

Dear All,

We are all Believers as even the 'fools' know that there is God so the bible and our Edo saying goes.

I am a Believer in the existence of God Almighty and I also believe strongly that Edo tradition and custom must survive. My wish and what is reality are very different. That is my worry. These differences in the way of worship are as many as there are different cultures and traditions in the world.

We know God is everywhere 'omni presence,' He is all knowing 'omni science' He has so many names in all the languages and He understands every language including Edo language because he hears our prayers in whatever language we say it.

He is Alpha & Omega and our ancestors understood this very well in their dealings with one another and in communing with God Almighty and our ancestors.

I have listened to our elders praying thus;

Osanobua vbe enikaro!

Osanobua vbe erinmwini n' egbe ivbi Ise!

Osalobua, Osanoghodua, Osanudazi kevbe Olokun!

The above is also similar to edifying God as the God of Jacob, the God of Isaac, the God of Abraham and the God of our ancestors

The above shows the reverence our people placed on God Almighty. They did not go wrong because they always placed God **first**. Even amongst those who are not Christians, they always placed God first in their prayers. It was with the power of God they achieved all the conquest credited to the ancient Benin Kingdom.

Our people have known God from when time began in what is today Edo Land. To say otherwise is to be ignorant of our culture.

Osa is God in Edo Land with praise and edification like Osanobua... Osanobuwa . God the creator, Osa nudazi, Osa noghodua the provider, Osa nose naga, worthy to be worshipped.

God is all purity in Edo Land hence His symbol is 'white' depicted as white chalk in 'Aruosa' (do not confuse with Aruosa Church). There are no carved images or symbols like we see in a Shango or Ogun shrines.

For anyone to say the worship of God by Edo people must be exactly the same as the worship of God in England or in America is not being realistic. Even in Christendom, all denominations do not worship God the same way. Belief in God is through faith and those who worship Him do so in faith.

We are talking about different people with different ways of life (culture & tradition) and different socio-economic status.

With the advent of Europeans on our shores, with commerce, there followed religion on the other hand.

Today with better means of communication and the advent of satellite television preaching, our people gradually imbibed this foreign ways of worship to the neglect of our own ways of worship.

This alien or foreign ways of doing things have permeated our ways of life in all aspects in recent times.

The food we eat, our way of dressing, speaking, celebrating our births and deaths and crave for foreign goods are testimonies to this permeation or foreign influence.

The way we bury our dead have been drastically changed and reduced to only one wake keeping instead of the usual three days or more depending on social status, so the new way seems easier and cheaper. It may be more of economic reasons that most families whose parents never ventured to the four walls of a church now prefer to bury their parents in the church.

Secondly people like the sense of belonging of being a member of the main stream faith which today is Christianity at least in our part of the world.

Thirdly, church burial is regarded as 'posh'

These changes in our custom and tradition are **irreversible** as sons and daughters of traditional chiefs who are supposed to be custodians of our culture now pastor churches and are strong members of main stream Christian denominations like the Holy Roman Catholic Church.

This is a welcome development because they are in a position to edify God and preserve what is **godly** in our culture and tradition.

No one therefore can alter the wheel of change as this is the spice of life.

In the Catholic Church for example there is effort for some reverend fathers to conduct the holy mass in Benin language as a way of shoring up our custom and tradition since language is an integral part of custom and tradition. The deduction here is that the main churches have not set out to exterminate our customs and traditions rather they wish to co-operate with it. It is for these reasons that they try very hard to have indigenous priests to handle the parishes in some localities. The above comment may not be true in all the denominations of Christian churches operating in Edo land today. Some of these churches insist on dress code, insist on greeting or salutation code which are alien to our people and an affront to our cherished way of life. It is in some of these churches that commercialization has taken root eroding the original principle of God which is to love our neighbours as ourselves.

Another factor for coexistence is that Nigeria is a secular nation and everyone is allowed to practice his/her faith the way he or she wishes. Individuals should be allowed to follow the religion of their choice without any hindrance; to do otherwise is to introduce chaos, unrest and acrimony. The only peaceful countries are those where people are allowed to worship unhindered.

What we should be doing now is to emphasis those aspects of our customs and tradition that we need to keep **especially our language** which is fast being eroded by the use of 'pidgin' English.

Pidgin English does not add to the study of the English language nor does it help in the test of English as a language. It is the greatest culprit in the destruction of Edo language and adulteration of the English language; therefore all efforts must be made to eradicate it especially from the primary schools during the formative years of our children.

Secondly, every effort should be made to record our custom and tradition in print and electronic version and Kudos to those who are already working in these areas for the benefit of all of us and those yet unborn.

Celebrations of festivals of new yarm '**ehor**' is akin to harvest in the church and should be encouraged and nothing ungodly about it so long there is no idol worshipping. The **Igue** festival for

example is an example of thanks giving ceremony and should be encouraged so also are the accompanying ceremonies of ***ubi rie' and ewere*** that follows Igue festival which symbolises the triumph of good over evil. There is a slippery slope here and one should know where, as a Believer one should not cross the thin line.

Every culture must modernise or else it will die. Edo culture must modernise like the British Royal Family is modernising. The above ceremonies of ehor, Igue accompanied with ubi rie' & ewere, ikpoleki can be modernised to make them more acceptable to 21st century Edo citizens.

In fact Our Oba knows this and he Omo n' Oba is already modernising and bracing the trail.

The world is moving ahead and very fast indeed; and anyone who decides to standstill is actually going backwards. Odaro Agbon rie!

To think things can ever be what they were a few centuries ago is an illusion. To refuse to modernise is to loose everything.

Finally belief in God and practice of Edo custom can coexist in harmony and in fact they have been co existing for centuries. The way we celebrate our marriages, births, and death, naming of our new born are unique and are not ungodly so can coexist with the Christian faith. Our morning salutations are also unique and not ungodly and can coexist harmoniously with our Christian faith or belief. As Edo and Believers in God Almighty, it is our duty to help preserve our customs and traditions in the best possible way as it will be pleasing in the eyes of God as our culture and tradition are His creation.

Usual Regard,

SEO

Thanks, Sir Steve Ogbonmwan.

Alex G. Igbineweka

Dear Steve

Thanks for that well written piece.

My only concern is your strong position that "These changes in our custom and tradition are irreversible... "

They are not irreversible.

The ebbs and tides of theological controversies and the rise and fall of forms of worship over the centuries prove that it all depends on many complex factors, including leadership. The motivation for some of the changes you have described are - as you have yourself pointed out - economic, western educational, fraud (ie "religion as a business investment industry"), etc.

To say that the current situation is irreversible" is like some 19th

century Edo Priest saying that Edo religion of that era was "irreversible." Ofcourse we now know what has happened since then.

Churches have arisen from nowhere. Even Hare Krishna has a small base in Edoland.

If a well funded charismatic character were to emerge, develop a theoretical basis for indigenous theology, and attract followers do not be surprised if there is a groundswell of followership.

One limitation to the expansion of traditional religion has been the lack of desire to proselytize. Traditional religion was built around individuals and families and villages and tied in to our lifecycle. It was always tolerant of alien religions even though the reverse has not proved to be the case. If that restraint were to be removed anything can happen.

What the colonial people did was insert a new lifecycle and allow foreign religions a degree of access to take hold of the young minds they were nurturing - in schools - for future leadership and control of our society. Hence the so called conventional wisdom, now, many years later that an alien religion is somehow "mainstream." Many are forced to practice syncretism under the table - although it is the true "mainstream". (There are only a few "pure" christians" and "moslems" in Nigeria. Many so called Pastors and Imams visit traditional shrines in their spare time)

Ofcourse, in the far north, Islamic leaders (just like the Chinese and Vietnamese and Thai etc...) resisted western education for a long time because they correctly foresaw the danger. They preferred for their children to attend Koranic schools (or Buddhist and other Oriental Schools as the case may be in Asia). They (the far north) are paying the penalty in terms of the modern political economy in Nigeria but in large part their "traditions" have survived to a greater degree than ours. The trick, therefore, is to balance the two - as the Asians did. The current negotiations between the Vatican and China reveal the sensitivities involved.

Why can't those who are very concerned, establish schools in which Edo traditions are actually taught and the language used as a medium of instruction? We are talking of years and years of so called education away from the home, where our people are slowly conditioned to get away from their roots.

Even the Aruosa Church, a hybrid of Portuguese christianity and Edo religion, can grow rapidly and develop a pipeline for its long term survival if it were to adopt some of the "development" activities of other churches (like major Christian denominations), such as establishing primary, secondary and perhaps even higher educational schools built around its doctrinal base. I have observed, for example, that there are moslems that send their children to Catholic schools, in the belief that they are offering them an economic passport for future survival, while anchoring them (with varying degrees of success) to Islam in the home. This real politic of political-economy and religion needs to be understood if our traditions must survive.

Further, the responsibility for protecting our traditions is not just for the "traditional institution" although it does not help that some of those with high visibility are busy establishing institutions of

alien worship - at least in part for money. Every Edo individual is a soldier in our tradition. His or her thoughts and actions on a daily basis will advance or retard tradition. If only the Palace is celebrating "Igue" it would not make much sense. Fortunately, our villages still do. If language/tradition is not actively practiced (as you recognized), it merely becomes an item of historical interest. If we do not know our history, there would be nothing to defend. The British knew this. In spite of all the late Jacob Egharevba did to lobby for his historical books to be part of the primary educational curriculum, the British refused. Even now our history is not being formally taught during the formative years of our youth.

Lastly, I want to point out that as "reasonable" and "centrist" as your take is regarding the "coexistence" of christianity and tradition, there are many "pastors" and "believers" and "born again" persons out there who see it as a zero sum game. There is a faction of the "christian" movement that regards the complete destruction of our traditions as a goal for which God has mandated them. Tina has identified one such faction. There are others. Just two weeks ago some Pastor in Benin was exhorting his congregation to go home and destroy all their family and village shrines - as occurred in Imo State.

It would seem, therefore, that even the benign examples of "coexistent" traditional practices you have projected are not acceptable to some of these elements.

I thank you, again, for the outstanding contribution to the discourse.

Regards

NAO

You said it all Sir, Well explained and thank you.

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Dear Dr. Stephen E. O. Ogbonmwan,

God bless you mightily in Jesus name. I thank God for your posting for you have brought the clarity that is the most meaningful since I became involved in the debate on this issue. I agree with you totally. There has always been one Almighty God that our fathers believed in and He is also the father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Just as He, Jesus took part in all the festivals and ceremonies (customs and traditions) of His people the Israelites, We can also enjoy our wonderful customs and traditions and still be the best followers of the Way, the Truth and the Life that we are called to be.

All I ask is for all Edo people to intensify their intercessory praying to the Almighty God for His mercy and forgiveness on Edo land and its people in particular and Nigeria in general.

If we shall humble ourselves, and pray, and seek His face, and turn from our wicked ways, He will hear our prayers from heaven, and will forgive our sins and heal our land. This is a promise that He has made and He is a faithful God.

Pray in any way that your belief dictates, just pray and continue to pray until our desires are granted.

Once more I thank God for your God given wisdom in Jesus name.

Pastor Paul O. Evbuoma New Orleans, LA

Dear Pastor

I thank you for your pastoral and fatherly wisdom. You cannot imagine how profound your words are.

There can be no doubt that there is 'center' where, as children of God, we can all meet.

Regards

NAO

Dear ALL,

We all believe in God. That is no religion. But how you go about serving God is religion. That makes all the difference in the world. Some people are so fanatical about this that they can kill to prove their loyalty to their religion. No doubt religious clashes between opposing groups have caused more wars and destructions around the world more than all other causes combined.

The people, who serve those gods like Ogun, Oromila, Olukun, etc, know quite well there is a higher God. They merely use those gods to communicate with a higher God. However, the Jews believe it is better to communicate with God directly. They are very fanatical about it. As a result, the Jews are religious in their beliefs because they use religion to enforce their laws. Jesus oppositions to the Jewish fanatical beliefs soon got him in trouble with the religious people. The rest is history.

However, the ways Jesus lived and died brought him more sympathies and fame than he could have ever imagined. So much so that people are fanatical about him... and believing in Jesus is now a religion of it own. But remember Jesus was against religious fanaticisms.

During his life, Jesus seized every opportunity he got to openly criticize the Jews fanaticisms and religious propagandas. He used several parables to emphasis his authority to make religious changes. In desperate attempts to convince his people (Jews) to honour his authority to make changes, Jesus said to the religious Jews, "I am the way, I am the light, and no one goes to MY FATHER accept through me." The Jews would rather deal with God directly and not go through Jesus to God. To the religious Jews, Jesus was asking for too much.

When Jesus realized how difficult the job before him was, he warned his followers: "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth; I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in-law against her mother in-law ... [Matthew 10, 34..]

At the end, accept for the Jews who prefer to deal directly with God Himself, the rest of us have to go through a middle god to plead our case before our Heavenly Father. Which of the several gods you choose to go through is your prerogative. Whichever of the gods your father or your forefather chose/served, as their counsel, should not influence you. We are individuals before God --- not as the son of one Dr. Nowa, or the daughter of one Honourable Iguade.

After all, Joshua said it better: "Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: put away the gods which your fathers served and serve ye the Lord. And if it seems evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose which gods ye will serve. but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." [Joshua 24: 15...]

FG

Final Comments,

We all can live together in peace and harmony sharing God's love an accepting each other's way of life and worship as there is enough room in the inn for everyone. No one religion or way of worship is better than the other. It is a matter of faith and the personal relationship of the individual with his/her God.

Stay Blessed my brothers and Sisters

SEO

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