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Religious Beliefs in the Social Life of African People: Ethnographic Description

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ANNOTATION

In this article, the religious beliefs existing in the social life of the peoples living on the African continent from ancient times to the present are scientifically analyzed.

KEYWORDS: Religious belief, culture, spiritual life, Islam, Christianity, magic, fetishism, gentile-tribal cults, church, religion, animism.

All the peoples of the world have been experiencing the processes related to religious education since ancient times until now. Some of them have become their spiritual and cultural property and are considered national value. In particular, as a result of scientific literature and ethnographic studies, we are sure that the religious beliefs of the African peoples that we want to touch on date back to ancient times. Religion has played an important role in the spiritual life of African peoples, both in the past and in the present. African peoples believe in Christianity and Islam, which are their traditional religions and world religions. The peoples who migrated from Asia to Africa brought with them their traditional local religions - Jainism, Sikhism, and Hinduism.

Autochthonous beliefs and rituals formed in the regions of this continent in ancient times are still important in many regions of Africa. In accordance with the decision of UNESCO, animism was conditionally accepted as a single term for all local religions in the reference publications. Various systems of belief are hidden under the meaning of this term, that is, from the simplest forms to the most developed pantheism. There is no single "African" religion, just as there is no single "European," "Asian," or "American" religion. Different living conditions and the level of development of socio-economic relations prepare the ground for the emergence of one or another form and variety of religious beliefs.

Among the widespread religious forms in Africa, fetishism, animism, sorcery, and various types of magic are clearly visible. Fetishism is the belief and worship of material objects made of natural or man-made materials, according to the African imagination, as having supernatural powers. Trees, stones, rocks, specially prepared items ("fetishes"), items used for daily needs (seat, vase) are common features in the spiritual life of African peoples.

Animism is also the worship of supernatural powers and spirits that control the objects and events of the material and non-material world, which is also widespread in Africa. Many peoples of Africa believed that a person has several souls and each of them has a specific function. [1]

Witchcraft, sorcery and magic occupy a large place in the system of religious views of African peoples. It is known that faith and religion have continued to live together since the earliest times when man appeared. When researchers refer to various African religions, they do not limit themselves to the comprehensive study of beliefs, but also study the level of social and economic development of African peoples. In this continent, most systems of religious ideas have a local character, that is, there are beliefs that are widespread within a small group of people - an ethnic group, a tribe or a group of relatives.

In science, it is accepted to treat such uniqueness as gentile-tribal cults. From the Latin "gens" means clan and "tribus" means tribe. Therefore, clan-tribal religions have always occupied a dominant position in the national religious systems, even in the large nations of Africa. The existence of different types of myths, cults, imaginations in different peoples can be an example, especially the beliefs of the East and West and Congo.[2]

Today, a third of the African population believes in various streams of Christianity. Christians make up more than half of the population in South Africa, Namibia, Lesotho, Equatorial Guinea, and Reunion, Sao Tome and Principe. In Zaire, Congo, Malagasy Republic, Uganda, Angola, Mauritius, Tanzania, the majority of the population is made up of Christians. The population of the former lands of France, Portugal, and Belgium is Catholic. Protestants live in the former colonies of Germany and England. The largest number of Catholics is in Gabon, Cameroon, Congo, Zaire, Angola, Rwanda, Burundi, and Madagascar. Among Christians in Liberia, Ghana, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Namibia, South Africa, Protestants make up a large part. 47% of African Protestants live in South Africa. This composition consists of the African Negro and the European population. [3]

The introduction of Christianity to this continent has a long history. In particular, the coast of North Africa was the place where important centers of Greco-Latin Christianity emerged, among which Alexandria, Egypt was the largest. From the regions of North Africa, Christianity penetrates into Ethiopia and Nubia (now the Republic of Sudan). In the 4th century AD, the first Christians appeared in the ancient Ethiopian state of Aksum. Later this religion became the state religion. The Ethiopian Church belongs to the Eastern Slavs, which includes Russian, Bulgarian, Romanian Orthodox, Greek, Georgian, and Nestorians of the Armenian-Gregorian Church. However, here the church consists of several separate dwellings. For example, Ethiopian Christians - monophysites, who call for the recognition of the one deity of Christ. They differ from most of the currents of Christianity. This stream of Christianity spread to the Nubian states from the 6th century. Only in the 16th century, Christianity was finally driven out of Sudan by Islam. The second wave of Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa was associated with the first Portuguese travelers. From the end of the 15th century, the first attempts to introduce the local population to the Catholic religion began. In 1491, missionaries invited the king of Benin and his relatives to Christianity. At the beginning of the 16th century, the Jesuits were active in Sierra Leone and Benin, and the Augustinians and Capuchins were active in the Gold Coast and Dogome.[4]

However, attempts to convert to Christianity both in the kingdoms of upper Guinea and Benin did not bring any results, and in the middle of the 16th century, the population returned to their local religion. Since 1491, the campaign of missionaries in the Congo state has led to the spread of Christianity. Churches and missionary schools were opened in San Salvador, the capital of the Congo. Prince Enrique, one of the sons of the ruler of Kongo, was sent to Lisbon and Rome to be educated, and in 1518 the Pope appointed him a bishop. With the

weakening of Portugal, the Church loses its position in the Congo, and by the middle of the 19th century there is no memory of Christianity.

In the 16th century, Jesuit missionaries began their activities among the Makaranga people in the lower reaches of the Zambezi in the state of Monomotapa in South-Eastern Africa. For a hundred years, they were able to influence the rulers and leaders of the tribe.

Portuguese Catholic missionaries entered Ethiopia in the 16th and 17th centuries. In the interim, Catholicism was even declared the state religion. The struggle for power with the Monophysite Church led to a bloody civil war. The Monophysites are victorious, and the Portuguese missionaries and religious are banished from Ethiopia for life. In the 17th century, French missionaries tried to settle in Madagascar. However, the looting of the Europeans and the extravagance of the Catholic missionaries started a rebellion in the country and the immigrants were expelled.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, Dutch Protestant missionaries promoted Christianity among the Gontentots of the Gold Coast and South Africa. All these efforts brought only temporary success. In the 18th century, the activity of most missionaries in Africa was stopped.

The third wave of the spread of Christianity in Africa belongs to the 19th century and this situation is connected with the rise of missionary activities. Travelers and missionaries who opened the geographical map of this continent also went there. Travelers and missionaries had different goals. Famous among them are David Livingstone and doctor Albert Schweitzer. They were both Protestants. Any missionary work done in Africa has had negative consequences. Because this activity was a preparation for conquering and dividing the continent. Troops and colonial officials followed missionaries.

The main activity is shown by the Catholic Church. From the second half of the 19th century, special missionaries operating in Africa were established. These are: "African Mission Society" in 1856 under the leadership of Bishop S. Lavignerie, "Order of the White Fathers" in 1868, "Order of the White Sisters" in 1869, etc.

In Africa, the Anglican and English Methodist Churches began to campaign widely before other Protestant church organizations. The Anglican Church established its headquarters in Sierra Leone in 1804, and was closely supported by the Church Missionary Society. Methodists started their activities in 1815. After the establishment of settlements in Liberia in 1822, American missionary Baptists settled there. In South Africa, in the Cape Colony (it was the first settlement established by Europeans in 1652), the Dutch Reformed Church began to operate in 1792, where they established a mission for the Gontentots.[5]

In 1799, the London Missionary Society began its work in this area. In 1817, a treaty was signed between England and Madagascar. From the beginning of the 20th century, the influence of English missionaries weakened and they were replaced by Catholics who served the French colonialists. Currently, 7 large Protestant churches are operating in South Africa, they also have their authority in other African countries.

At the end of the last century and the beginning of the 20th century, German missionaries were active in South-West and East Africa. It was called the Rhine Missionary Society in Namibia, the Evangelical Missionary Society in Tanzania, Rwanda, and Burundi. Today, the mission of Presbyterians from America - Methodists, Baptists, and Quakers - is extremely active.

In Africa, the Christian Church has had some successes as a result of years of unrelenting support from colonial and metropolitan governments. Church workers organize the entire education system, schools and even universities. Among these universities, Lovanium in the Congo and the Faculty of Theology of the National University in Zaire are of great importance.

In short, the introduction of religious beliefs into the social life of African peoples began in ancient times, and this process has intensified in recent times. Because in the social life of African peoples, there is not only one religion, but many religions have entered and they are accepted by the population. The religious traditions of the African peoples were dominated by Christian religious traditions.

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