

A RELIGIOUS AND ETHICAL ANALYSIS OF TIV BELIEF SYSTEM ON VIRGINITY

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Abstract

Virginity plays a vital role in humanity as it greatly upholds an essential part of the total human existence. Virginity signifies a condition of having no sexual participation or experience and being in the state of its original pure or natural condition that is not changed, touched, or spoiled but fresh. The changing trend in our contemporary society has greatly affected the perception and beliefs of its inhabitants, which have necessitated the change in values, previously adhered to, particularly in the Tiv society. Religion therefore plays a significant role in maintaining societal sanity and moral ethics. This study therefore seeks to make a religious and ethical analysis of Tiv believe system on virginity considering the past and present position. To do this, the research employs qualitative research technique for the assemblage of data hence it depended on primary and secondary sources. The primary source encapsulates oral interview while the secondary sources came from books, journals, internet, and periodicals. The research adopts the analytical

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method for the presentation of the work. The work reveals the fact that the practice of virginity in the contemporary Tiv society has gradually faded away because of socialization, modern civilization, and exposure to indecency that is rampant in the society. It was also found that the traditional Tiv man believes morality is given by God. The paper therefore recommends that religious organizations and revival movements in the society should intensify their moral teachings on the importance of virginity and its relevance to humanity and the society.

Keywords: Morality, Virginity, Religious Beliefs

INTRODUCTION

Morality for the Africans is tied to the consciousness of right conduct by reason of which things are accepted as well as denied as they affect individuals, families, communities and, in fact, all and sundry (Omogbe 5). Therefore, right and wrong are calculated in terms of beneficence or negative effect on the society. Thus, vices such as corruption, stealing, fraud, rumour mongering, and sexual misconduct are formidably frowned at while virtues like honesty, sexual appropriation, fidelity, virginity, faithfulness, and prudence are unreservedly cherished. Virginity, which is the focus of this work, is a crucial moral value. Generally, the conditions involved in the preservation of virginity vary from one ethnic nationality to the other. However, at one extreme its preservation is for the validity of a marriage.

Virginity is the state of being a virgin. It is derived from the Latin *Virgo*, which means “sexually inexperienced woman” (*American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (22)). In line with the Latin, the English word is often used with a wider reference, by relaxing the age, gender, or sexual criteria. Hence, more matured women can be virgins, men can be virgins, and potential initiates into many fields can be colloquially termed virgins. Virginity signifies a condition of having no sexual participation or experience, being in a state of its original pure or natural condition that is not changed, touched, spoiled, but fresh and not marked. It also signifies the reverence for bodily integrity, which is suggested by a virtuous nature

and is both found in men and women. Physically, it implies a bodily integrity, a visible evidence of which exist only in women. In human females, the hymen is a thin film of membrane situated just inside the vulva, which can partially occlude the entrance to the vagina canal. It is flexible and can be stretched or torn during first engagement in sexual intercourse (*Catholic Encyclopedia* 183).

Throughout history, the presence of an intact hymen has been seen by many as physical evidence of virginity, particularly alongside “proof of blood”. Thus, virginity is proven by the presence of vaginal bleeding from intercourse connected to the tearing of the hymen. The presence of a hymen is often considered an indication of virginity, but this is no guarantee given that some degree of sexual activity may occur without rupturing the hymen. The lack of a hymen is an even less clear indication of virginity lost as the hymen’s shape, thickness and coverage is extremely varied, and one that occlude the entrance to the vaginal canal may be broken through a means other than sexual activity. It is likely that almost all women are born with a hymen, but not necessary ones that will experience a measurable change during first experience of sexual intercourse (*Catholic Encyclopedia* 813).

Post-modern Tiv society has witnessed a decay in its moral culture. There is a sharp decline in morality and religious values. In their place, there is a new culture of immorality, pornography, incest, lesbianism, homosexuality, nudity, and lewdness. These are foreign to the Tiv culture and affect the Tiv society. Trust and responsibility have been pushed aside and in their stead, a new culture of unfaithfulness and lack of respect has suddenly become the order of the age.

However, among the Tiv of Central Nigeria, so many scholars have concerned themselves with some issues of academic interest based on their area or perspectives. For example, Shagbaor Francis Wegh in his book titled *Between Continuity and Change: Tiv Concept of Tradition and Modernity* asserts that chastity was a responsibility of parents to children and therefore the society cannot hold the children responsible for a contrary act (60). He was talking from a sociological perspective, thereby,

leaving the religious import out of the matter. This study, therefore, focuses on a religious and ethical analysis of Tiv belief systems on virginity.

THE MORALITY OF VIRGINITY IN TIVLAND

Virginity is one of the concepts that seem to have generated much controversy in the society today. Within the Tiv society where we have fourteen local governments which comprise Logo local government area, Ukum local government area, Katsina-Ala local government area, Ushongu local government area, Kawnde local government area, Vandeikya local government area, Konshisha local government area, Gboko local government area, Tarka local government area, Buruku local government area, Gwer-west local government area, Gwer local government area, and Makurdi local government area, there have been controversies regarding the preservation of virginity. In these local government areas, the practice varies. This has continued to attract scholarly attention and research. For instance, the case of companionship, which is a practice among the Tiv by which a man has a temporary union with a woman of a kinship unit within which marriage is not allowed. This is a temporary union between a man and a woman of an exogamic kinship unit. In some parts of Tivland, this practice is called *Ikyar*, which means friendship or companionship. The man and the woman are called *Ikyar* respectively, a word that means a friend or companion. In other parts of Tivland, the practice is called *Angbiankwase*, meaning a woman of an exogamic kinship segment. This indicates that the union is between persons who are regarded by the Tiv as brother and sister in the classificatory sense (Tarbo 35). In fact, the practice is never carried out within an *ingol* (kin), which extends up to the tenth generation therefore it can never be said to be a union between third cousins.

According to Tarbo, in Kparev, when a man wishes to make *Ikyar* with a girl, he approaches her, if she agrees; he begins to make presents to her and her parents. He may even have sexual intercourse with her at her home; but normally he elopes with her to his home, and celebrates a feast at which he invites his age mates and friends. The parents of the girl go to the man's home and ask his elders to return their daughter to them. Before returning the girl to the parents, her *Ikyar* makes presents to them and

slaughters a goat or sheep for them. If the girl has been found a virgin, her companion gives a she-goat to the mother as a virginity award (36). This is known as untying of the snail shell. The *Ikyar* of the girl also gives some money to the mother, which is called “tying of cloth round the waist of the girl’s mother”. This is done before she is taken back to her compound. When the practice is carried out in this way in *Kparev*, we say a man “*kua a wankwase* or *angbiankwase*” meaning (a man has brought his companion to his home). He taunts his age mates who have not had companions and sings a song of ridicule.

Another man may decide to stay with his companion in her home for some time after making specific presents to her parents. In this case, *Kparevs* use the expression *nyor wankwase* or *angbiankwase* (cohabit with a woman not married to). The persons involved in *Ikyar* are always free to break it off and contract marriage because *Ikyar* is never regarded as a marriage. The Tiv never used the term *er kwase*, meaning to marry a woman in connection with companionship. However, sometimes, children are born out of such irregular unions. This is in fact one of the social evils of the companionship that the *Kparev* people resist vehemently. Other parts of Tiv have the same practice with some variations. In *Masev* and *Iharev* lands, it is of greater importance than in other parts of Tivland, and the ceremony connected with it is one of the biggest feasts in *Masev* and *Iharev*. The expression used in these areas is *wa ikyar* (to enter into companionship).

Before now, if a girl reached puberty in *Masev* and *Iharev* and did not have a male companion at her home, she was laughed at as being not much of a woman. People would say that when she grew up, she was so unattractive that no man came near her. If a woman *wa ikyar* and breaks it off and marries, the friendship continues as in other clans. However, in *Masev* and *Iharev*, if she becomes pregnant by her husband, she must be brought to her natal home so that a fertility rite called *iee* (cleansing) will be performed on her to ensure a successful delivery. The day for the ceremony is a big occasion. On that day, there is a serious competition in dress, dancing, etc. between the group of the male *ikyar* and that of the husband. During the ceremony, the woman stands with her *ikyar* and the husband is pushed into the background throughout the ceremony. Thus,

the matrilineal companion takes a more prominent place than the husband of the woman (Tarbo 37) does.

An informant, Mama Angershishi Zugu revealed that she grew up when *Ikyar* existed and she participated in the practice. According to her, the main aim of *Ikyar* was to protect and prevent young girls who were of marriageable age from sexual abuse. It also served as a moral conduct to avoid mischief to youths in Masev land [Tivland] (Oral interview). Mama Zugu stressed that a young girl who was matured for *ikyar* was allowed to participate if found necessary. *Ikyar* was not allowed in a distant relation, which is a brother and sister relationship.

Mama Zugu further avers that, a young man would approach the parents of a girl and indicates interest, if approved; the young girl will be allowed to relate freely with the *Ikyar*, he can even take the young girl to his house for celebration. This feast was not done in form of real marriage but a token would be given to the parents indicating approval for the relationship. The *Ikyar* would untie a snail shell on the young girl's neck through *Ingbianjov* priestess before he could have sexual intercourse with her. If found a virgin, the girl's parents would be compensated for the girl's virginity, pregnancy could occur during the *Ikyar* system but if a child comes before the real marriage then, it becomes the husband's but if she gives birth within the *Ikyar* period, then the child was given to the *Ikyar*. Since *Ikyar* regarded the girl as his sister, he had the responsibility of looking for a good husband for her. There used to be a heavy celebration when a girl who entered *Ikyar* was to be given out in marriage. It was also the responsibility of the *Ikyar* to provide all the materials needed for the marriage. The celebration was done in form of *iee* (cleansing). On the day of *Iee*, the young girls who grew up without *ikyar* were laughed at for not being attractive enough to have an *Ikyar*.

The significance or rationale for *Ikyar* was to confine girls who were of marriageable age in one place in order to control them from immorality and other sexual involvement before marriage. Therefore, the *Ikyar* played a significant role in ensuring that most women were not involved in any immoral or sexual act possibly, before they get married. Based on the above, it can be deduced that the traditional Tiv society took it as a duty

to train their daughters before giving them out in marriage. This training was necessary to prevent them from having either pre-marital or extra-marital affairs. To do this, the Tiv had *Ikyôôr* cult as a measure to guard female virginity. This was a check on sexual morality. It also restored human dignity, sanctity and gave respect for sexuality. As Boh puts:

Ikyôôr tradition was a wonderful custom engineered and ordained by the *ingbianjôv* priestess to preserve the purity of the female child. The female child in every family once she became of age was taken to *Ingbianjôv* priestess where a snail (shell). *Ikyôôr* would be tied around her neck to serve as a reminder and warning to her and the strong he-goats eager to deflower her innocence. Once sanctified, the girl was to stay pure and free from any carnal knowledge of a man until she got married, when the snail was untied from her neck by the priestess. That way, a girl's purity was preserved and her marriage honoured (3-4).

The unmarried girls wore *Ikyôôr* shell on their necks to scare men away from engaging in any sexual activity with them. This symbolic sexual prohibition (*Yange Ikyôôr*) was considered pure. Any illegal carnal knowledge of the girl attracted immediate punishment until appropriate rituals were initiated (Torkula, *Traditional Institution of marriage...* 46). If the virginity were broken before marriage, the husband would send a perforated cloth as a symbol of the girl's infidelity to her father. It was a serious violation and shame not only to the ancestors but also to the living members of the community. A faithful girl who is discovered to be undefiled at marriage was not only the pride of the parents but also that of the larger community since chastity before and after marriage was cherished in traditional Tiv society.

Moral behaviours in Tiv were regulated by customs, traditions, and norms, which were community oriented. Thus, there were sanctions attached to going contrary to them. The Tiv traditional society was stable because of its emphasis on high moral standard.

Snail Shells used for Initiation into *Ikyôôr* Cult



Source: Field experience 18/06/2016

THE TIV SOCIETY AT PRESENT

The contemporary Tiv society has metamorphosed into an alien culture, which is completely different from the pre-colonial Tiv society. This is so because the moral values are gradually declining. According to Gbor, “the highly cherished cultural values no longer have a dominant position in governing Tiv behaviour, other considerations such as position and wealth have taken the central position in determining human actions in Tiv society” (*The Concept of Culture and Tiv...34*). Money and position were not considered very important values in Tiv society, but money has now become the most cherished value, and morality of one’s action does not matter. Today, most members of the Tiv society can do anything in the quest for money without putting into consideration the morality of their behaviour because only those who have money are recognised. Therefore, there is excessive and incessant greed for money today, which was not the case with the pre-colonial Tiv society.

Most of the offences, which the Tiv regarded as serious, are being ignored and looked down by the police, vigilante groups, and modern courts. For instance, the violation of taboos such as incest, rape, pre-marital sex, and extramarital affairs are treated as non-issues before the law courts. Though some may be regarded as crimes, yet much emphasis is not placed on

them as would have been done by the Tiv traditional society in the pre-colonial time (Ityohee 85).

In addition, the pre-colonial Tiv society's communalistic living has been replaced by individualism. Their deep egalitarian social base has been abandoned. The Tiv elders who were the promoters and custodians of ethical values are no longer living up to expectations; rather some elders are promoting immorality as they go into hotels with "their daughters", in the name of girlfriends, to satisfy themselves sexually. The young girls on the other hand accept men old enough to be their fathers because of money. Going by this, taboos, prohibitions, and laws have no effects on the contemporary Tiv society because there is moral laxity and neglect of traditional norms.

According to Adegá, the development of physical skills, and other aspects of Tiv culture such as dances have been neglected today. Tiv dances such as *Swange*, *Gbanyi/Gbangi*, *Shen*, *Ngyough*, *Anchenakupa*, are no longer cherished or learnt by Tiv youth. The in-thing now is hip-hop, rap, rhythm and blues that do nothing but promote immorality and corruption of the mind. The songs are full of lyrics based on erotic love and the artistes dress almost half-naked, and sag their trousers (49). Character training, which is the main objective of traditional education in Tiv society, is no longer aggressively pursued. The virtues of honesty, humility, perseverance, courage and the likes are no longer cherished values. It was uncommon for the Tiv to tell lies even in the face of danger or to cause wilful damage to a neighbour's property, it was, therefore, not unusual to see an individual redirect the stem of a yam plant that crossed the road so that passers-by would not step on it. However, nowadays, young educated Tivs arrogantly talk to elders and publicly abuse and swear at them in disrespectful manner (50). In addition, Adegá says:

Morality, which is the hub of traditional education, is no longer en-vogue; as a result, boys and girls do whatever appeals to them. Pre-marital sex is no longer a crime and girls break their virginity without an iota of regret, all in the name of trying to meet up peer expectations. Tiv youth nowadays observe a destructive cliché *ka wea tsor hyande u zenden aveker* (when

you choose a field for cultivation in the next cropping season, you start weeding it immediately) (52).

This cliché, as observed by Adegá, makes youths to sleep with each other with recklessness without raising an eyebrow. In this age of HIV/AIDS, STDs and other venereal diseases, the above scenario is better imagined than said.

CHANGE AND DISCONTINUITY OF THE *IKYÔÔR* CULT

Western education, which brought Western civilisation in Africa in general, and the Tiv in particular was the child of Christianity. The Christian missionaries who came to Africa had dual purposes: to evangelise Africa and to introduce the western civilisation, which is the product of the European Culture just as every other civilisation is a product of a particular culture. This western culture and civilisation was imposed on the Africans in form of Christianity and Western education, which go hand in hand. The missionaries, as it were, went ahead of the European colonialists to prepare their way by softening and weakening the minds of the Africans and breaking their traditional set ups leaving them without any cursive factor to fight effectively against foreign dominations.

The Christian missionaries and their colonialists challenged some aspects of African culture, calling the African way of life and practices many disgusting names such as pagan, archaic, etc. Africans who went to missionary or European schools were thus indoctrinated and brainwashed. This greatly informed their unappreciative attitudes towards everything in Africa. The colonial administrators, on their part, used forceful means to ensure that the African way of life was totally abandoned and any resistance was subjected to severe torture. There was vigorous conscription into forced labour without pay and under bad conditions. In this way, the traditional culture gradually gave way to Western civilisation or European and colonial administration of the missionary's culture. This disposition of the missionaries and colonial administration was observed by Fafunwa that: "a good citizen in Nigeria and elsewhere between 1950 and 1960 meant one, who was African by blood, Christian by religion and British or French in culture and intellect..." (52). The discontinuity of the *Ikyôôr*

cult and other cultural values started when the people embraced Christianity and could not allow their daughters to be initiated by the *Ingbian-jov* priestess into the *Ikyôôr* cult because they were brainwashed that *Ikyôôr* was a pagan practice, something not to be practiced by Christians.

According to Dzurgba, the European and American Christians were obedient to the Great commission of preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ to international communities (Mark 16: 15). The acceptance of that divine injunction brought about the inception and the development of Christian missions (*On the Tiv of Central Nigeria ...* 69). The Sudan United Mission (S.U.M) was founded in Europe. It was founded by Karl W. Kumm who was born on October 19, 1874 in the town of Osterode in Honover province, Germany. Sudan United Mission was an interdenominational and international organisation. On November 27, the committee of Sudan United Mission held its first meeting in London. The S.U.M committee decided to send missionaries to Nigeria for an exploration of the land and its people. Four men were selected and commissioned. They were Dr. Karl W. Kumm, Dr. Balema J. G. Burt, and J. Lowry Maxwell; Dr. Karl Kumm was the leader of that mission expedition. The four men began their journey on July 23, 1904 (qtd. in Dzurgba, *On the Tiv of Central Nigeria ...* 71-72).

Dr. Karl Kumm, Dr. Balema, I. G. Burt, and J. L. Maxwell arrived on the coast of Nigeria on August 10, 1904. They travelled up the River Niger to Lokoja. Dr. Karl Kumm left other missionaries at Lokoja and travelled to Zungeru. Because of the unhealthy environmental conditions of Lokoja, the capital of the protectorate of the Northern Nigeria had been moved to Zungeru. Sir Frederick Lugard, who had worked successfully in conquering Uganda in East Africa as well as South Africa until 1895, had been appointed a British High Commissioner in 1901 to conquer the protectorate of Northern Nigeria for British occupation. It was at that time that Colonel Kemball and Colonel Moorland conquered Northern Nigeria. Sir Frederick Lugard was in Zungeru at that time. Dr. Karl Kumm went to Zungeru to seek permission to establish a mission station in Northern Nigeria. Sir Frederick Lugard granted them permission to set up a

mission station at Wase. Lugard was in Zungeru until the capital of Northern Nigeria was later moved to Kaduna (qtd. in Dzurgba, *On the Tiv of Central Nigeria...* 73). Dr. Karl Kumm returned from Zungeru to Lokoja and joined his colleagues, Dr. Batema, J. G. Burt, and J. Lowry Maxwell. From Lokoja, they travelled up River Benue and came to Abinsi, a town in Tiv land. From Abinsi, they travelled to Ibi and arrived there on September 3, 1904. Shortly after, they left Ibi and headed for Wase. Dr. Batema became ill. He suffered from appendicitis. He had to return to Ibi and from there to Britain because he needed an operation, but there was no hospital. There was not even a clinic: there was no airway to fly him to Britain. Thus, he travelled by boat down River Benue and River Niger to the coast of Atlantic Ocean. He travelled to Britain by means of a steamship. Kumm, Burt, and Maxwell continued their journey and arrived Wase on October 8, 1904. They established the first SUM station in Wase.

Dr. Kumm returned to Britain at the beginning of 1905. He engaged in an international campaign to enlist the interest and support of Christians and churches. He travelled to the United States, Canada, Denmark, Australia, New Zealand, Tanzania, and South Africa. As a result, many branches of SUM were formed. For example, British branch in Britain, Danish branch in Denmark and Christian Reformed Church branch in the United States. The British branch coordinated the activities of SUM branches. That was because the British branch was the original initiator of SUM and most of its branches worked in the countries, which were ruled by British colonial regimes (*On the Tiv of Central Nigeria...* 73).

Christian Reformed Church (CRC) branch had the government's permission to work among the Jukuns and Tivs. The CRC branch had begun to work among the Jukun and hoped to expand their work gradually into Tivland. However, the CRC branch found out that a combination had to restrict itself in Jukunland. An occasion to do so came in 1910. In 1910, Vincent H. Hosking attended a general conference of all protestant missions in Northern Nigeria. The conference was held in Lokoja.

At the Lokoja conference, protestant missions decided that a mission had to work among a people whose population was not less than 50,000. Because of this decision, the South African branch had to leave the Mbula

people to look for an ethnic group since the population of the Mbula was only 8,000 people. It was at that time that the CRC branch handed over Tivland to the South African branch of SUM. Mr. Guinter, the superintendent of the Christian Reformed Church branch, wrote a letter to permit the South African branch to work among the Tiv. Having received Mr. Guinter's letter on February 8, 1911, Rev. George Botha left the Mbula to travel to Wukari on horseback. Fourteen days later, he arrived in Wukari on February 2, 1911. Wukari, the political headquarters of Jukun people was also the headquarters of SUM (CRC of America). Mr. Guinter and Rev. Botha settled the matter. The Tivland was handed over to the South African branch of SUM. On March 3, 1911, Botha had gone on leave to South Africa, the duty of establishing the first Christian mission station among the Tiv fell on Carl Zimmerman (qtd. in Dzurgba, *On the Tiv of Central Nigeria...* 75). It was the first Christian Mission station because there had been no other Christian mission in Tivland. Thus, the South African branch of Sudan United Mission was the first Christian mission to establish itself in Tivland.

The British colonial government in Northern Nigeria gave the permission that a mission station should be built to the East of River Katsina-Ala. The colonial government felt that the east of River Katsina-Ala was sufficiently pacified by a military conquest. It may be borne in mind that Tivland was one of the communities that were last conquered by the colonial soldiers. Carl Zimmerman travelled from Wukari in Jukunland, on Horseback, to Chief Saai Utu's Village. He arrived on April 17, 1911. Horses and asses were used as means of travel in Jukun land and other parts of Northern Nigeria, but horses and asses were not common domestic animals among the Tiv. Tivs who had succeeded in life used to buy horses from Wukari to enhance their personal greatness, honour, and prestige. Chieftaincy was a colonial innovation in Tivland. Sir Frederick Lugard's indirect rule through the chiefs was imperative for all communities in Northern Nigeria. Thus, chieftaincy was imposed upon the Tiv. As a result, Saai Utu became the chief of Shitile. His village was on the border between Tivland and Jukun land. It was at the extreme of the Eastern end of Tivland. Hosking joined Carl Zimmerman in September 1911, and November, Mr. A.S. Judd arrived from South Africa. He joined them at Saai Utu's village. A mission

station was established at Saai village. A primary school was also established. Apart from providing western education, SUM Primary School Saai, was a means of effective evangelization. In that year, 1911, Saai's wife gave birth to a baby boy. He was named Isholibo, which means (sin). This indicates, "Christianity had immediate social implications for the Tiv (Dzurgba 75).

The Tiv, in spite of their willingness and co-operation found Christian worship to be alien, strange, and funny. Rev. Casaleggio complained that:

... it was not easy to preach the gospel to the Tiv. Prayer was totally strange to them. When the White Missionists called upon them to close their eyes for a prayer, it was usually a matter of laughter: They peeped because they could not guess what the Missionist would do when their eyes would have been closed. Their attention was easily diverted. A passer-by was greeted loudly by a member of the congregation. Sometimes an elderly man or woman could loudly order a child to fetch and light a pipe for him or her. He or she smoked the pipe during the service. Rev Casaleggio saw that behaviour as an opposition (qtd. in Dzurgba, *On the Tiv of Central Nigeria...* 76).

For some people this behaviour was seen as prejudice but Dzurgba says:

It was a matter of newness of the Christian worship to the Tiv. Its change from traditional religious worship to a Christian worship needed enough time for a proper understanding on the part of the Tiv people. This is because a religious conversion involves not only beliefs and ethics, but also social reorientation of the people. African social orientation was different from European social orientation (*On the Tiv of Central Nigeria...* 76).

In the first annual report of Saai mission station in 1911, however, Carl Zimmerman, Hosking, and A.S. Judd expressed their joy because of the success Saai mission station had made in one year. It had made three converts, namely Akiga, Alam and Iverkpen. Buxton in 1841 however

argued that, to change the social condition of Africa and Africans for the better needed not only Christianity, but also exploration, trade, commerce, education, agriculture, medicine, industries and science. Through these means, trust and confidence between man and man would be inspired and a new civilisation would advance naturally. Christianity could operate as one of the agencies of that happy change (Dzurgba, *On the Tiv of Central Nigeria...* 76).

This became the procedure, which the missionaries used in Tivland through their contributions ranging from Western education and medicine, care of motherless children, promotion of modern business, background of political education, inculcation of Christian ethics, cultural transformation, and conversion of persons.

Since conversion is a process of changing from one religion to another religion or one religious belief to another religious belief through Church establishment and evangelism, the Tiv were converted from traditional religion to Christianity. In Tiv traditional religion, the people had one supreme deity called *Aondo* and many small deities called *Akombo* as plural, while one was *kombo*. These deities together were referred to by the white people as polytheism. The Tiv were converted to Christianity to which Europeans referred to as monotheism. The religiously changed persons were called converts or Christians who adopted European names recorded in the Holy Bible and Church records. Thus, there were Mathew, Luke, Mark, John, Paul, Peter, Stephen, Elijah, Moses, Joshua, Mary, Elizabeth, Hannah, Rebecca, etc. The conversion changed the people's attitudes towards social, economic, political, scientific, and technological ideals. The conversion of persons to Christian religion changed the people's taste, feeling or emotion, perception, thought, decision-making, choice making, mental orientation, general behaviour, and beliefs (Dzurgba, 20-22).

The above discussion shows clearly, where the issue of the discontinuity of the *Ikyôôr* cult and other cultural values started. People who embraced Christianity could not allow their daughters to be initiated by *Ingbian-Jov* priestess into *Ikyôôr* cult because they were brain washed and *Ikyôôr* was therefore seen as *Kwagh u Mbatsav man Akombo* (a thing of witch-

craft and idol worship). According to Gbenda, Akombo were used as intermediaries between man and the unseen forces as well as a means to maintain morality (181). These *Akombo* (unseen forces) usually monitor people's ways of life and their leaning to unethical lifestyle, which had to be set right by sacrifices and rituals to appease the ancestors and ultimately the super-sensible, being called *Aondo* by the Tiv.

The mystical forces owed their existence to God who creates the entire universe and is in charge of certain departments of life. Gbenda noted that, Tiv traditional ethics like that of other Africans is based purely on their tradition, customs, norms and prohibitions of actions which one ought to do and those things considered bad and to be avoided. The Tiv ethics is expressed in norms, which regulate relationships between individuals and social groups. There are sanctions or condemnations attached to going contrary to the observance of the norms (*African Theism... 175*).

Western civilisation was introduced in Nigeria through the Christian missionaries in the 19th century from the western part of the country. The missionaries spread their religion and culture to the hinterland using the river Niger and Benue. Through these channels, they sailed from the Southern part of Nigeria to Gongola and eventually reached Tiv land in 1911, at Sai in the present Katsina-Ala local government area of Benue State. From that time until date, western civilisation by means of education and evangelisation has been successfully integrated in the land. Western civilisation and education have caused many changes among the Tiv in terms of beliefs and practices. The influence has made it in such a way that, there is little or no regard for the religious and cultural practices. The Tiv looked at western education as something that delivered them from the cultural restraints of religious practices and liberated them from cultural complexity, which characterised the Tiv religion.

Christianity is the factor that traditional practitioners have frowned at most, because of its disassociation with traditional values and practices. It is the major reason why *Ikyôôr* cult is no longer valued or honoured in Tiv society today. Western education, which was the desire of every Tiv man to attain or send his children, has posed another challenge to the continuation of the cult. In the past, children grew up with their parents, and they

received training and due punishments for actions that were not accepted in the family in order to achieve a reasonable upbringing. As a result, children strived to avoid things that incurred punishments. This inspired and encouraged the parents to willingly take their daughters to be initiated into *Ik̄yôôr* cult knowing fully that the children had good discipline and could avoid crossing the boundaries. Unfortunately, the advent of western education and desire to attain it has created a lacuna between parents and children. Children travel a distance just for the sake of education. Parents nowadays cannot tell what the child is going through in school; they have neglected their parental responsibility as has been described by Ohaeri:

Modern day parents do not have time for their kids to the extent that the children look at their nannies as their mothers and address them as such while calling their real mothers aunties. If these basic African moral precepts are not inculcated at home and school, where else do you think it can be inculcated? These failures of parents in their responsibility of inculcating African moral values have immensely contributed to the deterioration of African ethical values (51).

It is no doubt that the colonial rule was an imposition that unleashed a deadly blow to African ethical values and culture. The traditional method of moral inculcation was disregarded which resulted in the abandonment of traditional norms and values through a systematic depersonalisation of the African and paganisation of its moral and cultural values.

From the above it becomes clear how the Europeans in collaboration with the colonialists used the instrument of education and power respectively to surpass the African way of life and instead imposed the western civilisation, which has brought in notable changes on the African society in general and the Tiv in particular.

CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the religious and ethical elements of Tiv belief systems on virginity. The study made us to understand that virginity signifies a condition of no sexual participation or experience, being in a state of

its original pure or natural condition that is not changed, touched, spoiled, but fresh and not marked. The Tiv concept of virginity was symbolized by the *Ikyôôr* cult, which was a traditional measure, used to preserve and prevent pre-marital sex among the youth. Thus, the violation of this rite became an offence to the husband and it constituted an offence punishable by the *akombo* visitation until appropriate propitiation was effected. It is found that these culture used for the preservation of virginity has metamorphosed into alien cultures which is completely different from the pre-colonial Tiv society because of the advent of Christianity. Christianity stopped them from allowing their daughters to be initiated by the *Ingbian-jov* priestess into *Ikyôôr* cult because they were brainwashed that *Ikyôôr* was a pagan practice, something not to be practiced by Christians.

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