONCEPT OF HUMANITY IN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

One of the major concerns of all religions and peoples groups in the world have been the origin, nature and destiny of humanity as well as the relationship between humanity and God. In African traditional religion, the issue of the nature of human beings is so paramount that the relationship between God and human beings is exhaustively dealt with. In this unit, you will study the nature, origin, and concept of humanity in African traditional religion.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Discuss the concept of humanity
- Give the origin of the human beings
- State the nature of humanity
- Narrate the features of humanity
- Explain the philosophical perception of the human beings
- State the anthropological conception of human beings
- Discuss the African religious perception of humanity
- Evaluate the relationship between humanity and the community

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Notion of Humanity

The human being in African conception consists of male and female gender. The male gender refers to man, while the female gender connotes woman. Different scholars have defined man variously. The psalmists for example, cried out “what is man that thou art mindful of him”. Many philosophers over the years have continued to reflect on the question of which man is. Matson asserts that:

...the question of man is an open one, which lives up for grabs. It has never been settled or agreed upon, possibly it can never be. Man is the only creature that is a problem to itself. The trouble is that human species is the only one which finds hard to be a specie, for there seems to be no problem about being a cat. Indeed, there is not identity crisis.

Yet, it is necessary for us to understand “our self”. The quest to know our identity is part of us. Thus, what makes us who we are, what we are, and what makes us who and what we are define the human being more appropriately. Jenny Teichman quoted Boethius as saying that “we have found the definition of man and that it is the individual substance of a rational nature”. He went further to examine the various usage of the term man in the three

main senses: theological, legal, and philosophical senses. The theological sense defines man as the creature of God fashioned in His moral likeness and image (Imago Dei). The legal sense describes man as a creature with freedom to do what he chose. While in the philosophical sense, man is defined as a rational or self-conscious being.

This however, means that each individual person belongs to a species typified by rationality or self-consciousness. John Locke described man as an intelligent being that has reason to think and reflect rationally. His identity depends entirely on memory, self-consciousness, and can consider himself. P. F. Strawson, described man as certain unique individual that must be ascribed to the state of consciousness and corporal characteristics. His definition compliments Abraham Heschke's description of man as a worm crawling on a pebble, the earthly and speak of life floating aimlessly through the immeasurable vastness of the universe. The scholastic philosophers have accepted the definition of man as "an animal rationale". Benjamin Franklin, for example asserts that man is "Homo-Fabes" and a "tool-making animal".

Humanity is a machine into which we put what can be called food to produce an indigenous assembly of portable plumbing. Aristotle remarked that humanity is a civilized animal, capable of acquiring knowledge and walking on two feet. He is a political, social, and religious animal that has the will power of making choice or imitating other creatures. Robert, E. Fitch opined that the only difference between man and other beasts is that man is a beast that knows he will die. These definitions show that much is left as regards the understanding of the identity of man.

3.2 The Nature of Humanity

Humanity is by nature a complex being that is difficult to understand. He is inquisitive by nature and is always interested in thinking where and how he emerged. He is also curious to know why he lives in time and space and certain events occur the way they do. This inquisitive nature of humanity makes him to behave in a strange manner that is very difficult to understand. The pre-Socratic and medieval thinkers believe that man is a social being whose selfhood, humanism, and physical appearance make him complex to be studied in any religion. In African, the concept of humanity is best expressed in the proverb, which says, "Mankind is the most valuable of all creation".

The Africans summarize his humanism in names, which expressed the stupendous nature of man as a dignified being created by the Supreme Deity. Some of these names

include *or hamba akaa cii* (man is the most valuable of all possession), *Ka or* (it is the man), *or gba* (man has fashioned) *or hide* (man has returned), *or vada* (man has refused), *or lumun* (man has accepted) amongst others. Mbiti has observed that in African society, humanity is placed at the centre of existence and he is conceived in relationship with his fellow men in the society in which he belongs. Booth, further states that, the position of man in the society makes him the focus point in African religion. In addition, Temples who wrote on Bantu religion collaborated that religion is centered more on man than God. He is emphatically as if he is speaking for the whole of Africa. In his words:

...life belongs to God. His grace and holiness is a gift to humanity. Other creatures which are lower or higher vital forces, exist in the divine plan to maintain and cherish the vital gift of God to humanity.

Mbiti's conception of humanity above is cut across the whole of African society and has been seen as contribution of African people to the quest for the study of the history of man in modern time. Kaunda has noted that in Africa, the emphasis on humanity as the centre of unity is held in high esteem by the African people. He asserts thus:

...to a certain extent, we in Africa have always had a gift for unity of human beings. It is at the heart of our traditional culture but now we see the possibility of extending the scale of our discovery by example to the whole world. Let the west have its technology and Asia its mysticism. Africa's gift to the world culture must be in the realms of africanness.

Kaunda's presentation above call for a projection of African people and their spirit of solidarity or collaboration among themselves, his emphasis on the spirit of communism and ones of African continents is at best the re-incarnated words of the author of the "Negritude" which called for an excavation and re-discovery of the lost African heritage. Even though Kaunda implicitly rejects modern science and western technology, yet, he fail to understand that African continent exist independent of other continents. This then pushes his contention to the wall. However, his proposal to project African culture to the outside world is very vital. Nevertheless, African culture is diverse; as such, it becomes inevitable for Africans to closely examine their various religious and cultural practices, and carefully select those that could be presentable to the outside world. It is for this very reason that this study tries to take a close

look at man as the focus point of African traditional religion. Interestingly, this search for self-knowledge in turn calls for examination of the nature of humanity's humanness, which is not only cosmological but also ontological in perspective. The cosmological dimension however, has to do with man as a religious being living in African society.

3.3 Features of Humanity

Our understanding of man can only be complete when we think of him in human terms and abstain from employing categories of lower forms of life. First, we must recognize that man is not **tabular rasa**. Unlike other objects, there is a desire in man to know himself. This is part of his being. And in order to know himself, man always try to question himself and to ask what he is in the light of an intuitive expectation or a vision of what he ought to be. Second, humanity is not free to choose whether he wants to attain knowledge about himself. This knowledge, pre-conceptions and self-interpretation is a necessity for humanity to know him. It is part of being for knowing oneself and being a self-go-together. Humanity is concrete being and a place in physical space. Moreover, unlike other beings, humanity is endowed with consciousness of his own being, not just the awareness of the presence of other beings. Humanity in contrast to animals is a being who not only behaves but also reflects about how he behaves. Sensuality to one's own behaviour and the ability to question it or regard it as a problem rather than as a structure consisting exclusively of irreducible, immutable, and ultimate facts is an essential quality of being human. What makes a human being is not just mechanical, biological, and psychological functioning, but the ability of him to make decisions constant.

The preciousness of humanity is another feature that is entirely natural and associated with sanctity. Human life is intrinsically sacred to human being and it is supremely valuable. Each individual is dear to someone, even if nobody cares for him; he is still a human being. Everyone seems to be aware that he is not just "everybody" but evolves as somebody; or a person, and something that cannot be repeated; something for which has no duplicate or substitute. Humanity is unique. He alone occupies a unique status. All other beings seem to fit perfectly into a natural order and determined by permanent principles. As a natural being, man is determined by natural laws. Moreover, as a human being, he must frequently choose, confined in his existence and be unrestrained in his will. He thinks and decides; as such, the course of his life is unpredictable. No person can write humanity's autobiography in advance

because no two human beings are alike. This mode of being human is man's uniqueness. The inconstancies in behaviour and in self-understanding are salient characteristics of man.

Humanity does not remain what he is for the last time. For animals, the world is just what it is. However, to humanity, the world is in making and to be human is to be on the way, striving, waiting, and hoping. To be human is to challenge and intend, not just to go on. Humanity's existence is not a thing replete with energy, but an inter-play of a process and events. Self-sufficiency, independence, the capacity to stand apart, to differ, to resist, and to defy-all is modes of being human. Humanity is never alone. As Abraham Heschel puts it "humanity solidarity is not the product of human solidarity". Reciprocity is another feature of man. In infancy, humanity begins to obtain and seize things he cares for. On developing and entering maturity, he becomes involved in giving and providing for those he cares for. Thus, to be a person is to reciprocate, to offer in return for what one receives. Reciprocity involves appreciation. Biologically, we will take and give off. Humanity is sensitive to other people's suffering and other men's humanity while, animals are concerned with their own needs. This implies that humanity is different from animals. Animals are content when their need is satisfied. However, humanity insists not only on being satisfied, but also on being able to satisfy. So humanity cannot just be adequately described by one sentence or phrase.

3.4 The Origin of Humanity

The origin of humanity in African religion can be viewed from different standpoints, namely; His ontological dimension, humanity's position in the universe, His relationship with other life forces and the society. The world humanity (anthropos or image) is a generic term signifying a human being, male and female derivation of the term that designates Adam in the concrete sense. The popularly root of the term derived from the world "Adama" which means "soul" or "clay" theses root terms are important in the understanding of the biblical conception of humanity. The medieval philosophers derived the term humanity or based their conception of humanity on the term "per se una" which connotes the "self". Philologists, which is inscribed as a representation of two masked figures in Etruscan, thus, the Greek philosophers thought of humanity as a face masked with human responsibility. These terms are implored by different scholars to indicate that humanity is a creature that is different from lower animals. Whereas lower animals act on instincts, humanity on the other hand use his intellectual reasoning, will power, self consciousness, freedom, and feelings to perform his responsibilities in the society.

This however, differentiates him from the rest of the animals and makes him transcendental human being in the society. Sometimes, his appealing instincts and reactions to the stimulus in the society make people to conceive him as a rational being created by God. Nevertheless, there are fundamental questions that remain unanswered by contemporary scholars: who is man in African religious thought? Is humanity a whole or spitted personality? What makes him different from other animals living in African society? These questions can only be answered when humanity is view from the religious perspective as exemplified in this chapter.

3.5 The Philosophical Perception of Humanity

There are various philosophical views about humanity. However, in this section of the book, we shall limit ourselves to only two of them. Kenneth Kantzer views about humanity are contained in his theories of modern optimistic interpretations, contemporary pessimism, and Biblical Realism. He maintained that humanity is a spark of the absolute spirit and he is inherently immortal, ethically good, and morally neutral as destined by evolution to self-perfection in complete union with the Divine. He also drew our attention to the contemporary pessimism about man, and emphasized that humanity is rooted in pessimistic school of thought. Kantzer further quoted Feuerbach by saying that “humanity is what he eats and receives; a characteristics of the despair modern existentialism”. Furthermore, he employed the theory of Biblical Realism as the basis for understanding the doctrine of humanity. He asserts that biblical humanity is neither a complicated machine nor epigemeral value. He is not a divine being that need only time and opportunity to achieve perfection, but father he lives in daily tension between the tragic, self-caused perversion of what might have been and the glorious foretaste of what may be and what in God’s good grace will be.

The Christian revelation points to the doctrine of creation in which humanity was made a little lower than God (Heb. 8:5). Humanity is also seen as the crown of the entire creative process and God Himself declared humanity “very good”. Thus, humanity was entrusted with possession of the earth and was made to have personal companionship with God.

3.6 Humanity in African Religious Thought

In African religion is seen primarily as a creature of God, eternal or self-existent but a creature of God. Even though the origin of humanity seems to vary considerably in African

mythologies and cosmogonies, African people commonly share the view that humanity originate from God. However, his origin may vary from one society to another but it is commonly held that humanity is a creature of God fashioned in His moral likeness and image. This belief about the origin of humanity is variously emphasized in African cosmogonic myths, which show that humanity is created by God and his holds a central position in the creative order. In the Dogon cosmogonic myths for instance, God (Amma) created humanity and sent him down to earth in an arch made up of four pairs (Nommo) who later became the ancestors of the Dogon people after he (God) had created and restored order in the world. These “nommos” subsequently cooperated with God in forming the human society with its institutions and civilization.

Similarly, the Fom cosmogonic myth states that Nzame (God) made humanity with the help of “Mbere” and “Nkwa” the spiritual beings that like themselves and live in harmony with one another. This man created by God according to Fom people was the first humanity and was full of God’s likeness and beauty. This creativeness of humanity in the image of God enables him to enjoy a special relationship with God. He is endowed with freedom and intelligence that placed him far above other creatures in the universe and makes him like God. However, God transcends man both in power and perfection as illustrated in Fom myth. The Fom people believe that *Nzame* (God) sent *Zelam* (thunder) to destroy the first human being farm and his world due to his superiority over the animal kingdom and refusal to worship Him. This myth of Fom people explains the relationship that existed between God and humanity in pre-modial time that was often defined in terms of father and son relationship. It is a relationship which is not only marked by humanity’s submissiveness, obedience and resignation but also a relationship which unquestioned the authority of God’s love, protection, care, security and trust for humanity.

Thus, the African people believe that humanity is an emanation from God Himself (Aeon). God created humankind body and soul, and poured blood into his lifeless body and after that humanity began to breathe as a human being who lives in the society. This belief is commonly found in most cultures of African society such as Ti, Lodagga, Akamba, Yoruba, Igbo, Ahanti, Nuer, Kalabari, Bantu, amongst others. The Lodagga people strongly believed that God created humankind as a potter does to his pot. The Akamba also believe that Mahungu (God) made the first couple and brought them out of a hole in the ground or in the sky. This common belief of African people concerning the origin of humanity is cut across the African continent and religion of African people. Biblical Christians also agreed with

African traditional worshippers that humanity is part of total created order that is created by the supreme deity himself.

Both Christianity and African religion also agreed that humanity evolved as a product of an independent process of natural selection and natural development such that humanity is seen as a special and direct creature of God. The Old Testament does not conceive humanity as a species in the sense of logical attraction but as a concrete existence being who lives in the society. The Hebrew word “Adam” which means “red earth” is an Ugaritic and Arabic term, which connotes humanity as someone that lives on earth. The term is also used to denote the nature of humanity as a being that is different from God and other animals (1 Sam. 15:29, Gen. 1:26). Humanity was created in the image of God (*Imago Dei*) and this indicates that he was not only set apart from the creation order but he was prefigured in creation as a human being upon which everything centered (Gen. 1:26, : 29, :2: 16). He is a spiritual being deemed worthy to be given a divine task and responsibility to rule the face of the earth. Humanity was created bisexual and this difference the fundamental form of society and lineages emerged. It is based on the understanding that Mbiti refers to Humanity as a being who is anthropocentric. He states:

...African philosophy of religion is anthropocentric, humanity is at the centre of existence and African people see everything else in their explanation of humankind's origin or sustenance, it is as if God exists for the sake of humankind. They describe or explain the destiny of humanity after a physical life...Animals, plants, land, rain, and other natural objects and phenomena, they also describe man's environment and incorporate it into religious perception of the universe.

Mbiti's observation above clearly demonstrates that humanity in African religious thought can be viewed from different viewpoints as earlier mentioned above. Humanity, *Mundu* in Akamba, *Muntu* in Bantu, or *Umache* in Tiv is the art of God who lives in the society in close relationship with other people and magical forces. He is made of clay and the breath of God, which indicates that his life is not owned by him. He must die and return to his creator when the breath ceases to exist. The physical body of humanity and the soul are then separated and life ended.

3.7 Ontological Dimension of Humanity

The word ontology in its original usage connotes the doctrine about that “which is” or that “which exist”. Ontology as a field of study is a totality of the things, which exist in the super sensible world. It is a scientific study of that which is or that which exists in the human world. The discipline coincides with metaphysics and philosophy whose branches include ethics epistemology, amongst others. Thus, ontology in the worlds of Ushe can be defined as:

...a systematizing of all concepts and principle, which deals with objects that can be verifiable by experience...it is concerned with the super sensible things, which are the ultimate goal of metaphysics.

From Ushe’s definition above, it is clearly noted that ontology is a branch of philosophy properly called transcendental philosophy and it contains elements of a prior knowledge. Ontology also studies the doctrine of abstract determination of the essence of an object in a super sensible world, which is the ultimate goal of metaphysics. The difference between ontology and logic is that, while ontology studies the essence of an object, which can be empirically verified, logic on the other hand, takes over the task of knowing the logical relationship that exist between the object and the world of perceiving it. Humanity in African religious thought is conceived in ontological dimension in relation to multiplicity of beings living in the society with one another.

The Africans understanding of humanity is synonymous with the western conception of humanity as a living force who is I active communion with other forces in the universe. This understanding of humanity in African worldview is slightly different from the western conception of humanity as a being composed of body and soul. This duality conception of man by the European is the last agreement accepted by the Africans who refused the dichotomy between the body and spirit our rather conceive humanity as a whole person. Ushe affirms that humanity is more of a principle, which distinguishes him from other beings who are living the society. He opines that:

...many Africans distinguish...spirit, the person, and the self. Each of these principles links him/her with a different category of beings in the ontological order.

Ikenga-Metuh, also explicates some of these principles thus:

...breath is conceived as a verifying principle, a life force that links humanity with other life forces in the universe. Destiny refers to the totality of the “bag” of good and bad fortunes associated with the person. The “self” then remains the unique individual being created by God.

Ikenga-Metuh’s presentation is a typical explanation of African doctrine humanity that does not admit dualism, which is a characteristic of the Greco-Roman culture. The Greece and Roman people believed that humanity possessed body (*soma*) soul (*nepes*), spirit (*pneuma*) flesh (*sarx*), a heart (*kardia*) a mind (*nous*), and conscious (*symudesis*). The body (*soma*) represent both the physical body and the person (Phil. 15:33, 15:44). Paul occasionally used the *Sarx* (flesh) synonymously with *soma*. It speaks of the transient nature of man. Flesh further signifies the sinfulness and guilt of humanity (II Cor. 4:10, 1 Cor. 15:50, Rom. U8:11). The psyche or *nepes* represents the human person as a living being in Paul theology (II Cor. 12:15, I Cor. 15:14). The Greco-Roman ontological composition of humanity such as the “flesh” (*basa*) (Ps 78:39), “spirit” (*ruah*), (Ps 146:4 and Ezekiel 11:19) and “soul” (*nepes*) and humanity as life (*leb*), all represent the essential features of the inner human being.

These compositions of humanity are opposed to his outward appearance (Job 12:3 and Isa. 16:17), because humanity is always seen as a complete whole and not a dichotomised principle consisting of the body and the soul. The body is not the prison house of the soul as generally conceived by African anthropologists. The principles in humanity are far from jeopardizing the unity of humanity which is closely bind him together and enable him to relate with order entities in the ontological order. Thus, African anthropologists identified four such principles in humanity that links him to a different category of beings in the ontological order. The “breath” is conceived as verifying principle, and a life force, which links humanity with other life forces in the universe. It relates to the destiny.

The soul, which is conceived as an “emanation” or “spark” as used here, is variously conceived as the personification of humanity’s personal deity, or a guardian spirit (*angel*). It

comes from God, and goes back to God after death. However, it is not a verifying principle, nor is it a fraction of man conceived in western conception of soul. This concept of the human spirit deity is found mainly in West African societies especially, among the Bantus. The destiny spirit is identified with the ancestral guardian spirit often referred to as the shadow. Finally, come to human being himself, the unique individual person created by God. These principles in humanity and their relationship is conceived in different ways by African societies as features which explain the harmonious integration of humanity with other life forces who are living in the universe.

Temples who studied the Bantu people of Southern Africa affirms that; humanity consists of four principles, which are constituent's part of his personality. These include; the body, shadow, breath and self. The "self" (*mantu*) is the whole humanity and is different from "muntu" which in Bantu language refers to a being, which possess a visible body as it is translated in English. Thus, *Muntu* (humanity) in the western usage of the term is "the person" or "self". In Bantu's worldview, a whole and integral part and not a fraction of a composite being this survives after death. The body of man serves to make him visible. In addition, this in no way diminishes humanity from losing his physical body as conceived by western scholarship. The shadow of humanity is associated with self and other life forces who might take to get hold of the person himself. When the "self" leaves the human body at death, the person ceases to exist in the physical realm. This explains why African people strongly believed that dead people do not cast shadows.

The *Muntu* looks like a shadow after death and as a figure of the total person who was a human being but now looks like an incorporeal matter. The shadow is the sign representing the whole person, while the breath is the manifestation of life in a person as a living being. Thus, when the shadow leaves the human body and the breath ceases to exist, the person is dead. This however, explains the general belief of African people, which says, "The dead do not cast shadows". The *Muntu* after death looks like a shadow when human beings see it. Sometimes it looks like an incorporeal matter or retain the figure of the deceased when he/she was alive on earth. This conception of man based on ontological dichotomy conceived in terms of his composition as an ontological being living with other life forces in the society. Among the Tiv of Nigeria, humanity is a living being with the body (*iyol*), soul (*jijigi*), life (*uma*), and blood (*iyol* and *wamber*). He is a living entity which live, die and enters the cult of the ancestors (*Adomoku*).

However, the body and soul of humanity have spiritual essence relating to biological entities, which are living together with him in the society. The Lugbar people based their

conception of humanity on five elements. These include; the body (*rual*) breath (*Ava*), shadow (*endiilandri*), the guardian spirit (*adro*) and personality (*fail*). They believed that humanity has body, which goes nowhere when he is alive but rots whenever he is dead and buried. His body contains the breath (*Ava*) which leaves the body at death and goes to the spirit world. It is a symbol of life and it is lost once life ceases to exist. Sometimes, the breath is associated with the soul (*orindi*), which leaves the body after the person is dead and hovers around in the form of a spirit before it finally goes to the world of dead.

The Lugbara people also believed that during the time of wandering, the dead spirits could harm the living members especially those who meet them. They could also attack the community members who offended them in dreams. These ghosts in Lugbara worldview go to their ancestral abode to join their ancestors who have gone before them and could descend to live in the shrines by the help of diviners. The Lugbara belief indicates that humanity possess a guardian spirit (*ado*) and personality (*tali*) which are other components of the ontological composition of man. The supreme deity gives these elements of humanity-to-humanity at birth and they increase as he carries out social responsibilities in the society. However, when man dies, the guardian spirit and personality ceased to exist. They all go back to the Supreme Deity who created them. For the Yoruba's, humanity is an embodiment of vital principles and manifestation of life. He is believed to have the physical body (*ava*) which perishes when a humanity is dead. He has the shadow (*ojiji*), which represents the invisible humanity, and whenever it leaves the body, the humanity becomes a corpse incapable of living in the society.

The breath (*emir*) leaves the body and wanders about and when it meets people, they begin to dream or have nightmares. The shadow represents the real man created by God who becomes an ancestral guardian spirit when incarnated into invisible body. The destiny spirit (*chi*) is believed to be an emanation of the spark of the individuals created by God and it is double in nature one is resident in heaven while the other is resident in the individuals. God chooses this destiny spirit during the conception of a child from the various pages of fortunes. In addition, once it is chosen, it becomes the destiny of such humanity. The spirit double lives in the humanity to administer the package, which contains the fortunes and misfortunes the man, will have in future life. Moreover, when humanity dies, his destiny-spirit goes back to the Supreme Deity to give account of the works performed by him while he was on earth. In this sense, the destiny spirit can be said to be associated with the ancestral guardian (*eke*) which is the spirit of a deceased ancestor who re-incarnates into a child to be born as man living in the society. It is assigned to humanity by God during conception and can be

recognized through the physical characteristics, which are similar to humanity's supposed re-incarnator or the deceased ancestors who re-incarnate in the humanity as a child. However, when there is doubt about a child concerning his/her identity, divination is consulted to ascertain whether such a child has *ice* spirit or not.

The importance of *ice* (the guardian spirit) is emphasized by the Yoruba people such that each person is believed to have a shrine in his/her family where sacrifices are offered to *ice* for good fortunes. The Akan people worldview of humanity is centered on four principles, which are believed to be packages from the Supreme Deity. These include; the destiny spirits (*okra*), the sunsum (breath), the father's spirit force (*ntoro*) and the mother's blood (*mogya*). The sunsum is man's ego or his personality, which is manifested in humanity's characters. The Akan people believed that the *sunsum* spirit leave the body of humanity during sleep and wanders away to an unknown place. Sometimes, it may not return to the humanity but goes to the witches or sorcerers, and dies. However, the Akan believe that those who heavily possessed *sunsum* spirit cannot die. Humanity with a father-life-force linked him to paternal lineage called the *Ntoro* (father's life force spirits) are blood related spirits which makes humanity a composite personality. Thus, the Akan societies, those who share the same blood belong to the mortician lineage and because Akan people are matrilineal blood form the basis of ancestral cult.

The supreme deity has given the destiny spirits (*okjra/kra*) is a compliment of humanity during the conception of humanity. It is a life force which lives in every humanity's body and can returns to the Supreme Deity when he dies. *Kra* is conceived as a guardian spirit, which guides a human being to whom it is assigned, and gives him advice. It is a destiny package from the supreme deity, which makes a realization of one's destiny to be obtained, and after the death of humanity; it goes back to the supreme deity to give account of the duties performed by him during his lifetime on earth. It may be allow returning to the world or remaining in heaven depending on the account of discharge of its duties in the lives of the people. Thus, ontological composition of humanity is conceived in various ways, which reveals the similarity of thoughts among ethnic groups in Africa as numerated below in this table.

Inter-Tribal Similarities and Names for the Composition of Humanity in Africa

S/N Nature Principle	Tiv	Nupe	Igbo	Yoruba
(General)				

Breathe (Life principle)	Humbe	Raji	Obi	Emi
Destiny (Spirit guardian)	Jijingi	Kuci	Chi	Ori
Personality (Ancestral guardian)	Mluiyol	Kuci	Eke	-
Shadow (self)	Mule	Fitingi	Onyinyo	Ojiji
Body (Primary matter)	Gunduiyol	-	Aru	Ara

From the above survey of the components of humanity, conceived by, the Africans, it is clearly seen that humanity is a homogeneous integral unit. He is not a split entity nor is he a composite of two or more principles, but a composite whole. Whether alive or dead, humanity is one entity, a spirit that underlies the bodily manifestation. He is a microcosm of forces and the nucleus around which revolves a number of other forces such as the body, shadow, personality, soul, or the destiny spirit. In African thoughts therefore, humanity is by implication a complex subject to discuss without any of the aforementioned components. He is a cell wrapping into one unit a number of life forces revolving around one nucleus (the self or the real man). Humanity is at the centre of the universe and above him is the supreme deity, the spirit and creator who give existence, and power of survival under man humanity and subordinate to him are the physical forces in the universe, animals and plants that were given to him by the supreme deity as food to eat.

3.8 The Supreme Being and Humanity's Destiny

Humanity is a social being that maintains a vital relationship with nature, the Supreme Being, the deities, ancestors, the extended family, and other people who are living in the society where he belongs. The components of life force in him are channelled for maintaining the relationship between the Supreme Being and himself. However, Africans believe that the Supreme Being is ontologically linked to humanity to the guardian spirits, which are the spark or emanation of the Supreme Being. This spirit of Supreme Being in man guides, advice and administers the destiny which worked out a plan for humanity and once it is sealed or realized by humanity, it cannot be changed by any other forces in the world.

Sometimes, ancestors and deities temporarily withhold the realization of humanity's destiny and for it to be rectified, certain rituals must be performed.

This however, shows the solicitude, which characterised the relationship between the Supreme Being and humanity in African religious thought. The African people strongly believe that humanity's mission on earth is to realize his destiny amidst the threats from mystical forces beyond the visible realm, and evil people from within his own community. Humanity who lives in a visible world can count on the support of his clan lineage and other social institutions in the society. His success and growth depends on how he relates to the forces within his society through rituals, sacrifices, prayers amongst others. Sometimes, humanity makes good medicine to neutralize the machinations of the evil forces and to consult divinations to reveal the snares of his enemies or to collect remedies where other possibilities of working out the destiny failed. This explains the Igbo proverb, which says "where a man fall his destiny push him down". The Tallensi of Ghana further illustrates this relationship between the Supreme Being and the ancestral spirits, the clan and the individual himself in achieving his own destiny thus:

...every human being has a parental destiny given to him by the supreme deity. The destiny that determines his success or failure in life is kept in heaven by the supreme deity. However, before a child gets to the age of maturity, he is under the influence of his parents' destiny especially his mother's spirit destiny. When he gets to adolescence, and begins to assume a certain social identity, his own parental destiny becomes stronger to exercise more influence. At this stage, with the help of divination, he discovers which ancestors will help him to realize his destiny. He then begins to make offerings of food and drink to them because their help will determine his success or failure in life. Under their guidance, the young man's destiny changes to become a good destiny thereby shedding its evil propensities and assuming more positive role. Thereafter, his own moral behaviour determines largely his personal success or failure in life. Sometimes, evil inherent in the prenatal destiny persist in case of women and this result to constant sickness or death of their children. For man, this could be unavoidable physical or psychological infirmity, which prevents them from marrying or having children. In both cases attempts are made to exercise the evils in the pre-natal destiny and where this fails, nothing eels could be done.

The Tallensi explanation of the relationship between the Supreme Being and humanity above shed more light on African concepts of predestination and human responsibility. Even though the two seems to be conflicting, they are not diametrically opposed to each other. This is because humanity may hope to get in life what has been predestined from the supreme deity, but what man actually gets is reward for what he has done. In this case, where a man failed to be resourceful, it is believed that a fortune in his destiny package is lost. This is why the Igbo proverb says; “whoever says yes his destiny (*chi*) say yes” this Igbo proverb if appropriately understood explained the African worldview of predestination, which is slightly different from the western concept of predestination. In the western conception, predestination does not implicit that what is predestined by the Supreme Being must happen irrespective despite effort of humanity.

This dialectic of fate and responsibility implicit in African concept of man is further explained by Fortes with the stories of Depidus and job drawn from Greek mythology and the Bible respectively. One version of this story was illustrated by the story of Depidus, which says that; he killed his father and married his mother because it was predestined for him to do so. He then presents him as a fatalistically and a moral being. Another version of African concept of humanity was illustrated by the story of Job who through his devotions and patients achieved God’s design for him. He therefore, presents man as a moral, responsible and free created by the Supreme Being. However, whereas in western thoughts, these two versions of man are irreconcilably opposed in African thought, they are combined in a dynamic version of humanity. He is a victim of restriction imposes upon him by destiny as an architect of his own future. In this sense, the human destiny in African thought can be said to be both unalterable and attainable. Moreover, it is viewed as a resource to be exploited by humanity.

3.9 Humanity and the Community

In African worldview, humanity is believed to live in the society with other life forces, without which his identity is difficult to understand. These are living forces, which can influence humankind for good or evil as illustrated by spirit position among the Dinka people. According to the Dinka, humankind is called *Wunjok*, which means “the owner of spirit power that descended on mankind”. He participates in the being of the divinity to the point at which the spirit displaces man humanity’s personality. Moreover, in this state,

humanity can performed some activities, which are quite beyond the capability of ordinary men. Similarly, the interaction between the living and the ancestors as seen in the supposed re-incarnation of an ancestor in a new born baby illustrates this relationship that exist between humanity and other life forces who are living together with him in the society.

Re-incarnation in this context is understood to mean the life force of a newly born child has come under the vital influence of an ancestor. This according to Plicid Temple must be understood as a case of a particular humanity being born again. These Bantu beliefs represented by temples, ramifies with other African societies where the supposed re-incarnated humanity returns in his individuality to take part in the life of the society through vital influences which gives individualization to the newly born child. The above given facts shows that humanity is capable of entering into two relationships with other entities, which may inclined him to do good or evil in the society. Hence, humanity is vulnerable to the influence of other force in the world and can manipulate the spirits world and natural forces, which can harm him if he is carless or does not protect himself against them. Humanity is a being consisting of a life force, personality, and alter ego. The life force is a principle given to humanity during his conception as a human being. It is part of the soul, which dies when any of these life forces is stroke fatally. When this happens, and the physical body dies then the man is dead.

The breath, which is another component element in humanity, linked him with other life forces in the universe. It is a verifying principle, which enables man to grow spiritually to be strengthened, weakened or even to die. The breath is in itself a life force, which can influence humanity to live a good life. It can also be influenced by other life forces in the universe such as; the deities, ancestors, witches, sorcerers, animals and ordinary men. The personality is the aspect of humanity's soul, which does not die, destroyed and perished with the body. The alter ego is a duplication of the earthly pilgrimage of man, which is purely spiritual, and imamate to guide humanity in the spiritual world. Since man's destiny is a blue print, which requires human and spiritual efforts to bring his hope to fruition, the alter ego acts as a guardian of his moral code of behaviour in the society. At death the life force and the physical body of humanity ceases and the personality, which is a constituent of the soul, returns to the Supreme Being who is the giver of it.

African people believe that in such a death, comes before the allotted time or the chosen destiny, the personality soul hovers around the society as a ghost spirit until the life span originally given to the deceased is completed. Sometimes, the personality of a man who dies before the time allotted to him may materialised, a normal life until his life span is exhausted.

However, it is also believed that if the ghost of such a deceased is recognised by anyone who knew him prior to his physical death, he immediately disappears to another location where no one will recognize him as a dead spirit living in human form. Nevertheless, the alter ego of humanity who dies at the right time may be re-born within the family lineage for cultures that believed in re-incarnation if necessary. In that case, the personality soul of the deceased will perform the same functions, which the latter carried out for him during his earthly sojourn and where rebirth has taken place, the alter ego of a may have to fulfilled his spiritual and normal roles of an alter ego in humanity as found amongst most societies in Africa. This tripartite notion of the composition of humanity is cut across African continent.

4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit, you have studied about the nature and concept of humanity as being created by God and being in perfect harmony with God from the beginning. After this, because of humanity's disobedience God eventually withdrew from humanity. You have also studied about the Yoruba and the Akan concept of humanity as having the physical and the spiritual parts.

5.0 SUMMARY

The following are the major points that you have learnt in this nit:

- Africans believe that human beings were created by God
- The Africans believe that there are both spiritual and physical aspects of humanity.
- An example of this belief is the Yoruba concept that a human being has five parts, namely, *ara, ojiji, okan, emi, and ori*.
- The Akan also name four aspects to human beings, namely: *Okra or Kra; the Sunsum; the Ntoro and the Mogya*.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Briefly discuss the nature of humanity in African traditional religion
2. What are the features of humanity in African traditional religion?

3. Discuss the African religious perception of humanity
4. Explain the ontological dimension of humanity
5. Briefly examine the relationship between humanity and the community

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UNIT 6 MYSTICAL POWERS IN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Magical forces are another realm of Africa traditional religion that is widespread. In this last unit of module 2, you shall study the mystical powers in African traditional religion. The belief in mystical powers is a common phenomenon that is experienced daily in every African community. African peoples know that the universe has mystical powers or mystical forces, which affect everyone for better or for worse. These mystical forces permeate completely human world and they work for good and evil. For better understanding, we shall discuss them under five categories, namely diviners, medicine practitioners, priests/priestesses, herbalists and charms.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Explain the role of priests/priestesses in African traditional religion
- Discuss what the Africans believe concerning medicine practitioners
- Identify the African belief about diviners

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Diviners

Divination is the means through which various problems facing both the society and individuals are solve in African society. The diviners more often than not are priests/priestesses and medicine men; but it is possible for a medicine man or a priest not to be a diviner. This is why it is necessary to treat the diviner as a separate religious leader in African Traditional Religion. It is thus a key provision in African religion and a widespread practice from community to community. The belief in knowledge of future events is a common phenomenon in Africa. African people have been so curious about the future and fortune that divination has become a widespread phenomenon in contemporary African society. Scholars who made critical studies on divination patterns have agreed that the practice of divination is as old as humanity himself. Ushe has noted that in almost every community in Africa, there are diviners, magicians, witchcrafts, and sorcerers interpret oracular messages and predict the future events in the society.

The diviners in the course of interpreting the oracular messages given by the gods utilized fixed ponds such as *Ifa Odu*, a diffused body of esoteric knowledge, a simple sliding myriad symbolic objects shaken in divination basket and other devices to reveal the answers to their clients. Sometimes, the diviners employ their bodies as vehicles of communication with the spirits, while others operate self-explanatory system to interpret metaphorical messages given by the gods. In most cultures of Africa, this information are provided only by the diviners who are believed to be trusted in making decisions on such matters in the society. This basic knowledge the diviners use during the interpretation of oracular message involve combination of cognitive, logical analytical, intuitive and synthetically modes of thinking akin to what Frazer, Racliffe and Fortune describe as a method of arriving at a judgment of the unknown through incomplete evidence.

Peek opined that, the knowledge the diviners possessed for foreseeing the future events and to obtain secret information and are obtained from the omens, oracles, signs, and portents in the society. The knowledge is also gotten from the revelations of the gods and extra rational perceptions of the mysteries in the universe. Furthermore, Dzuigba explained that in African society, the basic source of knowledge is divination. In his words:

...divination in African society is an investigative instruction, which deals with the revelation of inscrutable will, demands, and activities of the gods as they affect human society. It also deals with revelation of the activities of witches and spirits. The divine knowledge the diviners possessed enable them to act as mediators between the gods and the people. It also helps them to have the knowledge about what is going on in the supernatural world.

Dzuigba's assertion above shows that African system of divination has a particular pattern of providing information to members of the society. It is believed that without this source of information, life in the society becomes difficult to live. The signs, which diviners interpret, enable them to supply their clients with correct information in various forms. In this Peek proposed a tripartite system (i) Psychic method that involves spirits possessions, (ii) Psychological method which diviners interview their clients and (iii) Causal method, which has to do with casting of chance objects. All these methods enable the diviners to investigate and to enquire into the problems of their clients in African society. Peek dichotomization stated above ramified with the categorization of divination by Zahan into several types such as: structural divination, functional divination semantic divination, pralogical approach, psychic divination, causal interpreter, mediumistic or messengers and oracular interpretative divination. In all these systems of divination, the diviners aimed at emphasizing the therapeutic function of reducing the grief anxieties of the bereaved in the society.

Thus, Callaway has divided the African patterns of divination into four major categories, namely: Izimiyanga Zesitupa (thumb doctors), Izimiyanga Izinti/Amatambo (those who use sticks and bones), and Abenilozilinyanaga Yemilozu (those who use familiar spirits). The diviners in a low tone usually consult the spirit of the departed (amatorigo), during the process of divining to reveal answers to the problems of their clients. Dewish asserts that through interpretative mediumistic and oracular interpretative divinitional systems, the diviners are able to manipulate divinatory vehicles to decode communication according to the established scheme in the society. Biler also affirmed that, through the help

of mechanical body movement, ordeal, mediumistic, necromancy, presentiment, miscellaneous, clairvoyance and Torres traits systems of divination, the diviners are able to employ locomotion in divinatory processes in African society. Most diviners in African society employ these systems of divination for the benefits of the members who consult them for solutions. Thus, diviners are concerned with the art of divination.

3.2 Medicine Practitioners

Medicine-practitioners are also abounding in the African society and are call by various names depending on the language of the community. They are often referred to as “herbalists” or “traditional doctors”. The Igbo calls them *dibia*, the Yoruba calls them *onisegun*, and the Twi calls them *Samankwafo*. More often than not, the male sex is the specialists of medicine practitioners but some women also featured as herbalists. One fundamental belief in Africa concerning the functions of the medicine-practitioners is that all diseases and misfortune and even accidents are caused mysteriously either through the agency of witches, sorcerers and the effect of evil words. As a result, they are to be treated religiously. Consequently, the African medicine-practitioner does not see his art and profession as exclusive of religion as is the practice in the West now. Thus, going side-by-side with the use of roots and herbs is the invocation of religious and mysterious powers. It is in line with this prevalent belief that there must always be at least one accessible and effective medicine-practitioner in every African community.

There is no fixed rule governing the call of the medicine-practitioner. The call may come when he is young and unmarried or in the middle or later stage of life. It is not out of place to see the medicine-practitioner passing on his powers and knowledge to his own children. Some are people specifically chosen in mysterious circumstances to become medicine-practitioners. While there are those who only feel interested, walk into the field to seek knowledge. Whichever means one join medicine practice, he is to be trustworthy, upright, moral, friendly, willing to serve and to combat witchcraft and other forms of social evil.

Characteristics of Medicine Practitioners

- i. Medicine practitioners are highly respected persons in the society. They are not merely accepted by the people, but are highly respected and feared. Some people speak of them as friends of the community.
- ii. Medicine practitioners are public servants who are specialists in fighting witchcrafts. The difference between them and witchcraft is that, while the former are anti-social and hated by the people, the latter are highly respected in the community for their abilities fight witchcraft.
- iii. Medicine practitioners are specialists in fighting witchcraft. They believe in the existence of some spiritual powers in the universe, which are employing by wicked people to harm others in the society. They likewise use similar powers to treat people who are attack by witches/wizards.

Most African people believed that medicine men derived their powers from the visible forces. The sources of their medicines include leaves, roots of trees, herbs, grass, weeds, and the soil. The medicines are usually prepared in the form of liquid, powder, drug, expectorants, and syrups for people. They are also obtainable from shrines, medical gardens, and wild plants in the society. Medicine practitioners have guiding principles for the treatments are mostly used by medicine practitioners in the treatments and healing of victims, especially those attacked by witchcraft in African society. Medicine practitioners may also use the principles and their powers for destructive purposes and to attack innocent people in the society. For example, a 'diviner' or 'a specialist' who seeks to diagnose disease or discover the solution to the problem, by means of inspiration or manipulation of objects through various techniques may decide to use his divinatory powers negatively. Instead of him serving as veritable channels between the people and ancestral spirits, he becomes the medium through which the spirit kills.

3.3 Priests/Priestesses

Priests/Priestesses are specialists in African society who predict future events. They perform vital services in the community such as advising the warriors when and how to win the battles. Their knowledge of the future makes them famous in the societies in which they belong. The priests are categories of people specially chosen by the gods to serve at the

shrines of various divinities. Priests are called to their vocations and through intensive learning; they become specialists in their chosen professions. They preside over prayers, perform rituals and sacrifices to the gods. They also serve as intermediaries between the gods and human beings in the society. In many cultures of Africa, there are criteria's for becoming a priest. These include; (i) divine choice of the person by the gods (ii) He/she must possess the ancestral spirits and the rites of initiation into priesthood cult. (iii) The person must be called through misfortunes such as sickness, accident, bad harvest, temporary madness or other mishaps, which had occurred previously that leads to initiation of the person's vocation. (iv) The person is to inherit the office of priesthood from his/her ancestors. (v) The person must be trained practically as a neophyte to follow, initiate and observe his/her master. He/she learns the art of praying, meditation, the use of mystical and cryptic ritual languages, sacrificial procedures, and observation of taboos and priestly conducts.

These practical things, which the neophyte learns, equip him or her to perform all the duties ahead of him/her and to be able to handle all cases within the profession. Thus, in African traditional society, priests are medium and intermediary between the gods and the people as earlier mentioned in the chapter. They are the heads of religious system of the society and they offer prayers and sacrifices on behalf of the people. The priests also serve as professional medical doctors and specialists in treating ailments of all kinds. They enforce moral, social, and religious values, which maintain group solidarity and respect for others in the society. The general welfare of the society is therefore, closely guided, and protected by the priests. They mediate between man and woman and the gods or God. The priests also consult the ancestors on behalf of the family or clan. Hence they link the living and the dead together.

Functions of the Priests

- 1) **Intermediary:** The priests are the intermediary between humanity and God (Supreme Being). They act as an intermediary linking the people with God.
- 2) **Intercession:** The priests intercede with the divinity on behalf of the people. The evils in the community may indicate the ineffectiveness of the priest to be in constant consultation with God.

- 3) **Sacrifice:** They priests offer sacrifices and say prayers at the shrine. They lead worship during the yearly festival of the divinity. As the custodian of the religion, and keepers of religious treasures and knowledge, he ensures that the emblem and symbols of the divinity are suitable and reverently preserved.
- 4) **Custom:** They ensure that the people maintain customs and practices related to the divinity. They know the taboos surrounding the cult and transmit them correctly.
- 5) **Divination:** They divine for the whole community; they is also herbalist or medicine practitioner.
- 6) **Kingship Issues:** They priests installs the king. They also perform the necessary rites of burial for the dead king.
- 7) **Counsellor:** Since they are an important figure in the community, he is a member of the council of the community. They advice people; they also quarrels and enforces morality.

In summary, the priest is essential in the day-to-day running of the community's affairs. He presides over meetings and communities and serves as judge inmost cases and act as director with regard to the general well being of the community.

The Differences between the Priests and Medicine Practitioners

Despite the similarities in the functions of these two seemingly indispensable religious leaders in African Traditional Religion, they are quite different personalities. In this section, you will learn the differences between the two of them and they are as follows:

- 1) The priest is more functional in the various social gathering of the society than the medicine-practitioner.
- 2) The priest lives within the society at a place in time while the medicine man more often than not is itinerant.
- 3) The priest hs an established shrine while the medicine-men have none.
- 4) The medicine man carries the knowledge and power of spiritual and chemical substances while priest may be limited to spiritual power alone.

- 5) The priesthood is an institution while the medicine-art is a profession.
- 6) The medicine-practitioner operates empirically using substances that can be seen accompanies with words, but the priests operates dogmatically. He is more of a teacher of doctrines.
- 7) There is a difference on point of ecstasy. The priestly function powers are fixed while it breaks out in the medicine-practitioner.
- 8) The priest is more functional in social gathering than the medicine-practitioner.
- 9) The priest fixes times, places and actions of worship while the spirit controls the medicine-practitioner.
- 10) The medicine-practitioner has the spiritual and physical power and knowledge but has no institution like a priest. The priest has an established shrine but the medicine-practitioner has none.
- 11) The medicine-practitioner operates in practical elements; materials and words (incantation) but the priest operates with strict rules.
- 12) Both the priest and the medicine-practitioner use herbs and charms for the benefits of man.

Despite all these differences, they both use their knowledge for the blessings of humanity.

3.4 Herbalists

Herbalists are in every part of African society. African society people are familiar with medicinal value of various herbs. They also know the vital roles played by herbalists who prescribed these herbs to help the victims in the society. However, herbalists are distinct from diviners who combined herbal remedies with divination and mystical powers for the treatments of patients attacked by witchcraft or diseases of every kind. Herbalists are highly respected the people. Some of them are pretenders while others are real, and since witchcraft and sicknesses are daily occurrences in African society, only herbalists have the knowledge and power to fight them. They alone know the magic of healing the victims and to fight evil powers that overpowers them. The herbalists use their powers without religious connotations. This is because their belief their spiritual power is gotten from medicine practitioners that provide them with hope to solve the problems of their patients attacked in society by witchcraft.

3.5 Charms

Charms are produced by medicine practitioners out of material objects such as herbs, roots, bark, insects, skins, and bones, leaves, and animal horns. These objects are empowered magically through the repetition of Set words. And may be used for variety of purpose, such as attracting a lover, gaining employment, protecting wealth, sickness, and anything else that is needed. Today, charms are being used to protect warriors from deadly bullets in warfare. Charms may be a kind of medicine, while medicine on the other hand has the effects of charm. Both of them are used as protective and healing magic in African society. The effectiveness of medicine depends on the materials and words used by the medicine practitioners to fight off attacks from witches. These specialists are called “witch doctors”. They helped the troubled sick and dying persons who have been bewitched in the society. Some of them are referred to as traditional doctors or herbalists and can treat patients by administering local herbs and medicines. These functions performed by medicine practitioners make people to fear and consult them for solution in time of troubles.

4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit, you have studied about the mystical powers, which is the ability to make impossible things possible, or give someone control over the forces of nature. You also learnt about the role of priests/priestesses in African traditional religion, comparison between medicine practitioners and diviners in African traditional religion, as well as the spirit mediums, sacred kings and prophets/prophetesses in African societies.

5.0 SUMMARY

The following are the major points you have learnt in this unit:

- Divination is the means through which various problems facing both the society and individuals are solved in African society.

- Diviners are religious specialists who have the knowledge of future events and ability to interpret oracular messages.
- Medicine practitioners are herbalists or traditional doctors.
- There are criteria for one to become a medicine practitioner. These include the person must be call by the gods, he/she is to be married, he/she inherit it from his/her parents and he/she choose it because of personal interest.
- There are certain characteristics features of medicine practitioners. These are the person must be highly respected, he/she must be a civil servant, and the person must be a specialist in fighting witchcraft.
- Charms are produce by medicine practitioners out of material objects such as herbs, roots, bark, insects, insects, skins, and bones, leaves, and animal horns.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. What are the roles of priests/priestesses in African traditional religion?
2. Discuss belief of African people concerning medicine practitioners
3. What is the role of diviners in African traditional religion?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 7 SPIRITS FORCES IN AFRICAN RELIGION

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

As you have learnt in the early unit, the second dominant features of African traditional religion are the belief in the spirits world. The Africans believed that forces such as the Supreme Being and mystical agents inhabit the material world where man lives. However, while some of them believed in existence of mystical powers such as divinities and ancestors, others do not. In this unit, we shall discuss in details the spirit forces that formed the spirit world in African society.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Explain the cult of divinities in African traditional religion
- List and explain the divinities in some African societies
- Give the functions of divinities in African traditional religion
- States the roles of ancestors in African traditional religion
- Discuss the typology of magic in African traditional religion
- Differentiate between witchcraft and sorcery

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Cult of the Divinities in African Traditional Religion

Divinities are gods who emanated from Supreme Deity. They have attribute of the Supreme Being and are in essence His offspring. Thus, the Edo believes Olokun as the son of Osanobwa, the Akan of Ghana regards Aboson as the son of Nyame. They are smaller deities, which are next to the Supreme Being. They are gods thought to have been created by the supreme deity in the ontological category of the spirits and are often associated with the Supreme Being as personifications and spiritual beings in charge of the phenomenon of nature. Hence, divinities are seen as the assistants, agents, sons, servants, and messengers of the Supreme Deity. They stand between the spiritual and the material world each of them governs a sphere of life and human activities. Many of them are personifications of natural phenomenon.

These divinities derived their powers from the Supreme Being and they form the immediate link between the supreme deity and human beings. Though divinities are said to be generally beneficent, they can be dangerous to human life. Sometimes they punish people under certain conditions and can even cause death to human beings. Thus, divinities are of three major groups, namely; primordial divinities, deified ancestors, and personification of natural forces and phenomenon. Iya Olamide, one of the priestesses of African Traditional Religion in her response to the identity of the divinities has this say:

The Orisha are complex multivalent beings. The Orisha are aspects of God. Since we cannot know God, and the Orisha are a little easier to grasp in our

understanding people concentrate more on the divinities. They are forces of nature. As such, they exist everywhere. They are also forces in the human mind. Ogun is will. Yemoja is compassion. Obatala is reason. Oshun stands for self-esteem. The Orisha also embody values. They are also principles of life. Yemoja's principle is that of nature; Shango is for truth; Obatala stands for ethics; Oshun is for connectiveness and Oya is for change. Some consider the Orisha laws by which we must live our lives. Oshun's law loves yourself while Shango's is use your head. The Orisha laws also have reincarnated on the earth and achieved Orishahood. There are stories about the apotheosis of Yemoja, Shango, Oya, and Orisha-Oko, to name a few. Therefore, the Orisha are also ancestors, however, a special category of ancestors.

This presentation on the identity of the divinities from these priests has corroborated our earlier explanation about the nature and the categories of the divinities.

Typology of Divinities

There are three different categories of the divinities in African society. These include:

Primordial Divinities

These are divinities whose origin is unknown. Many African people believe that they are deities of heaven who have been with the Supreme Being since the creation of the universe. They are partakers in the creative work of the universe and they work hand in hand with the supreme deity who is the arch-creator of the universe.

Deified Ancestors

These are human beings who are deified because of the extraordinary lives they have lived. They are living deads in African society, who are deified, as gods or ancestors and so become divinities with all the attributes and characteristics of the earlier divinities. Among the Yoruba's for example, Jakuta and Sango are the divinities associated with thunder and fire, Sango who was the fourth King of Oyo became a deified divinity after his death. He was

so powerful that after deification, he acquired the attributes of Jakuta, the thunder divinity of Yoruba land.

Personification of Natural Forces and Phenomenon

These are myriad of spirits, which populates the African continent. They are spirits, which are associated with natural phenomenon like hills, lakes, rivers, rocks, caves, trees, brooks, lakes, and thick forests in African society. Among the Yoruba's for example, Oke Ibadan hill is believe to be a hill for the spirits which have helped the Yoruba people during wars and which have continued to bless the people of Ibadan till date. Thus, there are priests dedicated to these spirits and animal festivals are celebrated by the people in their honour as protectors of the land. Although, divinities of natural phenomenon are many, and their numbers varies from one community to the other their number is said to be between 202, 401, 600, and 1700. The African people called them by various names depending on the functions they performed and the characteristics they acquired as divinities.

3.2 Divinities of Some African Societies

Among the Yoruba's the arch-divinities is called *Orisa-Nla*. He is also called *Obatala*. The people associated it with natural phenomenon and objects linked with human activities and experiences. It believes that *Orisa* came into existence to serve the will of the Supreme Being in the theocratic governing of the universe. In other words, *Orisa* was to act as emissary to the Supreme Deity in the theocratic administration of the world. The Yoruba people also called him the offspring, servant, and messenger of *Olodumare* (the Supreme Deity) (. He was believed to have been given the work of creation. He moulds man's physical form and creates the the deformed person at will. He is the deputy of son of *Olodumare*.

The Yoruba creation myths have shown that *Orisha-nla* (arch divinity) which is known by many attributes of *Olodumare*, *which he acquired*, was commissioned to create and equip the solid earth. He was also believed to have been commissioned by *Olodumae* (the Supreme Being) to mould the physical form of man and he did it by carrying out an order of the will of *Olodumare*. He then fashioned a man, which *Olodumare* breathed into him, and man became a human being. Hence, *Orisha nla* is popularly known as the maker who spread

over the whole earth. In Yoruba land, *Orisha-nla* represents the symbol of purity and morality, while beads and snails are offer to him as sacrifices instead of food by the people. Other diinities in Yoruba society, which associated with neutral forces and phenomena, are *Oduduwa*, *Orunmila*, *Orisha oko*, and *Shopona*. *Oduduwa* is another powerful and prominent divinity in Yoruba land. He is regarded as the ancestor of the Yoruba people and his name means Chief who created us.

According to Yoruba myth, *Oduduwa* was once a powerful leader in Yoruba land who had a dominant personality and good qualities of leadership. He ruled the kingdom of Ile-Ife, the capital city and when he died, an ancestral cult was created on his behalf in remembrance of him by the people. This began the history and legend about him which eventually resulted in the present day belief that, after *Orisha-nla*, have eceieved order from *Olodumare* to create man, *Orisha-nla* got dunked by palm wine and this angered *Olodumae* who quietly gathered the materials and created man's physical body there by supplementing *Orisha-nla* in honour as the creator divinity. *Orunmila* is another divinity in Yoruba land whose wisdom is believes to surpass that of *Orisha-nla* (the creator divinity). He is a divinity who had been with *Olodumare* during the creation of the world and knows all about the fashioning of the physical body of man. His wisdom and knowledge is next to that of *Olodumare* himself. According to Yoruba mythology, *Olodumare* was perplexed about how *Orunmila* administered the world because of his insight and solutions he have to *Olodumare* who created the universe.

Hence, *Orunmila* was made a minister of *Olodumare* and he is usually consulted by other divinities in Yoruba land. He is worship throughout Yoruba land as the universal king and his oracles are trusted by many Yoruba people. *Orisa-Nla* forms a hierarchy of spiritual beings in Yoruba land. It is recognition by the Yoruba people is based on the socio-political and religious functions perform by them in the society. Thus, *Orisha nla* is recognize as the arch-divinity in charge of moulding human bodies. *Orisa-nla* is associated with white colour, which symbolizes purity and transparency. His whitewashed temple has emblems of white chalk, white containers and his priests wear white clothes. His sacrificial foods include sanail (bloodless) and shea-butter. The water in his shrine is changed everyday to retian absolute freshness. The one who draws the water must not talk to anybody until she has fetched the water from the designated river. He represents the purity of *Olodumare*. The adherents are expected to be plain, pure, clean and men of proven integrity. In recognition of his delegated powers from God, he is usually called Alabalase-the prosposer that wields the sceptre. He passes this sceptre to kings to confirm them of divine rulership. *Orisa-Nla* is worshipped all

over Yorubaland and the barren comes to him for children while the sick comes for healing too. They are made to drink from the water in his shrine at treatment.

Orunmila

Orumila or Ife is the oracle divinity in Yorubaland. He is one of Olodumare's principal representatives on earth. He was said to know when man's destiny was being determined. So he is called 'Eleri-Ipin' that is the witness of destiny. Great wisdom and power and attribute to him and he also tells the priest (Babalawo) what roots and leaves could be used for healing purposes. Osanyin who is said to be a brother, friend, partner or servant of Orunmila assists him in discharging duties. The following are mysterious stories that surround this legendary figure:

- a. He was sent to earth by Olodumare for being too clever when he outwitted Olodumare in an argument.
- b. He had no bones in his body and so he is carried about by others.
- c. Orunmila treated Olodumare's illness
- d. Orunmila had no brother or sister until he used 180 palm nuts to divine for his brother who then gave birth to Osanin.
- e. Orunmila descended from heaven and was found amidst banana plant with an opele, palm-nuts, vessel, and an offering consisting of a rat, a fish, snail, and a female goat, and was then brought home after several sacrifice.

He taught Babalawos the art of divining and healing. Thereafter, he departed to an unknown place. He knows everything about man and gives right counsel; people consult him throughout the passage of life (birth, marriage, sickness, business ventures and death). In consulting *Orunmila*, the diviner makes use of the geomantic form of divination known as Ifa. The word is at times used synonymously with *Orunmila*, but it is used often to refer to the system of divination. There are many stories connected to with each Ifa corpus. The story told by the diviner is identified with the client's problem, and he is instructed to do what the character in the story did to overcome his problems. *Orunmila's* worship is widespread in Yorubaland. His shrine is located in the priest's house. The white plate that contains palm-kernels, cowries, and graven elephant tusks is his emblem. The priest makes sacrifices

according to *Orunmila's* instruction. A simple sacrifice may involve pouring of palm oil and breaking of Kola nut and bitter-Kola. An elaborate one may involve killing a fowl or he-goat.

Orunmila is the great oracle divinity and is known as *Ifa*. This is a divinity which one can be said is worshipped throughout Africa under different names. However, according to Yoruba mythology, he was said to have accompanied *Obatala* as a counselor when *Obatala* was sent to equip the earth after it has been created. *Orunmila* is undoubtedly one of the most revered representatives of *Orunmila* and *Ife* divination is associated with the cult of *Orunmila*. He is said to declare the will of God and the other divinities. In addition to his skills and wisdom in matters pertaining to divination, *Orunmila* can reveal to the Ifa priest (*Babalawo*) what roots and leaves that can be used in healing a particular ailment. In this field, he is said to be assisted by *Osanyin* (another divinity that has variously been described as a brother, friend, partner or servant of *Orunmila*). Yoruba myth has it that *Orunmila* was present when human destiny was fixed in heaven before they were born. This is why he is called “the witness of destiny” (*Eleri-ipin*) and this forms the basis for people going to him almost at every stage of life to inquire if they are on the track of their chosen destiny.

This singular factor explains why the worship of *Orunmila* is the most widespread in Africa. *Orunmila* is believed to be able to give advice to all and sundry. According to Bolaji Idowu, *Orunmila* constitutes one of the elements of the demands and sanctions of morality in Yoruba religion. For instance, an *Ifa* priest is constrained not to abuse his office in any way or use his position to enrich himself or refuse his services to anybody because of inability to pay the divination fee. It is believed that the *Ifa* priest should not tell a lie, bear false witness, or do anything evil with his powers. They say that anyone who does will forever remain impoverished. The shrine of *Orunmila* is usually found in the house of the worshippers or priests. His emblems include palm-kernels, cowries, a graven, and beautified elephant's tusk. These are kept in a white plate or bowl. Sacrifices are offered to *Orunmila* from time to time. The fifth day (*orun*) is however his day of worship when sacrifices are more elaborate. At times through divination, he can be worshipped on request and things to be used in worship are determined through divination. *Orunmila* is a divinity reputable for knowledge and wisdom and the Yoruba people associate him with *Ife* (god of divination).

Ogun

Ogun is conceived as the owner of all iron and steel. He is regarded as a hunter who prepares the way for other divinities to come to earth and for this reason; he is counted as a

chief among the divinities. He is believed to be a divinity of war, hunting, and other activities connected with iron. The Yoruba people strongly believe that he is everywhere in their society. *Sango* is the divinity, which represents the manifestation of the supreme deity, and he is associated with the divinity of thunder and lightning in Yoruba land. The Yoruba people have cults for him where sacrifices are made throughout the year to appease him and to ask for protection of the land.

Obatala

Obatala is the arch-divinity in Yoruba land. He is known by other names like *Orisanya* and *Ogiyan*. *Obatala* is the creator-divinity. Myth has it that it was *Obatala* and *Olodumare* commissioned to create the earth and equip it with everything that humanity would need. He was also the one commissioned to create the physical bodies of human beings from the dust of the earth. It was however *Olodumare's* prerogative to make the physical form made by *Obatala* a living being the secret that was withheld from *Obatala*. Another myth has it that when *Obatala* grew jealous, curious, and attempted to spy on *Olodumare* to direct how He makes the physical forms turn to living beings, *Olodumare* made him to fall into a deep slumber only to wake up after all the physical bodies had come alive.

Note that this myth is another pointer to the fact that the divinities were not considered to be Deity and were not independent from deity. *Obatala* is regarded as the divinity of purity. The name *Obatala* implies the King of purity. This is the reason for the white colour of everything associated with him. His temple or shrine must be whitewashed. His priests and priestesses along with the followers are usually dressed in white. His emblems are white chalk and white beads. In fact it is a taboo for anyone to bring palm oil close to his shrine. There is usually in the shrine water drawn from the spring in the early hours of the morning (that is before anybody gets to the spring). The water must be drawn by a virgin who has not started menstruation or an old woman at menopause. This again implies that blood of any kind do not come to pollute his shrine.

The water drawn at drawn too implies unpolluted water. This nature of *Obatala* demands from his adherents a life of purified honesty and one set apart from pollution. In all things *Obatala* represents the holiness of God. *Obatala* is worshipped all over the Yoruba Empire and beyond as seen in the resuscitation of African religions in the West today. *Obatala* women those afflicted with unexplainable diseases, and those facing problem during the crises

of life take their position to him for solutions. what taken from his shrine is also given to the invalids for their cure.

Esu

It is unfortunate that many observers and even Africans have misrepresented Esu as the divinity of evil of the Bible (New Testament). If it is compulsory to make a parallelism, Esu best fits the concept of Satan in the early beginnings of Jewish theology, when Esu is seen more as a messenger of YHWH. The biblical concept of the all-evil personality that opposes all that is good and represents God does not fit into the Yoruba concept of Esu. The adherents of Esu see Esu as one of the divinities closest to *Olodumare* especially on matters of rituals and human conduct. He is therefore seen as the “Inspector General” of rituals. He is expected to watch over the behaviours and conduct of both human beings and divinities. He is expected to make a report on these to *Olodumare*. He has the authority to approve or disapprove of any sacrifice he inspects and it is his recommendation that is finally acceptable to *Olodumare*. There are two sides to this divinity that has been described more as a trickster. The one side cuts the picture of a divinity that is dreaded by the people.

They believe that by virtue of his office, Esu holds the power of life and death over them as their prosperity or calamity depends on the reports he gives to *Olodumare*. Usually people attribute all their difficulties to the failure of Esu to perform his duties. People also invoke Esu to punish their enemies and also to offer protection to them against mishaps and mischief. It is also believed that Esu is difficult to placate and to predict. On the other side, people see in Esu an element that can be utilized for human need and progress. Therefore, as it is with other divinities, Esu is approached daily in prayers with gifts to secure his favour and to enable him to confer benefits on them. The belief that Esu can be a medium of having children makes the adherents give their children names like *Esubiyi* (Esu has given birth to this one).

Ala

This is the Igbo earth goddess. She is the arch divinity of Igbo land. She is regarded as both the spirit of the earth and the queen of the underworld who rules the ancestors that have been buried in the earth. As the mother goddess, Ala is the spirit of fertility. The Igbo believe

that she is a powerful beneficent deity. She is also the custodian of public morality. The goddess is a giver and administrator of moral laws and her priests are the guardians of public morality on her behalf. Crimes, such as stealing, adultery, giving birth to abnormal children such as cripples and twins are offences that must be purged by necessary sacrifice. The shrine of Ala fosters social unity among the Igbo group. Every Igbo village has communal shrine of Ala where she is depicted by a status of a woman carrying a child on her arms and on her knees. Woman prays to her for children. It is believed that the spirit controls the earth and as a result, farmers usually propitiate her before tilling the ground.

The Igbo regard this divinity as a mother and a god according to their belief all that they have derives from this divinity. It is also believed that when a child mistakenly falls on the ground, Ala will take care of the child. The priest of Ala is known as Ezeala and is the one that offers sacrifices to this divinity. The sacrifice usually comes up before the planting of crops, during the harvest of first fruits and finally at the full harvest during which special sacrifices are offered to Ala who owns the land on which farming had taken place. Ezeala takes the lead in every ceremony and he is a potent force in all aspects of village life.

Amadioha

This is another popular divinity among the Igbo people. This divinity is also known as Igwe, Ofufe, and Kamalu in other localities within Igbo land. Amadioha is highly regarded among the Igbo. He is regarded as the one in control of lightening, thunder, and storm. He represents the wrath of God and the manifestation of divine justice. He is the one that punishes witches, thieves, sorcerers and other evil doers. As it is among other African groups parallel of this divinity, the victims must not be mourned because they have been punished for their evil deeds. Their corpses are given to the priests of Amadioha for burial. The burial is immediately followed by sacrifices at the spot where Amadioha had killed the victims. It is also held that all the properties of the victims must be handed over to the priest's of Amadioha immediately after the burial of the victim. It has to be noted however that Amadioha is not only known for his fearful dealings with the people, he is also regarded as a benevolent god. He gives rain to the people and is also prayed to for soil fertility by farmers. Barren women also pray to him for children while traders approach him for success in their trade.

Olokun

Olokun is a divinity among the Edo people; the name, Olokun literally means “the owner of the sea”. This implies that Olokun is the divinity of the ocean and water. It is believed among the Edo that Olokun has been in existence as the eldest of Osanobua’s children, the rest being Esu, Ogun (the divinity of iron), Igiuwu (the divinity of death) and Obiemwen (the divinity of fertility). Therefore, it was held that when Osanobua created the earth and needed to appoint a representative from among his children it was easy for him to appoint Olokun who has already distinguished herself as being head and shoulder above other children in terms of wisdom and health. After Olokun was appointed the vicar on earth, Osanobua endowed her with more wealth, power, wisdom, and all that is needed to make life comfortable for people on earth. In addition, all other brother-divinities were placed at her disposal. This is why Olokun is seen as the divinity of fortune. Olokun is regarded as a beneficent divinity.

It is believed that Olokun has all the material well-being at her disposal and can distribute this to people according to her will. The divinity is believed to send rain and give the soil fertility. The association of Olokun with wealth has actually drawn many people to the divinity. Apart from this, Olokun is regarded as a divinity of morality and purity of heart and body. This is symbolically seen in the emblems, which include pots of fresh water drawn from the stream early in the morning, pieces of white chalk and white cloth. Special offerings to the divinity include white fowl and white pigeons. The adherents of Olokun are expected to put on white apparels except the priestess who wears crimson red parrot feather and crimson coloured velvet cloth. The white apparels signify that the adherents belong to a cult of holiness and they are also expected to be pure both in the heart and physically. The priestesses are supposed to be embodiment of purity and honesty.

Sokogba

Sokogba is the thunder divinity of the Nupe. This divinity has a close resemblance to Sango among the Yoruba and Amadioha of the Igbo. He is seen as representing the wrath of God upon the disobedient. His presence is manifested in thunderbolts and lightning. He punishes moral offenders such as thieves, wizards, sorcerers, and witches. However, he is not always seen as a god of destruction the adherents believed that Sokogba is capable of procuring the fertility of women who are barren. Such prayers are offered on behalf of the needy by the priest of the divinity. When this is done, children that are born are possessions

of Sokogba. The priest, Kuti as he is called, is notified of the birth of such a child who will in turn inform the divinity through a sacrifice asking for long life for the child. After the sacrifice, the child is handed over to the priest.

Tano

Tano is regarded as the greatest of the Ashanti divinities. He is often described as king as his other name, Takora, signifies. He is also seen as the father of water gods. The Ashanti people see him as the divinity and the principal temple is located near the source of River Tano at Obuase. Other shrines are also erected near rivers. The emblems of Tano include stones taken from riverbeds, a brass pan, or basket in which these emblems are placed and sometimes medicinal herbs are included. Tano is worshipped by other ethnic groups. His worshippers are expected to keep some taboos including the one, which forbids the menstruating women from coming near his shrine.

Mawu-lisa Sorji Alioli and Sapata

These are divinities highly regarded by the Ewe of Ghana people as protectors of their land. *Mawu-lisa* is the supreme deity of the Ewe people and is twins in number. The female (*mawu*) is represented by the moon while the male (*Lisa*) is presented by the sun. The two of them are husband and wife and are said to have seven pairs of twins, which later became major gods in the Ewe land. There are cults established for their worship throughout Ewe society by the people and red wooden statues with large breasts and a crescent holding in one hand are symbols representing it in Ewe society.

However, the Ewe people also believe that there is a spiritual being that must have existed before *Mawu* and had the power of creating *Mawu*. This spiritual being in Ewe religious thought is another god-called “so” behind so is *nana Buluku* and *Da* who is another kind of force that assisted *mawu* in the creation of the world. Therefore, the thunder divinity of Ewe land, which is represented by a ram, painted red, with lightning coming out of his mouth and with two axes carved like lightning by his sides. This divinity is powerful and mostly feared by Ewe people because he can strike a wicked person and destroy the objects used by witches and wizards. So is an angry divinity that sends down axes upon people and inanimate

objects like trees whenever he is angry. He is generally believed to own the heavens and can send heat, rain, and fertility on the crops in the world to make human beings happy.

The Ewe people also worship earthly divinity called Ali/Li is believed to be the chief divinity in the pantheon of the earthly divinities (*sapata*), and is popularly called the “king of earth”. Li is also the divinity of sickness that makes people to suffer small pox whenever he sends it. For this reason, offensive and euphemistic expressions are used by Ewe people whenever someone is ill to show that it is the king who makes him to suffer such kind of sickness. Furthermore, the Akan people of the Ashanti, Fante and the Tiv ethnic have pantheons of divinities, which are channels, and manifestations of the Supreme Deity Himself. They worshipped these divinities performing certain rites known as *aboson*. Moreover, they act as intermediaries between the supreme deity and other creatures’ especially human beings who they guide. The divinities come from the Supreme Being where they derived their powers and are part of Him. They serve as minister of the supreme deity and mouthpiece in the universe.

Among the Akan, for example, *Nzame/Onyame* is both male and female divinities, which are principally symbolized by the sun and moon respectively. It is believed that the sun shot humanity with fire, which animate respectively. It is believed that the sun shot humankind with the fire, which animate into human veins and make man to live, while the moon created man with water. The lesser divinities are spirits, which dwell in the trees, animals, and inanimate objects. They are the most powerful spirits, which inhabit the rivers and lakes. Sometimes, they are said to bring into existence other divinities that are living in African society. For example, the second son of *Nyame* is said to be *Tano* who created his brother *Bia* the favourite son of *Oyame* of his inheritance and become the river god of the fertile land of western region of Ghana. *Bia* due to disappointment given to him by his brother *Tano* became the river divinity of the barren land of Ivory Coast. Thus, temples and shrines are erected and elaborately decorated by the people for the worship of *Nyame* while many others are scattered around the rivers by the worshippers in Akan land. Finally, the ancient Egyptians have pantheons of divinities, which are parallel to West African people. They have a belief in the existence of the supreme deity and a host of other magical forces. The Egyptian divinities were so numerous and this made many scholars to conclude that the Egyptians were pure polytheists. However, the book of the dead revealed that belief in *Neter* (the Supreme Being) was a form of monotheism practiced by the Egyptian people in pre-literate time.

Tem or Atmu

The Egyptians unlike their counterparts who are living in other African societies seems to believe that the Supreme Being was too great and too remote to concern Himself with the problems of the world. He therefore handed over the administration of the universe to series of divinities that are to be worshipped and propitiated by the Egyptian people. *Tem* or *Atmu* is the oldest of Egyptian gods or divinities, which are, believe to be self-created. They are also regarded by the Egyptian people as arch-divinities who created other gods and human beings. The Egyptians worshipped them in *Helipolis*, which is the centre for prayers and devotions. *Temit* (the female counterpart) of *Tem* and *Ra* (the god of the sun) usurped the place of *Tem* in the 4th Egyptian dynasty. *Ra* was the first god believed to have been created by *Tem* and sacrifices are offered to him as the greatest divinity of the universe. He is symbolised by the sun as his emblem in Egyptian society. *Nu* is the water divinity controlling the great mass of water on earth and is believed to be located in the sky, the resident of the supreme deity, who in his fathomless depth of water created the seed of life. Hence, *Nu* became personified by the Egyptians as the father of the gods in postmodern times.

From the above stated facts, it is right for one to argue with Budge, that the Egyptian religion has lost its concept of monotheism and the idea of the gods due to infiltration by the neighbouring African cultures. Budge, affirms that:

...the truth of the matter is that Egyptian religion has wholly lost the monotheistic elements, found in it and existed in the earliest times. The idea of the gods is a later development of the various competing claims of Egyptian priests. For example, the claim of the priests of Heliopolis that *Ra* (the sun god) is the greatest of all the gods. In competition, the priests of Memphis claimed that *Ptah* (the creator of heaven and earth), formed all other gods. While the priests of other Egyptian cities claimed absolute sovereignty for their own gods and this developed polytheism along side with monotheism. Divinities also proliferate in addition to *Neter* (the Supreme Being).

The argument of Budge given above has clearly shown that even though Egyptian culture seems to lose its original belief in monotheism, nevertheless, the idea of gods is more elaborate than African people who have some divinities but most of them are not elaborate as the ones mentioned above. One fact to be noted here is that, the belief in existence and activities of these divinities are commonly found in all African societies. In addition, in

societies where traditional kings and chiefs exist, they are regarded as sacred or divine kings. Sometimes, there are no clear distinctions drawn between these human rulers and the supreme rulers.

3.3 Functions of Divinities

The divinities have many functions that they perform in African society. These include;

- i. They act as the objective phenomena of African traditional religion. Divinities are entities, which are real to African people and are said to be ministers with portfolios in the theocratic governance of the world. They are functionaries delegated to rule the world, each of them, is given his own territory to administer for example, Sango, Amadioha, Skoba and Xevioso are names of divinities in Yoruba, Igbo, Nupe and Ewe associated with thunder and fire. Moreover, are usually employed to protect the society by the people when such calamities occur.
- ii. They act as intermediaries between the Supreme Being and human beings. Thus, African people usually go through them to the supreme deity as veritable channels. One can use them to reach the Supreme Deity. Priests/priestess and devotees therefore offer day to day sacrifices in their temples and shrines to seek favours and to appease the anger of the Supreme Being through them.
- iii. Divinities are “semi-autonomous agents” who are the executive head of various departments in the monarchical government of the world. People regard them as convenient and appropriate channels through which they can reverence the exaltedness of the Supreme Being.
- iv. Divinities are related to supreme deity in existential order. They are brought forth by the Supreme Being, and have no absolute existence, nor authority of their own. They constitute a half way house where man’s mind cannot obtain the fullest satisfaction except through them. This means that the divinities are means to an end and not end in

them; hence, they cannot do anything with the approval and sanction of the Supreme Being. They have no absolute existence apart from God because their powers and authorities are meaningless apart from God. They are ministers of God in a theocratic government and they act as intermediaries between God and humanity. However, though divinities are subservient to God, the divinities constitute a powerful force in the supra-sensible world in the African thinking

Divinities hold a prominent position in African Traditional Religion as far as the adherents are concerned. They are real to the people and exist with definite functions or duties and each of them functioning within its jurisdiction. Firstly, the divinities function as intermediaries between God and humanity. They are always at hand. The people approach God through these divinities and as such, they receive daily sacrifices. As such, the divinities are semi-autonomous agents, each being the executive head of his or her department in God's monarchical government. Secondly, the divinities are able to foretell the future and prevent misfortune. They however derive this power from God, from whom they derive their existence. This is one of the reasons the divinities are approached on all occasions of life. Even in times of peace, they are sacrificed to as a token of appreciation.

3.4 Spirits in African Traditional Religion

The existence of myriad of spirits is a wide spread belief throughout the African continent. They defy description due to their nature and environmental condition of African society. However, the African people attached more significance to the world of spirits, and they based their classifications on the nature and function each of them performs in African society. Hence, spirits may be classified into five major groups namely; created spirits, disembodied spirits of human beings who have long died, ancestors and malignant spirits.

Created Spirits

These are non-human spirits, which have not yet attained the status of the deities. Mbiti described them as, "common populace of spiritual being which are yet to become deities". Idowu, also referred to them as "simple spirits which co-inhabit African continent" in some West African societies, these created spirits are distinguished from the deities by the functions they perform for the growth of the society. Among the Ashanti of Ghana for example, created spirits are called *asumn* and their names are derived from the *abosom* deities, or

souls of animals' inanimate objects like trees. The Yoruba's of Nigeria refers to this category of spirits whose origin is uncertain as *abiku* (born-to-die spirits) the Igbos called them *arusi*, they believe that this category of spirits are of lower nature than the *Nmuo* deities. For the Boki people of Nigeria, the created spirits are called *Wan-Orin*, while the Tiv people referred to them as *Wan-kujov*, the names above category of spirits are wandering spirits, which specialize in the sadistic and mischief mission of entering into the womb of women to be born again in order to die.

Children who possess such spirits can only be identifying by the help of divination. In addition, to stop such children from going and coming back as the case may be, appropriate rituals and sacrifices are perform by the parents of the children in question. Whether such spirits are merely ghosts, their relationships with the living members of the society are doubtful. The created spirits are therefore invisible spirits, which are thoughtful to be ubiquitous such that no one is sure of their whereabouts. These spirits are in different regions of the African continent where they inhabit as their abodes. The Abaluyia, Banyarwanda, and the Igbos believe that created spirits dwell in the underworld, and the subterranean regions of African continent. The Ewe, Bushmen, Mannu-Mangutu, while the Tiv people believe that the created spirits reside above the earth./ some of them have a conviction that such spirits dwell in the air, the sun, moon, star and in the vault of heaven. It is also interesting to know here that majority of African people believe that created spirits reside in moods, bushes, forests, mountains, trees, ponds, seas, and villages as their abodes. They seem to have more powers than human beings do when they are working together as a group of spirits. However, they can be manipulated by human beings especially those who are specialists in controlling the spirits to do what they want.

Hence, even when human beings paradoxically fear the spirits, they have one conviction that they can drive them away from the society or use them to human advantage. When a spirit possesses a human being, such a spirit speaks through him so that the spirits uses him as a medium of communication. And spirits possession especially unsolicited ones can result into bad effects on the victims who are involve can cause severe tortures on the possessor until the rites of exorcism are performed by the spiritualist in order to drive them away from the victim who has been affected by such an evil spirit in the society. A priest traditional doctor or a diviner are specialists in handling the cases of evil spirits in African society. This relationship, which exists between created spirits and human beings in African society, differs from one community to another and from one culture to another. It is

relationships that exist between the notable among them are, Saussaye, Wedengren, and Ake H. They are the contemporary scholars of the Scandinavian and historians of religions.

Those who identified phenomenology of African religion as a specific discipline or method within *religiouswissenschaft* (the scientific study of religion had stronghold in Germany, Scandinavia, Holland (the Netherlands and Switzerland), Austria, Belgium and African. They also include Brede Kristense, Joachin Wach, Gerardus Vander Leeuw, Bleuler, Mircea Eliade, and Jacquet Waardenburg. These scholars formed the most important contributions to phenomenological study of religion. Other contemporary theologian's whose approaches of phenomenology have contributed to the understanding of the phenomenological study of religion in modern time include; Max Scheler, Paul Ricoeur, Otto, Gerardus Vander Leeuw, Mircea Eliade, Friedoich Schlemcher and Paul Tillich, Edward Farley and Nathcun Solderbton.

3.5 The Living Dead and Ancestral Cult

Ancestors are persons who are physically dead but are still alive in the memory of those who remember them as existing among the living in the community. As long as the deceased's are remembered by the living, they are said to be in the state of "personal immortality" and are externalized in the physical continuation to existence. They can be of Soteriological value to the living members in many ways. According to African understanding, the world is made up of three components: visible, invisible and the metaphysical. These worlds are connected so closely together that we can describe the African world as "mono-sectional". There is a close relation between the visible and invisible world. The departed who have left the visible world, are believed to continue their existence in the invisible and metaphysical worlds. This makes the Africans to interpret death as a rite of passage to the ancestral world. In traditional African religious belief, ancestors are conceived as the symbols of customs of the morals of the society. They are guardians of the tradition and intermediaries between God and the community.

The ancestors guarantee a good and prosperous life for their upright descendants who continue to acknowledge them as mediators with the spirit world on their behalf. The reverse is the case with unworthy descendants. They watch over their descendants positively, ensuring their happiness and welfare and guaranteeing their general well-being. They are seen as immediate sources of/or avenues to a successful life, good health, children and prosperity. They also bless and protect. If the community or individuals break the moral law, ancestors

punish to remind the living of their duties. Ancestors who have died recently are called the “living-dead”. The ancestors visit the community in dreams and visions and give specific orders. Requests are made to them for things, which are believed to be gifts from the spirit world. They mediate the Soteriological goals, which relate to tangible well-being and success for which humans strive in their lives. Their protection gives their descendants spiritual security against inimical powers that may seek to disrupt their lives and such benefits.

The filial bonds between the living and their ancestors make the latter approachable with such requests, while their post-mortar spiritual attainment gives them the opportunity needed to acquire such benefits from the spirit world for their descendants. Naming of children is a common reason why the living-dead speak to a family member. The name of the deceased contains their good character that will be passed on to the next generation. Wrong naming causes sickness or even death. Without naming, the child is not part of the community and is not considered a human being. Thus, to become a living-dead and an ancestor, one must have been a role model in the community. The ancestral cult, however, is not only concerned with success in life, but goes beyond life-after death Soteriology of Africa firmly rooted within its framework. The traditional African belief is that a person may come to different sorts of spiritual existence after death.

He can become a wondering ghost, or take up human life elsewhere on earth without going through the process of re-incarnation. However, the idea of post-mortem existence is to take up a new life in the spirit world of the ancestors, even if one is not ranked as one of them. Mbiti maintains that the living-dead are in *Sasa* (the present) and are still yet to complete the process of dying. They can only move into *Zamani* (the past) as personal spirits and become mere “its” when the last person who could remember them dies. They now lose their identities in antiquity beyond five generations and the living no longer remembers them by names. They become unknown by names and slip back into *Zamani* (the past) with continuous involvement in the affairs of the society. This partial process of re-incarnation involving re-birth is opposed to the Christian concept of resurrection, which promises eternal life. In African religious belief, the departed who were not given admittance into the ancestral world becomes ghosts, haunting the living.

These departed members had lived a bad life, committed suicide, or died without proper burial rites. African traditional “heaven” is therefore, the abode of the ancestors and to be in “hell” is to be an evil spirit. The Styx that must be crossed at death is the gate between lives as a disembodied; restless spirit and the peaceful world of the ancestors, where one is re-integrated into the root of his lineage. At death, the liturgy of libation requests that the

deceased settle into the world and not cause any harm to the living, except those who may be responsible for his death. Libation is also poured out and prayers offered to the ancestors to allow their deceased descendant to join them. The funeral rites are geared towards facilitating the settlement of the deceased into the ancestral world. These rituals, which are passage rites, re-direct the personality soul back to the ancestors and not to God, for the “life-soul” has already departed to God, its maker.

Africans classified death as bad or unnatural deaths, which do not anger well for easy transition. These include the death of infants and children, accidental deaths by drowning, for example, or fire, lightning, pregnancy, falling from tree, death during festivals or periods of mourning, and death due to certain types of abominable disease such as dropsy, leprosy, and small pox and so on. All such deaths suggest the displeasure of the ancestors or the gods and indicate the likelihood of a post-mortem existence outside the pale of the ancestral world. In most cases, such corpses are not even buried in the usual burial ground. Natural death suggests easy transits to an ancestral world, except where proper funeral rites have not been performed. Such a natural death consists in death at a ripe old age or at middle age after a brief illness. During these funerals, white attire is wearied by the living of Signify that the person has just gone “home” to the ancestors. The departed member who die unnatural death or has not fulfilled the requirements of being an ancestor becomes disembodied spirit harmful to the living.

It is believed that the “personality soul” is the seat of psychic phenomena and, disembodied at death; it acquires even more power. The soul, if it is not at rest in the ancestral abode, constitutes a danger to the living. In the case of children who die, it is believed that they continually re-incarnate and die, thus causing their unfortunate parents much pain. Accident victims are believed to be dangerous and vengeful as they haunt the spot where their mishap occurred, continuously dragging others to the same fate. Such spirits are called “wandering spirits” or “those who died an untimely or bloody death”. The African traditional “heaven” is, therefore, the world of the ancestors. This Soteriological belief has been resilient to the Christian influence. In spite of its long history, in the continent, the Christian Church has found the traditional funeral rites a challenger to its Soteriological teaching of the resurrection, followed by eternal bless or eternal damnation, presented as Heaven and Hell. The persistence of this traditional Soteriology in spite of the Church’s intolerance has, in the current milieu of contextualization led some African theologians to suggest that the traditional ancestral Soteriology may be accepted as a conceptual parallel to the communion of Saints in Christianity.

3.6 Magic

Magic is the performance or utterance of set of words and act to control or bend the powers of the world in order to satisfy the will of humanity. It is the manipulation and use of impersonal powers, words, formulae, and spell to control the universe. Magic is the art of producing effects with the use of chance, spell, and ritual to govern or to control the supernatural forces in the world. It employs impersonal forces of nature to control the resources of the world for its own benefits. Idowu asserts that magic is an attempt of humanity to tap, control, and manipulate the laws of nature and supernatural resources of the universe for its own benefits. It serves humankind geocentricism and shortcut to life. Magic is also a supposed supernatural power that makes impossible things happen or gives somebody control over the forces of nature and it can be manipulated for positive and negative purpose by human beings. Encarta Premium maintained that magic is used in many ways, these include healing, keeping away evil, seeking the truth, and for vengeful purposes.

Ellwood posits that magic is the art of attaining objectives, acquiring knowledge, or performing works of wonder through supernatural or non-rational means. Techniques used in magic typically include chants and spells, gestures or actions that often have a symbolic relation to the desired result, and the use of substances believed to have a special relationship with the powers needed to accomplish the intended purpose. Magic is the handling of nature and bending them to man has will to safeguard his welfare and shaping his destiny. Magic involves at least a partial symbolic recognition of the society's spiritual worldview and of its divinities and myths. In this respect, magic often merges with religion, and indeed the line between the two is frequently blurred. Religion, however, is usually regarded as the public acknowledgement of spirituality, while magic tends to be private and oriented toward worship. A distinction can also be drawn between white and black magic: White magic is employed for benign ends, and black magic is used to harm others. Black magic is sometimes referred to as witchcraft or sorcery, even though many people who practice witchcraft do not seek to cause harm. Magic in the supernatural sense is different from stage magic, in which apparent magical powers produced entertainment through such means as sleight of hand. Magic is of three major types. These include:

Homeopathic Magic

This type of magic operates on the principle that like begets like. It is the use of small portions of a thing to represent and affect the whole. In applying this form of magic, a magician tries to produce an effect by merely imitating it with the aid of supernatural power. Working on this principle of similarity, a person can injure or destroy an enemy by injuring or destroying an image of him believing that just as the image suffers so does the enemy. Homeopathic magic can also be used for the benefit of the society. For example, a barren woman can be asked to carry a carved image on her back in imitation of a mother with a child. A person who has a compound fracture can be asked to produce a fowl whose leg would be broken at the same point as that of the patient. The magician then treats the wound of the fowl and performs the magical rites. As the fowl recovers so, the patient recovers.

Sympathetic Magic

Sympathetic magic mostly use in witchcraft and voodooism where a doll or image can be made and with incantations be said to represent somebody and whatever is done to the image will begin an affect the person. For example if a pin is employed to strike the doll, the person would begin to bleed and feel pain from that same spot.

Contagious Magic

Contagious Magic is the form of magic that influences contact with another that ibelieved to be magically charged. Whatever one person or that the person has met will affect that person. This type of magic is based on the principle that things that have once been associated must remain ever afterwards in contact even after they have been separated. For example, it is believed in most African communities that fingernails, hair, spittle, urine and placenta among other things can br used to harm anybody hence all these things are guarded jealously. For example, till date among the Yoruba it is the child's father that placenta of a child would be handed over to and he in turn will ensure that it is safely buried and keeps the knowledge of the site to himself. This type of magic is also used to the benefit of the society in that it is used for protection. For example, the teeth oof a snake or lion or any other wild animal can be wrapped in leather as talisman. They then worn on the neck or the waist and these prevent such animals form attacking the weare. Mostly hunters too wear gunpowder as a protection against gunshot accidents.

Similarities and Dissimilarities between Magic and Religion

Similarities

- Both magic and religion deal with a power wholly other than humanity itself. The two recognizes the transcendental, the supernatural, and the power beyond humanity.
- Both magic and religion have a common root. They both arise because of humanity's sense of need. They are the result of humanity's attempt to deal with the mystery that surrounds their immediate physical environment.
- Both religion and magic are symbolic. There are objects representing the supernatural entities in both religion and magic. Such objects in turn are endowed with magical or religious significance.
- Taboos are common to both religion and magic because there are some things that must be avoided for efficacy of both.
- Magic and religion arise from the desire of humanity to dominate and have powers over others. When they possess such powers, fear, awe, and respected are created out of the situation for them.
- In summary, magic and religion have supernatural frame of reference and appeal to man's aindequacy and are able to give power to those who are in search of them for dominating others.

The Dissimilarities

- Magic deals with evolution of religion by trying to satisfy the needs of individuals in the society, while religion deals with reciprocal relationship between the supernatural being and the individuals in the society.
- Magic impersonal powers, words, and formulae and spell to manipulate and to control nature, while religion encourages trust, dependence, and submission of people to the Supreme Being.
- Magic enables humankind to get good things in life done without much suffering, while religion depends on the power of the Supreme Being to provide everything for humanity.
- Magic deals with non-human and more arbitrary order of reality while religion seeks foster idea of fellowship between human beings and God.

- Magic seems to make some things work together for humanity's good with force. Apart from its public concern as in the case of rainmaking, the hunter, trader, students, or politicians for selfish ends use magic at the personal level. Religion is more concerned with the good of the whole community by giving sanction to common laws and norms. Therefore, religion gives inner sense of sanity, peace, and self-being but magic does not provide these.
- Magic tends to show human beings how to obtain certain good things through their effort. Through magic, power is to satisfy individual's needs. While religion puts power in the hands of the Divine and human beings can have communion and communication with the Divine. This is to say that religion implies trust, dependence, and submission. In conclusion, magic commands and religion implores.
- Magic on the other hand would operate in spite of the moral status or ethical standard of the ones involved. It operates in spite of the moral status or ethical standard of the ones involved. Religion requires high moral standards on the part of its adherents. It holds that humanity must maintain high moral life in order to maintain communion with the Divine.

The stated above differences have been questioned today by scholars like Howell, Edward, Sapur, Jomo, Kenuatto, Wagner Gunner and a host of others who believed that magic and religion are inseparable. Howell, for example affirmed that human beings rally want magic to get good things done without much sufferings. It gives them a soothing conviction that they can take care of themselves by tossing nature around and pulling imaginary worries of life. It is another form of religion, which quickened the nerves of the individuals and the society in order to allay the urges or panic disunion. Howell's presupposition above explicitly link magic with religion as channels through which humanity ceaseless attempts to discover the spiritual serenity.

Razer asserts that magic is broadly group into two groups namely: white or good magic and black or bad magic. White magic is commonly practice in African because of the benefit people seems to get from it such as protection against evil forces and to predict the future events in the society. It involves the use of charms, amulets, herbs, seeds, power, skin, feathers, and chanting of magical formulae to cause rainfall by the rainmakers. The African people on the other hand, secretly practice black magic for evil purposes. It is intend primarily to harm people and most often people who practiced it do so at night, for the disapproval of the society. Thus, African people always associate black magic with witchcraft

and sorcery, the most feared practices in African traditional religion. Idowu, listed above divided magic into two groups namely: imitative magic and contagious magic. Imitative magic is popularly called sympathetic or homeopathic magic. It is the magic, which resemble the cause or have effects upon one another. For example, hunting an effigy or image of a person, Frazer opined that, the magician operates on the principles of similarity and piece of soil. There is homoeopathic and initiative magic and these work on the principle of similarity. There is also contagious magic and this operates on the principle of contact.

3.7 Sorcerers

Sorcery is the application of bad magic on people or object. It is generally held in Africa that sorcery is use to harm people, destroy life or property, and disrupt the well-being of an individual and to change a happy destiny to an unhappy one. Sorcery stands for anti-social employment oof physical powers. Thus, a person who uses bad magic is called a sorcerer and they are usually feared by all because of their mishieousness. It is believed that sorcerers are capable of employing all sorts of ways to attack other people and their belongings. They can even spit on the lions or any other animal to attack their target. They can even spit on the ground and command their spittle to go and harm another person or even go to the extent of invoking evil spirits to attack or possess their victims.

They call upon lightening to attack their victims; they also cause elephantiasis of the legs and others have used direct poisoning on their victims. It is also possible for them to attack their enemies through invocation and incantation. In doing this, they usually employ sympathetic or contagious magic. For example, they can prepare an effigy and invoke the spirit of their target into the effigy. After this, they can harm the person through whaever is done to the image into which the person's spirit has been invoked. For preventing themselves from being harmed by sorcerers, the use of charms, amulets and various type of medicines, either taken directly (orally) or through incisions is prevalent.

3.8 Witchcraft

Witchcraft is the manifestation of mystical powers, which are inborn in a person or acquired in various ways, while sorcery on the other hand; is use by black magic and medicines against other people in the society. Witchcraft and sorcery are use by witches and wizards for positive and negative purposes in African society. A witch/wizard possesses

innate powers within her/him, which help her/him to harm people and to do extraordinary things beyond human abilities. Sometimes, a look at a person can harm him/her. The psychic powers which witches and wizards possess make them to perform evil acts in the society. Their desire for human flesh make them to cause-to-cause sickness, accidents and sometimes even death of other members in the society.

Characteristics of Witches and Wizards

Witches are spiritual entities who have special characteristics that distinguished them from other people in the society. These include:

- i. Most witches are female (women) but not all of them.
- ii. A witch/wizard is evil within herself/himself and this enables her/him to perform wicked acts because of her/his nature. Some people think that she/he is wicked because of the witchcraft substance, which a witch contains in the stomach. This physical feature makes most people to regard a witch and wizard as an abnormal human being. Sometimes, a witch/wizard proves to be a threat to everybody in the society and not only his or her enemies who might offend them.
- iii. Witch/wizards are against the progress of the society and because of that, people fear them. She/he is always dangerous to people. She/he is different from a sorcerer who is only dangerous when excited by his will power to do such evil.
- iv. A witch/wizard strictly speaking does not use medicines, material apparatus, rites, and utter spells to perform her/his duties because his/her powers are innate in the mind.
- v. A witch/wizard uses her/his spirit to perform evil acts, while the body remains at home. Her/his spirit may fly at night and congregate with other witches/wizards during their meeting days to harm other people, dance completely naked, eating human flesh and sucking their blood. The unsatisfied desire of a witch/wizard for human flesh made her/him to commit acts feared by members of the society.
- vi. Every kind of misfortune and evil acts is the work of witches/wizards in African society. Sometimes, the wasting away of a person's body and the swelling of his/her internal organs are attributed to the evil actions of witches and wizards who might be interested in eating flesh and drinking his blood.
- vii. A witch/wizard use black magic to destroy their enemies. Their presence and activities in the society is due to these mysterious prerequisites enumerated above.

These listed above characteristics distinguished witches or wizards from ordinary human beings in African society. Paul Bohannan and Laura Bohannan observed that witches/wizards possess vital powers, which are equivalent in many respects to mana and tabu. These powers according to Akiga are “employed for strengthening life and ensuring prosperity of the members in the society. They can only be used for destruction and weakening of the community life”. This signifies that witchcraft (tsav) in African society can be, employed for malevolent and benevolent purposes by witches/wizards. This is the reason why autopsy or traditional post-mortem examination in most African societies to ascertain whether the dead person was actually a witch/wizard or not was performed. However, where the deceased person had shown the sign of witchcraft growth substance around his/her heart, it was generally concluded that such a person killed himself or herself. Thus, in African society, the acquisition of witchcraft is in different ways. Most people believe that it is hereditary. However, a person can be born without witchcraft. In addition, a person who is not a witch/wizard can give birth to a wizard. This also clearly indicates that witchcraft is not infectious but acquires a person in the following ways:

- a. Through purchase of it from those who possess the substance or powers in abundance
- b. Through inheritance from the parents who possessed such witchcraft powers and intended to pass over to their loved sons or daughters before they die. The father or mother could also give it to their children while young and the ceremony on behalf of his parent(s).
- c. The elders may simply choose any young person and initiate him/her into witchcraft.

All these ways of acquiring witchcraft in African society indicate that witchcraft has no cult and no age discrimination. Both old and young people are often accused of witchcraft activities and sorcery and since they are lovers of darkness, people usually referred to them as people of the night. The Azande people believe that witches and wizards dispatch spirits, soul, and substance of witchcraft to cause danger to other people in the society during their meeting times at night. Thus, in Tiv society children are strongly advised not to go out at night and to collect meat from people especially elderly ones. It is feared that such people might be witches or wizards who could initiate them or lure them into flesh debt (gba ipindi) which they must pay back with human flesh. An accused person is therefore; compelled to take the oath of swem in the midst of elders stating his case thus:

Tiv Version	English Translation
Swem ne a wuan a er me a er kwagh bo ne yo, swen a muran anigahar, a nandden ityongh, a shi a moron yau. Kpa a luer me a fa kwagh sha mi gay o, me sua kor	If I have done what they are accusing me of, let swen swell my legs, stomach and cause me severe headache. But if I have not done it, let me be vindicated.

After saying the above words, he/she carries the Swem pot around the community-visiting compound after compound singing sorrowful songs and throwing ashes from Swem pot at the doors of each house. This is a symbol that he has binds witches and wizards in the society by his or her oath and hopes for justice. Thus, the Swem oath is for various reasons in Tiv society and it is serving as a remedy for solving such problems in the society. Witches are mostly women, though some men hold important offices. It is believe that some people are born with the powers of witchcraft while others acquired it. The constitutional witches and wizards use witchcraft and sorcery for the growth of the society, while contagious witches and wizards employed their magical powers for negative purposes. It is in this regard that Monica Wilson asserts that witches and wizards in Africa are embodiments of evils, which they represent in the society. They are conspirators of evil and are malignant beings that seek to destroy people’s civilization by attacking members of such cultures. They provide humanity with ability to worship the supreme deity through certain channels such as the deities, ancestors, and spirits and to offer sacrifices in order to appease them.

The Differences between Witchcraft and Sorcery

Evans-Pritchard one of the greatest authorities on witchcraft and sorcery opined that, lack of agreement in the use of the magical powers among witches/wizards led to confusion among scholars in modern times. Nevertheless, he made distinctions between a witch and a sorcerer that a witch acts without rites or spells and uses hereditary psychophysical powers to attain its ends. While a sorcery uses techniques of magic to achieve its desire goals in the society. Witchcraft and sorcery are enemies of humanity. Parrinder and Middleton differentiation between witchcraft and sorcery show that a witch possesses innate powers, which make her capable of doing extraordinary things beyond human intelligence. While a sorcerer possesses powers, which are for his personal use, he is not a threat to members of the

society in which he lives. Field who studied West African witchcraft, made the same distinction between witchcraft and sorcery based on Parrinder and Middleton categorization when he states:

...the distinctive features of witchcraft and sorcery are that they have no apparatus, rite ceremonies, incantations and invocations connected with them, where a witch possess magical powers which enables her to harm other people, a sorcerer on the other hand employ his innate powers to achieve his desire goals in the society.

This distinction between a witch and a sorcerer is similar to that of Akamba people of Uganda. Witchcraft is an innate faculty that introduces person into the secret society of witches and wizards. This power enables a witch or wizard to use method to remove victim intestines without making a visible cut on the body. Sorcerer on the other hand, uses certain methods, which enable him to accomplish his evil purpose(s). Winter clarifying between witchcraft and sorcery further indicates that sorcery is perform for ordinary motives such as envy, jealousy and hatred. While witchcraft is inexplicable because witches perform activities to harm people by causing accidents and even death in order to satisfy their desire for human flesh. P. Bitek, who studied witchcraft and sorcery of the central Luo, asserts that witchcraft is an involuntary act inherited from somebody or blown into a person by his father. A witch is force to do evil, which makes her to act blindly without any positive. When these forces came upon her, she is regards as a victim, prisoner, or an instrument of witchcraft. A sorcerer, on the other hand is a responsible person who is in full possession of himself but uses medicines and poison to harm other people living in the society.

Witchcraft is of two types, namely: Laya or (the evil eye) and Latal or (the power that cause a person possessed by people with bloodshot eyes. They are the set of people who can cause harm by merely looking at a person. The latter group uses material substances to affect the victims. Sometimes, witches to kill their victims and to feast on them employ the power of Latal. They also dug the corpse of the deceased who are bury under their graves, and use their legs and arms for stirring dishes, while their skulls are used as cup for drinking water during their meetings. However, these witches because of their uncontrollable urges, people usually punish them severely.

4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit, you have studied about the spirits world in African society and the spirit forces that are dominant features of African traditional religion. Apart from this, we discussed the types, functions and relationship between these spirit forces as well as their relationship with God.

5.0 SUMMARY

The following are the major points you have learnt in this unit:

- The divinities hold a permeant position in African traditional religion.
- God creates them and the people regard as sons and daughters of God.
- They have no absolute existence apart from God because their powers and authorities are meaningless apart from God.
- They are ministers of God in a theocratic government and act as intermediary between God and humanity.
- The ancestors are the living dead in African traditional religion and perform various roles in the development of the society.
- They are pre-requisites for one to become an ancestor such as dead of old age, good burial rites, moral life, having children and good death.
- Spirits are apparitional entities, which form separate categories of beings from divinities and are of three types: ghost spirits, born to die spirits and guardian spirits.
- The belief in witchcraft is a common feathure of African traditional religion
- Magic is that which makes the impossible things happen or that which gives somebody control over the forces of nature.
- There are three forms of magic homoeopathic, sympathetic, and contagious magic.
- Belief in sorcery is prevalent in Africa
- Sorcery is able to cause misfortune to human beings.
- Magic and religion arise from the desire of humanity to dominate and have powers over others.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. List and discuss the divinities in African societies
2. Explain the functions of ancestors in African traditional religion
3. Differential between witchcraft and sorcery in African society
4. Discuss the relationship between divinities and spirits in African belief
5. Evaluate the position and role of the divinities in African traditional religion

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Online Resources

Iya Olamide, “Where Ogun Fears to Tread” an Internet article available in *Roots and Rooted*, an Internet Magazine on www.rootsandrooted.org.htm.

MODULE 3

Unit 1 Concept of African Cosmology and Cosmogony

Unit 2 History of Cosmology from Ancient to Modern Times

Unit 3 Creation in African Traditional Religion

Unit 4 Worship and Sacrifice in African Traditional Religion

Unit 5 Ritual Symbolism in African Traditional Religion

Unit 6 Rites of Passage in African Traditional Religion

Unit 7 Concept of Death and after Life in African Traditional Religion

UNIT 1 THE CONCEPT OF AFRICAN COSMOLOGY AND COSMOGONY

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In module 2, you have learnt about the African religious mythology, the religious concepts, and the spirit forces in African traditional religion. You also learnt about African theism and the concept of humanity in African traditional religion. In this unit, we shall look at the concept of African cosmology and cosmogony in African traditional religion. Every religion has its beliefs typical of cosmological and cosmogonic characteristics. African traditional religion is not an exception in this regard. Cosmology and cosmogony are concerned with the study of the origin of the cosmos (or of reality itself at its largest scales, including theories, its dynamics, evolution, and future).

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Define cosmology
- Describe the term cosmogony
- Discuss the different types of cosmogonic myths
- State the importance of cosmogonic myths in African traditional religion

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Definition of Cosmology

Cosmology is a term, which derives from the Greek κόσμος, *kosmos* "world" and -λογία, *-logia*, meaning the study of the origin, evolution, and eventual fate of the universe. In the general usage, cosmology is the study of the universe at its large scale, including themes of origin, its dynamics, evolution, and future. Cosmology is the placing of man in the universe in relationship to all other entities. It is the scientific study of the origin of the cosmos or of reality itself. Although the word *cosmology* is recent and first used in 1730 in Christian Wolff's *Cosmologia Generalis*, the study of the universe has a long history involving science, philosophy, esotericism and religion. Related studies include cosmogony, which focuses on the origin of the Universe, and cosmography, which maps the features of the Universe. Cosmology relates to the study of astronomy, but while the former is concerned with the Universe as a whole, the latter deals with individual celestial objects. Physics and astrophysics have played a central role in shaping the understanding of the universe through

scientific observation and experiment. Physical Cosmology has been shaped through both mathematics and observation of the whole universe. The universe is generally understood to have begun with the Big Bang, followed almost instantaneously by cosmic inflation; an expansion of space from which the universe is thought to have emerged 13.798 ± 0.037 billion years ago.

3.2 What is Cosmogony?

Cosmogony in a broad sense is theories about the origin of the universe. It is also refers to myths which explain the origin and organization of the universe from the fewest possible elements or from some first principles. In this sense, cosmogony includes creation myths, which trace the origin of the universe to the activity of some pre-existing divine being. Contrary to Okot P'bitek's assertion those myths of origin in African religions have no religious significance. Cosmogonic myths are very fertile source materials for traditional African religious beliefs, as has been pointed out earlier. African cosmogonies not only provide the symbolic categories by which Africans understand the organization of their universe, but also suggest patterns by which they try to maintain the balance and the harmony of the world through ritual. Cosmogonies are therefore an invaluable source of African religious beliefs and practices.

3.3 Typology of Cosmology

There are different types of cosmology. These include:

Physical cosmology

Physical cosmology is the branch of physics and astrophysics that deals with the study of the physical origins and evolution of the Universe. It also includes the study of the nature of the Universe on its very largest scales. In its earliest form, it was the science of celestial mechanics, which studies the heavens. Physical cosmology is scholarly and scientific study of the origin, evolution, large-scale structures and dynamics, and ultimate fate of the universe, as well as the scientific laws that govern these realities. It is studied by scientists, such as astronomers, and theoretical physicists; and academic philosophers, such as metaphysicians, philosophers of physics, and philosophers of space and time. The Greek philosophers

Aristarchus of Samos, Aristotle, and Ptolemy proposed different cosmological theories. In particular, the geocentric Ptolemaic system was the accepted theory to explain the motion of the heavens until Nicolaus Copernicus, and subsequently Johannes Kepler and Galileo Galilei proposed a heliocentric system in the 16th century. This is one of the most famous examples of epistemological rupture in physical cosmology.

Physical cosmology is the study of the largest-scale structures and dynamics of the Universe and is concerned with fundamental questions about its formation, evolution, and ultimate fate. For most of human history, it was a branch of metaphysics and religion. Cosmology as a science originated with the Copernican principle, which implies that celestial bodies obey identical physical laws to those on Earth, and Newtonian mechanics, which first allowed us to understand those physical laws. Physical cosmology began in 1915 with the development of Albert Einstein's general theory of relativity, followed by major observational discoveries in the 1920s of Edwin Hubble discovered that the Universe contains a huge number of external galaxies beyond our own Milky Way. Works by Vesto Slipher and others also showed that the universe is expanding.

These advances made it possible to speculate about the origin of the Universe, and allowed the establishment of the Big Bang Theory, by Fr. Georges Lemaitre, as the leading cosmological model. A few researchers still advocate a handful of alternative cosmologies; however, most cosmologists agree that the Big Bang theory best explains observations. Dramatic advances in observational cosmology since the 1990s, including the cosmic microwave background, distant supernovae and galaxy redshift surveys, have led to the development of a standard model of cosmology. This model requires the universe to contain large amounts of dark matter and dark energy whose nature gives detailed predictions, which are in excellent agreement with many diverse observations. Cosmology draws heavily on the work of many disparate areas of research in theoretical and applied physics. Areas relevant to cosmology include particle physics experiments and theory, theoretical and observational astrophysics, general relativity, quantum mechanics, and plasma physics.

Modern Scientific Cosmology

Modern scientific cosmology contains Big Bang theory and it began in 1917 with Albert Einstein's publication of his final modification of general relativity in the paper *Cosmological Considerations of the General Theory of Relativity*. General relativity prompted cosmogonists such as Willem de Sitter, Karl Schwarzschild and Arthur Eddington

to explore the astronomical consequences of the theory, which enhanced the growing ability of astronomers to study very distant objects. Prior to these physicists assumed that, the Universe was static and unchanging. In parallel to this dynamic approach to cosmology, one long-standing debate about the structure of the cosmos was coming to a climax. Mount Wilson astronomer Harlow Shapley championed the model of a cosmos made up of the Milky Way star system only; while Heber Curtis argued for the idea that spiral nebulae were star systems in their own right – island universes. This difference of ideas came to a climax with the organization of the Great Debate at the meeting of the (US) National Academy of Sciences in Washington on 26 April 1920. The resolution of this debate came with the detection of novae in the Andromeda galaxy by Edwin Hubble in 1923 and 1924. Their distance established spiral nebulae well beyond the edge of the Milky Way.

Evidence of gravitational waves in the infant universe may have been uncovered by the microscopic examination of the focal plane of the BICEP2 radio telescope. Subsequent modelling of the universe explored the possibility that the cosmological constant, introduced by Einstein in his 1917 paper, may result in an expanding universe, depending on its value. Thus the Big Bang model was proposed by the Belgian priest Georges Lemaître in 1927 which was subsequently corroborated by Edwin Hubble's discovery of the red shift in 1929 and later by the discovery of the cosmic microwave background radiation by Arno Penzias and Robert Woodrow Wilson in 1964. These findings were a first step to rule out some of many alternative physical cosmologies.

Recent observations made by the COBE and WMAP satellites observing this background radiation have effectively, in many scientists' eyes, transformed cosmology from a highly speculative science into a predictive science, as these observations matched predictions made by a theory called Cosmic inflation, which is a modification of the standard Big Bang model. This has led many to refer to modern times as the "Golden age of cosmology". On 17 March 2014, astronomers at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics announced the detection of gravitational waves, providing strong evidence for inflation and the Big Bang.

Religious or Mythological Cosmology

Religious or mythological cosmology is a body of beliefs based on the historical, mythological, religious, and esoteric literature and traditions of creation and eschatology. It deals with the world as the totality of space, time and all phenomena. Historically, it has a

broad scope, and in many cases founded in religion. The ancient Greeks did not draw a distinction between this use and their model for the cosmos. However, in modern use it addresses questions about the Universe, which are beyond the scope of science. It is different from religious cosmology in that it approaches these questions using philosophical or dialectical methods. Generally, Africa is not very rich in mythology. Some groups however do have complex myths. A researcher should look out for these and make the most of whatever there is. Parrinder who has collected and published some African myths and stories made this significant remark about the value of myths in the study of African Religion. For Africans to record the myths themselves help to reveal the Africans' own thoughts about religion and life and so, with illustrations of art, this begins to provide the basis for a scripture of African religion.

3.4 Creation Myths in African Traditional Religion

The Bambara Creation Myths

Hermann Baumann's conclusion after studying some 2,500 African myths was that central to the African mythology stands a creative principle, which is in most instances identified with the High God and the first man formed by his creative power. The fashion in which this man came on earth how he lived and what he experienced is the subject of nearly all-African mythology. Many African myths go beyond the creation of man, and speculate about the creation of the world and the entire universe: including the sun, moon, and star. Sometimes God is describe as creating from some pre-existing matter like clay sand, wood, or water. In such cases, the earth, sun, and moon are mould out of these substances. In many African myths, the concept of 'creation out of nothing' is not explicit. Some other myths, like the Dogon and Bambara myth discussed here, ascribe the production to a divine 'flat' or creative pronouncement. In some cases, God employs the services of an arch-divinity subordinate to himself to affect his creative activities.

Creation myths illustrate the relationship between the Supreme Being and the deities in African Religion. From Central Africa, we discuss the myth of the Fang of Gabon, while the fifth myth is from the Abaluyia of Nyanza province of Kenya. The Fang and the Abaluyia myths strike one as having some resemblance with the biblical creation stories. Southern African is not rich in creation of myths. However, the myth of the Malozi of Zambia, on the withdrawal of God, which we give in the second part, shows that myths from Southern

African are similar to those from other parts of Africa. Levy-Bruht thinks that the myths of primitive men are no more than folktales, which are for entertainment. Many authors do not share his view on this point. Malinowski observed that the Traditional Islanders whom he studied clearly distinguish myths (Liliu) from both folktales and legends. Myths about deities were formerly matters of faith, 'a sacred tale' believed to have happened.

Thus, according to the Bambara cosmogony, in the beginning there was the original void, 'Gla'. From this void came a voice, which in expressing its desire to create produces its double and joins itself to it. From this union arises unorganised matter. Then came the spirit, 'Yo', who is the mind, the consciousness that governs the world. from 'Yo', was born FARO, master of the world and God of Water, who first created the world, and later organised it after the disorders provoked by the jealousy of the first woman. The excess of the power of the tree of life (Balanza) had marked the first creation. The tree was the second creation or reorganization of the universe marked by a definite distinction between the vegetable, animal, and human orders, and by the introduction among men of the techniques of work.

The Dogon Cosmogony

According to Graule and Dieterin the Dogon of Mali sees the order of the universe as it, is a projection infinitely magnified of what took place in the *Kize Uzi* (the little thing) the smallest cultivated seed. The internal vibration in this seed (*Digitaria Exilis*) makes the unfolding matter to move in a zigzag, cutting the seed into seven segments. At the seventh segment, the seed bursts its enveloping sheet. The zigzag movement represents the alternation of opposites reflecting the principle of twines, which should ideally direct the proliferation of life. The seven segments together with the seed itself represent the divine octet (8 divine beings) by which the universe was organized. While the bursting of the sheet represents the principle of disorder and incompleteness in the universe. The creative process took place in '*Aduno Tal*' (the egg of the universe). As a result of the same process reflected in *Kize Uzi*, the egg divided into two placentas each of which contained a pair of twin *Nommo*. These emanations of Ama or Supreme God exist from the beginning. These twin beings were each equipped with two spiritual principles of opposite sex, each of them was therefore a pair (thus forming the ideal octet).

The male *Nommo* in one placenta emerged before the time appointed by Amma and flew down with a torn part of its placenta intending there with to create a world of its own. This being, *Yurugu* and his earth were from the beginning solitary and impure. *Yurugu*

therefore returned to heaven to recover the female Nommo, but Amma had already given her away to the other pair. Yurugu returned to the dry world and began to procreate incomplete beings, offspring's of incest for he created from his own placenta. Instead of destroying the world thus disordered by Yurugu's rebellion, Amma decided to restore order in it. He therefore killed the Nommo of the other half of the egg and sprinkled her blood all over the earth. In this way, Amma regained control of the world, and was able to impose his order upon it. After five days, Amma restored him to life and made him master and ruler of the universe. From the other part of Nommo, Amma also created four other twin Nommo (Divine octet), whose offspring's became the ancestors of the Dogon. They descended from heaven on an arch with everything needed to restore and fructify the earth, and sustain the human race. With the skill taught by Nommo, social life came into existence. The arch delimits space, measures times and the seasons. Death appeared due to the activity of Yurugu.

Yoruba Creation Myth

According to this Yoruba myth, in the beginning, all the deities lived with the Supreme God, *Olorun* in heaven. The earth below covered by primeval water. *Olorun* gave *Orishanla* (god of whiteness) a chain, some earth in a small shell, and a five toed chicken and ordered him to go down to create the earth. At the gate of heaven, he saw some gods having a party. He drank too much palm wine and fell asleep intoxicated. *Oduduwa*, his younger brother, took the materials and descended to the earth below on a chain. *Oduduwa* threw the earth on the ground and dropped the five-toed chicken upon it. The chicken began to scratch the earth spreading it in all directions, and as far as the ends of the earth. After the chameleon had tested the firmness of the earth, he stepped on it as 'Idio' where he made his home, and where his grave in Ife is located today. Later, in a quarrel, which ensued between *Orishanla* and *Oduduwa* over the worship of the earth, the other deities took sides, but *Olorun* intervened and made peace between them. To *Oduduwa*, who created the earth, he has the right to own the earth and rule over it, and he became the first king of Ife. To *Orishanla* he gave the power to mould human bodies and he became the creator of men. *Olorun* also sent to the earth *Oranife* (Ife god of thunder) to keep peace between them, with *Ifa* (god of divination) and *Eleshije* (Ife god of medicine) as their companions.

The Fang Creation Myth

At the beginning of things says a Fang Creation Myth, was Nzame God, even before, man, animals and plants came to be. With Nzame were two other divine beings, *Mbere* and *Nkwa* Nzame made the heaven and the earth, and reserved the heaven for himself. He then made everything in the earth including the sun, moon, stars, animals, and plants. With the help of *Mbere* and *Nkwa*, he made man like themselves, full of life, force, and beauty. To the first man whom they called *Fam*, they gave power over the entire creation. However, *Fam* became full of himself, rebelled, and refused to worship *Nzame* and scorned him in a song which says ‘God on high, man on the earth...God is God, man is man, everyone in his house, everyone for himself’. Furious, God destroyed the world with thunder and fire. God had promised the first man immortality. Therefore, burnt *Fam* still lives in an unknown place; Nzame again took council with *Mbere* and *Nkwa* and recreated the world, and created another man called *Sekume* and gave him a wife *Mbongwe*. Man is now made of a body (*Gnoul*) and a spirit (*Nsissim*). Man dies when the spirit goes away, but spirit does not die. The spirit lives in the eye, the shiny point in the eye that is *Nsissim*.

The Abaluyia Myth

The Abaluyia myth of creation states that *Wele Xakaba*, the Supreme Being and giver of all things, created the world, as we know it. First, he made his own abode heaven, which to prevent from falling, he propped up with pillars. He then created two assistants, *Wele Muxove* and *Wele Murumwa*. Then, he created the moon, sun, stars and clouds and fixed them in the sky. God, then made the clouds to produce rain, and created rainbows to stop rain. The creation of the heavens took two days. God’s act of creation is said to be like lightening and done in a mysterious way. After the creation of the heavens, God created the earth to provide his assistants and the things he has created where to work. The earth had mountains, valleys, and depressions. To enjoy the things God created the first man called *Mwambu*, and gave him a woman called *Sela*, as wife. God provided the earth with water and plants and animals, and instructed man to eat animals with hoofs, and refrain from eating crawling animals with hoofs, and refrain from eating crawling animals and scavenger birds. He gave a young buffalo to the couple as a domesticated cow. *Mwambu* later knew his wife *Sela*, and she begot a son *Lilambo*. They also begot a daughter called *Nasio*. These two also begot children. Thus began the spread of human beings on earth. God completed the work of creation in six days, and rested on the seventh day because it was a bad day.

Human Beings and Animals Myths

Human beings and animals appear in stories sometimes explaining things in nature or just do heroic deeds. Numerous myths told in Africa about its biggest animal, the elephant, whose very size makes it unassailable in nature, except by man, who has weapons and magic to kill it. In the African fables, the elephant is always the wise chief who impartially settles disputes among the forest creatures. A hunter in Chad found an elephant skin near Lake Chad and hid it. Soon he saw a lovely big girl crying, because she had lost her good 'clothes'. The hunter promised her new clothes and married her. They had many big children, for the son of an elephant cannot be a dwarf. One bad day when the grainstore was empty, his wife found the elephant skin at the bottom, where the hunter had hidden it. She put it on and went back to the bush to live as an elephant again. Her sons became the ancestors of the clan whose totem was the elephant. They do not have to fear elephants. A myth of the Kamba in Kenya tells us how elephants originated. A very poor man heard of Ivonya-Ngia, 'He that feeds the Poor'. He decided to go and find Ivonya-Ngia but it was a long journey. When he finally arrived, he saw uncounted cattle and sheep, and there, amidst green pastures, was the mansion of Ivonya-Ngia, who received the poor man kindly, perceived his need, and ordered his men to give him a hundred sheep and a hundred cows. 'No', said the poor man, 'I want no charity; I want the secret of how to become rich.'

Ivonya-Ngia reflected for a while, then took a flask of ointment and gave it to the poor man, saying: 'Rub this on your wife's pointed teeth in her upper jaw, wait until they have grown, then sell them.' The poor man carried out the strange instructions, promising his wife that they would become very rich. After some weeks, the canine teeth began to grow and when they had grown into tusks as long as his arm the man persuaded his wife to let him pull them. He took them to the market and sold them for a flock of goats. After a few weeks, the wife's canine teeth had grown again, becoming even longer than the previous pair, but she would not let her husband touch them. Not only her teeth, but her whole body became bigger and heavier, her skin thick and grey. At last, she burst out of the door and walked into the forest, where she lived from then on. She gave birth to her son there, who was also an elephant. Her husband visits her in the forest, but does not persuade her to come back,

although she did have more healthy children, all elephants. It was the origin of elephants and it explains why elephants are as intelligent as the humankind is.

In Southern Africa, there is the tale of the girl who grew up so tall and fat that no man wanted her as a wife because she was accused of witchcraft and exiled from her village, wandering into the wilderness on her own. There she met an elephant who began speaking to her politely in good Zulu. She agreed to stay with him and he helped her to find wild cucumbers and other fruits of the forest. She gave birth to four human sons, all very tall and strong, who became the ancestors of the Indhlovu clan of paramount chiefs. In the African fables, the elephant is described as too kind and noble, so that he feels pity even for a wicked character and is badly deceived. The Wachaga in Tanzania relate that the elephant was once a human being but cheated out of all his limbs except his right arm, which now serves as his trunk. He paid for nobility! The Ashanti of Ghana relate that an elephant is a human chief from the past and when they find a dead elephant in the forest, they give him a proper chief's burial.

3.5 Lost of Paradise/Withdrawal of God Myths

The mythologies of 'paradise Lost' or withdrawal of God' is concerned with the existential rather than the metaphysical questions about evil. In other words, they seek to explain the facts of existence, as they are experienced today. They try to grapple with the intriguing paradox of life and death, of good and evil, of optimism and frustration, of the immanence and transcendence of the Supreme Being. Many versions of this kind of myths occur in various parts of Africa. Generally, most would claim that at the beginning when divinity was close to man, there was complete absence of evil, and that evil came later when man deprived of this divine presence. However, the different versions vary in their explanations of how divine presence was lost. Some would say that Divinity withdrew (withdrawal myths). Others would rather say that God expelled humankind from divine presence, or that the easy access and familiar relationships with God ended (Paradise Lost).

In the 'withdrawal myths' the separation and distance between the sky and the earth is seen as symbolising the separation between God and man. Many African peoples link the Supreme Being with the sky. In fact, names of God among some groups also designate the sky. Versions of a certain 'withdrawal myth', found in many parts of Africa (among Dinka, Igbo, and Akan) tell of how in the beginning God was very close to man, for the sky then lay just above the earth. There was no death, sickness, sorrow, or hunger, and men were

content with one grain of millet a day granted them by God. One day, a greedy woman who wanted to pound more than the one grain permitted, used a long handed pestle, and struck the sky. This angered God who withdrew with the sky to its present position. Since then the country has become 'spoilt', and men are now subject to death, sickness, hunger, and disease.

3.6 Myths of the Coming of death

Many African myths tell of the first appearance of death in human society. These include *Sa* and *Alatangana* myths of the coming of death, the Kono myth of death, the Lamba, Luyaa, Nuba, Dinka, and Buganda myths of the coming of death, among others. In *Sa* and *Alatangana*, *Sa* is the god of death who creates a home from the mud. When the god *Alatangana* comes to visit, he complains that *Sa* has a dirty house and he should fix it up. *Alatangana* banishes *Sa* and his wife and only daughter until he fixes it up by adding vegetation and animals. *Sa* is pleased and the two become good friends. Eventually *Alatangana* falls in love with *Sa*'s daughter. He asks to marry her but *Sa* keeps stalling. He doesn't want to lose his daughter.

Alatangana realizes this and elopes with *Sa* daughter. They go far away to escape *Sa*'s anger. They have a happy life and a large family of fourteen children but four girls are white and three are black, and four boys are white and three are black. In addition, each speaks a different language, which *Alatangana* and his wife cannot understand. He goes to see *Sa*. *Sa* tells him that he has caused this because of the anger he felt toward *Alatangana* and his daughter for marrying. He goes on to tell them that they must have the white children marry with each other and the black children marry with each other. Then many tribes of black and white people will populate the earth. *Alatangana* does this. However, the children of *Alatangana* still have to live in darkness since there is no light. *Alatangana* again wants to ask his father-in-law *Sa* for help. This time he sends the red toutou and the golden cock: the earliest risers of all the birds. *Sa* listens and tells them by musical sounds. Then he teaches them the correct sounds. When they return to *Alatangana*, he becomes angry and is about to kill them when both birds begin to cry out to heaven for help.

At that moment, the air song and the first light of day comes. *Alatangana* is happy and apologizes to the birds. The sun makes its journey each day on the route *Sa* orders. The sky is not dark at night for the moon and stars and planets come out at night. *Sa* realizes he has done much for *Alatangana*. *Sa* goes to him and tells him that he has given him and his children much while *Alatangana* has taken *Sa*'s only child away. In payment, *Sa* will snatch one of

Alatanganas children whenever he desires as payment. All of this comes about because *Alatangana* did not pay the bride price for *Sa's* daughter. This myth is interesting first because it is a well-told and vivid version of creation. It not only explains the making of the earth but how different races developed, how light came to be, and why we are subject to death. The story really gives students a chance to discuss the very basic idea that we share a common origin and we are in fact brothers and sisters. In the story, *Sa* punishes his daughter and son-in-law by making their children different colours and speaks different languages. Why is it a punishment to be different in this story? How would you react if suddenly your brother or sister changed colours or spoke a different language? Would they still be your brother or sister? *Sa* does all of this because he is angry. What do you think of *Sa*? Why do we often hurt people we love when they make us mad? *Alatangana* is supposed to be a god. Why does not he oppose *Sa*? Who is more powerful? In this story, *Sa* also introduces death. What would happen to the earth if no one died? Could our earth hold all of those people and provide them with the resources to live? *Sa* takes the children but it does not say what happens to them. What do you think happened to them? What do you think happens when we die? While diversity is a punishment in the story of *Sa* and *Alatangana* is in the second mythology, how Humans were scattered is treated very different way.

Here people are living on earth and eventually become bored because they are the same. They ask God if he can make them different. Some want to have different colour skin. Some want to speak differently, while some want more land or to be cleverer. Finally, God becomes angry. He tells the messenger from the people that they should be happy because there is nothing to fight or argue about. They are equal as god intended. When the messenger goes back to the people, they tell him to tell God that if he does not change his mind they will turn away from him. God finally relents, each person gets their wish, and so from that time on there has been suspicion, greed, and envy in the world. In this story, sameness is equal to boredom. The god in this story feels that being the same will make people happy. He cannot understand why they want to be different from each other. Why is it that good people are not alike? What would it be like if we were all the same? Would we be bored? It would be interesting to take each student and have their classmates suggested some positive characteristic that have made them different. It could be their smile, their ability in math or art, their kindness, their athletic ability, among others.

In the third story of creation by the *Yao*, the God Mulling is withdrawn to heaven by humankind. At first, there are no humans, only Mulling and the animals. Everything is peaceful. Then one day the chameleon decides to fish in the river. On the first day, he catches

a good catch and eats well. On the second day, he finds nothing in his trap but a tiny man and woman. The chameleon takes them to Mulling who tells him to release them and let them walk the earth. The chameleon watches them grow to the size people are now. Then they rub two sticks together and make fire, which spreads to an uncontrollable forest fire that threatens all the animals. The man and woman next kill a buffalo and cook it. Mulling is upset that the humans are destroying his creation. All the animals run away. The chameleon goes into the high branches of a tree and the spider climbs so high it disappears into the sky. The spider throws down a line to Mulling who also climbs up into the sky where he remains. Thus, God is withdrawn from earth by the evils of humankind. Here the God Mulling is himself confounded by his creation. His only reaction is to run away.

It is interesting that this early African myth has man and woman emerging from the water, which most scientists regard as place of origin for the earliest life on earth. Mostly due to the importance of water in their lives, it is not surprising that they incorporated this into mythology. This story brings up the notion of free will of the man and woman. Why does not god stop the man and woman? Does he act the way other gods have in the stories we read? Does god control the people in the story? This mythology makes us realize the power of humankind over the land; and how we can be forces for good and/or evil. The man and woman make fire and cook food but they also set the forest on fire and almost destroy the world. Why do we say that people have to take care of the world? How should we do that? Along with creation of the earth, there are many stories of interest about the sun and moon and sky. The Wute of Cameroon tells of the early days when the sun and moon were good friends. Both shine with equal radiance. One day the sun suggests that the both sun and moon along with their families should take a bath in the river. The sun suggests that each family take turns and that he would go upstream, where he could have some privacy. He tells the moon that when he sees the water boiling he will know that the sun is in the water. Then he leaves but he does not intend to do what he had said.

When the sun and his family are out of sight, he tells his family to cut dry branches off the trees, set them on fire, and throws them into the river. When the moon sees the steaming water, he thinks that the sun has taken his bath and he goes into the water. However, when the sun appears he laughs that now he is brighter than the moon. The moon, seeing that he is trick, decides to take bloody revenge. Sometime later, there is a great famine. The moon suggests that he and the sun kill all their children and wives because they can no longer feed so many people. The moon says that he will go upstream and when the sun sees the blood in the river, he will know that the moon has killed his family. The moon does not kill his family.

When he is out of sight, he has his boys throw red clay into the river until the water turns red. When the sun sees the red water, he kills all of his family. Now, he remains alone in daytime shining brightly, while the moon seems pale and cool surrounded by his wives and many children.

In a story by the Chaga, who live in Tanganyika the sun and moon are husband and wife who live on earth. The sun often visits where the water lives. One day the sun asks why the river never visits him at his house. The river replies that suns house is too small for him and his family, and they would probably drive the sun and moon out of their home. It just so happens that at this very time the sun and moon are building a new house. The sun asks the river if he will visit if the new house is bigger. When the new house is completed, the river comes to visit. He is still skeptical but does not want to disappoint his friend. Therefore, the river comes in and flows bringing in many fish and rats and water snakes. The water level reaches knee deep. The river asks the sun if he still wants to have the entire rivers family visit. The sun insists that it is all right and so more water flows in and the water level rises. The sun and moon are force to climb onto the roof to keep dry. However, this is still not all of the rivers family. Again, the river asks if the sun wants all of his people to come. Not to go back on his word the sun said they are all welcome. The river continues to flow now rising to the top of the house. The sun and moon are force to go right into the sky where they remain to this day.

These two stories can lead to a discussion of the nature of friendship and trust. In both stories, we have supposed friends. We see in the first that the sun and moon cannot trust each other. In actuality, they are envious of each other. Students can easily relate to how a good friend today can abandon you very quickly. Discussions might concern what are some of the qualities we look for in a friend. Can we be friends with someone we cannot trust? What makes us feel jealous? What can we do to stop that feeling? In the second story, the sun is a bit too polite. Are there times when we have to say no to a friend? How do you think the river would have felt if the sun and moon stopped him from visiting? What does it mean to give our word? The sun and moon are now in the sky do you think they are still friends with the river. There is also a great opportunity to use this story as a bridge to some science lessons on the sun and moon.

In a third story, the thunder, and lightning are two main characters that dwell on the earth. Thunder is an old mother sheep and lightning is her only son a handsome ram. Lightning has a quick temper and when he gets mad, he flies into a rage and destroy houses and field. He is so strong he could uproot trees and crops. When his mother finds out, she

yells at him with her loud voice. Over the time, the people fed up with this behaviour, and spook to the ruler about the ram's behaviour. The two live at the end of town. The problem continues. The ruler is force to have the mother and son banished from the town. They go into the woods and cannot go into town again. On the way out of town, lightning sets the woods on fire, which starts a terrible fire. This time the ruler meets with his advisors. They decide that the only thing to do is to throw both of them high into the sky. Therefore, mother and son went into the sky to live, however, the people still not rid of them. Lightning still loses his temper and fires down fire to the earth and his mother still heard scolding him. Here again powerful forces of nature cloaked in the guise of animals with human characteristics.

The Africans probably did not have a clue as to the scientific explanation of what caused thunder and lightning. It would be interesting to have students write a few lines about what they have been told about the origins of thunder and lightning. I know from past conversations that most have been told stories such as, god is throwing things around heaven, has shaking out a rug, or has bowling. Why did your parents tell you these stories? Why did not they tell you the scientific reason? Did you believe the story? How did you feel before and after you heard the story? Do you still believe it? Not only does this story lead into possible science topics but it also unlocks the concept of metaphor and simile. This story nicely offers obvious comparisons of temper to lightning and a powerful voice to thunder.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Like cosmogony, the study of cosmology is concerned with the origin of the cosmos at its largest-scale. Human beings are fascinated with the concepts of our place in the universe and of the origins of all things. Understanding nature (and human nature) helps us both practical and at the emotional levels.

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5.0 SUMMARY

There are different types of cosmology, which mythologically describe the origin of the world. These include physical, religious, metaphysical, historical, and modern and Big Bang cosmologies. The Big Bang cosmology is the most accepted theory today. It accounts for how the cosmos have developed after something triggered an expansion from some massively hot and dense gravitational singularity, whose size was smaller than an atom.

6.0 TOTUR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Define the term cosmology
2. What is cosmogony?
3. List and discuss the different types of cosmology
4. Explain the different types of cosmogonic myths in African Traditional Religion
5. List and discuss the cosmogonic myths

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UNIT 2 HISTORY OF COSMOLOGY FROM ANCIENT TO MODERN TIMES

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Like every other disciplines, cosmology is not without its beginning and development. It started in time and developed with time. However, cosmology is as old as humankind is because from man's humble question is fundamental to human condition: How did the universe begin? Where do we come from? Where are we going? Cosmology grapples with some questions that demands philosophical and theological answers. Therefore, we can actually say that the study of cosmology has always existed from time immemorial.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Discuss the history of cosmology from ancient time

- Examine the development of cosmology from Galileo Galilei to Nicolaus Copernicus
- Explain modern cosmology
- Highlight the nature of composition of the universe
- State how the universe expanded to its current shape

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Ancient Cosmology

Before we jump into the scientific details of what we know of the universe today, and how we know it, it is useful to remind ourselves of what human beings have historically thought about the universe. Every single culture on Earth has its own unique creation myth. This fact suggests that humanity has an innate desire to understand the origins of not just ourselves, but everything that we can perceive. The scientific field of cosmology is merely a modern extension of this primitive need. The Babylonians are a good place to start with when discussing the history of cosmology. They were the first astronomers that kept careful logs of the motions of the moon and the planets in the sky in order to predict the future, using astrology. They also invented a sexagesimal (base 60), numbering system that reflects in our modern day usage of seconds, minutes, and hours, and degrees. The Babylonians' beliefs about the universe are typical of pre-scientific peoples.

They believed in a cosmology where the Earth was at the centre of the universe, bound below the water. The seven heavenly bodies that moved in the sky represented deities, with each one moving in a progressively further sphere from the Earth (in order of arrangement, they were the Moon, Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn). The fixed stars lay beyond Saturn, and beyond that was more water binding the outer edge of the known universe. The Babylonian creation myth is similar also to that of most other cultures. The gods were involved in the creation of the universe, and making of form in the cosmos from formlessness and chaos. His Babylonian tale of Genesis found in the *Enuma Elish* (c. 1450 BCE, but evolving from much older Sumerian myths). Here, an epic primordial struggle occurs between the god Marduk, representing order, and the dragon Tiamat, and representing chaos.

Marduk comes out victorious, and he divides up the body of Tiamat, with half going to construct the heavens, and the other half to build the Earth. Thus, even early people

recognized the need for explaining how the structure of the universe got the way it was, and the Babylonians were not alone in suggesting that order shaped from chaos. This need to understand our origins is a quest that continues today in astronomy. The *Rig Vedas* (Hindu's texts that date back to 1000 BCE) further discussed the cyclical nature of the universe. The universe underwent a cycle of rebirth followed by fiery destruction, as the result of the dance of Shiva. The length of each cycle is a "day of Brahma" which lasts 4.32 billion years (which coincidentally is roughly the age of our Earth and only a factor a few off from the actual age of the universe). The cosmology has the Earth resting on groups of elephants, which stand on a giant turtle, who in turn supported by the divine cobra shesha-naga. Although early Greeks thought on the heavens mirrored that of the Babylonians, with a reliance on gods and myths, the 7th century BCE, a new class of thinkers, relying in part on observations of the world around them, began to use logic and reason to arrive at theories of the natural world and of cosmology. Although the ancient Greek philosophers had a variety of ideas about the nature of the universe, many of which we know to be incorrect, we can begin to sense a thread of discovery and inquiry that will eventually lead to modern science.

- **Thales of Miletus (634-546)** believed that the Earth was a flat disk surrounded by disk surrounded by water.
- **Anaxagoras (Ca. 500 CA. 428 BCE)** believed the world is cylindrically shaped, and we lived on the flat-topped surface. This world cylinder floats freely in space on nothingness, with the fixed stars in a spherical shell that rotated about the cylinder. The moon shone because of reflected light from the sun, and lunar eclipses were the result of the Earth's shadow falling on the moon.
- **Eudoxus of Cnidus (ca. 400–CA. 347 BCE)** also had a geocentric model for the Earth, but added in separate concentric spheres for each of the planets, the Sun, and the Moon, to move in, with again the fixed stars located on an outermost shell. Each of the shells for the seven heavenly bodies moved at different rates to account for their apparent motions in the sky. To keep the model consistent with observations of the planets' motions, Eudoxus' followers added more circles to the mix-for instance, seven is for Mars. The complexity of this system soon made his model unpopular.

- **Aristotle (384–322 BCE)** refined the Eudoxus model, by adding more spheres to make the model match the motions of the planets, especially that of the retrograde motions seen in the outermost planets. Aristotle believed that “nature abhors a vacuum,” so he postulated a universe that was filled with crystalline spheres moving about the Earth. Aristotle also believed that the universe was eternal and unchanging. Outside of the fixed sphere of stars was “nothingness.”
- **Aristarchus (ca. 310–ca. 230 BCE)** made a first crude determination of the relative distance between the Moon and the Sun. His conclusion was that the Sun was 20× further, and the only reason they appeared to be of the same size was that the Sun was also 20× larger in diameter. Aristarchus then wondered, if the Sun was so much larger, does it really make sense for it to move around the Earth? Would it make more sense for the Earth to circle it?
- **Claudius Ptolemy (CA. 100–CA. 170 CE)** writing in *Syntaxis (aka Almagest; -140 CE)* took the basic ideas of Eudoxus’ and Aristotle’s cosmology, but had the planets move in circular *epicycles*, the centers of which then moved around the Earth on the *deferent*, an even bigger orbit. Ptolemy’s ideas gave the most accurate explanations for the motion of the planets (as best as their positions are at the time). (Ptolemy and Aristotle’s ideas about the universe and its laws of motion remained the dominant idea in Western thought until the 15th century CE).
- **Nicolaus Copernicus (1473–1543)** made a radical break from Ptolemaic thought by proposing that the Earth was not at the center of the universe. In his *De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium*, he believed a Sun-centered universe to be more elegant: In no other way do we perceive the clear harmonious linkage between the motions of the planets and the sizes of their orbs. Although Copernicus made an immense leap by moving the displacing the Earth from the center of the Universe, in other ways he was still stuck with the past. The heavens were still moving via perfect circular motions.

Thus, in order for his model to reflect the actual motions of the planets, he still had to use the motion of smaller circles, known as an *epicyclet* that orbited an offset circle. Catholic officials and leaders of the protestant movement immediately attacked

Copernicus. However, he denied soon after the publication of his work and so he spared the wrath of the authorities. Others who also his heretical views about the universe were not so lucky, Galileo and Giordano Bruno were not exceptions in this regard.

- **Galileo Galilei (1564-1642)** found observational evidence for heliocentric motion, including the phases of Venus and moons of Jupiter. When he pointed his telescope at the Milky Way, the dim, nebulous land in the sky revealed itself to contain a myriad of faint stars that were otherwise invisible to the naked eyes. He not only supported a heliocentric view of the universe in his book *Dialogue on the Two Great World Systems*, but his work on motion also attacked Aristotelian thought. His heretical ideas resulted in him being forced to recant by the Church.
- **Giordano Bruno (1548-1600)** goes further to say that, there are number of stars in the sky and the suns with their solar system orbited by planets filled with life. These and other heretical ideas (that all these other life forms, planets, and stars also had their own souls) resulted in him being imprisoned, tortured and finally burned at the stake by the Church.
- **Thomas Digges (1546–1595)**, was a leading English admirer of Copernicus, published *a Perfect Description of the Celestial Orbes*, which re-stated Copernicus' heliocentric theory. However, Digges went further by claiming that the universe is infinitely large, and filled uniformly with stars. This is one of the first pre-modern statements of the Cosmological Principles.
- **Tycho Brahe (1546–1601)** made and recorded very careful naked eye observations of the planets, which revealed flaws in their positions as tabulated in the Ptolemaic system. He played with a variety of both geocentric and heliocentric models.
- **Johannes Kepler (1571–1630)** was able to topple the Ptolemaic system by proposing that planets orbited the Sun in ellipses, and not circles. He proposed his three laws of planetary motion. In 1610, Kepler also first pointed out that an infinite universe with an infinite number of stars would be extremely bright and hot. Edmund Halley (1656–1742)

in 1720 and Heinrich Olbers (1758–1840) in 1823 took this issue up. Olbers suggested that the universe is full with dust that obscured light from the most distant stars. Only twenty years later, John Herschel showed that this explanation would not work. The problem of Olber's paradox would not be until the 20th century.

- **Isaac Newton (1642–1727)** discovered the mathematical laws of motion and gravitation that today bear his name. He *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica*, or simply the *Principia* was the first book on theoretical physics, and provided a framework for interpreting planetary motion. He was thus, the first to show that the laws of motion, which applied in laboratory situations, could also apply to the heavenly bodies. Newton also wrote about his own view of a cosmology with a static universe in 1691: he claimed that the universe was infinite but contained a finite number of stars. Self-gravity would cause such a system to be unstable, so Newton believed that the finite stars are infinitely far so that the gravitational attraction of stars exterior to a certain radius would keep the stars interior to that radius from collapsing.
- **Immanuel Kant (1724–1804)**, the German philosopher, inspired by Wright, proposed that the Milky Way was just one of many “island universes” in an infinite space. In his *General Natural History and Theory of Heaven* published in 1755, he writes of the nebulous objects that had been observed by others (including Galileo!), and reflects on what the true scale of the universe must be. He states:

Because this kind of nebulous stars must undoubtedly be as far away from us as the other fixed stars, not only would their size be astonishing, but also the strangest point would be that with this extraordinary size, made up of self-illuminating bodies and suns, these stars should display the dimmest and weakest light.

- **William Herschel (1738–1822) and his son John (1792–1871)** used a telescope, based on a design by Newton, to map the nearby stars well enough to conclude that the Milky Way was a disk-shaped distribution of stars, and that the Sun was near the centre of this disk. Others however, took Kant's view that the nebulae were distant galaxies. Johann

Heinrich Lambert (1728–1777), German Mathematician adopted this idea and discarded heliocentrism, believing the Sun to orbit the Milky Way like all the other stars.

3.2 Modern Cosmology

The Copernican Revolution radically changed the philosophical mindset of humanity's role in the universe. It can be summarize by the statement that there are no "special observers". The idea of this Copernican principle has spread far beyond the realm of the astronomy. It takes its form in modern cosmology in the Cosmological Principle, that the Universe is *homogeneous* and *isotropic*. *Homogeneity* any one place is like any other. *Isotropy* implies that any direction one looks will be similar to any other direction. There is nothing special about where we are, nor is there a preferred direction. This may not be true on small scales, such as that of our Solar System, or even that of our galaxy and nearby galaxy clusters. The location of the sun inside the Milky Way, and the nature of the diffuse nebulae remained the subjects of heated debates.

- **Harlow Shapley (1885–1972)**, an American astronomer, observed globular clusters and the RR Lyrae variable stars in them. From their directions and distances, he was able to show that they are place in a spherical distribution not centred on the Sun, but at a point nearly 50,000 light years away.
- **Vesto Slipher (1875–1969)**, American Astronomer at Lowell observatory, used spectroscope to study the Doppler Shift of spectral lines in the "spiral nebulae," thus, establishing the rotation of these objects most of the galaxies in his sample, except for M31, the Andromeda Galaxy, were found to be moving away from the Milky Way.
- **Albert Einstein (1879–1955)** publishes his *General Theory of Relativity* in 1916, which explains how matter causes space and time to be warped. He realized that the resulting force General Relativity are use to explain the structure of the entire universe. He assumed that the universe obeyed the *Cosmological Principle*: it was infinite in size with the same average density of matter everywhere, with space-time in the universe warped by the presence of matter within it. However, his field predicted a Universe to be either expanding or contracting. This contradicted what was about the Universe at the time, and

it was against Einstein's sensibilities. Einstein as a result added a term into his equations, the *cosmological constant* to keep his model Universe from being dynamic. He posited that a cosmological constant can keep a growing universe from getting bigger, and it keeps a shrinking universe from getting smaller. However, to keep the universe perfectly static, the cosmological constant has to balance out exactly the other terms.

- **Willem de Sitter (1872–1934)**, a Dutch Astronomer, used Einstein's General Relativity equations with a low (or zero) matter density but without the cosmological constant to arrive at an expanding universe. His view was that the cosmological constant:

...detracts from the symmetry and elegance of Einstein's original theory, one of whose chief attractions was that it explained so much without introducing any new hypothesis or empirical constant.

In 1920, Harlow Shapley and Herbert Curtis held a debate on the "scale of the universe", or really about the nature of the "spiral" nebulae. Shapley argued that these were gas clouds inside our own Milky Way and that the universe consisted just of our Milky Way. Curtis on the other hand argued that they were other galaxies just like the Milky Way, but much further away. It was only in the following decade that as Edwin Hubble and other astronomers found novae and Cepheid variable stars in nearby galaxies, that they adopted Curtis view of modern cosmology.

3.3 The Composition of the Universe

According to modern cosmology, the universe is isotropic and homogenous. Saying that the universe is *isotropic* means that there are no preferred directions in the universe; it looks the same no matter which way you point your telescope. While saying that the universe is *homogenous* means that there are no preferred locations in the universe; it looks the same no matter where you set up your telescope. The isotropy of the universe on "large scales" in this context means that the universe is only isotropic and homogenous on scales of roughly 100 MPC or more. While on small scales, the universe is blatantly anisotropic. Fundamental observations show that the universe is composed of dark sky, isotropy, and homogeneity, Red-shift proportional to distance, particles and matter, and cosmic microwave background.

The Dark Sky

The dark sky is a fundamental observation made by Heinrich Olbers who wrote a scientific paper on the subject in the year 1826. In his cosmological principle, known as *Olber's Paradox*, Heinrich Olber saw a dark sky, with roughly two thousand stars scattered across it. Thomas Digges in 1576 also mentioned how strange it is that the night sky is dark, with only a few pinpoints of light to mark the location of stars. Although the darkness of the night sky posed no problems to the ancient Egyptians or Greeks, however, the cosmological model of Copernicus required that the distance to stars be very much larger than an astronomical unit; otherwise, the paradox of the stars, as the Earth goes around on its Orbit, would be large enough to see with the naked eye. Moreover, since the Copernican system no longer requires attachment of the stars to a rotating celestial sphere, the stars can be at different distances from the sun. These liberating realizations led modern cosmologists to adopt a cosmological principle, which states that there is nothing special about our location in the universe.

This cosmological paradox has an alternative name of the Copernican principle as a tribute to Copernicus who pointed out that “the Earth is not the centre of the universe. Later cosmologists also postulated that the sun is not the centre, Our Galaxy is not the centre, and the local Group is not the centre of the universe. In fact, there is no centre to the universe. Thomas Digges and other Post-Copernican astronomers embraced a model in which stars are large glowing spheres, like the sun, scattered throughout infinite space. This cosmological principle is an improvement on an infinitely bright sky, but is still distinctly different from the dark sky, which we actually see.

Red-Shift Proportional to Distance

When we look at a galaxy at visible wavelengths, we primarily detect the light from the stars, which the galaxy contains. Vesto Slipher, in 1912 measured the shift in wavelength of the light and postulates that galaxy is one of the few, which exhibits a blue shift. Edwin Hubble in 1929 made a study of galaxy's red-shift and discovered that galaxy's red shift

depends on its distance from us. However, the discovery of the cosmic microwave decisively tipped the scales in favour of the Big Bang model.

The Universe Contains Different Types of Particles

Modern cosmologists have confirmed that the universe contains a large variety of different particles: ships, shoes, sealing wax, cabbages, kings, galaxies, and so forth. Though, cabbages and kings are indistinguishable, the main difference between them is that the mean mass per king is greater than the mean mass per cabbage. The most significant difference between the different components from cosmological viewpoint is that they are made of different elementary particles. The material objects, which surround us during our everyday life, are made of *protons*, *neutrons*, and *electrons*. About three-fourths of the baryonic matter in the universe is the form of ordinary hydrogen, the simplest of all elements.

Another type of lepton, in addition to the electron, is the neutrino. John Updike in his poem, “Cosmic Gall”, gave the most poetic summary of the proper ties of the neutrino thus:

Neutrinos, they are very small; they have no mass. In addition, do not interact at all. The earth is just a silly ball, to them, through which they simply pass, like dust house cleaners down a draft hall or photons through a sheet of glass.

There are three types of neutrinos; electron neutrinos, muon neutrinos and tau neutrinos. A particle, which is massless, is the *photon*, while the most mysterious component of the universe is *dark matter* (something that is too dim for us to see).

The Universe is full of Cosmic Microwave Background

The discovery of the cosmic microwave background (CMB) by Arno Penzias and Robert Wilson in 1965 revealed that the cosmic microwave background is exquisitely black body spectrum with a temperature. However, as the universe expanded, it cooled. Moreover, when the universe no longer contained a significant number of free electrons, the black body photons started streaming freely through the universe without further scattering off free electrons. The black body radiation that fills the universe today is a relic of the time when the universe was sufficiently hot and dense to be opaque.

3.4 The Expanding Universe

Einstein, for example, in 1932 said to Hubble at Mt. Wilson that the invention of the cosmological constant was the biggest blunder of my life. In the same year, he and de Sitter published a joint paper on their Einstein-de Sitter universe, an expanding universe without a cosmological constant. George Lemaitre (1894-1966), Belgian astronomer, in 1927 independently arrived at Friedmann's solutions to Einstein's equations and realized they must correctly describe the universe, given Hubble's recent discoveries. Lemaitre was the first person to realize that if the universe has been expanding, it must have had a beginning, which he called the "primitive Atom". This is the precursor to what the Big Bang theory. The idea of cosmic dynamism, which states that the universe could be curved or non-Euclidean, long predates Einstein's theory of general relativity. Nikolai Ivanovich Lobachevski, one of the founders of non-Euclidean geometry, in observational tests to demonstrate whether the universe is curve, concludes from the geometric argument that if the universe is curve, it cannot have a radius curvature that is significantly smaller than the current Hubble is.

The Universe is Composed of Matter

Albert Einstein after publishing his first paper on general relativity in 1915, he noted that the universe contains both radiation and matter. He posited that most of the radiation in the universe was in the form of starlight. He also noted quite correctly, that the energy density of starlight in our Galaxy is much less than the rest energy density of the stars. Thus, Einstein concluded that the primary contribution to the energy density of the universe was from non-relativistic matter, and that he could safely make the approximation that we live in a pressureless universe. The complete evidence available to Einstein led him to the belief that the contracting and that it have a positive energy density but negligible pressure. The only permissible static universe, in this analysis therefore, is a very empty universe. Although, Einstein believed that the cosmological constant was "gravely detrimental to the formal beauty of the theory", his static model had a political defect; it was under stable. A simple

universe is one which is empty with no radiation, no matter, no cosmological constant, and no contribution to E of any sort. It is an empty expanding mathematical curiosity.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Cosmology has had a long history and an exciting development. However, like every science, it has not reached a level of perfection as not to need any improvement. To reach such level would also imply that man has stopped wondering on the question of his origin and the reality around him.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learned that cosmology studied the universe, or cosmo, regarded as a whole. It asks questions, which are fundamental to human conditions. We have seen that humankind from the beginning has many things. At a point, humankind experienced sensible reality that reduced him to sensible matter. This truth of the reality is the study of cosmological principles that demands philosophical and theological answers.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Discuss the development of cosmology from ancient to the modern times
2. Describe how Copernican Revolution radically changed the philosophical mindset of humanity role in the universe
3. List four component of the universe and briefly discuss them
4. Who occupies the unique position among modern cosmologists on the idea of expanding universe?

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UNIT 3 CREATION IN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

CONTENTS

1.0 Introduction

2.0 Objectives

3.0 Main Content

 3.1 God as Creator in African Traditional Religion

 3.2 The Process of Creation in African Traditional Religion

 3.3 The Purpose of Creation in African Traditional Religion

 3.4 The Care of Creation in African Traditional Religion

 3.5 The Interaction of Created Things in African Traditional Religion

4.0 Conclusion

5.0 Summary

6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment

7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Creation is a phenomenon that has interested the African peoples over the years. The explanation of Africans concerning creation of the world is obtained from the experiences of the African in the universe. In this unit, we shall examine the Supreme Being (God) as the author of creation, the process of creation, purpose and care of creation, as well as interaction of created things in the universe.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Discuss God as the author of creation in African traditional religion

- Explain the purpose of creation in African traditional religion
- Describe the process of creation in African traditional religion
- State the care of creation in African traditional religion
- Discuss the interaction of created things in African traditional religion

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Supreme Deity (God) as the Author of Creation in African Traditional Religion

Africans believe that the Supreme Deity (God) created the world though variations exist on how each group in Africa explains the modalities of creation. God is the author of creation by every narrative of creation by the Africans. Everything in the universe is controlled and maintained by the Supreme Deity. Africans reflect their belief in God as the Creator in the names and attributes that they ascribe to God. For instance, the Igbo of Nigeria call God “Chineke” which means “the spirit that creates”; the Edo called God “Osanobua” meaning “Source-being, who carries and sustains the universe”, and the Ashanti call God “Odomankoma”, Borebore or Oboadee which connotes “One who creates all things”. Africans perceive God as the one who creates and is in charge of the affairs of the universe. God controls and sustains the operations of the world and is actively involved in the well-being of all created entities.

3.2 The Purpose and Process of Creation in African Traditional Religion

The Supreme Deity (God) (known by different names in different African communities) created the universe to manifest God’s nature. This is an understanding that is integral in the African worldview and living experience. In addition, the Supreme Being through creation makes it possible for Africans to understand, know, and relate with God. Thus, the possibility of a divine-human relationship becomes a reality. Creation is also to display the power, authority, and awesomeness of God. Some names and attributes of God among some African peoples reflect the different purposes for creation. Creation stories in African traditional religion show that the process of creation among different African ethnic groups varies. Whereas some of these creation stories are orderly in their account, others are not well connected. Some of these stories usually reflect a tripartite structure encompassing a pre-

creation setting (watery expanse, darkness), the act of creation (by God who is also known by different names among Africans), and post-creation setting (which sometimes involves the violation of divine prescriptions and the separation of God from humanity).

In some other stories, the first act in the process of creation is the creation of the first man and woman by God. It is also worth noting that the process of creation usually entails the delegation of power by God to the divinities. For instance, Olodumare (God) among the Yoruba delegated the duty of moulding the physical body of human beings to Orishanla, the Yoruba arch-divinity. Among the Igbo of Nigeria, Chineke sent Nri-the first man-to earth to marry and multiply on earth. Sometimes, these agents of creation are confused with God but suffice is to state that the divinities are subject to the will, power and authority of God. These lesser agents are means to an end and not an end in themselves, for their authority is prescribed by God, which explains why their personal names do not express anything in the absolute sense as is true of the names of God in Africa.

3.3 The Care of Creation in African Traditional Religion

Whereas the control of the universe is the sole preserve of God, the care of creation requires both divine and human contributions in African traditional religion. The care of creation encompasses the care accorded everything that is created by God, including human beings, forests, grooves, water bodies, mountains, animals, birds and the seasons. Though humans could care for some of these identified areas, only God is in charge of the seasons. In spite of the advancement of science in the area of metrological services, the seasons still spring surprises sometimes. The care of the human body through good nutrition, exercise, adequate sleep and a moderate life is the responsibility of individuals. In addition, the care of trees, grooves, rivers and mountains are countenanced in African traditional religion through ritual prescriptions. For instance, hunting is forbidden in some forests to preserve the animal species there (Osun groove, Osogbo) and fishing is forbidden in certain rivers (Odo Awe, Oyo).

Mountains are designated as worship sites all over Africa (Oke-Agidan, Oyo) and these mountains are preserved due to the ritual prescriptions attached to them. However, the controversy trailing the practice of animal sacrifice in African traditional religion is worthy of mention. Though animals are preserved in some forest, where hunting is prohibited, nonetheless, animal sacrifice remains an integral part of African traditional religion. This paradox is daily negotiated in the practice of the religion worldwide, especially in North

America and Europe where issues of animal rights are quite prevalent. Individuals in their homes and the communities usually gear the use of taboo in African communities towards the care of the universe. There are different types of taboo, including sex taboo, ritual taboo, environmental taboo, and interpersonal taboo.

3.4 The Interaction of Created Things in African Traditional Religion

Nature is divine in African traditional religion. Every aspect of nature embodies an aspect of the essence of the divine. Some natural phenomena are habitat to spirit bodies that may sometime be accorded offerings. Humans are thus interconnected with other elements of nature in the enterprise of living. This is in opposition to the hierarchical relationship of human beings at the apex of creation as is true of some religions. The recent emphasis of science on the interconnectedness of all lives on planet earth has been a known fact to African traditional religion long time ago. Human beings need other elements of nature to live well and vice versa. Consequently, there is a bi-directional flow of spiritual energy between the element of nature and human existence. Whereas elements of nature such as rivers, sun, moon, wind, and rain sustain human life on earth, the activities of human beings as concerns the care or neglect of nature proffer serious implications for everything created by God. Consequences of human neglect of the elements of nature manifest clearly in the polity including earthquakes, floods, and draught. The Earth is a community of interconnected living things; all are mutually dependent on one another for life and survival.

Earth is a balanced and diverse domain where responsible custodians can function as partners, rather than rulers, to sustain a balanced and diverse Earth community. Earth and its components not only suffer from injustices at the hands of humans, but actively resist them in the struggle for justice as is explicated in the instances of volcano, earthquakes and floods in many communities worldwide.

4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit, we discussed creation in African traditional religion. We described God as the author of creation of the world, the purpose of creation, process and care of creation from the perspective of African traditional religion. Explanation on the interdependent relation of everything created was also given. It comes to fore then that creation in African traditional religion may be understood as a gift and a responsibility.

5.0 SUMMARY

In summary, this unit explained the act, purpose, and care of creation from the perspective of African traditional religion. We also discussed the relationship and interaction of everything in creation. All things are mutually dependent in creation.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Examine the concept of Supreme Deity (God) as the Creator in African traditional religion
2. Describe the purpose and process of creation in African traditional religion
3. Mention and discuss the care of creation in African traditional religion

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UNIT 4 WORSHIP AND SACRIFICE IN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

CONTENTS

1.0 Introduction

2.0 Objectives

3.0 Main Content

3.1 Definition of Worship

3.2 Characteristics of Worship in African Traditional Religion

3.3 The Origin of Sacrifice in African Traditional Religion

3.4 Taxonomy of Sacrifice in African Traditional Religion

4.0 Conclusion

5.0 Summary

6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment

7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Worship and sacrifice is the most essential elements of African religion. They are more important than belief, medicine, and magic because they differ in content and treatment from place to place, community to community and culture to culture. In African society, worship and sacrifices are common institution of ancient religions of the world whose purpose is to secure a benefit for the worshippers or recipients. Worship and sacrifice are liturgical issues, which maintain communal relationship with the supreme deity and worshippers. Whereas worship controls and ends all the affairs of life, sacrifice on the other hand, balances between humankind and the Supreme Being. In this chapter, however, we intend to look at worship and sacrifices in African traditional religion to enable us understand better their places in the society.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Define worship and sacrifice
- State the characteristics of worship in African traditional religion
- Discuss the origin of worship in African traditional religion
- Explain the different forms of worship in African traditional religion
- Enumerate the types of worship in African traditional religion

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Definition of Worship

Worship is an important duty, which stands out, prominently in African society. It begins controls and ends all the affairs of human life. The African people believe that during worship they are in the presence of the divinities and this awareness influence their religious thoughts and behaviours. Thus, the African people put their divinities first before other things. They believe that only the divinities can give them blessings support and succor as human beings worship in African society therefore have certain characteristics which must be follow by the worshippers whether in private or in public. These include; first, the worshipper must not carry bad medicine or impure heart during worship. Second, they must have moral and ritual cleanliness during worship. Failure to do so is considered a taboo or ritual defilement of the objects of worship. Third, it must take place in the shrines of the tutelary divinity of the community. This daily worship is individual affairs and it takes the form of reaffirming humankind acknowledgement of the supreme deity and his protection over the people. Fourth, worshippers must provide water and kola nuts as gifts to the divinities. This is usually done after the head of the community has presented his own kola nuts to the divinities.

Sacrifice on the other hand is a way of maintaining good relationship between humankind and the supreme deity. The word sacrifice comes from the Greek term “thusia” which primarily denotes the act of offering or that which itself is offered. It is defined in general sense as a material oblation made to the deity by means of consecration and consumption of the things offered”. Hasting, defined sacrifice as:

...an act, belonging to the sphere of worship, in which a material oblation is presented to the study and consumed in His service, and which has its object the securing of true communion with the divine being, seeking for His favours.

Hubert et Mans defined sacrifice as:

...a religious act, which by consecration of the victim, modifies the condition of moral agent who performs it, or of certain agents with which the sacrifice is concerned.

According to Awolalu, sacrifice can be defined as:

...something consecrated and offered to a divinity, it is also the solemn infliction of death on a living creature by effusion of its blood, in a way of religious worship, and as a supplication for the pardon of sin or supposed means of compensation for the insults and injuries offered to his majesty and government.

These above definitions given by various scholars clarify certain features of sacrifice in African traditional religion. For example, the idea of setting apart some objects, living and non-living things, and the idea of giving to the supreme deity and other spiritual beings is included in these definitions notwithstanding. Mbiti described sacrifice intense of restoration of the ontological relationship between humankind and the supreme deity. According to him, sacrifice is essentially a means of contact and communion between the determiner of destiny and humankind. It is humankind's best way of maintaining relationship between himself and his objects of worship. Longman defined sacrifice in secular and religious senses as the loss and giving up something of value, especially for a particular purpose, while his religious definition of sacrifice is "an offering to the divinities, by killing animals during a ceremony". Similarly, Mala gives a more adequate definition of sacrifice as:

...the destruction or surrender of something valued and desired for the sake of something, having a higher and more pressing claim the loss entitled by devotion to other things.

From these few definitions of sacrifice given by different scholars, it stands clearly that the idea of sacrifice in African society as the “offering of living creatures and non living objects to the deity and other super human powers is fundamental to all religions of the world and African religion is not an exception.

3.2 Characteristics of Worship in African Traditional Religion

Five major characteristics constitute the structure of worship in African traditional religion. These include:

1. Pouring of Libation

The pouring of libation is a priest offering, which involves singing of song, praying and offering of sacrifice to the supreme deity. It is the first ingredient of worship in African traditional religion because it appeases the deity. Thus, throughout Africa, the libation is poured in the form of drink offering and water, spirit drink, palm wine or beer are used as items of sacrifice. Sometimes, the worshippers pour libation with local drinks known as ‘burukutu’ as a symbolic act of softening the relationship between the deity and the worshippers. This libation is poured on the ground before the shrine or on the symbol of the divinity to open the divine presence for the worship. The pouring of libation is preceded with the invocation, which is the second element of worship in African religion.

2. Invocation

Invocation is the time a traditional priest addresses the deity by means of attributes and praises of epithets inviting Him to attend and accept the sacrifices offered by the worshippers. Among the Yoruba’s of Nigeria, the priest makes the following invocations:

...attend to us, o ogun Awwo, he who is in control of the world, chief of the divinities, he whose eyeballs are rare to see, support the orphans. You the owner of the innumerable houses of heaven.

After the invocation, the priest turns to be worshippers and asks why they have come to ogun after which he continues again with these words of invocation:

...lagunju, your child has come before you, he brings you kola nuts, he brings palm oil, he brings palm wine, he brings roasted yam, and he brings a dog. He asks that these things should be presented before you. Lagunju, your son is childless, he has no child of his own, he is in tears because he has no child, he is fasting because he has no one to carry his arms; o ogun, grant that he may have children of his own.

After this invocation of the priest, he pours the palm wine and oil on the ground before the shrine, and cast the kola nut. A musical gang was then sounded as part of the ritual to summon the divinity to accept the sacrifice. The invocation is meant to ensure the presence of the divine being during the worship. This was preceded with the offering the third element of African worship.

3. Offering

Offering involves the functions of divination in most cultures in African society. Dopamu observed that the priest who is the officer of the deity offers kola nuts, to seek the will of the divinity saying: “God of the four days, some and eat kola nuts, ancestors come and eat kola nut”. The offering is a means of ascertaining whether it is accepted by the divinities or not. The priest also asks ritual questions before casting the kola nuts as follows; “Is it peace and prosperity” is it peace or trouble? These questions could further be asked if the omen is propitious and the act of worship proceeds to its end. However, if the answer is not satisfactory the priest terminates the offering and worship ends.

4. The Chanting of Song

Chanting of song is the fourth element of worship, which follows, the offering and it takes the form of rhymical recitation of ritual words. This is accompanied with clapping, drumming of musical instruments and the use of other musical gadgets. Each of the divinity has its own set of hymns, which are connected with the cult. These songs are sung especially during public worship, sacred days, and the times of crisis as well as during funeral

ceremonies. Lighter hymns are also sung during annual worship and are songs of rejoicing that the gods of divinities have accepted the sacrifice(s) offered to them by the worshippers.

5. Prayer

Prayer is the time the worshippers are asking the deity for longevity and prosperity in enterprises and against their enemies. During the time of prayers, the worshippers make their petitions to the Supreme Being and enter into personal relationship with Him. These prayers are offered during worship and other times as occasion demands. Sometimes, people pray at shrines, sacred brooks or market squares asking the supreme deity for blessings and protections. People especially the heart-troubled ones on daily basis as part of worship to seek divine favours from the deity offer ejaculatory prayers.

3.3 The Origin of Sacrifice in African Traditional Religion

Sacrifice is a religious institution, which is as old as the history of humanity himself. Its origin is traced back to the history of religion, the product of man's creation of the idea of God himself because of the gifts offering to the deities. Tylor and Spencer, for example, assert that the origin of sacrifice is the offering of gifts to the ancestors. According to them:

...the origin of the traditional sacrifice is to be found in the custom of leaving food and wine at the graves of the dead by their living members eat and drink. In addition, the belief in the ancestral spirits rose to divine rank, the practice developed into sacrifice.

Cisero also corroborated that the idea of sacrifice originated from man's efforts to appease the divinities and other spiritual forces in the society. He states:

Let not the impious people dare appease the gods with gift. Let them hearken to plate of those who warn them that there can be no doubt of what God's disposition towards them will be, since even a good man will refuse to accept presents from the wicked.

Cicero's position presented above is that, sacrifice originated from the gifts, which human beings offer to the deities. His view is in contrast with other schools of thoughts who traced the origin of sacrifice to the Supreme Being. According to them, the supreme deity is the originator of sacrifice. He created religion and He is the author of sacrifice by which religious sentiments found their ancient and universal expression in the society. Sometimes, sacrifice is made to the divinities according to their requests and as prescribed by the oracles. Some sacrifices are usually treated according to the needs of worshippers add prescription of the gods. Thus, any kind of food, thing, or animals could be offered as sacrifice if only it is not a taboo or something forbidden by the deity. These sacrifices are exposed, buried, or shared amongst worshippers as communion meal binding all members together. Sacrifices can be divided into various groups. However, in this chapter we shall limit ourselves to only few of them.

3.4 Taxonomy of Sacrifice in African Traditional Religion

(a) Human Sacrifice

This is the highest and most potent offering in African religion. It was the oldest form of sacrifice practiced by world religious in ancient times. This sacrifice was practiced not only in African religion but also in the Old Testament era before it was refined by the sacrifice of Isaac where God revealed Himself as the object of sacrifice. Human sacrifice was definitively the practice of offering human beings to appease the divinities at annual festivals and moments of special needs, such as the laying of town foundations, on outbreaks of epidemic threat of war. It was also the time of ritual killing of human beings during the burial of highly placed kings in the society. African people in their stage of primitivism have developed high desire to question the unknown forces around him by offering human beings, to the deities in order to win their favours and to be restored to right relationship with them. Thus, African people believe that the more their relationship is restored, the more prepared they will be to offer the best to the deity.

The best in their consciousness they could offer to the deities was human beings. This was the reason while the Attah of Igala offered his only virgin daughter "Inekpi" to the deity in order to win the war between the Igala's and the Jukun people. Jephthan in the Old Testament sacrificed his only virgin daughter after winning the war, while Micah agreed to

give her first-born child for the transgression of her soul. Many of these human sacrifices in olden times took place in connection with funerals and memorial ceremonies of kings in African society. The kings of Abomey, Ghana, Benin Republic, to mention but just a few got their reputations of bloodthirsty depots at funerals and commemorations ceremonies. There were mass killings of people and it was believed that those sacrificed would be the king's attendants on his last journey to the abode of the ancestors. Among the Yoruba's, human sacrifice was made to appease the divinities so that they might be saved. In the olden days, it was the climax and highest form of gift, which was offered to Oranfe, ondo, and ogun the prestigious divinities of Yoruba land.

The victims of such sacrifice were regarded as "an ambassador", representing the interest of his/her community in the next world. Ironically, the sacrificial victims were to be given a special message to deliver when he or she gets to the deity. Sometimes, such a victim was dressed in his or her best clothes and was treated with respect or accorded extraordinary status in the community. He or she was also made to dance round the town to bear the evil of the community before he or she was ritually murdered, strangled to death, or tied to a tree until he or she dies. In many cultures of African, there were monarchs who had special wives and minister whose names indicate their readiness to die with the kings. For example, among the Yoruba people of Nigeria, especially Oyo kingdom, the Aremu (the first male child of the king) was expected to die with the Alafin. While in Dahomey, the Queen who was childless took poison to die in order to accompany the king to the next world. Sometimes, a dwarf was buried alive with a lighted lamp in his/her hands to light the king's path to the city of the dead. They were also scapegoats who out of bad luck or misfortunes were sacrificed to the deities. These were good looking and strong persons usually procured from a far place for such ritual sacrifices.

Thus, it was believed by African people that such victims are substitutes for the community and with their death; the sins of the community can be solemnly transferred to the sacrificial victims. For this reason, the victims were tied to the trees, insulted and finally knocked down until they died. The dead bodies were then thrown away into the bush. A typical example is the *Osu* people in Igbo land. They were special group of people dedicated or consecrated to the gods in the shrines and up until date, people discriminate against them. In olden days, the victims of human sacrifice were condemned to death and the gods held their punishments. Other forms of sacrifices in African society are meal and drink offerings, gift, or thanksgiving offering, votive offering, preventive offering, propitiation or expiation offering and substitution sacrifice.

(b) The Meal and Drink Offering

These were the offerings made for communion and harmonious co-existence of members in the community. African people enjoy eating and drinking together. They do accept individualistic kind of living, which brings about un-peaceful co-existence, lack of unity and lack of cohesion among members of the community. This solidarity spirits is extended to the deceased members of the community and the deity respectively. Thus, in many cultures, the dead are always invited to partake in feasting during ceremonies. Amongst the Igbo's of Nigeria for example, the Supreme Deity and the ancestors are usually invited whenever kola nut is broken at occasions to come and eat with them saying; "Chukwu ta oji, Ndiche ta oji," which means God, come and eat kola nut, Ancestors, come and eat kola nut". The Igbo people believe that since human beings break the kola nut as a sign of friendship and love, so it is with the gods, and it forms a bond of unity and communism between the deity and human beings in the society. During the meal and drink sacrifices, gifts are offered regularly on sacred days and festival occasions of the divinity in question. This meal was offered first to the divinity and then part of it was laid before the shrines, while remaining parts of the offering was shared among the worshippers. The pouring of libation of libation to appease the deity and to established communism between the gods and the people concluded meal and drink sacrifices.

(c) Gift Offering

This is an act of veneration or homage given to the deity. It is the manifestation of the appreciation to the deity. Africans in their hospitable manner try to extend their gratitude to the gods when they worship and have supplied them with all the good things in life. These gifts, though voluntary are generated by motive of expressing gratitude. The worshippers poured libations of water, wine, and palm oil as gift offerings and sacrifices to the gods. They also present oranges, bananas, yams, maize, beans, birds, pigeons, chicken, dogs, goats, sheep's, rams, ducks, and the like to honour the gods or divinities who have blessed them with good things of life.

(d) Votive Offering

Votive offering is the sacrifice of seeking the favour and support of one another in moments of needs. It is a sacrifice offered in fulfilment of the promise made for the deity, seeking help. The suppliant makes a bow, asking the divinity for favour, blessing, and protection. For example, the Attah of Igala made a vow that he would give Inikpi, his only daughter to the deity, if he wins the war with the Jukun people as earlier mentioned in this chapter. The motive or votive offering was to arouse the interest and cooperation of the gods who are more capable of providing solutions to their problems. Therefore, whenever the Africans are in trouble, they believe that the promise of gift gladden the heart of the Supreme Being. Even in moments of needs and distress, they hastily make solemn vows to the gods, as a demonstration of their belief in the personal deity who can help them. The votive offering may be shared with gods, especially if it is a meal offering or treated by the worshippers as it is prescribed by the oracles.

(e) Preventive Offering

Preventive offering is the sacrifice offered to ask the deity to intervene in times of trouble. This sacrifice is offered because African people have a belief that there are evil spirits that cause disasters in human society and such spirits can be given offering so that they will not torment people. These spirits must also be nourished to win their interest, and to prevent them for causing more havoc in human society, preventive offerings are offered by the worshippers. The Africans consider it more appropriate to appease them than to allow evil to happen to them in the society. Thus, regular offerings and sacrifice of favourite food such as water, palm wine, bitter kola nut, among other food items are offered to the gods in order to avoid their wraths and punishments. These offerings are placed at the cross roads, outside the dwelling houses and shrines for the gods to eat them. All these are done to ensure that the anger of the gods is not provoked. Sometimes, the worshippers are prevented from consuming the food offered to the gods since it was meant for the gods. Preventive offering is not for human consumption but for the whole group who them to appease the deity; based on the above belief that preventive offering is buried, burnt or exposed at crossroad in public places in accordance with the divine prescription of the gods.

(f) Propitiation or Expiation Sacrifice

Propitiation or expiation sacrifice is an offering for the appeasement of the gods to wipe away offences committed by the worshippers. This type of sacrifice is offered when a particular offence has been committed and has brought the anger of the gods on the society. Sometimes, such offences could result to epidemics, misfortunes, drought, famine, sickness, and even death of the members in the community. To appease the anger of the gods, oracles are consulted to find out what offences have been committed by the people and the kind of sacrifice(s) that should be offered to appease them. In most cultures of African, kola nut, pigeon, fowls, dogs, snails, goats, sheep, clothes, and the like are prescribed by the oracles as proprietary offerings to the gods. These animals and objects prescribed by the gods are not to be eaten by the worshippers and the priests, but are to be buried at the crossroad or in an open market square as a symbol of appeasement of the anger of the gods in the society.

(g) Substitutionary Sacrifice

Substitutionary sacrifice is a life for life offering made by the worshippers in critical situations involving life. The origin of this kind of sacrifice is unknown, however, it is generally to the efforts of human beings to appease the gods, especially in moments of sickness, pregnancy, and death in Ti society for example a pregnant woman who has a protracted labour may be required to make substitution offering to appease the gods. This sacrifice offered with animals after the oracles have been consulted. The animal for the sacrifice is killed and parts of the carcass are removed for ritual offering, while the remaining parts of the meat are shared among the worshippers. Sometimes, the sacrificial animal is treated like a corpse slaughtered or taken away by the ritual masters as a symbol that the death of the victims has been replaced by the sacrificial animal. Substitution sacrifice is not common in modern African society due to advancement in medical services, which tend to reduce mortality rates in urban rural areas.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Worship and sacrifice are the most essential components of African traditional religion. Their origin is believed to have been rooted in human efforts and desires to communion with the gods and to appease them in moments of trouble and needs. Mankind also wanted to express his or her belief, hospitality, and gratitude to the higher beings that can satisfy his/her daily needs. Hence, worship and sacrifice serve as vital ingredients that control

the existence of human beings and regulate the activities of daily life in the society. Worship and sacrifice are only good and efficacious when worshippers follow the laid down rules and regulations as prescribed by the gods. No deity would like to accept a sacrifice offered by an evildoer. This indicates that the worshippers ought to be morality sound in times of worship and sacrifice. Our next chapter therefore, examines the concept of morality in African traditional religion as a channel of establishing a cordial relationship between the supreme deity and human beings in the society.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have studied about worship and sacrifice in African traditional religion. We also learnt the characteristics of African worship, the origin of sacrifice and the taxonomy of sacrifice in African traditional religion.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. What is African worship?
2. Define the term sacrifice
3. Discuss the origin of worship in African traditional religion
4. Examine the forms of sacrifice in African traditional religion

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 5 RITUAL SYMBOLISM IN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

CONTENTS

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

You will remember that when we were discussing the nature of worship and sacrifice, we intentionally left out ritual symbolism because of the special attention we intend to attach to it. In this last unit, you will now study every issue related to ritual in African traditional religion.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Discuss the concept of ritual
- Define the concept of symbol
- Examine the anthropological theories of ritual
- Explain the Genre of Ritual
- Discuss ritual in African traditional religion
- Differentiate between ritual and religion

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Definition of Ritual Symbolism

Ritual Symbolism is useful tools for the development and organization of human society. They are channels of self-expression used for the smooth running of any human society. With symbolic references, each individual in the human society judges his/her experiences and interpret reality of things in ritualistic and symbolic manner. This symbolic language helps the individuals in the community to express thoughts, emotions, and meanings of actions and activities in a symbolic way for better understanding. This expression of human realities involves signs, which are both religious and secular in nature. Ritual symbols are replaced with ethical values, religious dogmas closely integrated with the structures and needs of the society. Mary asserts that ritual and symbol are religious actions, which involve socio-economic and political aspects of the individual's life in the community. In his words:

Ritual symbols are so correlated that, it is difficult to draw a clear-cut distinction between religious and secular activities or realities in the community. This polar relationship can only be expressed or points to something relatively unknown. Both of them coexist for the expression of the transcendental actions of the individuals in the community.

The *Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary* defines rituals as "...all the rites and forms connected with a ceremony. Ritual is a way of conducting a religious service. For example, the Roman Catholic Church Service, which is a procedure regularly followed." For Turner, ritual is a prescribed formal behaviour for occasions not given a technical routine but

having references to belief and mystical beings or powers. In his own words: "...ritual is a stereotype sequence of activity involving gestures, words, objects performed in sequestered place and designed to influence or force on behalf of the actor's goals and interest."⁵ For Leah, ritual actions are forms of mechanical human behaviour ranging from simple custom of shaking hands and the daily etiquette of greetings, to such a complex and solemn act of ritual sacrifices. Danfulani asserts that rituals perform the social integral roles of bringing the harmony between the actors and transcendental order during ritual actions. These integrative roles are carried out in the communities in four major ways the underlined social integrative roles of rituals are performed in a structural way in the society and it is within this set-up that symbolism expresses itself in ritual meaning in the social strata of the society. The study of symbol can only be preceded by the ritual framework of actions, which are translated as the first step of ritual symbolism. A symbol is a sign, mark, or object representing something unknown." Firth asserts that: "...the essence of symbolism lies in the recognition of one thing standing for another; the relation between them normally is being that of concrete to abstract, particular to general." For Cohen, a symbol can be defined as "...an object, act, concept or linguistic formation that stand ambiguously for a multiplicity of desperate meaning, which evoke sentiment and emotion, and impel men to action." The definitions above point to the fact that a ritual symbol is a stylised pattern of activities such as ceremonies, rituals, gifts, prescribed forms of joking, taking an oath, eating and drinking together.

A ritual symbol is representative of something unknown, though it may stand for itself. Symbolism as such, is the basic complex artistic forms and gestures used as a key to convey religious ideas and events. Since time immemorial, symbolism has been utilized by all religions of the world. It is rooted in the common biological nature of humankind, the structure of the cosmic universe and the social conflicts between individual and the community. Symbolism of each society varies from one to the other. The symbols used in rituals are not public and their function is to communicate meanings of the objects or actions involved. Sometimes, a symbol is demonstrated with model, diagram, and body action. Moreover, Ray is not wrong when he opines, "a symbol is embodied in ritual actions which manifests itself in human society as means of expression." The symbolic expressions, which an individual shares with other people in the community, are able to express values, which are otherwise inexpressible and experienced as shared. It deals with the symbolic representation associated with ritual actions. Our task in this study therefore, becomes more relevant and necessary to analyse and interpret the ritual symbols in Tiv death and burial rites.

3.2 The Characteristics of Ritual Symbolism

There are many characteristics of ritual symbolism. These include:

Traditionalism

Traditionalism varies from formalism in that the ritual may not be formal yet still makes an appeal to historical. An example is the American Thanksgiving dinner, which may not be formal, yet is ostensibly based on an event from the early Puritan settlement of America. Historians Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger have argued that many of these are *invented traditions*, such as the rituals of the British monarchy, which invoke "thousand year-old tradition" but whose actual form originate in the late nineteenth century, to some extent reviving earlier forms, in this case medieval, that had been discontinued in the meantime. Thus, the appeal to history is important rather than accurate historical transmission.

Invariance

Catherine Bell states that ritual is also invariant, implying careful choreography. This is less an appeal to traditionalism than a striving for timeless repetition. The key to invariance is bodily discipline, as in monastic prayer and meditation meant to mold dispositions and moods.

Rule-Governance

Rituals tend to be governed by rules, a feature somewhat like formalism. Rules impose norms on the chaos of behavior, either defining the outer limits of what is acceptable, or choreographing each move. Individuals communally approved customs that evoke a legitimate communal authority, which constrain the possible outcomes. War in many societies, for example, is bound by highly ritualized constraints that limit the legitimate means by which fighting can be conducted

Sacred Symbolism

Activities appealing to supernatural beings are easily considered rituals, although the appeal may be quite indirect or subtle, expressing only a generalized belief in the existence of the sacred demanding a human response. National flags, for example are more than signs representing a country. In the United States, no one argues the flag is holy, but it stands for larger symbols such as freedom, democracy, free enterprise, or national superiority. Anthropologist Sherry Ortner writes that the flag does not encourage reflection on the logical relations among these ideas, nor on the logical consequences of social actuality and history. On the contrary, the flag encourages a sort of all-or-nothing allegiance to the whole package, best summed by 'Our flag love it or leave.' Particular objects become sacral symbols through a process of consecration which effectively creates the sacred by setting it apart from the profane. Boy Scouts and the armed forces, for example, teach the "official" ways of folding, saluting and raising the flag, thus emphasizing that the flag should never be treated as just a piece of cloth.

Performance

The performance of ritual creates a theatrical-like frame around the activities, symbols, and events that shape participant's experience and cognitive ordering of the world, simplifying the chaos of life and imposing a more or less coherent system of categories of meaning onto it. As Barbara Myerhoff put it, not only is seeing believing, but doing believes it. Clifford Geertz asserts that political rituals construct power in African society. In his analysis of the Balinese state, he argued that rituals are not an ornament of political power, but that the power of political actors depends upon their ability to create rituals and the cosmic framework within which the social hierarchy headed by the king is perceived as natural and sacred. As a dramaturgy of power, comprehensive ritual systems may create a cosmological order that sets a ruler apart as a divine being, as in the divine right of European kings, or the divine Japanese Emperor. Ritual can be used as a form of resistance, as for example, in the various Cargo Cults that developed against colonial powers in the South Pacific. In such religio-political movements, Islanders would use ritual imitations of western practices (such as the building of landing strips) as a means of summoning cargo (manufactured goods) from the ancestors. Leaders of these groups characterized the present

state (often imposed by colonial capitalist regimes) as a dismantling of the old social order, which they sought to restore.

3.3 Anthropological Theories of Ritual Symbolism

Functionary Theory

Nineteenth century "armchair anthropologists" were concerned with the basic question of how religion originated in human history. In the twentieth century, their conjectural histories were replaced with new concerns around the question of what these beliefs and practices did for societies, regardless of their origin. In this view, religion was a universal, and while its content might vary enormously, it served certain basic functions such as the provision of prescribed solutions to basic human psychological and social problems, as well as expressing the central values of a society. Bronislaw Malinowski used the concept of function to address questions of individual psychological needs; A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, in contrast, looked for the function (purpose) of the institution or custom in preserving or maintaining society as a whole. They thus disagreed about the relationship of anxiety to ritual.

Malinowski argued that ritual was a non-technical means of addressing anxiety about activities where dangerous elements were beyond technical control: "magic is to be expected and generally to be found whenever man comes to an unbridgeable gap, a hiatus in his knowledge or in his owes of practical control, and yet has to continue in his pursuit." Radcliffe-Brown in contrast, saw ritual as an expression of common interest symbolically representing a community, and that anxiety was felt only if the ritual was not performed. George Homans sought to resolve these opposing theories by differentiating between primary anxieties felt by people who lack the techniques to secure results, and secondary (or displaced) anxiety felt by those who have not performed the rites meant to allay primary anxiety correctly. Homans argued that purification rituals might then be conducted to dispel secondary anxiety.

Radcliffe-Brown posits that ritual should be distinguished from technical action, viewing it as a structured event: ritual acts differ from technical acts in having in all instances some expressive or symbolic element in them. Edmund Leach, in contrast, saw ritual and technical action less as separate structural types of activity and more as a spectrum: actions fall into place on a continuous scale. At one extreme, we have actions, which are entirely profane, entirely functional, technique pure and simple; at the other, we have actions, which are entirely sacred, strictly aesthetic, and technically non-functional. Between these two extremes, we have the great majority of social actions, which partake partly of the one sphere and partly of the other. From this point of view, technique and ritual, profane and sacred, do not denote *types* of action but *aspects* of almost any kind of action.

The Functionalist model viewed ritual as a homeostatic mechanism to regulate and stabilize social institutions by adjusting social interactions, maintaining a group ethos, and restoring harmony after disputes. Although the Functionalist model was soon superseded, later "neofunctional" theorists adopted its approach by examining the ways that ritual regulated larger ecological systems. Roy Rappaport, for example, examined the way gift exchanges of pigs between tribal groups in Papua New Guinea maintained environmental balance between humans, available food (with pigs sharing the same foodstuffs as humans), and resource base.

Rappaport concludes that ritual, helps to maintain an undegraded environment, limits fighting to frequencies, which do not endanger the existence of regional population, adjusts man-land ratios, facilitates trade, distributes local surpluses of pig throughout the regional population in the form of pork, and assures people of high quality protein when they are most in need of it. Similarly, Stephen Lansing traced how the intricate calendar of Hindu Balinese rituals served to regulate the vast irrigation systems of Bali, ensuring the optimum distribution of water over the system while limiting disputes.

Rituals of Rebellion Theory

While most Functionalists sought to link ritual to the maintenance of social order, South African functionalist anthropologist Max Gluckman coined the phrase "rituals of rebellion" to describe a type of ritual in which the accepted social order was symbolically turned on its head. He observed, for example, how the first-fruits festival (*incwala*) of the South African Bantu kingdom of Swaziland symbolically inverted the normal social order, so that the king was publicly insulted, women asserted their domination over men, and the established

authority of elders over the young was turned upside down. Gluckman argued that the ritual was an expression of underlying social tensions (an idea taken up by Victor Turner), and that it functioned as an institutional pressure valve, relieving those tensions through these cyclical performances. The rites ultimately functioned to reinforce social order, insofar as they allowed those tensions to be expressed without leading to actual rebellion. Carnival is viewed in the same light.

Structural Theory

Claude Lévi-Strauss, the French anthropologist, regarded all social and cultural organization as symbolic systems of communication shaped by the inherent structure of the human brain. He therefore argued that the symbol systems are not reflections of social structure as the Functionalists believed, but are imposed on social relations to organize them. Lévi-Strauss thus viewed myth and ritual as complementary symbol systems, one verbal, one non-verbal. Lévi-Strauss was not concerned to develop a theory of ritual (although he did produce a four-volume analysis of myth) but was influential to later scholars of ritual such as Mary Douglas and Edmund Leach. Victor Turner combined Van Gennep's model of the structure of initiation rites, and Gluckman's functionalist emphasis on the ritualization of social conflict to maintain social equilibrium, with a more structural model of symbols in ritual. Running counter to this emphasis on structured symbolic oppositions within a ritual was his exploration of the liminal phase of rites of passage, a phase in which anti-structure appears. In this phase, opposed states such as birth and death may be encompassed by a single act, object, or phrase. The dynamic nature of symbols experienced in ritual provides a compelling personal experience; ritual is a mechanism that periodically converts the obligatory into the desirable.

Mary Douglas, a British Functionalist, extended Turner's theory of ritual structure and anti-structure with her own contrasting set of terms "grid" and "group" in the book *Natural Symbols*. Drawing on Levi-Strauss' Structuralist approach, she saw ritual as symbolic communication that constrained social behaviour. Grid is a scale referring to the degree to which a symbolic system is a shared frame of reference. Group refers to the degree people are tied into a tightly knit community. When graphed on two intersecting axes, four quadrants are possible: strong group/strong grid, strong group/weak grid, weak group/weak grid, and weak group/strong grid. Douglas argued that societies with strong group or strong grid were marked by more ritual activity than those weak in either group or grid. In his analysis of rites

of passage, Victor Turner argued that the liminal phase that period between was marked by two models of human interrelatedness, juxtaposed and alternating: structure and anti-structure (or *communitas*). While the ritual clearly articulated the cultural ideals of a society through ritual symbolism, the unrestrained festivities of the liminal period served to break down social barriers and to join the group into an undifferentiated unity with no status, property, insignia, secular clothing, rank, and kinship position, nothing to demarcate themselves from their fellows. These periods of symbolic inversion have been studied in a diverse range of rituals such as pilgrimages and Yom Kippur.

Social Dreams Theory

Beginning with Max Gluckman's concept of rituals of rebellion, Victor Turner argued that many types of ritual also served as social dramas through which structural social tensions could be expressed, and temporarily resolved. Drawing on Van Gennep's model of initiation rites, Turner viewed these social dramas as a dynamic process through which the community renewed itself through the ritual creation of *communitas* during the liminal phase. Turner analyzed the ritual events in four stages: breach in relations, crisis, redressive actions, and acts of reintegration. Like Gluckman, he argued these rituals maintain social order while facilitating disordered inversions, thereby moving people to a new status, just as in an initiation rite. Clifford Geertz also expanded on the symbolic approach to ritual that began with Victor Turner. Geertz argued that religious symbol systems provided both a model of reality (showing how to interpret the world as is) as well as a model for reality (clarifying its ideal state). The role of ritual, according to Geertz, is to bring these two aspects the model of and the model for together: it is in ritual that is consecrated behaviour that this conviction that religious conceptions are veridical and that religious directives are sound is somehow generated.

Symbolic Theory

Symbolic anthropologists like Geertz analyzed rituals as language-like codes to be interpreted independently as cultural systems. Geertz rejected Functionalist arguments that ritual describes social order, arguing instead that ritual actively shapes that social order and imposes meaning on disordered experience. He also differed from Gluckman and Turner's

emphasis on ritual action as a means of resolving social passion, arguing instead that it simply displayed them.

3.4 Ritual Symbolism as a Form of Communication

Whereas Victor Turner saw in ritual the potential to release people from the binding structures of their lives into a liberating anti-structure or *communitas*, Maurice Bloch argued that ritual produced conformity. Maurice Bloch argued that ritual communication is unusual in that it uses a special, restricted vocabulary, a small number of permissible illustrations, and a restrictive grammar. As a result, ritual utterances become very predictable, and the speaker is made anonymous in that they have little choice in what to say. The restrictive syntax reduces the ability of the speaker to make propositional arguments, and they are left, instead, with utterances that cannot be contradicted such as I do thee wed in a wedding. These kinds of utterances, known as performatives, prevent speakers from making political arguments through logical argument, and are typical of what Weber called traditional authority instead.

Bloch's model of ritual language denies the possibility of creativity. Thomas Csordas, in contrast, analyzes how ritual language can be used to innovate. Csordas looks at groups of rituals that share performative elements (genres of ritual with a shared poetics). These rituals may fall along the spectrum of formality, with some less, others more formal and restrictive. Csordas argues that innovations may be introduced in less formalized rituals. As these innovations become more accepted and standardized, they are slowly adopted in rituals that are more formal. In this way, even the most formal of rituals are potential avenues for creative expression.

3.5 Ritual Symbolism as a Disciplinary Program

Monks described the Scriptorium-monk-at-work labour of transcribing manuscripts as being like prayer and fasting, a means of correcting one's unruly passions. In his historical analysis of articles on ritual and rite in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Talal Asad notes that from 1771 to 1852, the brief articles on ritual define it as a book directing the order and manner to be observed in performing divine service (as a script). There are no articles on the subject thereafter until 1910, when a new, lengthy article appeared that redefines ritual as a

type of routine behaviour that symbolizes or expresses something. As a symbolic activity, it is no longer confined to religion, but is distinguished from technical action. The shift in definitions from script to behavior, which is likened to a text, is matched by a semantic distinction between ritual as an *outward sign* (public symbol) and *inward meaning*.

The emphasis has changed to establishing the meaning of public symbols and abandoning concerns with inner emotional states since, as Evans-Pritchard wrote, such emotional states, if present at all, must vary not only from individual to individual, but also in the same individual on different occasions and even at different points in the same rite. Asad, in contrast, emphasizes behavior and inner emotional states; rituals are to be performed, and mastering these performances is a skill requiring disciplined action. In other words, apt performance involves not symbols to be interpreted but abilities to be acquired according to rules that are sanctioned by those in authority: it presupposes no obscure meanings, but rather the formation of physical and linguistic skills. Drawing on the example of medieval monastic life in Europe, he points out that ritual in this case refers to its original meaning of the book directing the order and manner to be observed in performing divine service.

This book prescribed practices, whether they had to do with the proper ways of eating, sleeping, working, and praying or with proper moral dispositions and spiritual aptitudes, aimed at developing virtues that are put 'to the service of God. Monks, in other words, were disciplined in the Foucauldian sense. The point of monastic discipline was to learn skills and appropriate emotions. Asad contrasts his approach by concluding, Symbols call for interpretation, and even as interpretive criteria are extended so interpretations can be multiplied. Disciplinary practices, on the other hand, cannot be varied so easily, because learning to develop moral capabilities is not the same thing as learning to invent representations. Asad's work analyzed the notion that there were universal characteristics of ritual to be found in all cases. Catherine Bell has extended this idea by shifting attention from ritual as a category, to the processes of ritualization by which ritual is created as a cultural form in a society. Ritualization is a way of acting that is designed and orchestrated to distinguish and privilege what is being done in comparison to other, usually quotidian, activities.

3.6 Prayer

Prayer is an important duty, which stands out, prominently in African society. It begins controls and ends all the affairs of human life. The African people believe that during

worship they are in the presence of the divinities and this awareness influence their religious thoughts and behaviours. Thus, the African people put their divinities first before other things. They believe that only the divinities can give them blessings support and succour as human beings worship in African society therefore have certain characteristics which must be follow by the worshippers whether in private or in public. These include; first, the worshipper must not carry bad medicine or impure heart during worship. Second, they must have moral and ritual cleanliness during worship. Failure to do so is a taboo or ritual defilement of the objects of worship. Third, it must take place in the shrines of the tutelary divinity of the community.

This daily worship is individual affairs, which take the form of reaffirming humankind acknowledgement of the supreme deity and his protection over the people. Fourth, worshippers must provide water and kola nuts as gifts to the divinities. This is after the head of the community has presented his own kola nuts to the divinities. These listed above characteristics constitute the six structure of worship in African religion. These include; the pouring of libation, singing of song, praying and offering of sacrifice to the supreme deity. The first ingredient of worship in African religion because it appeases the deity. Thus, throughout Africa, the libation is poured in the form of drink offering and water, spirit drink, palm wine or beer are used as items of sacrifice.

Sometimes, the worshippers pour libation with local drinks known as '*burukutu*' as a symbolic act of softening the relationship between the deity and the worshippers. This libation on the ground before the shrine or on the symbol of the divinity is to open the divine presence for the worship. The pouring of libation with the invocation, which is the second element of worship in African religion. African worship consists in prayer and expression of words to God in times of needs. Worship has been defined as the field of ritual action, and even the vaguest prayer is a kind of ritual, though it need not be fixed in form or ever repeated in precisely the same way. During worship, prayer is made to God and sacrifices are offered by the priests, calling forth the Great Spirit to intervene in human problems. The Gikuyu prayer clearly demonstrated this thus:

You who make mountains tremble and rivers flood, we offer you this prayer and sacrifices so that you may bring us rain. People and children are crying; sheep, goats, and cattle are crying. We beseech you to accept this prayer and sacrifice and bring us prosperity. Great Spirit, piling up the rocks like mountains, serving the sky like cloth, calling forth the branching trees, you

bring out the shoots so that they stand erect. You fill the earth with humankind, the dust rises on high, O Lord, wonderful one, you live in the midst of the sheltering rocks, and you give rain to men. You are on high with the spirits of the great. You raise the grass-covered hills above the earth and you create the rivers, gracious one.

This rain prayer of the Kikuyu reveals better than many explanations the nature of an African faith in God, his greatness, character and attitude towards men. It is not solitary example, for from all over Africa there are being recorded prayers made on many occasions, which are enriching the literature on African traditional religion and providing the materials for something like a prayer Book of African worship. The attributes of God are expressed in “praise names”, which are repeated and savoured like salutations to a Great Chief, and they resemble epithets used in collects and prayers of other religions. Anyone who has listened to African prayers must have been impressed by the sorrow rehearsals of divine qualities, Loran, Olodumare, Baba, Alaami judo; God, Almighty, Father, most merciful; so the Yoruba’s begin many prayers, and continue with rolling sentences in which praise and prayer mingled. This poetry of African prayer delights in expressive words, the interest of God in men, and his ability to help them in times of needs. The need for rain is one of the great concerns of people in the drier parts of Sudanese and eastern Africa, and it is much less important in the damp forest regions.

Another constant demand is for children and so people look to God as the creator of all life. In Burundi, it is said that there is little prayer to God, *Imana*, though he is constantly in people’s thoughts and speech, but a baby song has recorded which expresses petition. ‘Hush, child of my mother *Imana* who gave you to me, if only I could meet him I would fall on my knees and pray to him, I would pray for little babies...You came when *Imana* lit the fire, you came when he was in a generous mood.’ However, in suffering or bareness, laments and reproaches may be addressed to God: *Imana*, in the question manner: why are you punishing me? Why have you not made me like other people? Why have you not given me a child like others?’ All family affairs can be matters of prayer, whether they are good or bad, and sometimes a prayer may be almost a curse, as in the Old Testament. A Mende, whose son had left home against his father’s will, was prayed against in these words to God, *Ngewo*: *O’ Ngewo*, you know this is my son; I beat him and trained him and laboured for him, and now that he do some work for me refuses. In anything he does now in the world may he not prosper until he comes back and begs my pardon?’ Such a breach with traditional custom and

inherited crafts is common nowadays, with the attractions of big cities and easy money, but children often seek reconciliation with their parents, and if misfortune comes, they may return home and ask for forgiveness.

The errant son finds his mother first, and they go with a gift, rice, or money and sit or kneel at the father's feet. If he is moved with compassion, the father prays again: '*O Ngewo*, this is my son...he knows he cannot stand behind me; he has come now to beg me to pull the curse as I am doing now. Whenever he goes, may he now prosper and have many children.' The assembled family responds by saying, "God grant it". Not only children but also ancestors are the constant concern of prayer. They are believed to show their power through the welfare or misfortunes of their family, in sending children and blessing the crops, or the reverse. They are often associated with God in prayer, and as a chief are approached through an intermediary so prayer may go to God through ancestors and other spirits. On the other hand, God may be asked to include all the ancestors in his blessings: 'O God let it reach all our forefathers who are in your arms.' Prayers made directly to the ancestors may be longer than prayers to God, for they know all the intimate family concerns and will pass on to God the most pressing need. They may be thought to answer prayers themselves, but only if God is willing. Sometimes God and the ancestors are so closely associated that it is difficult to know which is being addressed.

The *Shilluk* invoke their founder ancestor, *Nyikang*, and only rarely address God (*Juok*) directly, but their recorded prayers are ambiguous. There is no one above you, O God. You became the grandfather of *Nyikang*; you became the grandfather of man. If famine comes, it is not given by you. We praise you, you who are God. Protect us, we are in your hands, and protect us, save me. You and *Nyikang*, you are the ones who created... The cow for sacrifice is here for you, and the blood will go to God and you. These prayers are not fixed in form, and it is a widespread delusion the 'primitive' people always pray in exactly the same words, for fear of uttering a word out of place, which would have harmful effects. Prayers are made in everyday language, to express general or particular needs, and they can be short and simple or long and complicated. The ancestors are some of the most powerful spiritual forces in African belief, and in many places, they take the place of the gods, which are more prominent in West than in East or South Africa. The vexed question whether the ancestors are worshipped, or simply revered like elders of the clan, finds a partial answer in the fact that prayers to ancestors differ little in tone and content from those directed to God and other spirits.

Some of the best examples were recorded years ago by Rattray among the Ashanti, and his examples are models of care, given in the original language followed by English translation as follow:

In Ashanti *Adae* ceremonies, performed every three weeks, water, mashed plantains, and sometimes meat, blood, and alcohol are offered at the stools of the ancestors. The worshipper offer the sacrifice in the following words: “My spirit grandfathers, today is the Wednesday *Adae*, come and receive this mashed plantain and eat; let this town prosper; and permit the bearer of children to bear children; and may all the people of this town get riches”. On another occasion when a chief offered a sheep these words were said: ‘Ancient ones... who came from the Sky God, receive this sheep and eat, permit me to have a long reign, let this nation prosper, do not let it act foolishly

Like God, the ancestors are addressed not only in petitioner prayer, but also in praise and epithet, and their characteristic virtues are recounted in funeral dirges. Particularly that benevolence is praised which is one of the most popular virtues of chiefs and is expected of the departed still: ‘You are a mighty tree with big branches laden with fruit. When children come to you they find something to eat.’ The dirges show both the loss to the community of the dead person and the continuing links with his family. ‘Grandsire... with a slim but generous arm, fount of satisfaction... I depend on you for everything...Although a man; you are a mother to children.’ People are mentioned by their qualities and events that happened to them: ‘Ataa the Priestess fell on a Friday, she was the one called by God.’

In addition, God himself is invoked in funeral dirges as the ruler of the departed: ‘The Creator of the sun, receive this liquor and show me the way to the world of the dead.’ Private prayers are often short, whether daily or in time of need or danger, but since much religious practice is formal there are priests or elders who lead prayers at public ceremonies, and as professional men, they are proud of their fluency. At a sacrifice for a sick young man among the Dinka the leader seized a spear and addressed the ancestors, ‘You of my fathers’, and the spectators repeated the words in chorus. He continued, ‘I call upon you because my child is ill’, and the chorus repeated this, and so on throughout this prayer and others.’ The promise that you promised, you of my father, where is it? You, tree, hear my words, and you grass hear my words, and you Divinity hear my words, and you earth hear my words. O Divinity, because of sickness, you will help my tongue. Prayers are comprehensive and tend to include

any spirit force that may give help. This may be shocking to a monotheist, but the purpose is to call all the varied powers to give health and well-being.

This prayer was recorded at an annual *Apo* purification ceremony in Ashanti: ‘Sky God, upon whom men lean and do not fall, Goddess of the Earth, Creature that rules the under-world, Leopard that possesses the forest, Tano River, by your kindness the edges of the year have met stand behind us with a good standing. Let no bad thing whatever overtakes us. We give our wives. We give ourselves into your hand; let no evil come upon us. The ‘nature gods’ are also objects of many petitions. They are praised in long chants, which refer to past traditions, as well as to the present activities and characters of these powerful beings. These words are taken from songs (*Oriki*) recorded of great divinities of the Yoruba. The Great God or King (*Orishanla* or *Obatala*) is the agent of creation under the Supreme Being: *Obatala*, powerful king, *Obatala*, owner of the sacred thing. He gives to any body and takes any time he wishes. He remains calm and judges calmly; he looks from the corner of his eye without seeming to do so; with long hands he takes up the son who has fallen into a trap; he pours out quickly away from the hand of the evildoer; if he has something to eat he gives us to eat.’ Moreover, to the great storm god, *Shango*, traditional songs are addressed: ‘*Shango* can help us...hear if I speak, *Shango*, hear if I speak...Come, O king, that we may all go and that the festival may be good.

Prayers usually assume that the divinity will help his suppliant by an intervention, either open or hidden, but powerful and effective. People know the regularity of nature, the revolution of the solar and agricultural year, and the proper times of rain and harvest. The *Luyia* ask God to ‘let things take their normal course’, and to ‘let the sun rise and shine as usual’. When variations appear in the normal order of things, God does not send these out of spite, but to punish people who have deviated from the natural order, which he established. If children die it may be blamed on the mother’s adultery, or it is witchcraft from a jealous co-wife or a withered grandmother. The argument may be mistaken, but it is based upon reasoning which looks for explanation. Nevertheless, the traditional conception of the world is not static but dynamic. God has not fixed an order that can never change or placed people in position where they are doomed to stay forever. The philosophy of forces pictures many different powers, under the supreme one, striving for improvement and progress. Great endeavours are made today by people and communities to ‘get up’, improve and modernize themselves and become successful, because of this dynamic idea. Therefore, prayer petition and praise, all seek augmentation of force, by recognizing and invoking the powers of the spirits and the Supreme Being.

3.7 Ritual Colour symbolism in African Traditional Religion

In African traditional religion, colours are important ingredients that represent ideas. Colours create a synopsis of symbolic realities, which are employed by religious functionaries (i.e. diviners, witch doctors, medicine men, and soothsayers among others), to maintain a cosmic harmony, identify or interpret the causes of events in the universe. The three colours, namely: red, black and white dominates the African beliefs, rites, rituals and practices of death and burial. While white stands in defence of itself, red colour creates harmony in the sustaining of life, peace, and legitimacy. Black, on the other hand, represents the darkened human community. Usually, these three colours appear in antithesis, the red as danger/blood, black as bad/evil, and white as good/peace. Take the red colour for example, in Tiv pre-colonial times, with the use of blood, which symbolizes danger. Water was also employed to purify or wash away people's guilt. While black charcoal was used to mark the chest of dead bodies before post-mortem. This is clearly illustrated in the diagram below:

Table 1: The Three Colours and their Ritual Symbolism

RED	BLACK	WHITE
Danger/Blood	Bad/Evil	Good/Peace
Spirits	Sorcery/witchcraft	God
Destruction	Wickedness	Happiness
Life	Death	Life/Peace
Woman/Man	Man/Woman	Children
Blood	Sickness	Cure
Bad Luck	Misfortune	Fortune
Disappointment	Lack of Success	Success
Authority	Dethronement	Authority
Redness/Fair	Darkness	Clearness
Sustaining/Give life	Terminate life	Source of life

Ripe	Spoiled	Live
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In Table 1 above, we have seen how the three colours are distinct and symbolically represented. The white colour is associated with the red colour. The red and white colour here stands in direct opposition to the black colour. The colour red is a source of life, power and it serves an intermediary role. In contrast, it is symbol of danger, death, and blood. The role of red colour as a catalyst, however, is to maintain a balance between two opposing camps, namely, the human and the spirit world. The red blood, which serves as a symbol of purification, is a catalyst that helps to calm down the anger of the gods and takes away their wraths from the community. This is where animal blood as a catalyst functions well as an appeasement for the maintenance of good relationship between the ancestor's spirits and human beings.

The white colour is also prevalent in most deaths and burial rituals and it symbolizes life, purity, peace, and clearness. Thus, in African traditional religion, the corpse is dressed in white traditional clothes to symbolize purity. The ritualist who performs the funeral ceremony (*or sôrun ku*) wears a white robe during the burial ceremony as a symbol of ritual cleanliness and purity. The white chicken waves round the victim's head signifies the transference of guilt from the victim to the chicken, while the water that is sprinkled indicates the cooling of bitterness and anger of the gods. On the contrast, therefore, the black colour represents all malevolent acts ranging from sorcery, witchcraft, sickness, black heartedness, physical suffering, darkness, wickedness, and death. To understand better the black colour, we need to refer to the analysis of black as death and life force. Similarly, the cap worn by the ritual specialist during death and burial ceremony is a symbol of manhood. The black grains represent fertility, reproduction, rebirth, and life. The above table as well as discussion has shown that red, white, and black colours have special symbolism in Tiv death and burial rituals. However, to avoid frivolous suppositions, let us, in the following heading, analyse these three colours- white, black, and black in relation to Tiv death and burial rites.

4.0 CONCLUSION

You have seen from this unit that ritual in African traditional religion consist in expressive words, and the subtleties of traditional aphorisms are not allowed, as salutations to a great chief but resemble epithets used in collects and prayers of other religions. Daily rituals

and prayers are offered by the priests as act of thanksgiving and for ensuring a return blessing from the gods. These sacred people are specialists in their own field, which though may overlap in functions, have clearly defined roles.

5.0 SUMMARY

The following are the major points you have learnt in this unit:

- In African traditional religion, ritual involves religious actions, which has to do with the socio-political and political aspects of the individual's life in the society.
- Ritual acts are both religious and secular, and are connected in one way or the other with symbol.
- Ritual actions are forms of mechanical human behaviours, ranging from simple prayer, worship, and offering of sacrifices to the gods.
- Ritual performs the social integral roles of bringing the harmony between the actors and transcended order during ritual actions.

6.0 TOTUR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. What is ritual?
2. List and discuss the theories of African rituals
3. Discuss prayer in African traditional religion

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 6 RITES OF PASSAGE IN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

CONTENTS

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Every human being has different stages of life that he/she must pass through in life. These stages involved the crossing from one stage of life to the other. Africans attached importance to these religious cycles. Rituals are performed to mark them from birth to death. This unit shall focus on the rites of passage of selected ethnic groups in African society.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Defined what rites of passage is

- Narrate the Ashanti rites of passage
- Discuss the various Yoruba rites of passage
- Explain the Mende rites of passage

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Definition of the Rites of Passage

The rites of passage are of diverse types and marked by multiplicity of emphasis in different African communities. They are important transitional stages in the life cycle of every human being in African society, which involve the crossing of life from one stage of life to another. Van Gennep affirmed that, the passage of rites mark the turning point in the life cycle of every individual in the society. In his words:

...in African society, the rites of passage stimulate interest, which called for relative development of life in the society. Periodicity has repercussion on the lives of the individuals to such an extent that transition becomes a meaningful development in the cycle of life. Sometimes this transformation is characterized by “life-crisis-rituals” which enable an individual to live a fulfilled life as a member of the society.

The rites of passage has three major compulsory stages which every individual must undergo in order to live an accomplished life in the society. These include Birth and naming ceremony, initiation into the human community and the life crisis rituals (death and burial rites).

3.2 Ashanti Rites of Passage

3.2.1 Ashanti Birth Rites

The Ashanti birth rites have many challenges. The pregnant woman has many restrictions, and she must not leave her compound during the first trimester. When it becomes

necessary to go out she must cover her head and breasts, she must not be told that she is pregnant, she must avoid adultery, she must not abuse a divinity, she must not see the sight of blood, and she must not look at ugly things. The Ashanti believes that failures to adhere strictly to these taboos could lead to miscarriage or an abnormal child. When the pregnancy is eight months old, the woman must go to her parent's home where she has to remain until delivery. On the day of delivery female attendants assisted and the baby is called by the name of the day he was born when finally arrives. For example, child born on Friday is named *Kofi* and the one born on Saturday is called *Kwame*. For the first eight days of birth, no special attention is pay to the newborn baby because as the Yoruba also holds, the baby can return within that period. However, when the first eight days are passed clothes are provided and name is given officially.

3.2.2 The Ashanti Puberty Rites

The Ashanti puberty rites for a girl according to Kwesi and Ellingworth begin on the day she sees her first menstruation. She informs her mother as soon as she sees the menstruation and the mother turn makes the news known to the village community. After breaking the news, she will return home to pour libation to *Nyame* (God) and then to the ancestors. After this the girl's hair is shaved from both the armpit and the vagina. This shaving symbolizes that she is newborn adult. A ceremony is later carried out where everybody is entertained with foods and drinks. This ceremony also symbolizes that the girl is ripe for marriage.

3.2.3 The Ashanti Marriage Rites

A rite of marriage is an important ritual cycle of life among the Ashanti people. As with most of other tribes in Africa, when an Ashanti man is ready for marriage, he takes some gifts to the home of his would-be parents-in-law. Such gifts could be in the form of materials like tobacco, fish, and meat or in the form of direct labour in the farm of the would-be-in-laws. After the parents have agreed to give the girl to the man as wife, the ancestor's rites are involved to seal the marriage. The girl is then allowed to follow the man home.

3.3 The Yoruba Rites of Passage

3.3.1 Birth Rites among the Yoruba

Birth Rites among the Yoruba is of great importance because the new child is seen as the reincarnation of some ancestors who are seeking a return to life. This singular reason is the basis for the Yoruba is handling of barrenness as a serious curse and a great misfortune. From the point of conception until a child is finally delivered, great care is taken to ensure safe delivery. Medicine men are consulted to provide charms to ward off evil spirit and all the needed medical care to ensure safe delivery. At this point, the pregnant woman is made to observe all family taboos and ones that are considered general taboos. Some examples are that the pregnant woman should avoid walking in the sun during the day and in the dead of the night to avoid the spirits of children that are born to die from entering her womb. She is also expected to offer sacrifice to the husband's ancestral spirits who are believed to be capable of warding off witches and sorcerers who may want to attack the woman at the point of delivery.

Finally when the child arrives, the first eight days are the most critical ones. The baby during these eight days is regarded as a visitor to this world whose stay in this earth is still uncertain. On the third day of the child's birth, the *Ifa* oracle is consulted. This ceremony is called *ese n taye*. In this ceremony, the child's feet is placed on the sand of the divination tray to determine what sort of child he/she would be and what should be done by the parents in order that the child may have a happy destiny. The next ceremony comes up either on the seventh day (if the baby is a girl) or on the ninth day (if the baby is a boy); this is the naming ceremony.

The name a child is given in Yoruba land depends on the circumstances surrounding the birth of the child or the situation in the family as at the birth of the child. For example, a child born during festival period can be called *Babatunde* or *Abiodun*. If a child is born shortly after the demise of the grandfather or mother and the child happens to be in the sex of the departed one, the child would be named *Babatunde* if it is male or *Iyabo* if it were a female. Elements used for the naming ceremony among the Yoruba people include honey, salt, and sugarcane (all of which symbolizes the sweetness of life); bitter-kola (which symbolizes a safe journey through life) and kola-nut which symbolizes the warding off evil. As soon as the child is named with prayers using the elements, the elements are passed round for those present at the ceremony to eat out of it.

3.3.2 Puberty Rites

The Yoruba do not have an elaborate puberty rite. The principal adolescent rite for the male children is the circumcision rite. This is usually carried out when the boy reach the age of twenty or is about to take a wife. Due to modernization and western influence, the rite now takes place immediately after the birth of the child and without the attending fanfare. The female children too as a sign of maturity are expected to go through circumcision before they get married. Tattooing of the shoulders, back, trunk and thighs are also done at this time. It has to be noted too that western civilization has reduced female circumcision to the minimum among the Yoruba.

3.3.3 Marriage Rites

Marriage among the Yoruba is a very important event and it is a meeting point for the departed, the living, and the ones to be born. In the Yoruba worldview failure to get married is a sign that the person has rejected the society and the society in turn has rejected the person. Unlike the culture of the West, marriage is a family concern and not an individual matter. This is because marriage is seen as the unity of the two families and the responsibilities are shared between the two families. The marriage bond for the Yoruba does not terminate at death of either or the two spouses. When a girl is found to be of the age of marriage a group from the house of the would-be-groom would approach the girl's family to ask for her hand in marriage. The family would request time to consider the matter. During this period the family would carry out their secret investigation about the boy's family and consult with the oracle to ask about the viability of the proposed union. The investigation is specifically carried out to ascertain if the proposed groom's family had a history of diseases such as insanity, leprosy, epilepsy, and tuberculosis.

It will also examine whether the family had been associated with any crime or unsocial behaviour, which would bring disgrace to them if they get associated with the family. When all these had been ascertained and there is no obstacle, then the union may be allowed to take off and the negotiation for marriage proper begins. At this point, the proposed groom would go to the bride's family and pay a token sum of money, called *owo ibasoro* for talking and when this is taken, talks between the proposed couple would commence. If the girl consents to the marriage and the girl's parent too consent, another token sum of money called *owo ijohen*, for saying yes is paid along with two gourds of palm wine or two bottles

of hot drink. When this is received, it is assumed that everyone concerned and the tutelary divinities had given consent to the marriage.

The next stage is the engagement called *Idana*. The customary bride price (a token to say thank you for the girl's parents to have taken good care of her) which actually varies from family to family is paid. This legalizes the marriage because of payment of bride price gives a man control over the woman and all her offspring. The marriage proper takes place shortly after the payment of the bride price. The ceremony is characterised by prayers from both parents for fruitfulness, peaceful union, and long life. The tutelary divinities are invoked to shower their blessings on the new home. At the end, the bride is delivered into the hand of the eldest wife from the husband's family or some other elderly women who will take her home. This usually takes place in the night. On reaching the husband's house, she would go in only after she has been prayed for at the doorstep. Later she is introduced to every member of the family who will welcome her with gifts and she is introduced to her domestic responsibility.

3.4 The Mende Rites of Passage

3.4.1 Birth Rite among the Mende

Birth rites of Mende involved many things. As soon as the woman is pregnant, she is put under the care of an elderly woman who acts as midwife. At the point of giving birth, all men are forbidden to be present in the house. A male child is named on the fourth day while a female child is named on the third day. Like what obtains among the Yoruba, a child's name indicates the circumstances surrounding the birth of the child. For example, a child born shortly after the death of child is called *Gilo* (female) or *Gibas* (Male) which means Let this one live. The naming of a female child is usually done by a woman who will take the child out and face the sun. She spits on the child's face and gives the name. A male child is however, named by his father, the father's brother or any elderly man in the family. The procedure is the same as for the female.

3.4.2 Puberty Rite among the Mende

Among the Mende puberty rites is very elaborate. It is during this period that both the males and females undergo a training and initiation into adulthood. The initiation usually comes up between the age of fourteen or fifteen. The boy initiated into *Poros* society first face

circumcision if they are not already circumcised. Those conducting the rites then force the boys onto ground and cut their backs with razors while forcing their heads into a hole. The resulting scars signify the teeth marks of the *Poro* spirit that consumes the boys. The *Poro* initiates undergo training periods during which they are considered dangerous. They play pipes and yell warning cries to prevent passers-by from coming into contact with them. *Poro* initiates undergo ordeals during this state are deprived of sleep, forced to labour, exposed to the elements, forced to seek their own nourishment in the bush, and instructed in *Poro* law. The initiates then re-emerge, often through formal ritual procedures, to the normal social fabric with a newly defined identity and a changed social status.

The girls on the other hand are initiated into the *Sande* society where they are circumcised and prepared for motherhood. The initiation and socialization of females takes place in *Sande* camps, where young girls learn basic Mende female values. They are trained for marriage, in domestic and family issues, about economic pursuits, and in singing and dancing. The *Sande* maskers visit the camps periodically and the young girls learn to respect the spirits that guide and protect them. When the girls leave the camp it is a symbol of rebirth; they are then women ready for marriage. The *Soweï* mask is worn over the head of a female dancer and represents Mende ideas of female virtue and beauty. The broad smooth forehead of the mask signifies contemplativeness and restraint. The neck creases of the mask signify full-bloodiness and good health, while the smooth skin represents youthfulness. The small shapely ears, nose, and mouth mean that women are not given to gossip and braided hair is a testament to sexuality and cosmetic skills. The bird figure perched on top of the mask has several meanings that include love, discipline, laughter, danger, and power.

3.4.3 Marriage Rite among the Mende

The marriage rite of Mende people does not take place until the girl has initiated into the *Sande* society. Under normal conditions, the Mende girl is betrothed very early in life. It is believed that a girl or a boy that has not been fully initiated must not have sexual dealings. When a Mende boy is ready to get married he will take the bride price to his father-in-law. This is usually a lump sum of money and other goods such as clothes. The girl's parents in turn will call their daughter and present the bride price to her. The girl's mother asks her if she is prepared to go with the man. After two days, the husband sends a message usually an elderly woman, to his parent-in-law to request that his wife should come to live with him. As soon as the parents give their consent, they will call the girl to get her set for her new home.

When the girl is ready to leave, the mother blesses her by spitting on her hands and rubbing the saliva on the girl's forehead. The girl is then led to her husband's house by dancers.

4.0 CONCLUSION

You would have seen from these examples the cyclic view of life that permeates the African society. The birth of a child is a process that begins from point the mother gets pregnant. The newborn child is seen more as a reincarnation of one of the ancestors who is seeking a return to life and childlessness is seen as a big misfortune. Puberty is the transition from childhood to adulthood and there are many localized rites to mark this symbolic transition. Marriage is also seen as a religious duty and a responsibility for everyone.

5.0 SUMMARY

- The different stages of life that human beings have to pass through in life are usually referred to as the passages of life.
- Religiously among African, these are the stages when people are made into new beings.
- Because of the importance attached to these stages, the Africans attached them to religious cycle and attached important rituals to them.
- There are four major rites of passage among Africans and these are the birth rite, puberty or adolescence rite, marriage or procreation rite and death or funeral rite.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Discuss the significance of marriage rites among the Africans

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 7 THE LIFE AFTER DEATH AND FINAL END OF MANKIND IN AFRICAN RELIGION

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, we learnt about the rites of passage in African traditional religion. We intentionally left out funeral rites because of the special attention we intend to attach to it. In this last unit, you will study every issue related to death and after life in African traditions and its implication to its religion.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Discuss the African concept of death
- Examine the African concept of life after death
- Explain African beliefs in death and after life
- State the implications of funeral rites in African society

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Death

Death is seen in Africa as the inevitable end of all human beings. It is also considered as the most disrupting phenomenon of all. Death to the Africans stands between the world of the living (human beings) and the world of the spirits or between the visible and the invisible world. The African concept of this world is that this world is like a voyage and that everyone will go home one day. Therefore death is that event that returns everyone back home. Hence, the idea is that no matter how long one may stay put on earth, one will eventually return to where he comes from through the agency of death. However, though death is seen as the end of all human beings, Africans do not see death as the end of life. Death is a transition from the present earthly life to another life in the land of the spirits.

Death is a journey which humanity must take in order to reach the land beyond where they would be elevated to the position of an ancestor. It is also believed that death does not sever human beings relationship with their family but on the contrary it extends the family relationship into infinity. This is the basis for the continual fellowship and communion between the living and the death in African. They believe that both the living and the ancestors (the dead) have a role to play in fulfilling family obligations and ensuring the continual existence of the family. It has to be noted that though death is not seen as the end of all things, it is still an unwelcome development among Africans. It is often seen as a wicked destroyer and a curse that frustrate human effort. It brings about physical separation of loved ones and constitutes a great loss to the immediate family where death has occurred and to the community at large.

There are several myths in Africa that seem to explain the origin of death. The most acceptable is the one that sees death as the messenger of God himself. It then confers on death the status of debt that all the living must pay one day no matter how they live on earth.

Death can be classified into two categories among Africans. These are the good, also called natural death and the bad death. The death of young people, either as children or as youths or young adults is regarded as bad death. This is the basis for such not enjoying the privilege of full funeral rites. For example, when a child dies, the parents and the relatives would lament and dispose the corpse as quickly as possible. In fact, the parents in most cultures would not even want to know where such a child is buried. Also falling in the category of bad death are deaths that can be attributed to divinities of judgment and justice. For example, those killed by thunder and smallpox are regarded as having been given capital punishment from the divine. Hence, they are not mourned. They are buried with purification and expiatory rites to appease the divinities concerned.

Other types of bad death include those who died of leprosy, accidents such as falling down from the palm tree, suicide, murder, drawing, burns, and those who died with pregnancy or in labour. All those in this category are not given formal burials but are handed over to the priests for burial immediately. Good death is the death that comes to human beings at a ripe old age. Consequently, the death of an old person in the African community is an occasion for much rejoicing and ritual ceremonies. Most good death actually falls into the category of natural death. This death comes because of old age. At times stories are told of old people who are ready to die but sent for all their children and give them final instructions before passing on finally. It is important to say at this point that in most African communities, it is believed that when a person stopped breathing, the person is declared dead. The general belief is that the spirit or the soul of the person returns to God but the physical body is buried and it rots there. The soul on arrival before God will give an account of how the person has lived in this world and this would determine the person's final home.

The African concept of end times reflect in their understanding of human death and every ceremony attached to the time of death. Since Africans subscribe to the belief that human soul is immaterial and capable of surviving death, it follows that the end time for Africans cannot be conclusive. African belief in eschatology reflects a dual submission, both of which are regarded as true. One that at end times, after the death of humans, the creator would require an account of everything done on earth by each individual. Two, that at death, people with good moral deeds would come back to earth from the abode of the ancestors, either as newborn babies or as masked visitors on ancestor festivals.

3.2 Funeral Rites

The African belief that death is a transition from one plane of existence to the other is seen in the funeral arrangements and burial. Funerals are generally taken to be a great occasion among Africans. It involves the whole community who gather to perform appropriate rites, which to them strengthen the bond of unity between the living and the death. It is believed that unless these rites are appropriately performed, the spirit of the dead would never be at rest nor join the ancestral spirits but would be hovering around the homestead and may actually begin to harm people. This belief encourages all those who are alive to see to the success of the funeral rites. It has to be stated here too that funeral rites vary from one society to the other and dependent on the circumstances surrounding the death of the person to be buried. Considerations are given to age, social position, and status of the dead. In this section, we will focus on what seems to be the general and the burial of an old person.

In most cultures, the death of an old person is heralded with gunshots. As soon as such gunshots are heard and identify the person who has died. If the corpse is to be moved to another place for burial, then a man holding a live fowl goes in front and he will be plucking the feathers of the fowl until they reach their destination. The undertakers will eat the fowl on reaching their destination. The hair of the deceased is shaved if he is a male, while the deceased is beautifully plaited if she is a female. The corpse is then thoroughly washed with warm clean water and new sponge and soap. The belief is that before one joins the ancestors the person has to be clean. After the bath, the corpse is dressed in dignifying clothes brought by the relatives. It is then laid on a well-decorated bed. After this, music, dancing and feasting begins. Women dance round the corpse singing funeral songs while the other people spend money on them as gifts. The interment takes place either in the morning or in the evening and the grave is dug in one of the rooms in the house.

This is done because it is believed that the deceased still forms part of the household and should not be separated from the people. Messages are sent to the ancestors through the deceased. People ask for personal benefits, like gifts for children, good husband or wife, good work and the victory over enemies. After the burial ceremony is concluded, a gun is fired to indicate that the corpse has been buried. It is believed that the deceased would be around the household for a number of days after the burial. This is because they believe that until certain other rites are performed the deceased has no place in the abode of the ancestors. The ceremonies will take place on the third, the seventh, the thirteenth, and the fortieth day. It is after the performance of these rites that the deceased takes its place among the ancestors.

3.3 The Hereafter

It is generally believed that the hereafter is another world or a distant place where life may resemble this life. For this reason, articles such as clothing, sponge, towel, food and in the case of the wealthy or the royal household gold tickets and precious ornaments are buried alongside to help the dead on the way to the next world. It is the same belief that makes the Africans bury slaves and wives along with deceased rulers so that they will continue to assist them on the way to the eternal home.

Funerals are important occasions and statements about the social accomplishment of the dead and the status of his or her family are pronounced. Funerals are also qualifications required of the dead entry for the abode of the ancestor. Because Africans believe that death is a transition into another life and that, a journey is undertaken by the dead to the land of the spirit after death, provisions are made for the envisaged needs of the deceased. There may include cloths, food items, cooking utensil, cosmetics, and slaves to attend to his needs. A belief that life continues after death reflects the people's theology of the end time. This is further buttressed in the contents of African oral genres. The oral genres, are recited and performed in form of songs, praise names and eulogies at funerals to show that the dead was a morally upright person who lived well and died a good death. A general practice during burials in African societies is the act of sending messages through the dead to ancestors who had long departed from the society. Messages of help, request for retribution on evil doers, especially those suspected to have killed the deceased are also made. Burial ceremonies among the Igbo of Nigeria will be explained here to further highlight the link between morality and eschatology in African Traditional Religion.

The Igbo people of Nigeria perform two types of burial ceremonies for every dead elder. The first is the burial of the physical body while the second comprises of sacrifice and festivities to enable the deceased take a rightful place among the ancestors. Both ceremonies are marked by festivity, various kinds of food items, singing, drinking, and the booming of guns. The first ceremony may last for many days and a cock is killed and buried with the corpse. Later chosen by the family, the second ceremony is performed. The Igbo belief is that until this second ceremony is performed the deceased continues to roam about because he is denied admittance into the abode of the ancestors. This is unpleasant for both the dead and the living who may be haunted until the dead settles in the new abode with other ancestor. Heirs of the deceased often perform this second ceremony, which is characterized by feasting, singing, drumming, dancing, and eating.

Thus, African belief in hereafter is geared purposely towards re-incarnation of the ancestors into their families. The belief is two-fold: Personal and collective immortality. The two forms are distinct but not separate. They are intimately related, criss-crossed and interwoven. The former gradually flows into the latter and vice versa. To understand the relationship one needs to understand the meaning of death to the Africans. Death is not just an abrupt and immediate termination in the drama of life. Though it is sudden yet its completion is a gradual exercise. When a person dies, his physical life is suddenly terminated. However, he immediately goes into the second phase of life. He is partly alive (because his death is not wholly completed) and partly (because his physical life is terminated). At this milieu, he is regarded and referred to as a “living-dead” Parrinder explains this belief thus:

As soon as a person dies, he becomes a living-dead he is a “spirit” in the sense that he is no longer in the body, and yet he retains features, which describes him in physical terms. He retains his personal name.

The point Parrinder is pointing out here is that as long as the deceased are remembered by the living descendants who perpetuate their personal names; they are in the state of personal immortality. It is therefore the ability of the living to retain and commemorate the personal name that keeps the person in the realm of personal immortality. The “personal immortality of the living-dead is for all practical purposes dependent on his progenies”. And this is why it lasts for the first few generations when it could still be committed to, and be retained in, the memory. It is about four to five generations when someone who knew the living-dead is still alive. As long as their descendants honour and pray to them, they retain among the living dead. After the period of personal immortality, the living dead in a gradual but a continuous transmission journey into the next stage, the third phase. This is the phase of collective immortality. He is properly called a spirit (no longer living-dead) “The living-dead is now a spirit which enters the state of collective immortality”. They have fallen into oblivion. As far as human beings are concerned, he now loses everything that is personal: name, humanity (human personality), remembrance. It is now an ‘it’ no longer he or she because he/she has joined the myriads of spirits who have lost their humanness is, however, compensated by the gain of “full spiritless.

African religion is essentially this worldly. Its beliefs, concepts, and convictions are consequently “world-affirming”. This means that there is no dichotomy between this world

and the world beyond. They are inseparably related and interconnected. His “weltanschauung” is not lineally eschatological but cyclically world affirming. Nothing is therefore, in the seclusion of the next world. Whatever belief he has of the world beyond is manifesting shown, celebrated, and affirmed in this world.

3.4 Beliefs Concerning Death and After Life

There are many beliefs concerning death and after life in African traditional religion. These include:

3.4.1 Eschatological

Eschatological is undoubtedly a doctrine on which there is a diversity of opinions amongst scholars. And though the concept of eschatology has attracted the attention of both secular and religious thinkers, yet Mbiti, who proposed eschatology for Africa sharply argues in his book, *New Testament Eschatology in an African Background* that the term eschatology can best understood in the Christian point of view, where the word is placed in the camp of postmillennialism. In this usage the term (eschatology), refers to the view of the last things’ the ‘future climatic events in the universe’. However, this kind of eschatology claims is different from African eschatology. For the reason that the “African hereafter is not in the future but in the past”. He then falls back on his *Sasa-Zamani* philosophy, in which the present flows into the past and they become one. In his words:

To live here and now is the most important concern of African religious activities and beliefs. Even life in the hereafter is conceived in materialistic and physical terms. There is neither paradise to be hoped for nor hell to be feared in the hereafter...

Mbiti’s presentation of African Concept of Eschatology above is opposed to Christian teaching concerning the end times. This is because, in Biblical perspective, there is paradise (heaven) to be hoped for, and hell to be feared in the hereafter. There is also purgatory where some departed souls undergo sufferings to purify themselves before they are finally moved to paradise. In this vein, the dead and living cannot be one or linked with the departed souls in

Sasa period who have entered into the *Zamani* and the two become contemporaries in the timeless rhythm of human life as postulated by Mbiti. Mbiti's postulation above, however, either has come under the criticism of some authors who argue that, whilst his emphasis on the here and now aspect of eschatology may be appreciated, he (Mbiti) minimizes or rejects the future aspect of *eschaton*. However, it is accepted and workable practice to approach eschatology in a future sense (wherever it is applied), which is a valid understanding of *eschaton* (the last events). Again, Mbiti's, assertion, critically evaluated, is not a proper representation of African eschatology. It may be perfectly descriptive of the ethnic groups of eastern Africa. It is not what some other African tribes conceived of eschatology.

The African people, for example: believe in a definite place where the souls of the dead gather to rest forever. This home is called, *Kamunu Tamen* (the Great Home of the Dead), which is in the vault of Heaven the residence of *Aôndo* (the Supreme Being). There is also the belief in a place where the departed exists, a neither world below and a place for the special ones above. African eschatology has a positive belief about death. Even if this is viewed in terms of a mere human union with the spiritual, it is fine, and if it is viewed in terms of inheriting some place elsewhere (such as the great home of the dead), then, it is the better. For in all of this, the target is to postulate that death is not the end of everything. Mourning reflects soberness at a loss; hence, normal social interaction is disrupted and mobility restricted or totally prohibited for the mourning period.

African eschatological beliefs submit that if proper mourning processes and period is not observed the deceased may be denied entry into the abode of the ancestors. It is believed also that such a deceased's soul would continually threaten the life and peace of those living. Prescriptions for mourning are stricter with women than with men in African Traditional Religion. The period of mourning may involve some ritual acts of separation between the dead and the living. For example, in certain instances, a living spouse is encouraged to engage in sexual relations shortly after the death of a wife or husband to permanently place a wedge between the living and dead spouse. The assumption is that the dead spouse will be disgusted at the act that he or she would leave in anger and thus sever any emotional ties to the living spouse.

3.4.2 Re-incarnation

Amongst the African people, it is believed that death is not the end of humankind. Rather, it is a means by which the present earthly existence is changed for another. The belief

in the return of the dead, or some part of their life force, to the family is widely held in Africa. Notwithstanding, there are differences in the degree and manner in which this takes place. This belief that death is not the end of humankind but that there is a rebirth of some sort is technically called. Re-incarnation viewed from the broad spectrum means different things to different people. Thus, the term Re-incarnation is better described than defined. This notwithstanding, Mbiti describes re-incarnation as “the soul of a deceased taken a new body after death”. This means that “after death” the deceased’s soul is believed to return a new body to be born again on earth if life was short for him to have accomplished his divine assignment. This re-birth is seen as an opportunity for the deceased to come back as it were on a second mission to make amend for his evil deeds.

Re-incarnation is the belief that after death the soul of a deceased return back to take a new form of human existence in the society as newborn child to accomplish the second mission and to make amend for his evil deeds. The term is a complex one in the sense that though ancestors are reincarnated, yet offerings are still made to them at their graves. They are believed to be in heaven, yet back on earth, and could enter not only one body but also several bodies of deceased members. No wonder, this belief is often thought to be at the core of African philosophy of power. They (Africans) believe that one force can weaken or strengthen another or several, and wisdom and happiness are increased by the influence of the dead ancestors. Ajayi explained that the single soul of the ancestor does not passes from one embodiment to another in an endless round or chain of existence, but an ‘ontological influence’ as Temple calls it, which an ancestor exerts on his grandson or grandsons. The immortal vitality continues to reinforce and uplift. Though the belief in reincarnation is trans-continental, there are some ethnic groups in Africa, the Yoruba to be precise, who in the classical sense, do not believe in re-incarnation in the sense that:

Reincarnation is the passage of the soul from one body to another. Those who depart from this world will remain in ‘After-Life’ where their children can keep unbroken intercourse with them, since they are now in ‘After-Life’ with all their ancestral qualities unimpaired. The Yoruba believe that the departed do’ reincarnate’, not only in one grandchild but also in several contemporary grandchildren.

The above view expressed by the Yoruba people whereby ancestors are in the spirit world, yet they are seen to have reincarnated in grandchildren is called “partial

reincarnation”. The Yoruba people therefore have certain popular names that depict this belief such as *Babatunde* (father has returned) and *Yetunde* (mother has returned) respectively. The above conception of African re-birth clearly show that their conception of re-incarnation is quite different from the Hindu sense of *Samsara*, where the human soul (atman) continues to reincarnate from body to body, in different familiar *atmans* or states. While African concept of re-incarnation retains the essence of the person, in the ancestral spirit, the Hindus teaches that the character, personality, and biological traits that are found in the chromosomes within the same nuclear and/or extended family are not the same in the reincarnation from one body to another.

Besides that, we also have widespread belief in “born-to-die” children. Such children are called, *Abiku* in Yoruba, *Ogbanje* in Ibo, *Wam-Orin*” in Boki, whilst in Africa it is called, “Wan-Ijôv. Because of infant mortality, many babies keep on dying. Unfortunately, each baby is supposed to be identical with its predecessor and great efforts are made to break the chain of rebirth and consequent death, by magic and medicine. Stories are told of babies who had the same physical characteristics of deformations as their predecessor. These are cases of children and their returning ancestors having both facial and other resemblances and so the diviner recognizes which ancestor had been reborn. Such children (*abiku-ogbanje* and *wan-ijôv*), are stopped from coming and going, by performing the necessary sacrificial rituals (as shall be described in chapter four). Inherent in our discussion is the fact that amongst the African people, an ancestor can be reborn. This is manifested in the naming pattern of the African people. Take the Africa ethnic group, for example, names like *Terhide* (Father has come back), *Ngôhide* (Mother has returned) and *Mhide* (I have come back), among others, exemplify such a belief.

Interestingly, a child can be reborn in one person at once or in several persons simultaneously, and gifts may be presented to the re-born child under the ancestor’s name, as well as to the ancestor at his/her grave. A re-born spirit is called “the spirit which comes back to see the world”. Here we must endeavour to clarify that it is usually those who have been good persons while on earth and were ripe for death when they die that can be re-born. Conversely, criminals do become ghosts and are not reborn in African tradition. Re-incarnation is a prevalent feature of African religion. African people feel the presence of the departed ancestors who are believed to influence their homes and could return in the grandchildren to be reborn again in the society. The African doctrine of re-incarnation is primarily rooted in a widespread belief in “spirit-born-children” who because of the mysticism of the society and prolongation of the family are believed to be re-incarnation of

their departed ancestors. These re-born children reveal the true relationship between the living-dead and their surviving members through resemblance and facial appearances, which shows that the deceased ancestors have re-incarnated or return to be re-born in the society.

In African religious thought, re-incarnation has its foundation in the African notion of time used in classical sense to explain fact that it is not the spirit of the departed ancestors, which returns, fully in the newborn child but some of his spiritual qualities. While some characteristic traits of re-incarnated children are made manifest in their grandchildren, Africans are of the opinion that, there is no complication about the existence of such departed souls in the spiritual world. This further indicates that the souls of deceased who re-incarnate still have their individual existence in the spiritual abode. Thus, Idowu presentation of re-incarnation is the true position of the African concept of re-incarnation. He states:

For the deceased ancestors to re-incarnate in their grandchildren and continue to live in after-life, one's grandchild according to this system may not have the monopoly of the ancestral *Ori*. *Yiya Omo* cannot be taken as establishing a re-incarnation in the technical sense. All it appears to establish is the belief in the concrete fact that there are certain dominant characteristics, which keep recruiting through births and thus ensuring continuity of the vital existence of the family or clan.

Mbiti affirms that human life follow a rhythm of nature, which nothing can destroy, be it death, poverty, initiation or entry into the company of the spirits. This personal immortality is externalized and realized in the continuation of the individual progeny that bears the traits of their ancestors. Africans desire the continuity of their families and clans, and to affect this necessary relationship or interaction between the living death (ancestors) and the living members they carried out funeral rites to grant their departed souls perfect rest in the ancestral abode. They believed that if such departed members were not given proper burial rites, they would remain as ghost spirits, wondering on earth harassing the living members. For this reason, children and relations fulfil their obligations to the deceased parents by giving them befitting burial rites to ensure that they are led home safely to join the ancestors. They count on their protections and guidance at all time. The prayers people offer at their graves are meant to assist the deceased ancestors rest in perfect peace and to employ them to be reborn quick into their families for prolongation of the clans. The prayer petitions

also urge the deceased ancestors to bless the family living members and to protect the unborn children. Bongotons explains this thus:

While the purpose of these funeral rites are to transform the dead person into an ancestor who will reside indefinitely in the spirit world, watching over their descendants and demanding their attentions, yet, in songs and prayers, they are constantly urged to return in a new incarnation among their descendants. The ancestors by establishing the roots of descent group in the past have the function among others of legitimizing the authority of their families and lineages, and of providing sanctions for the maintenance of proper relations between kin and spouses.

The desire of Africans that the departed ancestors should rest in peace and return to be born in their families in no distant times is a more practical demonstration of re-incarnation, which attaches importance to the naming ceremony of children in order to carry out their existence prophecy. The parents of the newborn children consult diviners to know which ancestors have been reborn or re-incarnated. Sometimes, it may even be discovered that the same grandfather has re-incarnated in several great grand children. In such cases, the newborn babies are addressed and treated in the same manner as re-incarnated ancestors. Thus, among the Africans those kinds of children that are believed to be re-incarnated grandparents are given names to indicate that the deceased grandfather is re-born. For example, in Tiv society the child who is believed to be the re-incarnation of the deceased father is called *Terhile* (the father has returned). While the girl who is said to be the re-incarnation of the deceased mother is named *Ngôhide* (the mother has returned).

Such names are used more frequently for children with characteristic traits of their departed grandparent (grandfather or grandmother) and are believed to have been reborn in the society. The names give not only the strong conviction of African people that the deceased grand-parents have come back to life, but provides glaring evidence that the departed ancestors could be re-incarnated in the unborn children into their families. Among the Yoruba, children who possess the characteristic traits of their deceased grandparents are called *Abiku* (born-to-die children). While in Igbo society, such children are called *Ogbanje* (Repeaters). Mbiti affirms that they are children whose spirits are believed to enter their mother's wombs in order to be born again. These categories of children are believed to have held their meetings prior to entering the wombs or taken the decisions on how and where they

are to be reborn. There are many instances reported by parents who have had several cases of such children in African society. Thus, to ascertain the truth or falsity of re-incarnation of these kinds of children, lacerated marks are made on specific parts of their bodies to prevent them from returning into the society.

It is believed that with such marks, people would easily identify them if they happen to return as newborn babies in the society. Ushe explain vividly this belief thus:

The problem of born-to-die children raises another issue of continuation of human existence after death. The belief is that there are wandering spirits who enter some women's wombs only to be born and to die soon after. There are many stories practical instances of such children who are said to have died and come back with marks made on them while on earth to stop them from coming back as newborn babies in the society.

There are however, cases in which members of born-to-die children have grown to adulthood. In such cases they present serious problems to the families and society. Their frequent nature of illness, irresponsible behaviours, and long period of personality growth all constitute big problem to their parents. There are female group of such spirits who are said to have husbands and even have intercourse as well as children with human beings in African society, despite the claim by some spiritual churches of professing expert knowledge in disassociating them. The uncertainty in the duration of existence of re-incarnated spirits and where they go after their prolonged period of existence poses a very big difficulty to African concept of the after-life. The Africans believe that the ancestral abode is the place where all the departed souls go after death. This place is believed to be in the great beyond and in the vault of heaven. The admittance of departed soul into this ancestral world has certain processes and criteria's` that must be accomplished before one is accepted into it. These include old age, good life, befitting burial rites, children, and happy death.

Bad spirits, especially those of wicked people who have failed to possess and are denied of re-incarnation cannot be granted admittance into the ancestral abode. They become wandering ghost spirits whose sadistic mission is to harass or torment surviving members in the society. However, how long these ghost spirits continue to exist on earth remains an issue of debate among scholars of African Traditional Religion. For some, its continuation last as long as the individual is a member of the society. While for others, the prolongation last for a decade. Thus, in African society, the soul of the deceased ancestor takes a new body as in the

case of Hindu *Samsara* or Metempsychosis. This African conception of re-incarnation, which thinks more of the survival and prolongation of the family, is contrary to the Indian's belief in Karma.

According to Indian doctrine of *Karma*, one's action here on earth determines the type of life he will live in the future life. If the person lived a good life, he or she is expected to return to life more elevated than he was in the previous life. On the other hand, if he had lived a reckless life, he could return in a very poor and wretched state. In fact, it is believed that he can be reborn a dog or some other unbecoming states Ikenga-Metuh gives a clear picture India concept of Karma thus:

...Karma is a technical term, which means "action" in general, whether it is good or bad, religious, or secular (none-religious). Because actions produce their own good and evil fruits, "a man reaps what he sows". Therefore, the Hindu believes that his present life is the result of past Karma and that his future lives will be affected by his Karma in the present existence. Thus, pain, suffering, sickness and any sort of ill fortune is not regarded by the Hindu as an affliction sent from God...but as the result of his evil Karma in a past existence

Ikenga-Metuh's description of Karma shows the nearness of African conception of re-incarnation to Indian or Hindu idea of rebirth whereby a new baby does not reflect African belief about re-incarnation but makes a reflection of metempsychosis or transmigration idea, which according to Drever purports that the soul of the deceased goes to inhabit a new body. Thus, Idowu is right to conclude that in African belief, there is no reincarnation in the classical sense. One can only speak of partial or, more precisely apparent reincarnation if the word must be used at all. There is the belief in certain areas that ancestors return in one or several children in the family.

To the Africans, therefore, death is not the end to human life but it is a transition from earth to the abode of the ancestors. African burial arrangements portray this by making provisions for the comfort of the dead person during this journey. Such provisions could include clothes, food items, cosmetics, and sometimes slaves, as is true with the burial of rulers. Death and after life are connected to the African perception of the soul. The African idea about the human soul is complex and intricate. Whereas some proffer that, the soul is of two parts, others say three parts and yet another group submits that the human soul is made up of four parts. There is, however, the consensus that the human soul originated from the

creator and to the creator it will return at death. Africans therefore conceive the soul as being immortal. Maxims and sayings in different African communities may be cited to buttress this belief in the immortality of the soul. The Yoruba for instance say *ko si bi a se pe laye to ao pe ni orun ju be lo*, meaning “no matter how long we stay on earth, we shall stay longer than that in heaven”. The people say *aye l’oja, orun n’ile*, meaning the earth is a market place, but heaven is home.

The mode of Re-incarnation in African religion is closely linked to the human character while the individual was on earth and whether the person died a good or a bad death. A good death is death at a ripe old age and full burial rites given to such a person. He/she would be qualified to enter the abode of the ancestors to Re-incarnate in any child born into that family. This is especially true when the time of death and the birth of such a baby occur in close proximity. Names such as *Babatunde* (father has come back and *Iyabode* (mother has returned) are given to such children). However, if a Person is of bad character and morally bankrupt while on earth, he or she cannot Re-incarnate. A bad death is premature death or death in "precarious ritual situations such as drowning, death with pregnancy or through the affliction of small-pox. Such people would Re-incarnate as bird, stones, animals, or reptiles. This same fate is assumed the lot of people with bad character while they were on earth. In some cases, traits of the ancestor, like the manner of walking or speaking is noticed in the new born child as she grows up and these are regarded as proves that their mother has returned.

The basic influence of Re-incarnation in African Religion is the retaining of the family guardian spirit from generation to generation. As long as ancestors (male & female) continue to Re-incarnate in their children and grand children, the guardian spirit of the family is guaranteed to remain alive and relevant. This is one of the reasons for the African prioritization of procreation. Effort is made to ensure that each person produces children in African societies because a childless man or woman is perceived as a loser and one whose journey to earth is non-productive. In addition, Re-incarnation perpetuates the identity and peculiar traits of families and individuals. Some families are known to be warriors, others as hunters, yet others as artists and such reputations are passed down from one generation to the other. Again, Reincarnation influences the moral conduct of the living though it operates in an after death setting. This is because certain types and levels of moral conduct are prerequisites for qualification to be Re-incarnated. Consequently, individuals strive to maintain high moral standards in order to attain the status of an ancestor.

The doctrine of Re-incarnation is common to many existing religions in the world through generations. However, certain features of Re-incarnation in African Traditional Religion are peculiar. In Hinduism for instance, Reincarnation is likened to the shedding of old clothes and the donning of new ones. One takes on birth repeatedly in countless bodies - perhaps as an animal or some other sub-human form. In African Traditional religion, people do not just take up birth repeatedly, neither do they treat life as the shedding of old clothes. Re-incarnation for Africans is the return of a dead ancestor in another body or by a body influenced by features of the ancestors. Again, Re-incarnation is perceived as an individual affair in Hinduism and Buddhism but this is not true for the African whose sole agenda is harmony and the well-being of the community. Consequently, the community has stakes in the practice of Re-incarnation.

3.4.3 Judgment

Authors and experts on the various disciplines concerning African socio-cultural and psycho-religious beliefs and practices, hold the view that, apart from one or two exceptions, African peoples do not expect any form of judgement in the hereafter. If judgement has to come, it comes in the course of one's earthly life. Sources within our research reveal very few instances, where it is believed that the departed undergo some kind of judgement in the next world. The Yoruba explains it thus: "...all that we do on earth, we shall account for, kneeling in heaven where we shall state and recount our case at the feet of Olodumare". Here what follows that depends on the kind of life the individual led on earth. Amongst the Lodagaa, it is believed that older spirits do judge the departed, upon arrival in the next world, in accordance to the person's life on earth. In this judgement, the Supreme Being remains passive and steps in only when the wicked plead for mercy. Judgment is the repercussion or punishment for people who have falling short of certain expectations and it exist between the divine and humans or within human interpersonal relations. Judgment involves indictments and pronounced penalties. Because of the close link between morality and religion, God is often believed to be the One who passes judgment on humans directly or through the delegated authority given to the divinities. Many African people have attributes and names, which show the Supreme Being as the only true judge, the impartial judge, and the end time judge.

Judgment could also be ameliorated through rituals in certain cases, depending on the availability of expertise of the cultic functionaries approached. Also, the concept of judgment

in African Traditional Religion is both immediate and remote. Africans conceive of judgment as an immediate occurrence due to the belief that people are to be held responsible for their deed, whereas judgment as a remote concept in Africa Tradition Religion hinges on the conviction that God will ask the individual to give an account of his/her life while on earth. There is an eschatological dimension to it. Furthermore, judgment is regarded as an event that cannot be escaped. Even when the judgment is delayed or it look like an evildoer is going scot-free, Africans still believe that judgment is sure to come. Every action or inaction will necessitate a reaction, which may be a judgment by another human being or the creator.

The ultimate agent of judgment in African Religion is God though in executing such judgments, it is sometimes delegated to the divinities or the ancestor. Africans believe in accountability for one's life while on earth. Every individual would have to give an account of how his or her life was lived on earth. African belief system subscribes to an abode of ancestor, which is constituted of people who died good deaths as opposed to the wandering spirits of people who suffer premature deaths and bad deaths. However, due to the influence of Christianity and Islam, the concept of a good heaven and a bad heaven is now entrenched in African Religion. God is thus, the first and ultimate agent of judgment. God is seen as the impartial judge; hence, humans can be assured of fairness. The anti-wickedness divinities are also agents of judgment in Africa Religion. These divinities operate with delegated power and authority from God on specific areas of operation. Examples include the deities in charge of iron (*Ogun* among the Yoruba), thunder (*Sango* among the Yoruba and *Amadioha* among the Igbo), earth (*Ile* among the Yoruba and *Ala* among the Igbo) and small-pox (*Sopona* among the Yoruba). When the prescribed stipulations of any of these deities are contravened, judgment may descend on the offender.

Ancestors as custodians of family morality and integrity may also be seen as agents of judgment. The well-being of individuals in a family or the family as a whole may be jeopardized if the ancestors find fault. Such occasions may involve the refusal or reluctance of members of the family to offer sacrifice or have a festival on behalf of the ancestor. It could also be due to the refusal of an instruction from the ancestors through diviners. Consequently, rules and prescriptions towards the veneration of ancestors are strictly adhered to avoid judgments. A general assumption underling the concept of Judgment in African Religion is the need to penalized prohibited action. Therefore, negative instances in the life of an individual or a community are construed as evidence of the judgment of God. These may manifest as sickness, lack of material and non-material prosperity and tireless work with little or nothing let show for it. The above observation is especially true of judgment that emanate

from the divinities and the ancestors. However, the method of judgment by the supreme on human life after death is based on accountability of actions and inactions while on earth. Sacrifices, offering and prayers are usually offered to remedy the situation.

The concept of punishment in African Religion hinges on sin, which is the violation of regulations in the society. Sin in African Religion therefore, encompasses immoral acts, ritual mistake, and breach of covenant and violation of taboos, to mention a few. Again, sin is a concept linked to the structure of African communities such as the cult of the divinities, the ancestors, and ritual relations with others in the society. In some African societies, sin is often linked with sickness of body or brain. Consequently, sick people are often encouraged to confess any hidden violations of regulations in the society. Constant misfortunes, incurable diseases, and general penury were all construed as indications that the supernatural powers were punishing an unconfused sin in the life of the individual so afflicted. Again, pregnant women who have difficulty in childbirth are encouraged to confess their sin to have a smooth childbirth because sin is believed to be responsible for the delay in childbirth. In addition, there are different types and classes of sin in African Religion.

Some sins are limited to the moral setting, examples are theft, lying, rudeness and disrespect to elders and slander. While other types of sin, include ritual violations, murder, incest and adultery. Any act connected with sexuality is especially denounced when linked with the land because of the effect of such violations on fertility of the crops. Among the Igbo of Nigeria for instance, it is forbidden for people to have sexual intercourse on the bare floor because it would be a sin against Ala, the earth goddess and this may adversely affect the fertility of the land and consequently the means of livelihood of many in the community. Confession and acceptance of guilt is a crucial factor to the eradication of sins committed in African Traditional Religion and this is usually followed by procedures to ratify the situations. Africans believe that God ultimately punishes sin through agents to whom authority had been given. Such agents are the divinities, ancestors and elders Africans believe that God will require an account of the individual's life from him or her after death. Sin in African Religion is usually presented as a sanction. These sanctions promote good moral conduct in the society because they act as deterrent to potential offenders. However, at the same time, these sanctions are sins for violations of regulation in the society.

The first level of punishment for sin in African Religion is the conscience, which is in-built by the creator into every person. Africans believe that human conscience can and do condemn evil doers and that it is the conviction of the conscience of the offender that leads to confession. There are different types of sin commensurate with every sin committed. The

underlining principle for sin in African Traditional Religion is, however, not to destroy the offender but to remove the sin and restore fellowship and harmony. Different modalities exist for the removal of sin in African Traditional Religion. Such modalities could be cleansing and purification, which would entail ritual washing of parts of the body affected or a total cleansing of the body. It could also involve the offering of sacrifice - of food items, animals or other items - to the deity in charge of that area of operation. Once the sin is removed, Africans believe that fellowship and harmony is restored in the society.

3.4.4 Reward and Retribution

African people have a firm belief in personal rewards or privileges that are enjoyed by those who lived nobly whilst on earth. Whilst personal reward may help us understand the African belief in an after-life, it does not sound clear in the area of retribution. It falls back into the African shadowy conception of retribution in the next world. This reminds us of the answer given once by an Ashanti tradition priest who is quoted to have opined that we are sure that people die...our relatives and loved ones, too, die... we believe that God rewards the wicked receive punishment from God when they die. This above position knows the certainty of death, and boosts our optimism about the hereafter; yet, it does not present us with a clear and comprehensive picture of the concept of retribution after death. This belief is possibly a muddling of Christian teaching, and in any case, is not held everyone, not even amongst the Akans.

Among the Tiv it is believed that a dead person who was wicked during his lifetime was exhumed and made to undergo torture by the *mbatsav* (witches/wizards) after restoring his life. Ushe asserts that the deceased is treated either fairly or otherwise depending on the way he related with others while on earth. In his words:

When they (*mbatsav*), restored him (the dead man) to life, they flogged him so terribly that he wept, wept, and became tired. They (the *mbatsav*) questioned him why he was so wicked; and started flogging him again as he (the deceased) complained, they (*mbatsav*) threatened to extend their punishment to members of his (the deceased's family that are still alive...

From the above assertion it is evident punishment of the dead begins here on earth. This leads us to agree with the view of Ikenga-Metuh that there may be a heaven or hell like

the Christian conception of them, and there is certainly a state of achievement and happiness, a state of unhappiness and frustration in the after-life. These states, I think, are forms of retribution. The point Ikenga-Metuh is making here is that African people consider reward and retribution to begin in this life and continues in the next world. There are only few societies in Africa where the beliefs in retribution and reward in the next life are mentioned. Even then, it is often clouded with doubts and probabilities.

4.0 CONCLUSION

You have learnt in this unit that Africans do not see death as the end of all things even though death is seen as the inevitable end of all human beings. It is the belief that the death is not permanently severed from relating with the living that has led to the institution of the ancestral cult. Those that are inducted into the cult of the ancestors are those who have lived up to old age and have died peacefully or naturally. Those who died because of sickness or at a young age are seen as cursed and so are not fit to be ancestors.

5.0 SUMMARY

The following are the major points you have learnt in this unit:

- Death in Africa is seen as the inevitable end of humanity
- Death however, is not seen as the end of existence but leads to existence in the spiritual world.
- This belief led to the establishment of the cult of the ancestors
- Full funeral rites including induction to the cult of the ancestors are accorded those who lived to old age and died peacefully or naturally.
- Those who died because of sickness or at a young age are seen as cursed and so are not fit to be ancestors.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Discuss the concept of life after death among African people
2. List and discuss African beliefs concerning death and after life
3. Examine the concept of life after death in African traditional religion

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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