



NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA

FACULTY OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

COURSE CODE: CRS880

COURSE TITLE: THEOLOGY OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

COURSE CODE: CRS880

COURSE TITLE: THEOLOGY OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

CREDIT UNIT: 3

COURSE TEAM	
COURSE DEVELOPER(S)	Dr Oyeronke Olademo University of Ilorin Ilorin Kwara State
COURSE WRITER(S)	Dr Oyeronke Olademo University of Ilorin Ilorin Kwara State
COURSE EDITOR(S)	Rev Fr Prof Michael N. Ushe Dept of Religious Studies National Open University of Nigeria Abuja
COURSE REVIEWER	Rev Fr Prof Michael N. Ushe Dept of Religious Studies National Open University of Nigeria Abuja

YEAR OF REVIEW: 2021

©2021 by NOUN Press

National Open University of Nigeria

Headquarters

University Village

Plot 91, Cadastral Zone Nnamdi Azikiwe Expressway Jabi, Abuja

Lagos Office

14/16 Ahmadu Bello Way

Victoria Island, Lagos

Email: centralinfo@noun.edu.ng

URL: www.noun.edu.ng

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, in any form or by any means, without permission in writing from the publisher.



COURSE GUIDE



MAIN COURSE

TABLE OF CONTENT**PAGE**

Module 1.....	1
Unit 1	Definitions of African Traditional Religion..... 1 - 6
Unit 2	Theology of African Traditional Religion..... 7 - 12
Unit 3	Creation in African Traditional Religion 13 - 17
Unit 4	The African Concept of Human Beings 18 - 24
Module 2.....	25
Unit 1	Ethics in African Traditional Religion 25 - 29
Unit 2	Judgment in African Traditional Religion 30 - 33
Unit 3	Reincarnation in African Traditional Religion 34 - 37
Unit 4	Women in African Traditional Religion38 - 41
Unit 5	Sin and Reward in African Traditional Religion42 - 46
Module 3.....	47
Unit 1	Eschatology in African Traditional Religion 47 - 51
Unit 2	The Human Agency in African Traditional Religion 52 - 56
Unit 3	Modernization and African Traditional Religion 57 - 62
Unit 4	The Contemporary Study of African Traditional Religion ... 63 - 67
Unit 5	African Traditional Religion and other Religions..... 68 - 71

MODULE 1

- Unit 1 Definitions of African Traditional Religion
- Unit 2 The Theology of African Traditional Religion
- Unit 3 Creation in African Traditional Religion
- Unit 4 The African Concept of Human Beings

UNIT 1 DEFINITIONS OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION**CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
- 3.1 African Traditional Religion
- 3.2 Background to the various labels of African Traditional Religion
- 3.3 Why Study African Traditional Religion?
- 3.4 Components of African Traditional Religion
- 3.5 African Culture and African Traditional Religion
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

You are welcomed to this course on the Theology of African Traditional Religion. In this unit, you will examine the definitions of African Traditional Religion, noting the different labels with which it had been described over the years. You will be exposed to the different names the African Traditional Religion has been known by in diverse settings.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

Explain what African Traditional Religion is;
 Distinguish and explain reasons for the different labels for African Traditional Religion;
 Define African Traditional Religion and explain its contents; and
 Describe the relationship between African culture and African Traditional Religion

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 African Traditional Religion

African Traditional Religion is the indigenous religion of the Africans which was handed over from one generation to another by word of mouth until recent attempts at documentation. The title “African Traditional Religion” presents an assumed unitary portrait of the religions of the African. Though it is true that many features of religion and its practice are similar across Africa, it would be erroneous to assume that all African religion (s) is the same. Hence, it has been suggested that the right label for the religions of Africa is African Religions or African Indigenous Religions, to reflect the plurality within the continent’s religious landscape. Another suggestion to describe the religion of Africa has been African Traditional Religions, the emphasis being on the “traditional” aspect of the religion 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.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

What is African Traditional Religion? What other terms are used to describe African Traditional Religion?

3.2 Background to the Various Labels for African Traditional Religion

The earliest attempts at studying African Traditional Religion 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 of African Traditional Religion, the African's identity and self-esteem were greatly disvalued and the consequences are still with Africans today.

Until about sixty years ago when African scholars started writing on the true nature of African Traditional Religion, the field of study was controlled by anthropologists, explorers and investigators who were non-indigenes from Europe and North America. Consequently, many porous labels were attached to African Traditional 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 Traditional Religion in its entirety and that African Traditional Religion should be discarded. Some of these labels are:

Animism

Animism assumes that African Traditional Religion is primitive and concerned primarily with animal sacrifice and the belief that everything in creation has an indwelling spirit.

Polytheism

Polytheism refers to the multiplicity of deities in African Traditional Religion

and concludes that the religion features the worship of many gods; whereas the religion recognizes one Supreme Deity who may be approached through different agents.

Idolatry

This label is informed by the use of carved images in African Traditional Religion to sustain the attention of the worshipper and as a representation of the deity being worshipped. It has to be noted that despite the use of images in Western religion, it has not been described as idolatry.

Juju

This refers to the use of magical principles to effect change in the universe. The knowledge and ability to command elements in nature towards specific goals was suspect to the foreign writers but natural to the Africans.

These labels were being used to describe African Traditional Religion until African scholars like J. S. Mbiti, J. O. Awolalu, P. Ade Dopamu, A. Shorter and J. K. Olupona, came on the scene to provide labels that adequately described the true nature of African Traditional Religion, such as African Indigenous Religions, African Religions, and African Traditional Religion.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

What situation led to the different labels assigned to African Traditional Religion by foreign writers? What alternative labels did the African scholars offer?

3.3 Why Study African Traditional Religion?

The study of African Traditional Religion is closely linked to the study of the African continent. This explains why earliest reports on the religion were by explorers, anthropologists and missionaries from Europe and North America. The need to study African Traditional Religion is informed by the imperativeness of human interaction and globalization. Colonialism compelled culture contact between the West and African societies and this relation included religious interactions. To study African Traditional Religion is to study the African people's philosophy and ethics. This is because African Traditional Religion permeates the African life in its entirety. The religion provides normative paradigm for social classification in the African societies. In addition, African Traditional Religion supplies the underlining principles to practices and social structures in the societies. For instance, African gender classifications are best understood within the people's religious perspectives. Also, African concepts of kinship and family could only be appreciated with adequate knowledge of the people's philosophy and religion. It is worth mentioning that the study of African Traditional Religion has been dynamic over the years with shifts in theoretical as well as pragmatic premises.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

What is the rationale for studying African Traditional Religion?

3.4 Components of African Traditional Religion

African Traditional Religion is orally based, though some recent attempts at its documentation may be cited. The contents of African Traditional Religion are:

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, or female or even being androgynous.

Africans have had the knowledge of the Supreme Being and have had interactions 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.

Belief in the 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.

Belief in the 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.

They may influence happenings in the lives of individuals or the family or even in the community. The desire to be in the good books of the Ancestors by Africans is to ensure harmony between them and the unseen powers. Ancestors are both female and male and death at old age is a compelling prerequisite to be an Ancestor.

Belief in Spirits

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.

Belief in Magic/Medicine

Medicine in African Traditional 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.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

State and discuss the components of African Traditional Religion.

3.5 African Culture and African Traditional Religion

Africans have a very rich culture which has been acknowledged worldwide. This culture reflects in the people's language, songs, fashion, cuisine and ethics. African culture exhibits similarities and differences from one African society to the other. However, certain features are true of African culture in any African society. For example there are emphasis on procreation, respect for old age, male/female dichotomy and being your brother's keeper, to mention a few.

African culture and African Traditional Religion have been described as two sides of the same coin due to the close affinity of the two. African Traditional Religion is embedded in African culture and vice versa. This is explainable in the light of the pervasive influence of religion in the African worldview.

Everything finds explanation and validation in religion in Africa.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

What is the relationship between African culture and African Traditional Religion?

4.0 CONCLUSION

We have discussed the definitions of African Traditional Religion and a background to how the many labels given to the religion were arrived at. We explained the contents of African Traditional Religion and the relationship between African culture and African Traditional Religion. African Traditional Religion is integral to African worldview and its study is compelling for any understanding of African way of life.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have examined the definition and components of African Traditional Religion. By looking at the background to the study of the religion, we came to understand the many wrong labels that were previously given to African Traditional Religion and how African scholars have rectified this situation. The relationship of African culture to African Traditional Religion was also examined.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. What is African Traditional Religion?
2. Why do we need to study African Traditional Religion?
3. List and explain the components of African Traditional Religion.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

- Awolalu , J. O. & Dopamu, P. A. (1979). *West African Traditional Religion*, Ibadan: Onibonje Press.
- Benjamin, Ray (2000). *African Religions: Symbols, Ritual, and Community* 2nd Edition, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Gyekye, Kwame (1996). *African Cultural Values: An Introduction*. Philadelphia, Pa/Accra, Ghana: Sankofa Publishing Company.
- Mbiti, J. S. (1969). *African Religions and Philosophy*, London: Longman.
- Olupona J.K. (ed.) *African Traditional Religion in Contemporary Society*, Minnesota: Paragon House.

UNIT 2 THEOLOGY OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 What is the Theology of African Traditional Religion?
 - 3.2 The Contents of the Theology of African Traditional Religion
 - 3.3 Approaches to the Theology of African Traditional Religion
 - 3.4 Methodology of the Theology of African Traditional Religion
 - 3.5 The Tasks of the Theology of African Traditional Religion
 - 3.6 The Sources of the Theology of African Traditional Religion
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, you will study the theology of African Traditional Religion, including its scope, approaches, tasks, sources and methodology. The Theology of African Traditional Religion has proven to be dynamic and of constant relevance to the African worldview. Consequently, any attempt to interact with the African on any enterprise should accord serious attention to the theology of African Traditional Religion.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

Define the theology of African Traditional Religion;

Enumerate the various approaches to the theology of African Traditional Religion;

Discuss the methodology of the theology of African Traditional Religion;

Mention the tasks of the theology of African Traditional Religion; and

State the sources of the Theology of African Traditional Religion.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 What is the Theology of African Traditional Religion?

The word *theology* is etymologically derived from two Greek words *theos* - God and *logos* - word (reason). Theology then means reason about God or the study about the nature of God. Often times the definition of theology is coloured by the perspective of the religious affiliation of the person defining theology. For this course, we will work with a definition of theology as the study of God and of God's relationship with human beings.

Consequently, the theology of African Traditional Religion is the African's way of understanding God, and the dealings of God with him/her. The Theology of African Traditional Religion is informed by the history and lived experiences of the Africans from one generation to another. The people's experiences of God influence their understanding of God and the relevance of God to their experiences on a daily basis.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

What is the Theology of African Traditional Religion?

3.2 The Contents of the Theology of African Traditional Religion

The contents of the theology of African Traditional Religion may be divided into two broad classifications: the mode of God's revelation of His nature and attributes to human beings and the responses of human beings to the revelations of God. In the first instance, Africans pondered on the mystery of the universe – the smooth seasons, pregnancy, elements of nature and others - and concluded that a super-sensible intelligence must be responsible for the smooth ordering of the universe. African Traditional Religion then is a revealed religion without a founder. It is a theology revealed through nature. Secondly, in addition to observing nature and her elements, Africans evolved a theology through their daily experiences including; moments of joy, sadness, death, sickness and some experiences defying the laws of nature. These led to the theology of a creator who is all-powerful, all-knowing and all-present. The people's response to how they experience God thus constitutes a second component of the contents of the Theology of African Traditional Religion.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

What are the contents of the Theology of African Traditional Religion?

3.3 The Methodology of the Theology of African Traditional Religion

Methodology of different theologies may involve two dimensions: above or below. The methodology that begins above starts from the divine (God / Supreme Being) unto the human level; whereas the methodology that prioritizes "below" dimension begins with the human experience and traces this to the divine. The Theology of African Traditional Religion by its very nature combines these two methods in its study and understanding of God.

As stated while discussing the contents of this theology, both the “above” and the “below” methodology is significant for the theology of African Traditional Religion. The context of the theology is the African culture and as noted in Module 1: Unit 1, these two are intertwined. Hence, our study of the theology of African Traditional Religion will accord serious attention to the African culture.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

What are the methods to employ in doing the theology of the African Traditional Religion?

3.4 The Tasks of the Theology of African Traditional Religion

The concern of the Theology of African Traditional Religion is to elucidate the true nature of the religion and offer explanations for the people's convictions about God. This is pursued towards attaining a healthy spiritual life for the people as well as an apology to those who are meant to misinterpret the religion as a result of biases. Therefore, if one agrees or disagrees with the tenets of African Traditional Religion, the theology of the religion seeks to remove any ambiguity about the religion.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

What are the tasks of the theology of African Traditional Religion?

3.5 Sources of the Theology of African Traditional Religion

The following constitute sources of the theology of African Traditional Religion:

Myths

In the study of religions, myths do not refer to false beliefs or narratives as erroneously assumed in some quarters. Myth, from the Greek word *muthos* refers to anything “oral”. The Africans came up with myths as explanations for the observed mysteries of the universe. For example, explanations on the origin of the universe, the purpose of life, the problem of evil, the essence of death and the complexity of the galaxies are all recorded by the African in myths.

These myths are explanations by the Africans for the mysteries in the universe. Myths are perpetuated in their oral forms through memory and word of mouth from generation to generation. A careful study of these myths shows the philosophical make-up of the Africans as intelligent people, who analyzed situations and came up with explanations which were informed by their experiences of the divine.

Liturgies

These are mode of rituals required for public worship sessions. Liturgies are set patterns of prescribed mode of worship as a means of communicating with the divine. The Theology of African Traditional Religion does not comprise the imperative need to maintain that the prescribed format of worship is religiously adhered to.

The consequence of contravening such format is an unsuccessful worship session. It is the bid to prevent such undesirable situations that the cultic functionaries – the priests and the priestesses- are trained and expected to lead in worship sessions.

Liturgies include prayers, recitation of names and attributes of the deity and body movements during worship (clapping, dancing and waving).

Songs

Songs are the recordings of a people’s lived experiences which are rendered in melodious tunes; songs are integral to the social and ritual lives of Africans. Indeed, there is rarely an occasion, be it joyous or solemn, in Africa where songs do not feature. The people’s understanding of God and their experiences of the divine in its different ways are recorded in the songs. You can also find therein, the hopes and aspirations of the people.

Oracles/Divination

Some African people have divination practices whereas others do not. Where they exist, oracles are reliable sources of the theology of the people because it encompasses the basis of the people’s philosophy and worldview. Examples of oracles are the Ifa oracular system among the Yoruba people of Nigeria and the Fa oracular system of the Ewe people of the Republic of Benin.

Sayings

These comprise of dictums, riddles and proverbs. These types of saying are usually products of human experiences and interactions over the years. The messages therein are coded and need careful analysis to unfold. Sayings serve different purposes in conversations which may include scolding, teaching, commendation and encouragement. Sayings may also serve as records of a people's hopes and aspiration, especially when facing formidable challenges.

Symbols

Symbols are representations of some other things. These include; works of art, emblems, carvings, paintings and engravings. Oftentimes, symbolic representations may be found at the shrines grooves and sacred places of worship in Africa. Such representations embody divine essence and are treated as sacred objects. Masks are also symbols utilized in Africa to represent

visitations from the super-sensible world. The practice of mask festival may be found among different peoples of Africa. Examples include the Gelede Masks of Benin Republic and the Egungun of the Yoruba of Nigeria.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

State and discuss the sources of the Theology of African Traditional Religion.

4.0 CONCLUSION

We have explained the theology of African Traditional Religion and its contents. In addition, we discussed the methodology, tasks and sources of the theology of African Traditional Religion. The Theology of African Traditional Religion reflects the deep understanding of God by the Africans.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit you have been exposed to the definition of the Theology of African Traditional Religion. In addition, you have explored the contents and methodology of the Theology of African Traditional Religion. The tasks and sources of the Theology of African Traditional Religion also engaged our attention.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. What is the Theology of African Traditional Religion?
2. State the contents of Theology of African Traditional Religion.
3. Explain the tasks of the Theology of African Traditional Religion.
4. List and explain the sources of the Theology of African Traditional Religion.
5. What are the methodologies of the Theology of African Traditional Religion?

7.0 REFERENCES / FURTHER READINGS

- Awolalu, J.O. & Dopamu, P.A. (1979). *West African Traditional Religion*, Ibadan: Onibonoje Press.
- Blakely, T. D. (ed.) et al (1994). *Religion in Africa*, London: James Currey Ltd.
- Platvoet (ed.) et al (1996). *The Study of Religions in Africa Past, Present and Prospects*, Cambridge: Roots and Branches.
- Mbiti, J. S. (1969). *African Religions and Philosophy*, London: Longman.

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 - Names and Attributes
- 3.2 The Process of Creation in African Traditional Religion - Agents and Elements.
- 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 - Web relationship.
- 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 over the years and for which explanations have been proffered based on the experiences of the African in the universe. In this unit, we shall examine the creator (God), the process, purpose and care of creation. The interaction of created things in the universe will also be discussed.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- Discuss God as the Creator in African Traditional Religion;
- Explain the process of creation in African Traditional Religion;
- Describe the purpose of creation in African Traditional Religion;
- State and discuss the care of creation in African Traditional Religion; and
- Mention the interaction of created things in African Traditional Religion.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 God as the Creator in African Traditional Religion

Africans believe that the world was created by God though variations exist on how each group in Africa explains the modalities of creation. God is acknowledged as the Creator by every narrative on creation by the Africans. Everything in the universe was put in place by God, just as God controls and maintains the universe. 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 call 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.

SELF- ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

How is God reflected as the Creator in African Traditional Religion?

3.2 The Process of Creation in African Traditional Religion

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 Orisha-nla, 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.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

What roles do divinities play in the process of creation in African Traditional Religion?

3.3 The Purpose of Creation in African Traditional Religion

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. It is a relationship of a higher power (God) and a lower entity (humans); both of which are in constant relationship and communication. 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.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

State and discuss the purpose of creation in African Traditional Religion.

3.4 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 Tradition 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 style is the responsibility of individuals. Also, 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 is a paradox that is daily negotiated in the practice of the religion worldwide, especially in North America and Europe where issues of animal rights are quite prevalent.

The use of taboo in African communities is usually geared towards the care of the universe by individuals in their homes and the communities. There are different types of taboo, including sex taboo, ritual taboo, environmental taboo and interpersonal taboo.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

How would you describe the Care of Creation in African Traditional Religion?

3.9 The Interaction of Created Elements 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 who 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 the process, purpose 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, process, purpose and care of creation from the perspective of African Traditional Religion. The relationship and interaction of everything in creation was also discussed. All things are mutually dependent in creation.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Describe the process of creation in African Traditional Religion.
2. Explain the purpose of creation in African Traditional Religion.
3. Mention and discuss the care of creation in African Traditional Religion.
4. Examine the concept of God as the Creator in African Traditional Religion.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

Awolalu, J. O. Dopamu, P. A., (1979). *West African Traditional Religion*, Ibadan: Onibonoje Press.

Benjamin, Ray (2000). *African Religions: Symbols, Ritual, and Community* 2nd Edition, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Mbiti, J. S. (1969). *African Religions and Philosophy*, London: Longman.

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

UNIT 4 THE AFRICAN CONCEPT OF HUMAN BEINGS**CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 The Source of Human Beings in African Traditional Religion.
 - 3.2 The Visible Composition of Human Beings in African Traditional Religion.
 - 3.3 The Invisible Composition of Human Beings in African Traditional Religion.
 - 3.4 The Position Cycle of Life of Human Beings in Cosmic Order.
 - 3.5 The End Transmission of Human Life in African Traditional Religion.
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit will examine the concept of humanity from the perspective of African Traditional Religion. You will be exposed to the make-up of human beings and their roles in the created order. The understanding of the African concept of humanity is important because in the African thought, human beings are situated at the very core of God's creation.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

Describe the origin of human beings in African Traditional Religion;

List and discuss the visible components of human beings in African Traditional Religion;

Describe the invisible components of human beings in African Traditional Religion;

Mention the landmarks in the cycle of life of human beings in African Traditional Religion; and

Explain the end of human life in African Tradition Religion.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT**3.1 The Origin of Human Beings in African Traditional Religion**

The origin of human being is located in God, the Creator. It was God who created human beings and put divine essence in them. In addition, humans are spiritually connected to God before, during and after their lifetime in the African belief system. In African belief system, the origin of human beings could be discerned from the strong cord that links the African to the super-sensible world which is reflected in the African rich spirituality. The African conviction that God is sovereign also gives some indication that the African person is closely linked with God. God is recognized as the ultimate authority on all issues and the last court of appeal for any aggrieved soul. Different types of sayings in the African communities reflect the belief that God is the origin of human beings. For instance, the divine essence in human beings is designated with the same label as the name of God in some African communities. Examples include the Ijaw who call the divine-essence in

human being *Tamuno*, the name of God; and the Idoma who call God, *Owoiko* and also call the divine-essence in humans *Owo* (derived from *Owoiko*). These observations point clearly to God as the origin of human beings in African Traditional Religion.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Describe the origin of human beings in African Traditional Religion.

3.1 The Visible Composition of Human Beings in African Traditional Religion

Humans are composed of visible and invisible element both of which are necessary to have a whole human being. The physical parts of humans can be seen and handled and could be described as the physical features of the human body. These would include the head, chest, hands, belly, thigh and legs. These physical parts of the human body are known by different names among different peoples of Africa. Nonetheless, each African people usually have a word for the collective physical features of humans. Among the Igbo it is *ahu*, the Yoruba call it *ara*, whereas the Akan call the body *honam*. In addition to this, some parts of the human body are perceived as symbols of unseen entities in the cosmos. Example is the physical head (*ori*) which is a symbol of the personality - soul (*ori inu*) among the Yoruba.

The body enables human beings to interact with the environment. Hence, such activities such as farming, hunting and fishing are as a consequence of the physical features of humans. In addition to this, the human body constitutes a "container" for other non-physical features of human beings. The proper care and nurture of the physical body is the responsibility of individuals but also of the community in certain instances (e.g. the case of pregnant women). The human body perishes at the death of every human being through the process of decomposition.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

What is the physical composition of the human body in African Traditional Religion?

3.3 The Invisible Composition of Human Beings in African Traditional Religion

The human shadow could be described as that which occupies the midway between the physical and the non-physical features of human beings. The human shadow is of social and ritual significance among the people of Africa. It is known by different names in many African communities. The Yoruba call the human shadow *ojiji*; the Nupe refer to it as *fufingi*; whereas it is known as *we-sagu* among the Ewe and Fon.

The human shadow is inseparable from the human body but cannot be handled, it thus combines physical and non-physical characteristics. The shadow disappears at the death of the human body. It is conceived by the African as a representation of the soul of individual human beings. In the ritual sense, any enchantment on an individual's shadow affects him or her directly. The African stance that the shadow of an individual is the symbol of his/her soul may find correlation in the biblical report of Peter's shadow that effected healing on some sick people.

The vital principle, which is represented by the breath of human beings, is an invisible feature of the human body. The breaths of human beings also represent the personality soul of every individual. We shall examine the personality soul in a subsequent section of this unit. The breath is known among the Yoruba as *Emi* whereas the Nupe call it *Rayi*. The origin of this vital principle could be traced to the creator, the Supreme Being

who gave breath to all living creatures. According to some African cosmological narrative, the Supreme Being delegated the fashioning of the physical features of humans to specific divinities but the giving out of breath to make the physical figures into living beings was the sole prerogative of God. The vital principle or breath ceases to exist at the death of each individual.

The personality soul is another invisible feature of human beings. The concept of the personality soul is prevalent among African peoples. Basically, this is the belief that assumes the existence of an invisible aspect of the human being which maintains constant interaction with the super-sensible world. The personality-soul is known by different labels in Africa and the concept is variously developed among the people. The Yoruba, for instance, have a rich concept of *ori*, that is, the personality-soul. The Igbo call it *Chi*, the Edo refers to it as *uhunmwun*; it is *kuci* among the Nupe whereas the Akan and Ga people call the personality-soul *sunsun*.

Again, the creator is the source of the personality-soul which is given to humans from the heavenly abode. Africans believe that the personality-soul is positive while it is given by the creator but certain factors in the environment may alter the positive disposition of the personality soul. Some of the factors that may alter the personality-soul according to Yoruba belief system are: the divinities, the evil ones of the world (*omo araye*) and a person's character. During worship seasons, the personality-soul may be represented by the head of individual concerned (Yoruba) or by the *ora* or *ogbu tree* (Igbo). A major character of the personality-soul is the rich scope of its knowledge base. African Traditional Religion subscribe to the stance that the personality-soul knows all about human life from the pre-existence to the daily activities of the individual till death.

There are other invisible features of the human body among different African peoples but those discussed above may be found in nearly all African communities: The purpose of the African emphasis on these invisible features of the human body is to buttress the dependence of humans on and relationship with the super-sensible world.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Mention and discuss two invisible components of human beings in African Traditional Religion.

3.4 Cosmic Human Cycle of Life in African Traditional Religion

The circle of human life is characterized by some landmarks that are appreciated and celebrated in African Traditional Religion. The cycle of human life in the African perception begins at birth, through puberty, marriage and ends at death. African Traditional Religion recognizes each of these occasions as worthy of celebration and specific rituals known as rites of passage are designated to this effect. The general aim of these rites is to celebrate the transition of the individual from one stage to another, for example, the transition of a child to adulthood through puberty rites. According to Benjamin Ray (2000), it usually involves three stages: the old stage that is to be discarded; the neutral stage when the individual is neither here nor there; and, the new stage into which the individual is to be incorporated.

These rites are of social and ritual significance in Africa because they constitute occasions for congregations, social interactions and harmonious living in addition to their religious elements. Furthermore, these rites of

passage are of diverse types and marked by multiplicity of emphasis in different African communities. For illustrative purposes, examples of some rites of passage in some African communities will be cited here. We shall discuss birth rites among the Edo and puberty among the Akan and Ga.

Birth Rites among the Edo

As is true of all African communities, the birth of a child is an occasion for much joy and felicitation. Among the Edo, the pregnant woman is placed under the care of a woman-healer who is vast in the field of gynaecology. The care of the mother and the delivery of the child is generally a duty for women; only in cases of serious problems do men interfere.

At birth, the child is given "the water of life" through the process of throwing water on the roof and the water drops on the child. The naming of the child is informed by the circumstance that is prevailing at the time of birth. The baby may also receive the name of the ancestors that is believed to have reincarnated.

Puberty Rites among the Akan and Ga

A girl's puberty rites commences at the first menstruation. At the appearance of the first menses, the girl informs her mother who gives the information to the community. The mother offers the prescribed sacrifice which includes wine to the creator (*Nyame*) and the ancestors. Thereafter, the girl's hair is shaved, along with the pubic hair and the hair at the armpits. She is gaily dressed as she is perceived as a newborn into adulthood. Five days feasting marks this puberty rite. The girl is expected to get married shortly after and become a mother not too long after that.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

What are the rites of passage in African Traditional Religion?

3.5 The End and Transmission of Human Life in African Traditional Religion

The end of the human life in the African perception is marked by the departure of breath from the human body. Death is however not the final termination of the journey of the human soul. This is because Africans believe that death is a mode of transition rather than a termination. At death, the human soul leaves the body but is received in the abode of the ancestors from where he/she may continue to influence the activities of people that are still living especially his or her family members.

Clear indications of this African conviction on death may be discerned from three perspectives: elaborate funeral ceremonies, funeral arrangements and the veneration of ancestors. Giving "proper" burial ceremonies to the dead is considered very important in the African belief system. A proper burial ceremony ensures that the departed is enlisted into the guild of ancestors and the children left behind are free to continue their lives without any form of spiritual oppression.

Funeral ceremonies in some African communities may involve the inclusion of clothing, food items and even slaves in the grave to ensure the comfort of the departed in the great world beyond. Also, Africans venerate the ancestors in order to receive blessings and support from them. Indeed, some African communities have elaborate ritual practices to celebrate the ancestors as found in the Egungun festival among the Yoruba.

There are different types of death in African Traditional Religion. There are good deaths which refer to the death of elderly people who have lived purposeful lives. There are also bad deaths which refer to the premature death of young people and the death of questionable characters in the community. Such people may die through divine punishment, for example, people who die

due to thunder strike which signifies the activities of the god of thunder (Sango) among the Yoruba; or individuals who die because of an attack of small-pox (Sonponna, the god of small pox). The African belief is that victims of bad death cannot become ancestors because they are given "special" type of burial. A prominent desire of every African person is to have children before death. Those who remain barren to the point of death are considered pitiable in African communities.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

Why is death a transition and not a termination in African Traditional Religion?

4.0 CONCLUSION

You have examined the origin and complex composition of human beings in African Traditional Religion. You have also been exposed to the visible and non-visible features of human beings. In addition, you have considered the cycle of human life marked by the rites of passage and the end and transmission of the human life.

5.0 SUMMARY

This unit examined the origin of human beings from the perspective of African Traditional Religion. We explained the visible and invisible features of human beings and considered the different rites of passage marking landmarks in the individual's life. The place and types of death in African Traditional Religion was also mentioned.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. What is the origin of human beings in African Traditional Religion?
2. Mention and discuss the visible features of human beings in African Traditional Religion.
3. Explain the invisible features of human beings in African Traditional Religion.
4. What are rites of passage in African Traditional Religion?
5. Is death the end of human life in African Traditional Religion?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

- Awolalu, J. O. & Dopamu, P. A. (1979). *West African Traditional Religion*, Ibadan: Onibonoje Press.
- Benjamin, Ray (2000). *African Religions: Symbols, Ritual, and Community* 2nd Edition. Englewood Cliff, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Mugambi & K. Nicodemus (1976). *The African Religious Heritage*, Oxford University Press.

MODULE 2

- Unit 1 Ethics in African Traditional Religion
- Unit 2 Judgment in African Traditional Religion
- Unit 3 Reincarnation in African Traditional Religion
- Unit 4 Women in African Traditional Religion
- Unit 5 Sin and Reward in African Traditional Religion

UNIT 1 ETHICS IN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION**CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 God as the Source of Ethics in African Traditional Religion
 - 3.2 Guiding Principles of Ethics in African Traditional Religion
 - 3.3 Concept of Good and Evil in Ethics in African Traditional Religion
 - 3.4 Custodians of Ethics in African Traditional Religion
 - 3.5 Ethics and Harmony in African Traditional Religion
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

We shall discuss the concept and practice of ethics in African Traditional Religion in this unit. Ethics is of great significance among any group of people.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

Define the concept of ethics in African Traditional Religion;

Describe the principles guiding ethics in African Traditional Religion; Explain the concept of good and evil in ethics in African Traditional Religion;

Mention the custodians of ethics in African Traditional Religion; and

Explain the relations of ethics in African Traditional Religion.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT**3.1 God as the Source of Ethics in African Traditional Religion**

Africans recognize God as the source of ethics as a consequence of God being the source of human beings and by implication of the world. God is the ultimate authority in African societies and no section of the society escapes the scope of God's power and influence. Therefore, God is the cohesive factor of the society. A clear indication of this observation is the pervasive role of religion in African societies. Ethical prescriptions are perceived as divine injunctions and penalties for contravening such injunctions are regarded as emanating from God. However, the prescriptions and punitive measures may be executed through the intermediaries. For example, the king, divinities, ancestors and elders are regarded as intermediaries. However, the ultimate authority belongs to God. Furthermore, God is judged as the source of ethics because of the divine essence (a part of the Supreme Being) which is given to humans by God.

The divine essence distinguishes humans from other creatures of God. It makes humans to seek God and strive to please the creator. In addition there is the provision of the

conscience in humans by God. The conscience commends or condemns human conduct without any external influence. It is the in-built thermometer by God into the human being. Thus, African Traditional Religion holds tenaciously to the fact that God is the source of ethics in human society, some African peoples however profess that society is the source of ethics but God is the enforcer and ground of validation for ethics as can be found among the Akan of Ghana.

SELF- ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Why is the source of ethics traced to God in African Traditional Religion?

3.2 Guiding Principles of Ethics in African Traditional Religion

Certain principles were put in place in African communities to guide the concept and practice of Ethics. There include the principle of being your brother/sister's keeper (one for all and all for one), taboo, covenant relationship and the use of traditional media system. The ethical conduct of one individual may jeopardize the destiny of a whole community. This is due to the African belief that a part could influence the whole positively or negatively. In this wise individuals are cautioned to be very careful in their conducts in interpersonal relationships whether between humans or with the super-sensible world. Taboo constitutes another guiding principle for ethics. These are stipulations to deter certain acts or conduct in African communities. Repercussions for breaking taboo are constructed as supernatural penalties and these could proffer serious implications for both the individual and the society.

Taboo may be specific to certain deities, a family, a profession or personal. Whichever it is, taboos are to serve as boundaries to ethical conducts. Covenant relationships compel faithfulness to an agreement between two people, who may be equals (parity covenant) or a higher and lower entity (suzerainty covenant). The terms of a covenant often ensures high ethical standards in human relationship because to disobey these terms could be precarious.

SELF - ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Mention and explain the guiding principles of ethics in African Traditional Religion?

3.3 The Concept of Good and Evil in African Traditional Religion

The concept of good and evil in Africa sometimes hinges on divine prescriptions. That which is good in African Traditional Religion is the act that contributes positively to the well-being of the individual, the family and the community whereas evil is perceived as any act which undermines the well-being of individuals, families and communities. Further, the good or evil act may occur, reflect and affect inter-personal and human-divine relationship. The common thread running through these multilayered manifestations of good or evil in Africa is the sustenance of people's well-being. Some prescriptions of good or that which is designated as evil carries divine elements. Good and evil acts may be directed towards fellow human beings or the divine, however, evil acts towards human beings is to be differentiated from those directed towards the divine, which is called sin. Evil acts undermine the well-being of others in the community and may include stealing, gossiping, murder, slander and quarrels. Repercussion of such acts may manifest as ostracized measures, sickness or lack of progress. On the other hand good deeds are acts such as kindness, goodness generosity, respect and sharing. The concept of character is of utmost importance and occupies a

central place in the moral language and ethics of many African communities. It is regarded by Africans as a sure instrument to measure an individual's moral standard. A clear platform that reflects good or evil acts in human life is character. African Traditional Religion asserts that good deeds are rewarded by God whereas evil deeds bring condemnation; hence people are urged to be good wherever they are. Members of the community are encouraged to develop habits and patterns of behaviour that fosters the well-being of everybody in the community.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

What is the concept of good and evil in African Traditional Religion?

3.4 Custodians of Ethics in African Traditional Religion

The Supreme Being is the ultimate custodian of ethics in African Traditional Religion but other parties assist in the daily enforcement of ethical prescriptions in the society. These include the divinities, the cultic functionaries, the ancestors, and elders in the community. Since every act of the individual (be it positive or negative) affects the well-being of everybody in the community, the roles of these parties become crucial. The divinities are oftentimes in charge of human conduct towards the super-sensible world whereas ancestors usually, oversee the conduct of the members of their families. The priest or priestess directs both social and spiritual conducts with the aim of maintaining harmony. The elders (female and male) try to ensure compliance with ethical prescriptions as concerns members of their families. These custodians work towards the same goal of attaining and maintaining the well-being of all in the society and recognize God as the ultimate power and authority.

SELF - ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Who are the Custodians of Ethics in African Traditional Religion?

3.5 Ethics and Harmony in African Traditional Religion

The provision of moral rules and ethical principles in African society reflects that character is basic to the well-being of the community. Character is a concept common to many African communities. It is conceived as an attribute bestowed on humans before birth in some African communities whereas others perceive character as a feature that each individual imbibes during the process of socialization tinted by some inherited traits. Whatever, the origin suggested for character, it is basic to fostering harmony in African communities. Some submit that character is “a state or condition of the soul which causes it to perform its actions spontaneously and easily” (Gyekye,1997), which in other words implies that character is innate. Other schools of thought, however, disagree with this because character formation also involves habits and oftentimes, inherited traits. In addition, they argue that moral instructions could be useless and irrelevant if character was innate. Ethics and harmony are interdependent from the perspective of Africa Traditional Religion because commendable acts foster peace and unity in the community and a peaceful & harmonious atmosphere promotes commendable acts.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

Describe the relationship between ethics and harmony in African Traditional Religion.

4.0 CONCLUSION

We have discussed the concept of ethics in African Traditional Religion in this unit. We examined the source, guiding principles and custodians of Ethics. We also discussed the African concept of good and evil and the relationship between ethics and harmony in African Tradition Religion.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we considered concept of ethics in African Traditional Religion, guiding principles of ethics, custodians of ethics and the contribution of ethics to harmony in African Traditional Religion. We also explained the concept of good and evil in African Traditional Religion.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Why is God the source of ethics in African Traditional Religion?
2. Mention the guiding principles of ethics in African Traditional Religion.
3. Describe the concept of good & evil in African Traditional Religion.
4. Discuss the custodians of ethics in African Traditional Religion.
5. How is ethics utilized for harmony in African Traditional Religion?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

- Awolalu, J. O. & Dopamu, P. A. (1979). *West African Traditional Religion*, Ibadan: Onibonoje Press.
- Gyekye, K. (1987). *African Philosophical Thought*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Mbiti, J. S. (1969). *African Religions and Philosophy*, London: Longman
- Opoku, K. A. (1987). *West African Traditional Religion*, Singapore: FEP Int. Private Ltd.

UNIT 2 JUDGEMENT IN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
- 3.1 Judgment and Morality in African Traditional Religion
- 3.2 Agents of Judgment in African Traditional Religion
- 3.3 Methods of Judgment in African Traditional Religion
- 3.4 Judgment and Human Responsibility in African Traditional Religion
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall examine the concept of judgment in African Traditional Religion. Judgment suggests forms of reactions to negative human actions.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

Describe the concept of judgment in African Traditional Religion; Mention the agents of African Traditional Religion;

Discuss the methods of judgment in African Traditional Religion; and

Explain judgment and human responsibility in African Traditional Religion.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Judgment and Morality in African Traditional Religion

Morality could be defined as rules and guidelines put in place to regulate and guide people's social conduct in a society. It could also be taken to mean behavioural patterns including attitudes and response to laid-down rules and norms in a society. An individual whose attitudes are deemed satisfactory is described as being morally upright. In Africa, often times, morality flows out of religion. Morality is thus a standard set to which members of the community are expected to live up to. Where an individual fails to meet this mark satisfactorily, then judgment is given. Judgment refers to a repercussion for falling short of certain expectations. Judgment could 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 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 seems like the evil-doer is going scot-free, Africans still believe that judgment is sure. Every action or inaction will necessitate a reaction which may be a judgment by another human being or the creator.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

What is the relationship of judgment and morality in African Traditional Religion?

3.2 Agents of Judgment in African Traditional Religion

The ultimate agent of judgment in African Traditional 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. Traditional 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 Traditional 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 Traditional 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 divination or when dreams are disregarded. Consequently, rules and prescriptions towards the veneration of ancestors are strictly adhered to avoid judgments. Also, in interpersonal relations, especially as it concerns oath taking and making of covenant, the divinities or ancestors may give judgment on violators of such agreements.

The greatest violation among the Yoruba in this regard for example is the breaking of covenant between siblings or relatives, known as "alajobi" (that which is born together); such is seriously sanctioned.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Who are the agents of Judgment in African Traditional Religion?

3.3 Method of Judgment in African Traditional Religion

A general assumption underling the concept of Judgment in Africa Traditional 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. But 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.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

What are the methods of Judgment in African Traditional Religion?

3.4 Judgment and Human Responsibility in African Traditional Religion

The responsibility of the individual is seriously upheld in African Traditional Religion. Though the concept of destiny exists nonetheless, it does not negate the concept of human responsibility because humans are endowed with the capacity for thought and action. It follows therefore that once an issue is thought about and action is taken by the individual on such thoughts, whatever the outcome may be, such an individual is to be held responsible for such actions. If such actions demand judgment, then it will be given and this is equally justified. There is the provision for human improvement in the African concept of character and morality. Hence the Akan of Ghana say: "We offer advice (in order to reform one's character") but we do not change destiny.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

What is the role of human responsibility in the concept of judgment in African Traditional Religion?

4.0 CONCLUSION

We examined the concept of judgment in the unit. The agents and methods of judgment were also discussed. We submitted that the concept of judgment hinges on the African subscription to human responsibility.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we discussed the concept of judgment in African Traditional Religion. The relationship of judgment and morality was examined. In addition, the agents and methods of judgment in African Traditional Religion engaged our attention. Also, we discussed the place of human responsibility in judgment in African Traditional Religion.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. What is the influence of morality on the concept of judgment in African Traditional Religion?
2. Who are the agents of judgment in African Traditional Religion?
3. What methods are employed in executing judgment in African Traditional Religion?
4. How can we reconcile destiny and free will in the concept of judgment in African Traditional Religion?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

- Awolalu, J. O. & Dopamu, P. A. (1979). *West African Traditional Religion*, Ibadan: Onibonje Press.
- Eliade, M. (ed.) (1987). *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, (Vol.10) New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.
- Gyekye, K. (1987). *African Philosophical Thought*, Philadelphia: Temple, University Press.

UNIT 3 REINCARNATION IN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
- 3.1 The Principles of Re-incarnation in African Traditional Religion
- 3.2 Methods of Re-incarnation in African Traditional Religion
- 3.3 Influence of Re-incarnation in African Traditional Religion
- 3.4 Peculiarities Re-incarnation in African Traditional Religion
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall examine the belief of the adherents of African Traditional Religion in re-incarnation. This is the belief that dead people could be re-born on earth.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

Explain the principle of reincarnation in African Traditional Religion; Describe the methods of reincarnation in African Traditional Religion; Mention the influence of reincarnation in African Traditional Religion; and

Discuss the peculiarity of reincarnation in African Traditional Religion.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Principles of Re-incarnation in African Traditional Religion

To the Africans, death is not the final end to human life. Rather, 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. Also, death and whatever happens thereafter is 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 general 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”. Also the people say “*aye l’oja, orun n’ile*” meaning “the earth is a marketplace but heaven is home”. Another observation that confirms the African belief in the immortality of the human soul is the immortality of God in African belief system. Since He is the origin of the soul and God is immortal, it follows therefore that the soul is immortal. Furthermore, the belief in the immortality of the soul in African Traditional religion is geared purposely towards Re-incarnation through which ancestors are re-born into the family. The process of the ancestors being re-born into the family is of prime

significance for the continuity of family lines from one generation to another.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

What are the principles that underline the belief in reincarnation in African Traditional Religion?

3.2 The Methods of Re-incarnation in African Traditional Religion

The modes of Re-incarnation in African Traditional 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 to be 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. Indeed, some members of the family would insist on calling such children "my mother" if this is how they addressed the dead ancestor.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Discuss methods of reincarnation in Africa Traditional Religion?

3.3 The Influences of Re-incarnation in African Traditional Religion

The basic influence of Re-incarnation in African Tradition 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, Re- incarnation 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.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Discuss the influence of reincarnation in Africa Traditional Religion?

3.4 The Peculiarities of Re-incarnation in African Traditional Religion

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, Re- incarnation is likened to the shedding of old clothes and the donning of new ones. One takes on birth again and again in countless bodies - perhaps as an animal or some other sub-human *form*. In African Traditional religion, people do not just take up birth again and again, 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.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Mention the peculiar features of Re-incarnation in African Traditional Religion?

4.0 CONCLUSION

We have examined Re-incarnation in African Traditional Religion. We discussed the principles of reincarnation and its practices. We also distinguished Re-incarnation in Africa Traditional Religion from the practice in other religions. Reincarnation remains a crucial component in understanding the religion of the Africans.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we considered the principles of Re-incarnation in African Traditional Religion. In addition, we examined the methods, influence and peculiarities of Re-incarnation in African Traditional Religion.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. What principles underline the practice of Re-incarnation in African Traditional Religion?
2. Describe the methods of Re-incarnation in African Traditional Religion?
3. Discuss the influence of reincarnation in African Traditional Religion?
4. Mention the peculiarities of Re-incarnation in African Traditional Religion?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

Fisher, M.P. (1997). *Living Religions*, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Benjamin, Ray (2000). *African Religions*, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Gyekye, K. (1987). *African Philosophical Thought*, Philadelphia: University Press.

K. Gyekye (1996) *African Cultural Values*, Accra: Sankofa Publishing Company.

UNIT 4 WOMEN IN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 African Gender Construct and African Traditional Religion
 - 3.2 The Role of Women in African Traditional Religion
 - 3.3 The Place of Women in African Traditional Religion
 - 3.4 Challenges for Women's Roles in African Traditional Religion
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall discuss the place and role of women in African Traditional Religion. The place of women in African Traditional Religion is also a product of the complementary gender construction in Africa.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

African gender construction;

Describe the place of women in African Traditional Religion;

Define the role of women in African Traditional Religion; and

Discuss the challenges for women's roles in African Traditional Religion.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 African Gender Construction and African Traditional Religion

Africans subscribe to the concept of interdependence of genders and the maintenance of balance in all human endeavours. Consequently both male and female principles are crucial to every human activity. The concept of African gender relations also reflects the multilayered understanding of the concept of power in Africa. Power is conceived not in terms of hierarchy but as areas of specialization and all are interconnected. Men have their areas of specialization (for example, hunting) and so do women (for example, cosmetics). Whereas the male is in control of the visible, physical and formal power, women control the invisible, non-physical and informal power in the polity. Yet both classifications of power are potent and relevant to the African social structures and gender relations. Furthermore, the base of power structure in some African communities is in the custody of women. This is especially true of the Yoruba, where the "Iya mi" (group of knowledgeable women) often referred to as witches, constitute the base of all power structures. Every case – spiritual, economic or political - would be resolved at the council of the Iya mi when the situation gets to the climax. Consequently, African gender construct bestows tremendous power on women. Also, the institution of motherhood is construed as a position of power in African communities. Mothers constitute the only authentic source of any child. This is because though the paternity of a child may be doubted, it is near impossible to dispute the maternity of a child. Moreover, the elements

that prevail in childbirth and child upbringing constitute avenues of power for the women in African communities. These are blood and breast milk. African gender constructions ascribe both elements to women and recognize them as sources of power and authority over the child. It is a normal practice to inquire about a child's well-being at different stages of life from the oracle in Africa. In such a situation, it is the mother's name that is required, not the father's because you don't doubt a child's mother. Also, if a mother curses or blesses her child with the blood shed at childbirth and the breast milk, the situation in African belief is near past rectification.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Discuss the African gender construction and how it affects women's place in African Traditional Religion.

3.2 The Role of Women in African Traditional Religion

The roles that women play in African Traditional Religion range from worshippers, to leaders, and custodians. Women constitute the majority of membership and worshippers in African Traditional Religion. Women also make up the "sustaining factor" in African Traditional Religion because the daily care of shrines and regular offering at the shrines is ensured mostly by women. Indeed, the role of women as sustainers of African Traditional Religion is crucial to the survival of the religion. Apart from these, women function as custodians of traditions in African Traditional Religion. This role pertains to the preservation and recitations of many oral genres that are necessary to the practice of the religion. Many of the repertoires are women. Some of these genres include cognomens of deities (oriki), incantations of various kinds, songs and other types of oral literature. In addition, Women function as cultic functionaries, priestesses and religious leaders. Women also function as healers and diviners in African Traditional Religion. In many African communities, women supervise the health care of people especially women and children.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Mention the roles of women in African Traditional Religion

3.3 The Place of Women in African Traditional Religion

Women occupy important position in African Traditional Religion. They constitute the sustaining factor of African Traditional Religion and are the live wire of any festival or religious occasion in Africa. The domestic activities of women during such occasions including washing, cooking and cleaning are construed as ritual activities that carry spiritual connotations and reward. To describe such activities in simple facton undermines the significance attached to the activities. Also, women constitute the custodians of tradition in African Traditional Religion. Seldom do you find any ceremony in Africa that not feature songs and recitations and normally, women are in charge of these. Again, women are in charge of the invisible base of power in many African communities. They prescribe and regulate the utilization of power and authority at every level of the polity in Africa but in a non-confrontational manner. Women have been described as the "ground" upon which African Traditional Religion operates. Many activities and participants step on this ground and often take it for granted but remove the ground and nothing works again.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Describe the place of women in African Traditional Religion?

3.4 Challenges to Women's Roles in African Traditional Religion?

The challenges that emanate from roles played by women in African Traditional

Religion are many and complex. A major observation cutting across these challenges is the influence of modernity and foreign religions on the contemporary African person. The prevalence of materialism and extensive influence of capitalism have necessitated major shifts in the African conception of womanhood. Again, the prohibitive regulations attached to menstrual blood is an imposed explanation from Christianity and Islam but which has become accepted even within African Traditional Religion. Menstrual blood is perceived as a conveyor of power because of the potential of life in it, therefore, efforts are made to avoid contact between it and any sacred object or setting. However, such a prohibition in either Christianity or Islam would be due to the conterminous label given to menstrual blood, as a spoiler or reducer of power. The prohibition of women from sacred space due to menstrual blood is, however, fast losing its level of compliance in the contemporary African setting. A clear evidence of this is the increasing number of childbearing women who are priestesses as opposed to the situation about a century ago when they were required to have passed childbearing age.

Further, the need to combine career and motherhood poses a serious challenge to women's roles in African Traditional Religion. The traditional network of grandmothers and stepmothers has been dismantled by individualism, industrialization and urbanization.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Explain the challenges for Women's Roles in African Traditional Religion

4.0 CONCLUSION

We have examined the place and role of women in African Traditional Religion. We also discussed some challenges that women face as they strive to fulfil their roles in African Traditional Religion

5.0 SUMMARY

We discussed the role and place of women in African Traditional Religion, in this unit. We examined African gender construction as the source of principles to understand roles of women in African Traditional Religion. We also explained some of the challenges to women's place and roles in African Traditional Religion.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Explain African gender construction
2. Discuss the role of women in African Traditional Religion?
3. Explain the place of women in African Traditional Religion?
4. Mention some challenges to women in African Traditional Religion?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

- Olajubu, O. (2003). *Women in the Yoruba Religious Sphere*, New York: Sunny Press.
- Gyekye, K. (1996). *African Cultural Values*, Accra: Sankofa Publishing Company.
- Oduyoye, M.A. (ed) et al. (1992). *The Wall to Arise: Women, Tradition and Church in Africa*. New York: Orbis Books.

UNIT 5 SIN AND REWARD IN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 The Concept of Sin and Reward in African Traditional Religion
 - 3.2 The Methods of Sin and Reward in African Traditional Religion
 - 3.3 Agents in Control of Sin and Reward in African Traditional Religion
 - 3.4 The Concepts of Punishment and Removal of Sin in African Traditional Religion
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall examine the concept of sin and reward in African Traditional Religion including the methods and agents that control both concepts. We shall discuss the relevance of punishment for sin and reward as well as the effects of both concepts in African Traditional Religion.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

Explain the concept of sin and reward in African Traditional Religion.; Mention agents that control the practice of sin and reward in African Traditional Religion;

Discuss the concept of punishment in African Traditional Religion; and

Describe the effects of sin and reward in African Traditional Religion.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Concept of Sin and Reward in African Traditional Religion

The concept of sin in African Traditional Religion hinges on violations of regulations in the society. These violations run contrary to prescribed mode of conduct and speech by the Supreme Being and which are supervised by the lesser deities and the ancestors. Sin in African Traditional Religion therefore, encompasses immoral acts, ritual mistake, 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 un- confessed sin in the life of the individual so afflicted.

Again, pregnant women who have difficulty in childbirth are encouraged to confess their sins so as 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 Traditional Religion. Some sins are limited to the

moral setting, examples are theft, lying, rudeness and disrespect to elders and slander. But the scope of other types of sins may be wider and serious and punitive measures accrue to such. These 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.

The concept of reward in African Traditional Religion cuts across human and the supernatural spheres. Commendable moral acts which are in conformity with prescribed code of conduct in African societies are often rewarded. Such acts may include kindness, bravery, truthfulness, faithfulness, leadership qualities and ritual correctness in worship. Such act by any individual is perceived as indications of good character, which is of prime importance among some ethnic groups in Africa e.g. the Yoruba. The Yoruba call character, *iwa*. *Iwa* is also believed to be a crucial determinant of what the lot of an individual would be both here on earth and in the heavenly abode among the ancestors. These acts are also perceived as ingredients for harmony and peace for the promotion of the individual and communal well-being in the society.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Discuss the concept of sin and reward in African Traditional Religion

3.2 The Methods of Sin and Reward in African Traditional Religion

Diverse methods are pertinent to the conclusion that an act constitutes a sin. Central to these methods in African Traditional Religion is morality. The African assumes a strong link between sin and morality, therefore where immoral acts prevail, sin cannot be absent. An individual's moral integrity is thus perceived as a good instrument to measure his/her propensity toward committing sin. Also, taboo is instituted as a way of regulating people's conduct in the society and violation of any taboo is a sin. There are different types of taboos like food taboo, sex taboo, ritual taboos, taboo for different professions and taboo on social interaction. Food taboo may affect individuals or families or in some cases entire communities and many reasons may be adduced for this. As a consequence of divination at the birth of a baby, certain food items may be forbidden to him or her and this prohibition is to be observed till death.

Some families, due to specific experiences may also decide to abstain from some food items and such restrictions become binding on all members of the family through all generations of members of that family. These taboos are put in place to ensure harmony and well-being for every one. Therefore violations of such taboo would disrupt the peace of the community. Another means through which sin can be committed is the human relation with the ancestors. Whenever an individual clashes with the ancestors in Africa either through acts of omission or commission, sin is the result.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

What are the methods of sin and reward in African Traditional Religion?

3.3 Agents in Control of Sin and Reward in African Traditional Religion

God is the upholder of moral law in African Traditional Religion and God is also the prime agent in control of sin and reward. This is because in African Traditional Religion, every sin committed is ultimately against the Supreme Being and all rewards could be traced to God. However, the lesser deities and the ancestors are the agents who engage humans directly on issues of sin and reward. For instance, some lesser deities are in charge of portfolios guarding the moral conduct of humans in the society. Also, cultic functionaries -priest, priestesses, and elders, - oversee ritual settings that may offer avenues for both sin and reward. These agents are involved in daily human relations and act as means of regulation for the harmony and well-being of individuals in and the community as an entity.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Mention the agents in control of sin and reward in African Traditional Religion.

3.4 The Concept of Punishment and Reward of Sin in African Traditional Religion

Africans believe it is God who ultimately punishes sin through agents to whom authority had been given. Such agents are the divinities, ancestors and elders. Also, Africans believe that God will require an account of the individual's life from him or her after death. Punishment in African Traditional Religion

is usually presented as a sanction. These sanctions promote good moral conduct in the society because they act as deterrent to potential offenders. But at the same time, these sanctions are punishment for violations of regulation in the society. The first level of punishment for sin in African Traditional 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 punishment commensurate with every sin committed. The underlining principle for punishment 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.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Discuss the concept of punishment in African Traditional Religion

4.0 CONCLUSION

We have examined the concept of punishment and the removal of sin in African Traditional Religion, in this unit. We discussed how sanctions against sin and reward for commendable acts could disrupt and galvanize the society respectively.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit are considered the concept of sin and reward in African Traditional Religion. We discussed the methods and agents that control sin and reward in African Traditional Religion. We also examined the African concept of punishment and the removal of sin.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Describe the concept of sin and reward in African Traditional Religion.
2. Mention the methods of sin and reward in African Traditional Religion.
3. Discuss the Agents in control of sin and reward in African Traditional Religion. .
4. Explain the concepts of punishment and removal of sin in African Traditional Religion.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

- Awolalu, J. O. & Dopamu, P. A. (1979). *West African Traditional Religion*, Ibadan: Onibonje Press.
- Gyekye, K. (1996). *African Cultural Values*, Accra: Sankofa Publishing Company.
- Mbiti, J. S. (1969). *African Religions and Philosophy*, London: Longman.
- Ray, B. (2000). *African Religions*, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

MODULE 3

- Unit 1 Eschatology in African Traditional Religion
- Unit 2 The Human Agency in African Traditional Religion
- Unit 3 Modernization and African Traditional Religion
- Unit 4 The Contemporary Study of African Traditional Religion
- Unit 5 African Traditional Religion and other Religions

UNIT 1 ESCHATOLOGY IN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION**CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
- 3.1 The Cyclic Concept of Eschatology in African Traditional Religion
- 3.2 Eschatology and Morality in African Traditional Religion
- 3.3 Burial Ceremonies & Eschatology in African Traditional Religion
- 3.4 Mourning & Eschatology in African Traditional Religion
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall discuss the concept of eschatology in African Traditional Religions. Eschatology refers to end time things and how different people conceive of it. Africans have their own conception of Eschatology and this reflects in their burial ceremonies, moral codes and mourning.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- Discuss the concept of Eschatology in African Traditional Religion;
- Explain the place of morality in African Eschatological beliefs; Describe African burial ceremonies; and
- Explicate the relevance of mourning in African Eschatological belief

3.0 MAIN CONTENT**3.1 The Cyclic Concept of Eschatology in African Traditional Religion**

The African concepts 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 is 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 new born babies or as masked visitors on the occasion of ancestor festivals, for example, the *Egungun* among the Yoruba. Worthy of note, however, is the fact that not every dead person makes it to the abode of the ancestors. The cycle of African belief in end time therefore comprises a baby being born, life lived, died and returns to the abode of the ancestors from where the cycle begins again.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Explain the cyclic concept of Eschatology in African Traditional Religion.

3.2 Eschatology and Morality in African Traditional Religion

The uppermost incentive for good moral conduct in African societies is tied to benefits accruable at the end of life. Whereas it is true that moral guidelines are instituted to ensure the well-being of members of the society, the idea of recompense at the end of life also aid good behaviour in people. Similarly, the expectations of reward, promotion and goodness after death deter individuals from being immoral. Africans avoid sanctions and strive to be good so that nothing obstructs their qualification for the abode of the ancestors after death. African eschatological concept thus plays an important role in sustaining the moral coherence of African societies. Moreover, as individuals strive to be morally upright, agents in control of moral codes in African societies also try to be upright because any laxity could result in sanctions. Therefore, the African concept of eschatology has acted as a form of checks and balances between members and leaders of the society.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Describe the relations between Eschatology and Morality in African Traditional Religion.

3.3 Burial Ceremonies and Eschatology in African Traditional Religion

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. This 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. At a later date 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.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

State the link between burial ceremonies and eschatology in African Traditional Religion.

3.4 Mourning and Eschatology in African Traditional Religion

Mourning in African Traditional Religion reflects the African distinction of the living from the dead and the necessity to separate both as soon as possible after death. This is because without this separation neither the dead nor the living would be at peace. Periods and modes of mourning vary from society to society and for women and men. Basically, however, mourning is supposed to reflect the care and love of the living for the deceased. It is also to show that the living respect and would miss the dead. This explains why physical cleanliness is usually undermined during the time of mourning in some African societies. 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 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.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

How does mourning affect the African concept of Eschatology?

4.0 CONCLUSION

We have discussed the concept of eschatology in African Traditional Religion and how this is reflected in African moral sensitivity. We examined the African burial system and how the dead are mourned.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit are considered the concept of Eschatology in African Traditional Religion. Also, we examined the place of morality, burial ceremonies and mourning in the African concept of eschatology. We saw that the concept of eschatology in African Traditional Religion proffers significant implications for both the living and the dead.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Discuss the concept of eschatology in African Traditional Religion.
2. Explain the place of morality in the concept of eschatology in African Traditional Religion.
3. Describe burial ceremony in one African community.
4. Show the relevance of mourning to the African concepts of eschatology.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

Awolalu , J. O. & Dopamu, P. A. (1979). *West African Religion*, Ibadan: Onibonje Press.

Ray, B. (2000). *African Religions*, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Gyekye, K. (1996). *African Cultural Values*, Philadelphia:
Sankofa Publishing Company.

UNIT 2 THE HUMAN AGENCY IN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
- 3.1 The Role of Human Beings in African Traditional Religion
- 3.2 Human Agency in Worship in African Traditional Religion
- 3.3 The Dynamics of Human Agency in African Traditional Religion
- 3.4 Limitations of Human Agency in African Traditional Religion
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall discuss the human agency in African Traditional Religion. Human beings occupy a crucial place in the practice of African Traditional Religion in diverse ways. They represent the divine in some setting and wield power as representatives of the divine. Yet, humans are limited whereas the divine is limitless.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you are expected to:

Describe the role of human beings in African Traditional Religion; Explain the human agency in worship in African Traditional Religion; Discuss the human nature and how it affects the representation of the divine in African Traditional Religion; and Mention the limitations of the human agency in African Traditional Religion.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Role of Human Beings in African Traditional Religion

The centrality of humans in the world affairs is appreciated in African Traditional Religion. The conception, interpretation and practice of the religion rest with humans at the various levels of relationships in the society. This is why the acts of interpretations and pronouncements by humans have serious implications for the practice of African Traditional Religion. People who recite African oral genres in ritual setting wield tremendous influence because they re-enact rituals and historical occurrences frequently and these shape the African Traditional Religion. Spirit possession in African Traditional Religion involves the possession of the body and thinking faculty of the individual. In such situations, the person under possession displays all known characteristics of the possessing spirit and may deliver messages for the benefit of the people from land of the spirits. Again, when worship requires sacrifice, humans perform it according to laid down procedures and format. Such sacrifices are often recommended after the process of divination in some settings in Africa. Divination could be of different types but the main rationale is for guidance in a difficult situation. To attend to the need of the inquirer, sacrifice may be recommended by the diviner. When the sacrifice involves the killing of animals, the blood is shed on the altar but the flesh is cooked and eaten by those who are qualified to do so. The human agency is the "face" of divine power in the ritual setting. Some humans wield power by various degrees over other human beings and this proffers serious implications for African Traditional Religion. This is because the manner in

which power is displayed and exercised affects lives and the integrity of the religion. Instances of power abuse may be cited while some have utilized their access to power positively. Human agency in ritual setting thus translates to the power of a few over the majority, the effects of which may be positive or negative.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

How does the human agency manifest in worship in African Traditional Religion?

3.3 The Dynamics of Human Agency in Divine Representations in African Traditional Religion

The human nature is dynamic and complex, therefore many agenda may run through a person's mind at once and this is bound to affect both action and utterances. Humans represent the divine in different capacities in African Traditional Religion. In addition, humans communicate with the divine structure and liturgy of African Traditional Religion. Cultic functionaries act as intermediaries between the worshippers and the deities and this makes them interpreters for both the divine and the worshippers. They convey requests by worshippers to the deities and bring back responses to the worshippers. When the deities have messages for the worshippers or the ancestors may wish to address members of a family on specific issues, cultic functionaries fulfil these roles. The offering of sacrifices is done by humans to appease, appreciate or make requests from the deities; hence the continuous relevance of the deities is guaranteed. In the absence of the worship given by humans the relevance of the gods in African Traditional Religion would become highly contested.

It has been observed that human beings are connected to God in three ways: through creation, the divine essence placed in humans by the Supreme Being and human destiny, which is given by God. These connections equip humans with the ability and capacity to influence the practice of African Traditional Religion either positively or negatively.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

State the role of humans in African Traditional Religion

3.2 Human Agency in Worship in African Traditional Religion

Worship connotes an act of communication between human beings and the spirits, ancestors, deities or the Supreme Being. Worship is a means of sustaining fellowship between humans and the super-sensible world. Worship is an inner attitude which finds expression in formatted outward expressions. These formatted gestures reflect the inner reverence in the heart of the worshipper and were formatted by the human agency. Both regular and occasional worship revolve around human beings. Other aspects of worship sessions also depend on the human agency, for example, songs, recitation of praise names and cognomen of deities in any particular divinity cult rest upon humans.

Spirit possession is another exhibition of the human agency in diverse settings and for many reasons it is imperative to give cognizance to the dynamic nature of human agency while it is representing the divine. For instance, a common trend today is that Ifa priests and priestesses can do consultation and the offering of sacrifices by proxy while in the past it is imperative that the client should be present and do most of the purchases personally. Moreover, there is the possibility that the material need of the cultic functionaries may influence the items of sacrifice required from some clients, especially if such clients are well to do. However, the exposure of some cultic functionaries to Western education has positively influenced their representative of the divine in the propagation and practice of the religion. For instance, examples of Ifa priest and priestesses who are lawyers, doctors, agriculturalist, bankers and administrators may

be cited. These adherents of African Traditional Religion use their training in schools to enhance the exposition of African Traditional Religion to non-adherents. In addition they use their experiences to portray the religion in commendable light. An example of such personalities is the former Vice Chancellor of University of Ife (now, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife) who took Ifa religion to great heights internationally.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Describe the dynamics of human nature and how it affects representations of the divine in African Traditional Religion.

3.4 Limitations of the Human Agency in African Traditional Religion

The limitations of the human agency centres around the human nature, the divine is limitless. This explains the lapses in human representation of the divine. Emotions could distract humans in certain settings whereas the divine is unchanging and unaffected by emotions. Human reaction could alter due to anger, jealousy or greed but this is not true of the divine. Again, the mode of communication between the divine and humans could be distorted because of a slant in human nature. Therefore, sometimes, messages that are received through human agency may actually be a misrepresentation of divine injunction. Further, it is possible for humans to deliberately alter divine message for personal gain. Nonetheless, the Supreme Being must of necessity be represented among humans, therefore these limitations would continue to be managed as much as possible.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE.4

Explain the limitations of the human agency in African Traditional Religion

4.0 CONCLUSION

We have examined the human agency and the various ways it impacts on African Traditional Religion. We discussed the different ways by which humans represent the Supreme Being and how human limitations may impair divine representations.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit we discussed the human agency in African Traditional Religion. We considered the role of human beings in African Traditional Religion, especially their roles in worship sessions and in divine representations. We examined the limitations of the human agency in African Traditional Religion as well.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Discuss the roles of human beings in African Traditional Religion.
2. How would you describe the dynamics of the human agency divine representations in African Traditional Religion?
3. Explain human agency in worship in African Traditional Religion.
4. What limitations affect human agency in African Traditional Religion.
5. Would you advise that the human agency be avoided totally in African

Traditional Religion?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

Adediran, B. (ed) (1994). *Cultural studies in Ife*, Ife: Institute of Cultural Studies, Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria.

Awolalu, J.O. (1979). *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites*, Essex: Longman.

Gyekye, K. (1996). *African Cultural Values*, Philadelphia: Sankofa Publishing Company.

Ray, B. (2000). *African Religions*, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

UNIT 3 MODERNIZATION AND AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
- 3.1 The Effect of Modernization on Worship in African Traditional Religion
- 3.2 The Effect of Urbanization on African Traditional Religion
- 3.3 The Effect of the Media on African Traditional Religion
- 3.4 The Effect of Materialism on African Traditional Religion
- 3.5 African Traditional Religion in the Diaspora
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall examine the impact of modernization on African Traditional Religion and vice-versa. Modernization encompasses multilayered concepts and developments and nothing escapes its influence, including religions. African Traditional Religion has been influenced by modernization in different ways.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- Explain the effect of modernization on worship in African Traditional Religion;
- Describe the effect of urbanization on African Traditional Religion;
- Discuss the effect of the media on African Traditional Religion;
- Explain the effect of materialism on African Traditional Religion; and
- Explicate the export and practice of African Traditional Religion in the Diaspora.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Effect of Modernization on Worship in African Traditional Religion

Modernization in this context means all that culture contact between Africa and the rest of the world entails. This is principally in two ways: religion and economics; the introduction of Christianity and Islam and the many trade routes passing through Africa. Ever since the opening of these two avenues of contact with other cultures, African Traditional Religion has not remained the same. The influence of modernization reflects in the transfer re-interpretation and sometimes in exchanges of concepts between religions for example between African Traditional Religion and Christianity. An example is the African concept, names and attributes of God which have now been usurped by Christianity and Islam in a modified form. Worship sessions now involve the use of modern musical instruments in addition to the traditional ones previously employed. Liturgy is highly tinted by Western culture, custom and cuisine. The sayings and the instructions of the religion that has been largely oral are presently being documented and translated into English language for a

wider distribution and appeal.

Modernization has increased the number of non-blacks and non-Africans to become adherents of African Traditional Religion; consequently there is a vibrant worship community of African Traditional Religion in Europe, North America and Latin American countries. Modernization has influenced all the following: the venue of worship, the methods of worship, the use of language, musical instruments as well as the dressing of worshippers. In some congregations of African Traditional Religion, worship sessions take place in a temple, built for that purpose like a church or mosque. Furthermore, the structures of these temples resemble those found in mosques and churches, for instance, there are choirs with uniform, ushers, different grouping of men and women and youth with specific title and an altar for officiating ministers. Also, some worship seasons are recorded on video cassettes for different purposes. Offerings of money and other items are collected at the appropriate time during worship sessions. Hymn books of songs are utilized during worship sessions, while aspects of scriptures are read and elucidated during these worship sessions.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

How would you describe the effect of modernization on worship in African Traditional Religion?

3.2 The Effect of Urbanization on African Traditional Religion

Urbanization dismantled individual, communal and ritual identities in Africa. It could be said that urbanization was a direct product of industrialization and modernization in Africa. The migration of people, men especially, to the urban centres in search of jobs undermined African Traditional Religion because it removed the people from their base. As the people moved to the cities they could not move their shrines, priests or ancestors. Rather, they met Christianity and Islam as the viable options in city life. City life compelled the people to conform to the guiding rules of modernization, one of which was that anything that had to do with African Traditional Religion was demonic and should be discarded totally. Indeed until very recently, it was nothing of pride for anybody to publicly profess that he or she is an adherent of African Traditional Religion. The preferred options were Christianity and Islam because such an identity carried some level of prestige with it and could open doors in areas of influence. The migration of men to the cities to search for work has also been cited as the reason why African women became custodians of the traditions of Africa. Women continued to sustain the religion long after the men had converted to Christianity and Islam in a bid to belong and put money in the pocket. Urbanization altered the ethical sensitivity of the African person significantly and this could be easily discerned through the many vices that resulted there from. These include armed robbery, pen robbery, prostitution and other fraudulent activities. African virtues became seriously undermined and eventually ignored, examples include, humility, goodness, truthfulness, obedience, diligence at work, loyalty, respect for elders and brotherly or sisterly love. African ceremonies in contemporary African societies have become modified with some of them losing their core essence in the process. Examples are naming ceremonies, marriage ceremonies, initiation ceremonies and burial ceremonies. In addition, rites of passage which were often taken for granted in traditional. African societies are now taking up socio-political issues such as human rights, animal rights or gender oppression. Issues of female and male circumcision are examples of contentious issues in African Traditional Religion in contemporary Africa and the Diaspora.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

What are the effects of urbanization on African Traditional Religion?

3.3 The Effect of the Media on African Traditional Religion

The media has been both a friend and a foe to African Traditional Religion at different times. A positive effect of the media on African Traditional Religion is in the area of propagation, especially the role of the internet. Through the World Wide Web (www) African Traditional Religion, its meaning and practices could be accessed by anybody in any country in the world. The television in different African nations has also assisted the spread and sustenance of African Traditional Religion through publicity. The radio is of immense assistance to African Traditional Religion because of its wide coverage, even in the remote villages where television and the internet may not be readily available. But a major handicap to the utilization of these facilities in some African countries is the epileptic power supply. The supply of electricity is unreliable at best and totally absent for some period in other cases. However, the media is also the chief culprit in hoodwinking innocent people in believing purported miracles such as healing of long term health conditions, raising of the dead and deliverance from satanic powers. Research findings have proven that some of these advertised "miracles" are nothing short of fraudulent attempts by money-hungry preachers to defraud people. The percentage of such preachers is higher with Christianity and women constitute a very large proportion of their victims. The media has made it possible for some preachers of Christianity and Islam to become tin-gods in their empires (ministries). This is because through television programs these preachers become known and are hero-worshipped, especially by the youths. If by chance such a preacher should visit a city, the youths are seen running after their cars believing that touching the man or woman would alleviate their problems, all these point to hero-worshipping.

Again, the media sometimes promote rancour in religious propagation because some preachers go on air to attack other preachers or other religions instead of explaining the contents of their own religion. An example is a Muslim preacher who goes on air to preach nothing but that God has no son, knowing fully well that Christians profess that Jesus is the Son of God. Thus, the media sometimes contributes to religious crisis in Africa.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Explain the effect of the media on African Traditional Religion.

3.4 The Effect of Materialism on African Traditional Religion

Materialism may be taken to mean the prioritization of the acquisition of material things, especially money and all that money could buy. There is no gain saying that materialization is a major challenge for religion to manage in the contemporary world and African Traditional Religion is no exceptions. The bid to acquire money has seriously undermined integrity and faithfulness among practitioners of African Traditional Religion. This is especially true in the relationship between practitioners of African Traditional Religion in the Diaspora and on the continent. Diverse cases of fraud in the terms and process of initiation into different Orisa cults may be cited. In addition, there have been complaints on the sale of fake religious products such as symbols, charm preparations and recitations. These developments arose as a result of materialism which has now cancelled the need to be a person of integrity as was the case in the Africa of old.

In another parlance, because individual practitioners are more concerned with their personal pursuit of money and materials, it has been a great challenge to get contributions towards the development of African Traditional Religion from adherents. Projects that

are envisaged as possible ways of developing the religion remain dormant due to lack of funds. Materialism undermines the prescribed ethical principle of African Traditional Religion because in their bid to get money at all cost, adherents pay little or no attention to ethical

principles, neither do they accord adequate relevance to the reaction of the divinities, spirits or ancestors.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Discuss the effect of materialism on African Traditional Religion

3.5 African Traditional Religion in the Diaspora

The practice of African Traditional Religion in the Diaspora could be traced to two major developments. The transatlantic slave trade through which Africans were forcefully taken from their continent to Europe and Americas, and the exposure of non-African and non-Blacks to African Traditional Religion through travels and the media. Today, there is a viable and vibrant practicing group of African Traditional Religion in the Diaspora and this has compelled an exchange between the continent and the Diaspora in terms of personnel (priest and priestesses and custodians of traditions), and training (initiations, lessons in oral recitations, dancing, drumming and performance) in the ritual setting. Many practitioners from the Diaspora visit Africa regularly to access, learn and renew their energy vibrations in different shrines and groves in Africa. Likewise, many African practitioners visit Americas, Europe and Islands to train, learn and visit 'sisters' and 'brothers'. The practice of African Traditional Religion in the Diaspora has to a considerable extent removed some of the negative tags previously attached to the religion. An indication of this is the adoption of some sites of African Traditional Religion as world heritage sites such as the Osun Osogbo sacred grove on July 14 2006. Also, many traditional festivals in Africa have become tourist attractions thereby promoting the tenets and practice of African Traditional Religion.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

How would you describe the practice of African Traditional Religion in the Diaspora?

4.0 CONCLUSION

We discussed the effects of modernization in various ways on African Traditional Religion in this unit. We considered how African Traditional Religion is affected by urbanization, migration and materialism. We also explained how the media contributed positively and negatively to African Traditional Religion.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit we examined the effect of modernization on African Traditional Religion. In addition, we discussed the effect of urbanization, the media and materialization on African Traditional Religion.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Describe the effects of modernization on African Traditional Religion
2. Explain the effect of urbanization on African Traditional Religion
3. Discuss the effect of the Media on African Traditional Religion
4. How does Materialism affect African Traditional Religion?
5. Examine the practice of African Traditional Religion in the Diaspora.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

Assimeng, M. (1989), *Religion and Social Change in West Africa: An*

Introduction to the Sociology of religion, Accra: Ghana University Press, 1989.

Olajubu, O. "African Traditional Religion and the Nigerian People. The suitation of the Divinities Revisited" in *Research in Yoruba Language and Literature*, Technicians of the Sacred, Burbank, U.S.A., pp. 21-24.

Iatvoet, J. P. (ed) et al. (1996). *The Study of Religions in Africa: Past, Present and*

Prospects, Cambridge: Roots and Branches, 1996.

UNIT 4 THE CONTEMPORARY STUDY OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Theories in the Study of Religion
 - 3.2 The Influence of Multidisciplinary Approaches on the Study of African Traditional Religion
 - 3.3 Tools for the Contemporary Study of African Traditional Religion
 - 3.4 Trends in the Contemporary Study of African Traditional Religion
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall consider the contemporary study of African Traditional Religion and the challenges that emanate in the process. The study of African Traditional Religion is a reality at the various institutions of learning in Africa.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

Explain theories used in the study of African Traditional Religion;

Discuss the influence in the study of African Traditional Religion;

Describe the tools for the contemporary study of African Traditional Religion; and

Explicate the trends in the contemporary study of African Traditional Religion.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Theories in the Study of African Traditional Religion

Many theories are utilized in the study of African Traditional Religion depending on the setting and the agenda of the researcher. Some of these theories will be examined. The theory of phenomenology attempts to describe and understand the religious consciousness of the believers who practice the particular religion being studied. It is usually marked by three methodological approaches: *epoche*, *eidetic* vision. *Epoche* is bracketing out of the researcher's belief system. *Einfühlung* advocates that the observer must empathize with internal understanding. The eidetic vision suggests that religions cannot be compared as wholes rather practices such as sacrifices, prayer or liturgy may be abstracted and analyzed in relation to similar components from a wide range of religions. The theories of anthropology are many but some similarities may be noted. For instance, anthropology prioritizes the "local" above the general; hence it is concerned about religion as practiced by particular communities as distinct from the general practice of religion. Ethnography is taken seriously by anthropology which explains why culture is also emphasized. Anthropology often views religion from the functionalist perspective whereby emphasis is on the function of religion in

individual lives and the society. Further, there is the sociological theories which focus on the institutional aspects of religion and the interrelationship between religion and society. Such theories deal with structuring in religion and the basic unit of analysis rather than the belief of the people in any religion. Also, sociological theories exhibit methodological atheism which suggests that any supernatural or theological explanation should be excluded as an explanation for religion in favour of a humanistic or social explanation. Also, there is the feminist theory which attempts to formulate theology that suits women's needs, religions are seen as an expression of an ideology that arises from and justifies patriarchal dominance. Religion must be challenged and transformed by the recovery of women's voices from the past, and as it exist today. Feminists advocate for a new way of studying and conceptualizing religion by giving priority to the experiential and the personal. Lastly there are the psychological theories which focus on the individual and some submit that religious experience is firstly explainable via chemical process in the brain, because they focus on the individual and his/her experience, they ignore the role of the group in religion and this hinders a thorough analysis of religion. The basic assumption for religious experience in psychology is abnormality though various theories explain this differently. These theories also argue for psychic universalism, that is, all human beings share the same psychological structures. Any of these theories or any combination from them could be utilized in the study of African Traditional religion.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Explain the theories used in the study of African Traditional Religion.

3.2 Influence of Multidisciplinary Approaches in the Study of African Traditional Religion

The prevailing multi-disciplinary approaches to the study of religion generally have had some influence on the study of African Traditional Religion. It has broadened the scope of analysis because of the possibility of diverse perspectives in the analysis of any topic at hand. Take for example the practice of sacrifice in African Traditional Religion, which has until recently been construed as an issue in the realm of ritual but which now carry connotations of environmental theories. This is because the process of ritual and the effect of such processes on the environment can no longer be ignored. The killing of animals for sacrifice, the burring of wood in the process of sacrifice and the noise level of songs and recitations during ritual are now serious issues brought to fore because of the concerns on theories of environmental sustenance. The sociological theories mandate that the positive and negative impact of religion on society and its structures be adequately analyzed instead of just assuming that religion is good for society at all times and in all ramifications. Thus, these multi-disciplinary approaches have helped to broaden (in depth and scope) the study of African Traditional Religion.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

How has multi-disciplinary approaches helped in the study of African Traditional Religion?

3.3 Tools for the Contemporary Study of African Traditional Religion

Ethnographic data analysis has continued to be relevant as a tool to study African Traditional Religion over the years. Its usefulness is informed by the need to allow the practitioner speak directly on the religious practices and

reason for such practices. Consequently, phenomenology of religion enjoys prevalent use in the study of African Traditional Religion. Also, participant observation and interviews are undisputed tools in the study of African Traditional Religion. Notwithstanding however, documentation of materials on African Traditional Religion continues to rise, thus books are potent tools for the study of the religion in the contemporary setting. Traditional oral genres are tools for the study of African Traditional Religion as well. Through recitation, and performances, it is possible to study different aspects of African Traditional Religion. Arts (painting, sculptor, batik etc.) constitute tools for the study of African Traditional Religion in many ways, especially as concerns the use of symbols and representation of the divine.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Describe the tools for the contemporary study of African Traditional Religion.

3.4 Trends in the Contemporary Study of African Traditional Religion

African Traditional Religion moved from being ignored as a subject to being studied in the periphery of religious studies and is now well positioned in the study of religions in the world. This is because the religion is intertwined with African culture which is versatile, rich and dynamic. The study of African Traditional Religion has extended beyond the continent of Africa and the trend will continue. The religion is studied in universities in North America and Europe with an exchange of faculty (Professors) between universities in Africa and the Diaspora, this trend will also continue. In addition, there is an attempt to integrate the study of African Traditional Religion on the continent and in the Diaspora, especially in the area of publications, either by individual African or non-African scholars in Africa and in the Diaspora or as collaborative research work between scholars in Africa and in the Diaspora, this trend also will continue. Further, conferences on African Traditional Religion bring together scholars of the religion all over the world but also practitioners who get to hear and see what academic engagement is being done on the religion and have the privilege of having inputs into such exercises.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Mention the trends in the contemporary study of African Traditional Religion?

4.0 CONCLUSION

We have examined the contemporary study of African Traditional Religion. We discussed the theories in the contemporary study of religion and attempted to analyze how they affect the study of the religion. We noted certain trends in the study of the religion as well.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we discussed the theories in the study of African Traditional Religion. We also examined the influence of multi-disciplinary approaches, the tools and the trends in the study of African Traditional Religion. We suggested that the identified trends could continue.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Explain the theories in the study of African Traditional Religion.
2. Describe the influence of multi-disciplinary approaches on the study of African Traditional Religion.
3. What are the tools for the contemporary study of African Traditional Religion?
4. Discuss the trends in the contemporary study of African Traditional Religion.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

- Kunin, S.O. (ed.) et al. (2006). *Theories of Religion*, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.
- Olupona, J. K. (ed) *African Traditional Religion in Contemporary Society*, Minnesota: Paragon House.
- Platvoet, J. et al. (ed). (1996). *The Study of Religions in Africa: Past, Present and Prospects*, Cambridge: Roots and Branches.

UNIT 5 AFRCAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION AND OTHER RELIGIONS

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
- 3.1 Initial Contact between African Traditional Religion and Christianity
- 3.2 Initial Contact between African Traditional Religion and Islam
- 3.3 Tension and its Resolution in Inter-religious Relations
- 3.4 Borrowing and Negotiations in Inter-Religious Relations
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall discuss the relationship between African Traditional religion and other religions in Africa. The close proximity of these religions compels some level of interaction among them.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

Describe the initial contact between African Traditional Religion and Christianity;

Discuss the initial contact between African Traditional Religion and Islam;

Explain the tension and resolution of such in inter-religious relations in Africa; and

Discuss instances of borrowing and negotiations in inter-religious relations in Africa.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Initial Contact between African Traditional Religion and Christianity

Tension marked the initial contact between African Traditional religion and Christianity because Christianity condemned everything African and depleted the membership of African Traditional religion through conversion by various methods. Christianity arrived Africa with the assumption that the African was uncultured, barbaric and demon-invested. It was the duty of Christianity then to enlighten and introduce God to the unlettered African. Whereas Africans were warm and accommodating towards the propagation of Christianity in the light of African hospitality to visitors, Christians recompensed them with degradation and oppression. However, after many years of interaction, certain levels of understanding were arrived at by both parties. For instance, experience soon proved to the Christians that it was futile to expect a complete separation between Africans and the African culture and worldview. In view of this, the churches started giving cognizance to African culture and worldview in the propagation of the Christian message. Also, the influence of Western culture on some structures of African culture cannot be denied. Examples include the changes in modalities and items used during African naming and marriage ceremonies.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Describe the initial contact between African Traditional religion and Christianity.

3.2 Initial Contact between African Traditional Religion and Islam

Islam arrived Africa earlier than Christianity and this was primarily through trade activities. Many similarities exist between Islam and African cultures such as polygamy and the use of herbs. This invariably reduced but did not eradicate the tension between the two religions. For instance, though Islam allowed the marriage of one man to as many as four wives if need be, there were conditions guiding this practice. But polygamy in African cultures was limitless, a man could marry as many wives as he liked, especially as this was considered a sign of prestige in the society. In addition, the Islamic injunctions on inheritance were not at par with what obtains in African cultures. Whereas the Quran specified what percentage of inheritance should go to each relative of the deceased, such a decision was at the prerogative of the elders in the deceased's family in African communities. Years of constant interaction between the two religions has produced influences on both sides from each of them. The practice of Islam in Africa has not escaped the influence of the African culture. Examples of such influence include the use of African songs, dressing and leadership structures. An example of the leadership structure could be seen in the turbaning of the Iya Adinni and Baba Adinni.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Describe the initial contact between African Traditional religion and Islam.

3.3 Tension and its Resolution in Inter-religious Relations

Many religions dot the African landscape and interaction between them is unavoidable, hence tension sometimes erupts. In Nigeria for example, instances of religious conflict between Muslims and Christians could be cited. It is worth mentioning that these conflicts may oftentimes be traced to the exclusive nature of these two religions and their evangelistic efforts, both of which are absent from African Traditional religion. African Traditional religion until recently had no evangelistic zeal. Workshops and seminars have been conducted at local, State, and national levels in Nigeria to address the issue of inter-religious conflict. All these seem to agree that a major factor that contributes to inter-religious conflict and that needs to be removed is suspicion, which is often a product of ignorance concerning other people's religions. Consequently, it has been advocated that each person should have a general knowledge of all religions existing within his or her locality. Christians should have a general knowledge of Islam and vice versa. Unfortunately little attention is paid to African Traditional religion in this regard yet many Christians and Muslims resort to African Traditional religion in their times of crisis. It is, however, commendable that religious knowledge - Islamic, Christian and African - is part of the curriculum in schools at all levels in Nigeria. This stance needs to be sustained and all efforts to remove religious knowledge from school curricula in Nigeria should be rejected.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Discuss tensions of Inter-religious relations in Nigeria.

3.4 Borrowing and Negotiations in Inter-religious Relations in Africa

Some levels of borrowing and negotiations may be discerned in inter-religious relations in Africa. A prime reference on this score is the African Independent (Indigenous) Churches who give important attention to African culture in their practices and organizational structures. For example, the Musama Disco Church in Ghana models its leadership structure after the political structure of the Asantehene of Kumasi in Ghana. Also, the

leadership structures of Yorubaland reflect in the structures of leadership in the Cherubim and Seraphim and Celestial Churches in Nigeria. The chiefs (male and female) in these churches are similar to the chiefs in Yoruba communities in terms of installation process, duties and responsibilities as well as regalia and the use of dressing accessories like neck and wrist beads. Also, the prioritization of African worldview reflects in the practice of prophecy and predictions in these churches. Sometimes, these prophecies and predictions may lead to sacrifice of animal victims and/or ritual baths. Christianity has also borrowed from African culture in the area of regalia. For example, the robes of the clergy is now made from African fabrics like kente (Ghana) and aso-oke (Yoruba, Nigeria) in part or in full. Further, ritual components like spirit possession which is a salient feature of African Traditional religion is presently operating in Christianity. Music is another borrowed component from African Traditional religion, especially vibrant music produced by African musical instruments. African leadership structures reflect in Islam as well because offices for male and female are created for smooth administrative purposes in the mosque though such offices cannot be traced to the Quran. These borrowings and negotiations in inter-religious relations is an ongoing process that is likely to continue so long as they meet the need of the worshippers.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Explain borrowings negotiations in inter-religious relations in Africa.

4.0 CONCLUSION

We discussed the state of relations between the many religions in Africa today and challenges that emanate from these relations. Tensions and its resolutions were also examined.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we examined the initial contact between Christianity, Islam and African Traditional religion, we described the tensions that resulted from these contacts and how the tensions were resolved. Some borrowing and negotiations in inter-religious relations were also identified.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Describe the initial contacts between African Traditional Religion and Christianity
2. Discuss the initial contacts between African Traditional Religion and Islam
3. Explain tensions and its resolution in inter-religious relations in Africa
4. Discuss borrowing and negotiations in inter-religious relations in Africa.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

- Balogun, I. A. B. (1976). *Religious Understanding and Co-operation in Nigeria*, Ilorin, (Proceedings of a Seminar organised by the Department of Religions, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, 7th- 11th August, 1976.
- Mala, S. B. (ed.) et al *Religion, Peace and Unity in Nigeria in the Nigerian Association for the Study of Religions.*