

# AAJMSHEL

**AFRICA AND ASIA JOURNAL OF SOCIAL AND MANAGEMENT  
SCIENCES, HUMANITIES, EDUCATION AND LEGAL STUDIES:  
SAN JOSE OCCIDENTAL MINDORO, PHILIPPINES**

**PUBLISHED BY AFRICA AND ASIA JOURNAL OF SOCIAL AND MANAGEMENT  
SCIENCES, HUMANITIES, EDUCATION AND LEGAL STUDIES: SAN JOSE OCCIDENTAL  
MINDORO, PHILIPPINES**

**ISSN: 2955-0548**

## **AAJSMSHEL**

Africa And Asia Journal of Social And Management Sciences, Humanities, Education and Legal Studies (aajsmshel), San Jose Occidental Mindoro, Philippines

Volume 4, Issue, 2, 2023, ISSN: 2955-0548

Articles are Indexed in Google Scholar Email: [aajhsms2080@gmail.com](mailto:aajhsms2080@gmail.com)

Published by Africa And Asia Journal of Social and Management Sciences, Humanities, Education and Legal Studies: San Jose Occidental Mindoro, Philippines

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## **THE IMPACT OF CHRISTIAN CULTURE ON THE NIGERIA SOCIETY**

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### **Abstract**

Christian culture over the years in Nigeria has contributed in the social and economic development of Nigerian society in various ways. Many in Nigeria society irrespective of their faith background have adopted the Christian culture in their daily living. The work emphasises the various areas like schools, public gatherings, and governmental and non-governmental organisations that have been greatly influenced to a great extent by the Christian Culture. Since culture is a way of life, many Christians in Nigeria have adopted the lifestyle of the Christian faith almost in all ramifications of their life. The Paper using an analytical and descriptive method of research in addition to primary and

secondary sources argues that many societies in Nigeria are under the influence of the Christian culture in many dimension. Many burial and marriage ceremonies celebrated in Nigeria were influenced by the Christian culture. This has contributed to the social growth in many dimensions in Nigeria society. The work finds and conclude that the church leaders and Christians in Nigeria should not in any way downplay the culture of the Christian faith. Moreover, it was also discovered in the work that Christians should not totally discard all aspect of the secular culture of Nigerian tribes because some have a nexus with the Christian culture. Besides, Christian leaders should encourage believers to ensure that the Christian culture is placed at a high premium.

**KEYWORDS:** Culture, Christianity, Secular, Marriage, Society.

## **Introduction**

Culture is a way of life that people find themselves in a particular environment. When one becomes a Christian he or she will be influenced by Jesus Christ's culture, which is the same as Christian Culture. Most of the practices in the Christian faith have a nexus with the Jewish culture which is their way of life.

In Nigeria, most ethnic groups have cultures that relate to the Christian culture. Christianity however, did not condemn all aspects of cultures except the diabolical practices that are inimical to the Christian faith. Many countries and tribes have culture similar to Jewish and Christian cultures. Every country has their way of life. The culture of African people is different from the European and American cultures.

Christian culture in many dimensions is dominating in continents like Europe, Africa, South America and North America and some parts of Asia, This is because God is the owner of the culture. When one becomes a Christian his secular culture will be downplayed because of the newfound faith. There are many Christians who are still following and practising their secular cultures that are inimical to their faith even when they have given their lives to Jesus Christ. Generally, some cultures need to streamline particularly as it concerns Nigerian societies. For instance, in some cultures in Africa, before the bridegroom will be



allowed to marry a girl in a particular family, he will be told to have sex with one of the sisters of the wife-to-be just to test his manhood and whether he is potent. In the same vein, some culture also allows a lady to be impregnated by the husband-to-be before marriage. These cultures have no relationship with Christian culture. Similarly, some cultures that have to do with burial are also against the Christian faith. The issue of the second burial that many people are practising is diabolical to the Christian religion. Daniel was influenced by the culture of the Babylonians but he rejected some of their cultures that go against his Jewish religion.

### **The Concept of Culture**

Culture from the German *kulter* has accumulated a plurality of definitions throughout the centuries. ((Desclée, Tournai 1992, 100-110). Human beings is a cultural and religious in nature. The present-day novelty lies in the understanding of culture as an anthropological reality. One of the earliest definitions of culture was suggested by Sir Edward B. Taylor (1832-1917) who is considered to be the father of modern anthropology. In 1871 he published his work *Primitive Society* where he defined culture as a

complex whole including knowledge, belief, art, morals, laws, customs and any other abilities and habits acquired by people as members of society (L.J. Luzbetak, 134). He notes that as a collective psychological phenomenon culture is to a large extent unconscious. As a psycho-social reality culture is an attribute of both the person and of society because there is a constant interaction between individual and collective consciences.

Generally, culture is understood as the vision of a group, its manner of perceiving the human person and its destiny, working, recreation, expressing oneself through art, transforming nature through its techniques, inventions, interpretation of life and the universe, celebration, of tradition and faith, characteristic attitude and behaviour. These embody meanings and beliefs, ethical norms, customs, traditions express themselves in institutions and systems as well as in symbolic forms in the most varied kind (P.C. Phan, 2000, 18). Culture however remains the manner of thinking, perceiving, acting, of relating to, a specific group of people. This definition does not promote cultural relativism, rather

it eliminates any conception of a superior or primitive culture. With this definition, the theory of cultural superiority falls apart.

### **Attributes of Culture**

Culture has certain attributes. (D. Whiteman, 1984, 1-28). It is not biologically inherited from our parents but through the environment one resides at a particular time. As a way of life of a specific group, the culture of a specific society is shared among its members. It is an imprint in the mind that makes it possible for one to know what to do in order to act in a manner that is acceptable to members of a given society. Since it is a shared culture then it is acquired by members of society. Without a society you cannot have a culture because it cannot exist independently of people. Without culture, society would not survive as a human society because it is a product of human beings. Human beings are dynamic in the process of growth and change, culture however is dynamic, it changes at every given time. The fact that culture changes is an indication that society is alive. Static or unchanging cultures are dead cultures.

## **Elements of Culture**

As earlier noted that culture does not exist in isolation. It is not a random mixture of unrelated elements. These elements are functionally interrelated with each other in the form of ideas, worldview, behavioural patterns and material products forming a coherent cultural system.

Hence every component of a culture has a value attached to it. No matter how strange a culture may seem, it will cease to be as soon as it is viewed in its totality. However, cultures are functionally integrated, the integration is neither static nor rigid, so all cultures are open to change. Yet every culture has a built-in drive toward continuity by preserving something of the past to enable the people to better participate in the future. It gives people a sense of security by relying on what has worked in the past that might also work in the future. If however, change happens too rapidly or too chaotically then there will be resistance called cultural conservatism. As a result, people would resist change that threatens their basic security; people also resist proposed change

that they do not understand. It is therefore important that the proposed change should be presented in ways that are understandable to the potential adopters of change otherwise it will be vehemently resisted.

The only way to achieve change is either through *discovery*, an *invention* of something new or *borrowing* from another culture. Cultural change, *therefore*, begins with individual human persons and their ideas. The centre of cultural change is, hence, the mind of the receptor of the idea. Cultural change is a process that begins with an idea on the part of an agent of change and ends with its adoption or rejection by potential recipients. When the manner of thinking, perceiving, of actions of individuals who make up the group, change the ideas people hold in common change. As these ideas spread throughout society culture begins to change.

## **CHRISTIAN CULTURE**

Every religion has a particular way of life. Jesus Christ's pattern of life can be termed as a Christian culture. Christianity has a system

and accepted pattern in God's perspectives. During the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ, he lived a life that is different because he came from God. What he did and the life he lived remains the Christian culture we are following today. These are various aspects of Christian culture.

**Respecting and Honouring Our Religious Leader:** Jesus Christ shows us an example by honouring the Father, the Almighty God during his earthly ministry. Every Christian ought to respect their spiritual leaders irrespective of the age of the leader. When you see a church member insulting his spiritual leader it is a violation of the Christian culture. God who is the custodian of the Christian faith has a level of punishment for those who are violating such culture. Just take a look on how God treated Miriam that violated the culture by not respecting her leader.

1 While they were at Hazeroth, Miriam and Aaron criticized Moses because he had married a Cushite woman. 2 They said, “Has the Lord spoken only through Moses? Hasn't he spoken through us, too?” But the Lord heard them. 3 (Now Moses was very humble—more humble than any other person on earth.) 4 So immediately the Lord called to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam and said, “Go out to

the Tabernacle, all three of you!” So the three of them went to the Tabernacle. 5 Then the Lord descended in the pillar of cloud and stood at the entrance of the Tabernacle. “Aaron and Miriam!” he called, and they stepped forward. 6 And the Lord said to them, “Now listen to what I say: “If there were prophets among you, I, the Lord, would reveal myself in visions. I would speak to them in dreams. 7 But not with my servant Moses. Of all my house, he is the one I trust. 8 I speak to him face to face, clearly, and not in riddles! He sees the Lord as he is. So why were you not afraid to criticize my servant Moses?” 9 The Lord was very angry with them, and he departed. 10 As the cloud moved from above the Tabernacle, there stood Miriam, her skin as white as snow from leprosy. When Aaron saw what had happened to her, 11 he cried out to Moses, “Oh, my master! Please don’t punish us for this sin we have so foolishly committed. 12 Don’t let her be like a stillborn baby, already decayed at birth.” 13 So Moses cried out to the Lord, “O God, I beg you, please heal her!” 14 But the Lord said to Moses, “If her father had done nothing more than spit in her face, wouldn’t she be defiled for seven days? So keep her outside the camp for seven days, and after that she may be accepted back.” 15 So Miriam was kept outside the camp for seven days, and the people waited until she was brought back before they travelled again. 16 Then they left Hazeroth and camped in the wilderness of Paran. Number 12:1-16

Miriam thought that since Moses was her younger brother that she has been licensed to talk to him without respect. God was not

happy with her insult and criticism against Moses. When we are violating our culture God who is the owner of the culture will punish such a person. Many Christians are fond of talking and insulting their spiritual leader because they think that there is a punishment from God that follows such unruly behaviour and insult. The best way to proclaim the gospel may be to cooperate with the culture and engage it with respect, particularly to our leaders. In Acts 17, Paul provides a model for us on how to respect government leaders. It begins with observation. Paul strolls the streets of Athens and observes the temple of the various gods he finds there. He reports that he “looked carefully” at the “objects of worship” he found there ( Tow Project, 2022).

**Payment of Bride Price Before Marriage:** Many cultures of the world do not see anything wrong with fornication. It is their way of life. Sex before marriage is not regarded as a violation of God's law in such a culture. But a Christian that knows the laws and the culture of God sees sex before marriage as a violation of the Christian culture. Though many Christians are violating this culture without feeling remorse. It is a bad omen for Christians to



start having sex before marriage. Marriage is a public demonstration of love and lifelong commitment between two people. For Christians, marriage is part of a pattern of life established by God when he created humanity. He recognised that it was better for the first man, Adam, to have a partner, Eve. Every Christian believes that the binding partnership of the marriage is a powerful symbol of the relationship between Christ and the Church.

The Christian marriage ceremony is rich in symbolism where the bride and bridegroom make promises to God and each other during the solemnization. It is a commitment for life. Prayers are said for the newlyweds recognising the joys and difficulties ahead and asking for God's support. (A Christian View of Marriage, 2022).

**Church Wedding and Blessing of Marriage:** Before the advent of Christianity marriage in many cultures have a particular pattern. But since the coming of Christianity wedding and blessing of marriage has become a part of Christian culture. This is the reason why a couple cannot sleep together even after traditional

marriage, provided when both have agreed to either hold a church wedding or blessing of marriage. The only condition that might warrant them to start living as husband and wife is when both have agreed that they will not hold a church wedding or blessing of marriage. It does not stop them from meeting their church pastor to pray for them before they start living as husband and wife. Certainly, the real marriage is the traditional marriage, but because of the Christian culture, church weddings or the blessing of marriage have become important because of the Christian faith. This is the reason why it is a sin for both couples to start having sex before a church wedding. The blessing of marriage was designed by those that traditionally married before they joined the Christian faith or those that mistakenly entered marriage without adequate preparation.

A church wedding is a ceremony that takes place in the church and presided over by a Christian pastor. Traditionally, Christian weddings occur in a church as Christian marriage ideally begins where one also starts their faith journey (Christians receive the

sacrament of baptism in a church in the presence of their congregation). (Dooley, Sandra 2016, 29–30).

Marriage in the church, for Christians, is seen as contributing to the fruit of the newlywed couple regularly attending church each Lord's Day and raising children in the faith. (Dooley, Sandra ... 29–30).

In some traditional weddings of Western Christianity (especially Catholicism, Lutheranism and Anglicanism), a 'care cloth' or 'nuptial veil' (*velatio nuptialis*) "signifying a marriage yoke joining the bride and groom together" may be held over the kneeling couple during the nuptial blessing given by the priest (Olavus Petri 1929).

**Prayer as a Part of Christian Culture:** Since culture is a way of life. Every genuine child of God has made prayer a way of life. This aspect of Christian culture is very beneficial, because of the spiritual blessings that follow it. “And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;”

What one does every day becomes a part of the person and his or her way of life. In the Traditional African Religion, they have a way they communicate with gods. The moment one becomes a Christian prayer becomes a way of life because one has to pray daily. What we do always becomes our way of life. God commands us to pray [Mat 26:41].

**Reading of God's Word is a Christian Culture:** Another aspect of Christian Culture is the reading of God's word. “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” 2 Timothy 2:15. The word of God enjoins us to study. The first book we suppose to read every morning should be God's word. It carries a lot of spiritual blessings. According to Sophia Bricker, emphasis was laid on the efficacy and the need to read God's word at all times. (Sophia Bricker, 2022).

**Respecting and Obeying the Laws of the Land:** Christians are to obey the good laws of the land and not the laws that are against the Scriptures. Some tribal laws are against the Christian faith. Such

laws should not be obeyed. Look at the episode in Daniel 3:13-18

13 Then Nebuchadnezzar in his rage and fury commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. Then they brought these men before the king. 14 Nebuchadnezzar spake and said unto them, Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up? 15 Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made; well: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands? 16 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. 17 If it is so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. 18 But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.

These young men were in a strange land yet there were not afraid of the King on what he will do to them. Worshipping of an idol was never a part of their culture. They refused to obey the king's decision because it is against their conduct and way of life. The

constituted authority of every nation particularly if it is not a theocratic state is expected to be respected by every citizen. God does not force anybody to worship Him. According to Jamaica Observer emphasis was laid on the need to keep the laws of the land. Christian leaders need to follow the laws of the land as long as they are not taking us outside the boundaries of our Christian principles and morals. We may not be comfortable with some of the rules set by the Heads of Government concerning our worship; however, the law of the land is set for us to obey. Romans 13:1 says any authority put in place is placed there by God, and anyone who rebels against that authority rebels against God (Jamaica Observer, 2020).

Christians need to adhere to the good aspect of the law of the land. It is a sign of disobedience for instance if a Christian refuses to partake in the singing of the National Anthem and other important activities that are done in a secular community.

### **The Impact of Christian Culture in Nigeria**

Nigeria is one of the countries in the world that has witnessed a revival of the Christian faith. Christianity came to the Nigerian soil

in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Since then it has impacted on the nook and cranny of Nigerian society. Some of the notable impacts can be seen in the schools, government house, markets, public gatherings, in dressing and other non-governmental organisations. In various public gatherings like political rallies, primary and post-primary school assemblies and tertiary institutions, prayers are offered.

Christian culture has influenced the government of Nigeria through its festivals like Christmas and Easter celebrations. The Federal government of Nigeria has approved a public holiday for these Christian Festivals. The influence of religion on Nigerian politics has both positive and negative implications. The positive influence of religion on politics enhances national development. In this sense one expects religious ethical values to manifest at every point of influence.

Christian culture has provided mankind with moral values, that continues to help some classes of youth who are ready to abide by the rules and regulation of the Christian faith. Christian culture

has moral values which regulate and harmonize human life. In Exodus 20 the Ten Commandments guided the behaviours of Christians in the society.

Highlighting the function of religion as a provider of moral values, Mbiti in Nmah (2004, 177) says, “It is a religion which tells what is right, and what is wrong... religion enriches people's morale for the welfare of the individual and society at large” Nigerian remains one of the most religious people in the world. Therefore, as posted by Omoregbe (1998) there is a need to live a moral life because it is commanded by God. Failure to do this will be counterproductive in the matter of national development.

Adeye (1988) affirms that religion breeds an ideal heart in man to be conscious of the need to have a clean heart. By this, he will grow to have philanthropic or patriotic thought before venturing to lead or represent his people in the government of the state. In other words, religion will prepare the mind of man to be a good politician who will constantly fall back upon his religion to guide him. The



teaching or threats of religion are expected to guide him to be able to lead his people aright as a politician with fear of God in him. He will never consider himself first, rather he knows that he is the servant of the electorates. (Adeye ...165). There are many Christian leaders in Government houses, schools, non-governmental organisations and other establishments that are doing well as a result of the fear of God planted in their life through the Christian culture.

In the area of marriage, the Christian culture has influenced many people in Nigeria. According to Christian belief, marriage is a sacrament of a new covenant with Christ. A sacrament is ritual sign which gives grace to the person who receives it. This implies that marriage is not an empty action, rather it is an action embodied with meanings. It is an action of Jesus Christ in his church (CCC. no.1603). As a sacred union, marriage becomes a medium through which a wedded couple fully commits to each other in order to receive the grace of God. The church's understanding of the sacredness of marriage is founded on the creation narrative in the

Book of Genesis: “The Lord said: it is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper [...]. Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife and they become one flesh” (Genesis 2:18, 24). The Christian marriage is between one man and one wife. This idea of marriage is in sharp contrast with the traditional conception of marriage in Africa, where the marriage is between two families and descent groups.

Consequently, the marriage ritual procedures in Africa have witnessed major Christian influence. (Radcliffe-Brown 1950) aptly states that: As the Church steadily increased in power and in control of social life, marriage became the concern of the Church. There was a new conception that in marriage the man and woman entered into a pact with God (or with His Church) that they would remain united till death. The marriage was under the control of the Church; matrimonial cases were dealt with in the ecclesiastical courts (Radcliffe-Brown... 45). Furthermore, through the marriage ordinance with the government by the Church, the missionaries were able to integrate Christian marriage into the

traditional culture. Compliance with the government ordinance before the Christian marriage helped to strengthen the bond of marriage and a means of delimiting the strength of traditional marriage.

Christianity gave young girls and young boys who have reached the age of marriage freedom. When a youth reaches a marriageable age, he or she is free to marry the person of his or her choice. In the Traditional African Religion, in many communities parent have great influence in that respect.

Marioghae and Ferguson (1965, 63) rightly state that: Christian partnership means not equal rights but common responsibilities, not the wife serving the husband, nor the wife refusing to serve the husband, but both serving one another, and joining together to serve God and their neighbour; not dependence, nor independence but interdependence.

Christianity brought stability in marriage in Nigeria and other

African nations. Shorter (1998, 93) maintains that; “while church marriages tend to be more stable, the customary marriages of Christians are notoriously unstable and are liable to end in customary divorce”. This position however questions the efficacy of the customary rituals of marriage, as a result of changes in the social system seems to have weakened in strengthening the social relations. Different factors could be responsible for that such as education, cultural contacts, migration and capitalism etc. But to what extent could the argument be justified in view of the current trends associated with Christian attitudes to marriage? Respect is not in terms of being independent of each other but in terms of responsibility to each other. Marioghae and Ferguson (1965, 63) rightly state that: Christian partnership means not equal rights but common responsibilities, not the wife serving the husband, nor the wife refusing to serve the husband, but both serving one another, and joining together to serve God and their neighbour; not dependence, nor independence but interdependence.

## **Recommendation**

- ❖ Since Christian culture has a nexus with some cultures in many societies in Nigeria. As a result of this development, Christians are advised not to discard all aspects of the secular cultures which has contributed to the social development of Nigerian societies.
- ❖ Various Christian leaders in Nigeria should adhere to the rules and culture of the Christian communities. This is important because they all have responsibilities to discharge in ensuring good governance and these responsibilities are implied in Christian ethics.
- ❖ There is a need for total freedom of the Christian faith in many states in Nigeria because Nigeria is a secular state where freedom of religion is recognised by the constitution which describes the nation as a secular state.
- ❖ Every Christian group in Nigeria should encourage Christian freedom whereby everybody can seek the truth without fear or any form of coercion.
- ❖ Total religious freedom in Nigeria is posing a big challenge to all

the religions on Nigerian soil. Regarding this, religious leaders of the three major religions in Nigeria should seek ways for mutual understanding, collaboration and dialogue.

❖ Our various governments should handle religious matters with caution just to prevent violence and crisis. This is because any country with religious violence cannot experience social peace, unity and a stable economy.

❖ In most parts of Nigerian society, Christian culture has been downplayed to a large extent. Therefore, Christian leaders should emphasize the need to uphold the culture of the Christian faith.

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