

Comparisons and Contrasts between Traditional Religion and Christianity

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Introduction

Christianity was founded by Jesus Christ of Nazareth in the first century C.E. Traditional Religion was founded by mankind soon after creation following the fall of man into sin and deviation from the God given ideals of worship. After God created mankind, he began a spiritual relationship with him. The relationship between God and mankind entailed beliefs and practices, which were a religious activity. After mankind fell into sin, God instituted a plan to restore the relationship he had planned to have with mankind. From the book of Genesis, God predicted the seed of a woman would crush the head of the seed of the serpent. Mankind had listened to the spirit of Satan in the form of a snake, and had began a different spiritual experience with a different spirit contrary to God's will.

Mankind scattered to different parts of the world, and different cultures emerged. Because there was a spiritual hunger in the heart of mankind, it had to be satisfied. Mankind therefore came up with native beliefs and practices, which became Traditional Religion. These beliefs differed from the Scriptures because they mainly involved appeasement of spirits and an attempt to control the universe for one's good. God does not need to be manipulated or appeased. The Old Testament in many places prophesied about the coming of Jesus. Isaiah 53 is a good example. Christianity would eventually come, and Jesus would die on a cross to save mankind.

It is important to understand that Traditional Religion is older than Christianity. Before Jesus Christ came, it was already in existence. The Old Testament in many places warns God's people against defiling themselves with pagan beliefs and practices. Israel was many times warned against worship of Baal. Jesus was accused of casting out demons with the power of Beelzebub. This study was done to answer the question as to whether there are any similarities and differences between Christianity and Traditional Religion. The two religions will be compared and contrasted based on the following themes:

- The concept of God.
- The spirit world.
- Intercession with God/spirit world.
- Superstition, witchcraft, drugs, and healing.
- The concept of sin and salvation.

The Concept of God

Both Traditional Religion and Christianity believe in a God who is transcendent and immanent. Both religions believe that God is Supreme and is all powerful, all knowing, and all present. John 4:24 states that God is a Spirit. Christians believe in a God who is a Spirit and who should be worshipped in spirit and truth. Traditional Religion on the other hand believes that God is also a spirit.

In Christianity, God is fully concerned about what happens on the earth. On the other hand, Ubah (1982) portrays the God of the Traditionalist as a Supreme Being who knows everything, can do everything, but who hardly concerns himself with anything. In Traditional Religion, worshippers are not much concerned about their God who is Supreme because he is a God who cannot be directly approached and who hides himself behind inferior spirits. Christians

have direct access to God through the blood of Jesus which has redeemed them.

While God in Traditional Religion does not require people to expend their resources in the effort to worship him, and is not jealous of his people's association with other spirits according to Ubah (1982), the God of the Christians is a jealous God and commands that his people should not worship other gods based on Exo. 34:14. Num. 23:19 states that God is not human, a belief manifested by the traditionalist also.

The Spirit World

Both Traditional Religion and Christianity believe in the spirit world. In Traditional Religion, according to Rock & Krippner (2011), the spirit world refers to an upper world and an underworld, with the earth, which they refer to as the middle world, resting between them. The dead live in the underworld but some traditionalists believe the dead live in the upper world. The upper world, the middle world, and the underworld are interconnected by a pole that may manifest as, for example, a world tree, cosmic mountain, or a world pillar. The upper world tends to be associated with spirit guides and teachers and may be populated with strange animals, plants, people, as well as celestial beings.

On the other hand, in Christianity, it is believed that beyond the visible realm is a spirit realm where angelic beings operate from. Christians believe there are three heavens. The first heaven is the sky based on Acts 1:11 where Jesus was seen ascending to heaven. The second heaven is the area of stars and other heavenly bodies based on Gen. 1:11. Finally, the Bible writes about the third heaven where Paul was caught up to according to 2 Cor. 2:2-4. Finally, the Bible states that under the ground is a spiritual place called hell based on Mark 9:43. In hell, there is fire and worms and this is the place where dead wicked people and demons dwell.

Both Christianity and Traditional Religion believe in the existence of a spiritual place under the earth and above the earth. For the Christian, the upper world, which is the third heaven, is the home of God and his redeemed. Angels operate in the three heavens. The traditionalist's upper world is sometimes the abode of guides and teachers, but not of God.

Intercession with God/Spirit World

Both Christians and traditionalists interact with the spirit realm and with God, who is Supreme. In Traditional Religion, Ubah (1982) states that God is worshipped through inferior spirits and is regarded as the ultimate recipient of all sacrifices offered to the inferior spirits. These inferior spirits include divinities or gods. Dobbin (2011) observes that these divinities or gods are helping spirits which can either be good or harmful. They are believed not to have had any beginning. All other intermediary spirits are believed to have come into being.

In addition to the divinities or gods, God is worshipped through ancestor spirits. Ephirim-Donkor & ProQuest (2010) states that the dead continue to exercise considerable influence in the affairs of the living. Apart from the gods and ancestor spirits, God is also worshipped through natural or supernatural spirits. Finke (2003) states that these natural or supernatural spirits are not connected to the ancestors and live in places like river beds, thickets, forests, hillsides, and their activities are unpredictable. Traditionalists never have direct access to the Supreme Being and have to go through inferior spirits, which can either be harmful or good. They have to be appeased or placated so that they may not bring disasters. Through appeasement, the traditionalist wants to control the universe to bring harmony and to manipulate God to get empowered.

In Christianity on the other hand, God does not need to be placated or manipulated for his people to receive blessings. Gal. 3:13 states that God's people have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus and so they

do not need to appease God with any sacrifices. Jesus was sacrificed once and for all. The Christian God does not need inferior spirits to receive worship on his behalf. Rom. 5:1-2 states that Christians have been justified by faith and have peace with God through Jesus Christ through whom they have gained access into the grace in which they stand. Christians have direct access to God in the name of Jesus. God in Christianity forbids any worship of his creation unlike the Supreme Being of the traditionalist. Rom. 1:25 writes of people who exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshipped and served created things rather than God the creator.

Superstition, Witchcraft, Drugs, and Healing

In Traditional Religion, there is a belief in mystical or magical power, which can either be used for good or for evil. The traditionalist operates under superstition, which is an irrational belief normally not based on reason or scientific evidence. This is a belief that supernatural influence will cause something good or bad to happen. All sicknesses and disasters are associated with spirit beings and witches. Even death is associated with angry gods or with witchcraft. There are cases where human beings are magically eaten by cannibal witches after being offered for eating by their relatives who happen to be cannibal witches also according to Anonymous (2013). In Christianity, God's people do not operate under superstition but by faith in God. It is true that Christianity also believes in existence of witchcraft.

In Traditional Religion, the spirits and God must be appeased for healing to take place and for disasters and deaths to be prevented. Traditionalists offer sacrifices and perform prescribed rituals to appease the gods and bring harmony in the universe which is believed to result in healing and good life. There are specially trained diviners who are believed to know the magical powers of natural phenomena like vegetation, animal parts, among others which they utilize as drugs for healing and protection of people and all about them. Divination is used to reveal spells form witches and the diviners

redirect the spells to animals or stones thus protecting the targeted individual.

In Christianity, healing is by the stripes of Jesus based on 1 Pet. 2:24. Every disaster and disease is destroyed by the word of God for Ps. 107:20 states that God sent his word and healed them, and rescued them from their destructions or grave. God forbids divination and witchcraft and Num. 23:23 states that there is no divination or witchcraft against God's people. In Mic. 5:12, God declares that he will eliminate witchcraft from the hand of the witch that they would no longer practice divination or witchcraft. The blood of Jesus Christ is enough sacrifice and Christians do not need to offer any more sacrifices for healing or deliverance. The spirits feared by the traditionalist have no power over the Christian and they are confronted, rebuked, and driven to hell but are not appeased at all.

The Concept of Sin and Salvation

In Traditional Religion, violation of the community code of conduct amounts to "sin" but this is not synonymous to sin according to Christianity. This violation is believed to bring bad consequences to the natural phenomena as well as suffering to people. To avoid these bad consequences, the traditionalist needs "salvation" which can only be obtained through appeasing the ancestors and gods. This means sacrifices and prescribed rituals have to be performed by traditional priests or priestesses. The goal of the traditionalist is to control and direct surrounding forces to gain good health and well-being.

On the other hand, salvation in Christianity is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Rom. 3:23 states that all have sinned and come short of God's glory. Sin for the Christian is missing God's mark, not a violation of a human code of conduct. Salvation is a gift from God based on Rom. 6:23. While Christians were still in sin, Jesus died for them based on Rom. 5:8. The forces of darkness have no power over the redeemed child of God because Jesus overcame Satan and his forces by dying on a shameful cross.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study has established that both Christianity and Traditional Religion believe in a Supreme Being who is transcendent and immanent. However, the God of the traditionalist knows everything and can do everything but concerns himself with nothing. The God of the Christian knows everything, can do everything, and concerns himself with everything. The God of Christians can be accessed by everyone by faith in Jesus while the God of the traditionalist can only be accessed through inferior spirits like departed ancestors. Both Christians and traditionalists believe in a spirit realm. The God of Christians forbids worship of other gods while the God of the traditionalist is not jealous of his people's worship of other gods.

The traditionalist operates under superstition, is afraid of witchcraft, and gets healing and protection from diviners. In Christianity, witchcraft, superstition, and divination are not allowed and healing is from God's word. In Traditional Religion, "sin" is a violation of a community code and salvation comes through appeasing spirits to attain health and well-being. In Christianity, sin is missing the mark, and salvation is only by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Finally, the study as proved that there are similarities and differences between Traditional Religion and Christianity, but it should be noted that the differences are more important. Traditional Religion and Christianity are incompatible.

Sources

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