



### **THE LAMP**

**“...TO CAUSE THE LAMP TO BURN CONTINUALLY” - Ex.27: 20**

**“BEFORE THE LAMP OF GOD WENT OUT” - I Sam.3: 3**

### **SHRINES OF THE CHURCH**

Custodians of the shrines are held in reverence and are sought as having access to spiritual powers that the common man does not possess. The priest is able to approach his god using mysterious but “correct” rituals and incantations in order to help the seeker to obtain spiritual power, success, happiness, or whatever else the “worshiper” may want, whether good or evil. His concern is not what the will of the god might be, but rather that the spirit will grant the seeker’s own desire. Simply stated, man is the focus of all of life for the traditional worshiper and the spiritual forces are viewed as existing solely for his benefit.

In African Traditional Religion [ATR], feeling, experience, and participation are what make his life meaningful, not ideas or knowledge derived from written sources. Animists practice oral traditions passed down through ritual to insure the continued involvement of the ancestral spirits among the living. Prayer, sacrifice, and rituals are not performed out of devotion, but in order to gain what he wants by “using” the spirit world. The existence of an impersonal power often referred to as the life-force is a common belief among animists. This force has no moral nature but can be tapped into and used for either good or evil according to the will of the man.

Fundamental to all animist thinking and practice is the belief that using the proper words correctly will always produce the desired results. There exist certain power words that must be used with great caution. “Positive” and “negative” declarations are believed to bring either prosperity or a curse. Animistic healing takes place using this technique. Through power ritual language, sickness is commanded to leave the distressed and enter the body of a sacrificial animal. Because of the universal belief that the spoken word carries

power to effect reality, 'speaking in tongues' is widely practiced among animists and is thought to have more power than understandable prayer.

There is evidence that the roots of ATR's basic animistic outlook and practice have not been abandoned in the Christianity of West Africa. Historically, when the Orthodox Church came with its liturgy, rites, priests, ceremonies, cassocks, religious objects, and sacred places, essentially they were received within this animistic framework.

These things were believed to be vehicles of power that were effective in and of themselves, rather than merely representative and symbolic. But it is grossest error to imagine that the true and living God can be influenced or controlled by objects or religious ceremonies such as fasting, holy communion, speaking in tongues, vigils, or tithing in order for Him to perform our own will.

ATR is ruled by spoken words while it conceives of the white man as being ruled by paper. By paper, it seems that one may possess all; magical knowledge and paper wealth. Do not whites exchange paper for goods? Do they not covet and fight over amassing paper? To an animist, writing is medicine; a mystical formula, a charm. Thus the Bible, as a sacred object, often is used as a talisman, pictures of Jesus as a means of grace, and water and crosses as charms for protection or blessing. Extreme forms of these characteristics are seen in the so-called White Garment churches.

Modern Pentecostalism in West Africa stemming from the 1970's is ever as much flagrantly animistic. Here the "Man of God" has taken the place of the *Ifa*, the oracle priest who speaks for the god. As among people seeking the priests in the shrines of ATR, it is thought by church members that the "pastor" has contact with the "Spirit" in a way that the uninitiated do not. He must never, therefore, be questioned, for it is believed that when this man speaks, God Himself is speaking in the same way as the juju man conveys the spirit's message.

Congregations are convinced that power is transferred by the minister's touch through the laying on of his hands. Objects such as water, oil, and handkerchiefs that he has "blessed" are believed to transfer the "anointing" and effect healing and bring blessing. In various Pentecostal gatherings it is common to hear groans, shouts, or short gasping sounds to inhale or obtain the "power" of the Spirit of God. Church buildings are spoken of as if they were sacred shrines where God dwells in a way that He does not elsewhere; that one actually comes into His presence in those "holy" places.

Pentecostalism's unbiblical "Positive Confession" doctrine is nothing more than the foundational assumption of all ATR: The spoken word has power to affect reality if the correct method is used. Shouting, "Back to sender," is a popular formula [incantation] used by "deliverance" ministers to transfer spirits, curses, or problems to a sacrificial victim, in this case, to the person who is the "source" of the spiritual affliction. "Blood of Jesus!" regularly is employed as a "Christian" incantation to ward off evil spirits and calamity. Declaring, "It is well!" is presumed to accomplish that, whether it is actually well or not.

All of these things are animistic to the core and must be repented of if our religion will be Christian indeed and be conformed to the Pattern of our Lord Jesus Christ. Perhaps the most critical issue facing the church of West Africa is that of the influence of ATR upon its beliefs and practices.

We must thoroughly repent of the traditional concept of incantation: manipulating spiritual powers through words. Positive Confession must be completely forsaken in order to submit to the written Word of the one true and Sovereign God. We must abandon the practice of serving gods based on oral tradition where the priest speaks for the deity and is the mediator of power and contact with the supernatural [Isa.8: 19,20].

ATR strictly demands that there is to be absolute and unquestioning submission and obedience to the hierarchy of elders. While the Bible expects honor to be shown to the aged, it does not support unreasoning subjection to authoritative rule as this leads to the bondage of a violated conscience [I Thess.5: 21; I Cor.10: 15; Job 32: 4-12; Tit.1: 10, 11]. General Overseers are not gods, nor are they lords over Christ's inheritance, the church.

The true and living God [I Cor.8: 6] abides in an unrivaled category by Himself and shares no arrangements with other deities. All others must therefore be cast away and He alone worshiped and served. Jesus Christ is not another deity to be added to those already being served; the One who can forgive and carry to heaven while the others take care of the "practical" issues of daily living.

When the gods are cast off, tribalism goes along with the ancestral spirits that have been rejected. When the various local deities and tribal spirits are abandoned, then the barriers and hostilities of countless generations disappear with them. Christians are a single culture as citizens of one kingdom and tradition [Phil.3: 20] who serve the one true Eternal Spirit, God the Father.

One of the most significant and devastating carryovers from ATR into Christendom is in the traditional view about and treatment of women. To a traditionalist, women are disposable possessions; a means to achieving the man's end for pleasure, profit, power, and progeny. This is completely anti-Christian.

The Christian woman and wife is to be honored, understood, and not mistreated since she is weaker [I Pet.3: 7]. She is a helper, not an animal used as a sexual object for pleasure and to simply provide children [Gen.2: 18-20]. Rather, she is to be loved as one's own body, not treated as property or as a servant whose labor profits the man [Eph.5: 25, 28, 31]. The man is to provide for her [I Tim.5:8], not she slaving to support him.

The Christian wife is not under the authority of the extended family or clan. They have no rights over the wife of their male relation [Gen.2: 23, 24]. She should not be isolated and separate from her husband and all that concerns him; and certainly she is not to be divorced [Mal.2:16], even for barrenness [Lk.1: 7; Gen.11: 30; 18: 10, 11; I Sam.1: 5-8]. No secrets are to be covered up. All is to be freely shared [Gen.2: 25]. Under no

circumstances is she to be shared among other wives. Polygamy does not have God's approval at all [Gen.2: 18-25; Mt.19: 4-6; Deut.17: 17].

Because these issues of ATR have not been thoroughly addressed by the West African church itself, there has been no distinctive Christian culture emerging in the more than one hundred and fifty years that the gospel has come to this part of the world.

Little difference can be seen between the Muslim, Animist, and Christian in their basic assumptions about daily treatment of wife and children, or with respect to the dead and the burial ceremonies attending that event. And what is worse yet, is the basic underlying outlook about worship and approach to the God of glory Himself. Closely examined, our Christianity resembles more of a local shrine than a church.

If we will be thoroughly Christian in all of these areas, both in our churches and in our homes, persecution will surely come; from family, our tribe, and from the church itself. But that truth, once known, will set us free and establish a distinctive testimony that currently is lacking among the heathen. May the Lord help us!

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