

# ***Religion and Social Change in a Typical Yoruba Community of South-Western Nigeria: A Historical Perspective***

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## **Abstract**

*Yoruba is one of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria. The people are located in the North-Western zone of the country. Shao is a typical ancient Yoruba community founded toward the end of the eighteenth century by great hunters and warriors from old Oyo – the capital of the Yoruba Old Oyo Empire. It is located in the northern fringe of the region along the major road that links the West with the Northern part of Nigeria. As one of the communities that were later surrounded by a strong Islamic religio-cultural influence, its history was greatly altered by the contact with the missionaries. In this community, the missionaries, apart from their new religion, introduced formal education. These served as tools and agents of change that imparted on, among others, the socio-cultural, medical and economic life of the community.*

*The author considered the subject, using the phenomenological approach. Here, the idea of the functional theories is employed as the basis for the analyses of the roles played by religion (a social phenomenon) in the community. The relevant aspects of this theory are those that Roland Robertson refers to as “the objective consequence of an activity or phenomenon” in the primary sense and in the secondary sense, the concept of interrelatedness. In this, every phenomenon in the system (society) is considered to be relevant to the system, and the change in one affects all others and the system at large (Robertson cited in Eliade 1987:446).*

## **Introduction**

Early scholars of religion like E. B. Taylor, Emile Durkheim, Sigmund Freud among others, were preoccupied with the search for the origin of religion. The assumption then was that such discovery would go a long way in explaining its meaning and development in history (Smith 1995:910-912). At a point in time, propounded theories of origin became of least importance and speculative. This notwithstanding, these scholars were confronted with the question of persistence. In this respect, Durkheim wondered why human beings should persistently relate to symbols as if they are literal. Freud’s concern has to do with

why human beings persist in believing an illusion. The clear answer in each of these is that, “religion persists because it functions to fulfil basic needs in human beings” (Smith 1995:912)

Also in the field of comparative religion, the same shift was experienced. The effort on the historical origin of various religions in the nineteenth century was redirected in the twentieth century toward the functions of religion in human society. That is, attention was shifted from “theological argument” to examining the idea that in spite of diversities in culture and religion from one human society to another, there could exist “impressive similarities in basic functions involving the culturally prescribed solutions of human social and psychological problems and the ways of expressing and re-affirming the central values of a society...” (Lessa and Vogt 1965:88). Subsequent questions that arose from the ideology were: Are there “social and psychological problems (that) one solved by religious beliefs and practices...? If yes, how? How far does religious system go in expressing, codifying, and affirming “the central values of a society...as to maintaining the social fabric of that society”? (Lessa and Vogt 1965:88). The attempted resolution of these questions form the fundamental idea in the functional orientation of religion (Smith 1995:913).

Primarily, functionalism is a theory of social sciences but later became popular in religious studies (Smith 1995:894). According to Smith (1995), the theory won the attention of scholars because it appears to be practically measurable. The slogan then was, “religion is what religion does.”(Smith 1995:912). With special interest in the analyses of functions of social and cultural phenomena, functionalism asserts that every item and activity in a system serve specific functions which should be the basis for their explanation in the system. Function in this respect centres primarily on “the objective consequence of an activity or phenomenon for the system of which it is a part”. In the secondary but equally important sense, it is seen in terms of interrelatedness as applied in mathematics where  $x$  as a function of  $y$  connotes “that  $x$  varies in direct proportion to variation in  $y$ .”(Robertson cited in Eliade 1987:446). The idea in this second meaning implies that,

all phenomena in the system are considered, at least initially, as being relevant to the system’s persistence. It is then but a small move to the postulate that all phenomena in a system are interrelated and that a change in one aspect will have implications for all others and for

the system as a whole (Robertson cited in Eliade 1987:446).

Robertson further explains that a philosopher from England, by the name Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), rendered the first full explanation to the idea of function and the related orientation in sociology. Spencer compared societies with organisms and on this basis reinstates the earlier stated principles of interrelatedness and all the usefulness of all the items in the functioning of a system as a whole. As an evolutionist, he opines that societies are progressive but become less dependent on religion as advancements are made. (Robertson cited in Eliade 1987:447). For A. R. Radcliff-Brown (1881-1955), the simple explanation for the theory is that,

the functional method of interpretation rests on the assumption that a culture is an integrated system. In the life of a given community each element of the culture plays a specific part, or has a specific function. The function of a ritual or ceremonial is to express and thereby maintain sentiments that are necessary for social cohesion (Smith 1995:912).

In summary, the basic thesis of the theory is that for individual and in the society, religion plays certain roles. Such roles includes unifying, integrating, maintaining or reducing anxiety “in the social or personal system.” (Smith, 1995:894).

### **Religion and Society**

As presented in the introductory part of this work, Smith (1995:912) asserts that religion persists because, in a unique way, it meets some needs or serves some purposes in the society. As one of the social phenomena, it is evident that a change in religion also affects other aspects of a society. This idea is what is referred to, in functional theory, as interrelatedness of the social phenomena in the society. These relationships are fundamental both to the nature of religion and society.

Characteristically, societies are recognized by the values they espouse, the motivations they encourage individually and collectively to their citizens; the types of incentive they inspire and sanction as well as the basis for establishing and securing belief, attitude, and behaviour. In the same vein, it is difficult to identify or define religion without relating it

to human beings. It is religion that prescribes values for a society. Although different religions may give different interpretations to these relationships, it is difficult for any religion to deny these relationships (Capps 1987:375).

The common saying that, change is the only thing that is constant in life can be applied in this situation. Here, such changes are evident in different aspects of life and are initiated by various factors. The focus here is social change, that is “major structural changes in the organization of any society” ( Revision Notes on “Religion and Social Change (1) in, [www.sociology.org.uk](http://www.sociology.org.uk). Mar18, 08) as initiated by religion. In the light of the above, this work examines a historical perspective of religion in relation to social change in Shao, a typical Yoruba community in South-Western part of Nigeria. Consequently, the next section is dedicated to knowing the Yoruba race in general and Shao community specifically.

### **Yoruba as a Tribal Group**

Oduduwa is considered to be the progenitor of the Yoruba race (Akintoye 2004:5). and Ile-Ife is recognized as the cradle of the people from where the descendants of Oduduwa moved out to form different Yoruba groups. One of the grandchildren, Odede (Oranyan), founded Oyo and became the Alaafin of Oyo, a town which gave rise to Oyo people. The offsprings of Oranyan were linguistically divided into four distinct dialects, which gave rise to the four provinces of the Yoruba proper. These were the Ekun Otun (right or Western province), Ekun Osi (left or Eastern province), Ibolu province and Epo province. Repeated wars, especially during the nineteenth century, had disrupted these geographical divisions and many of the chief towns had lost their status while some were even phased out. The capital city, Oyo itself, was forced out to relocate at Ago Oja in the Epo province (Johnson, 1996:7, 8). Before the fall of the capital city, some of its dwellers moved out to find some other Yoruba towns and villages. Shao happens to be one of such communities. Around 1906 the present day Nigeria was under two British Administrations namely: the Southern Protectorate (along with Lagos as a Colony) and the Northern Protectorate. Most of the Yorubaland belong to the Southern division while “the Yoruba City of Ilorin and its neighbouring towns and villages were part of the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria.” (Akintoye, 2004:17) With a population of about twenty five million (Lawal et. al. 2004:ix) Yoruba is a tribal group that is mainly found in South-Western part of Nigeria. The people occupy Oyo, Ondo, Ogun, Osun, Lagos, Ekiti; parts of Kwara, Kogi, and Edo States of

Nigeria. They are also found in Republic of Benin, and Togo. In Sierra Leone, their descendants are called *Aku*, those in Cuba they are known as *Lucumi*, while those in Brazil are commonly referred to as *Nago* (Cf; Bascon 1951:14-20 and Verger 1955:3-11 in Awolalu 1981:xiii).

### **Shao: A Typical Yoruba Community**

Shao, an off-shoot town of the Old Oyo Empire, is an ancient Yoruba community of about ten kilometers in the north-western direction from Ilorin in Kwara State, Nigeria. It is cited along the road that runs from Gambari area of Ilorin through the Army Barrack, Sobi to Bode-Sadu and Jebba - the major route that links the north with the south-western part of Nigeria. "The town is located on the world map at longitude 4° 35<sup>E</sup> and latitude 8° 35<sup>N</sup>" (Oke 1996a:1). History has it that it was founded in 1779(Emielu1991:12) when Alaafin Abiodun (r.1774-1789) (Law, 1997:395) was the paramount ruler of Oyo. In a unique way:

Shao emerged from the collection of some small, but independent settlements that were founded at different times by hunters/warriors who, out of their love for adventure, particularly hunting expedition, or a sheer desire to find a new abode for themselves, had moved out of Oyo. These hunters/warriors left Oyo at different time (Oke 1996a:2).

The new settlement became prosperous for the dwellers, and it was soon populated by friends and relations from Oyo–Ile and other Yoruba towns and villages like Ikoyi. All these happened, according to Dada, about sixty-five years before Ojo Isekuse founded Ilorin the capital city of the emirate (Dada 1985:n.p. cited in Oke 1996b:3).

The people of Shao are predominantly peasant farmers. They grow yam, cassava, and guinea corn but have okro as their major cash crop. Situated in the heart of Ilorin Emirate where Islam and Islamic culture is dominant, Shao has distinguished herself with typical Yoruba culture akin to what one could find in any Yoruba community of South Western Nigeria. For instance, every compound is identified with a distinct tribal mark. The community is noted for her unique *Awon* Festival, an annual mass wedding festival, during which every lady of marriageable age is given out in marriage. Other traditional Yoruba festivals also bring joy to the people at different periods of the year. When talking about traditional herbal medicine, it is claimed that Shao is a place where "roots and leaves"

spurn into actions when their esoteric names are chanted. The potency of traditional medicines from this community is difficult to compare with any other.

The people claim to be blessed with wisdom and supernatural power when it comes to the efficacy of traditional herbal medicine. Siniga, the ward of the eldest of the three early settlers, has the greatest concentration of this medical power. Shao people have so much confidence in the efficacy of their herbal medicines that they always assure those who patronize their traditional herbal practitioners that they should hold them responsible and charge them for any failure. The uniqueness of the Shao can also be perceived in the fact that, traditionally and still today, their spiritual endowment and power of herbs made the town impregnable for the Ilorin-based Jihadists that Islamized many great Yoruba towns and cities in the eighteenth century. In her earliest days, the community was claimed to have been shielded by the “power of herbs”.

### **Religion and Changes in the Life of the People of Shao**

As argued above, religion has been considered one of the factors that is responsible for changes in human society. On this basis Capps (1987) opines that every religious tradition directs its efforts toward achieving an agreement or conformity “between the ideals they espouse and the societal ordering of life in which such ideals are meant to be expressed”(Capps 1987:375). This implies that the experienced changes in a society are therefore the result of the combined aspirations of the religious ideals as exerted by different religious traditions. Changes in religion, a social Phenomenon, subsequently affects other social phenomenal in the society. Let us examine specific phenomena to demonstrate these changes as they result from interrelatedness of religion with such social phenomena in Shao community.

### **Sociocultural**

The coming of missionaries, beginning from 1915, brought a lot of changes to Shao as a community. The white men came with a new way of life which significantly altered the lifestyle of the people of the community. It is on record that the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the heart of the town was the first building ever to be roofed with iron sheet in Shao. It was also on this building that cement and paint were first used. It is not therefore surprising, that the first three indigenes to roof their houses in Shao, after that of the

church, were also Seventh-day Adventist Church members. They were: Pa Nathaniel Olorogun in Oke Siniga, Pa John Adebiyi in Oke Lade and the three brothers Pa Abraham Adekola, William Ore and Adalakun in Asipa compound Ogidi. Due to the conspicuous changes among the thatched houses, the ancestral compound of the three brothers in Ogidi was changed to *Panu* compound- literally, iron-sheet-roofed compound.(Amuda, interviewed: July 6, 2004). The house of Pa David Alabi also in Oke Lade employed the masons that worked on Reverend C. D. Porter's<sup>1</sup> residence to plaster and floor his house with cement. This distinct step also earned his house the name *Simonti* house (the cemented house) a title that remains today (Omirinde, interviewed :July 4, 2005).

Observing similar changes, N.A. Fadipe comments that those that learnt new ideas from the missionaries usually become the teachers of such ideas in their communities (Fadipe 1991:321). These innovations set the stage for others to follow. According to one of the earliest sets of young men that learnt the trade of masonry or bricklaying, they were more service oriented than gunning for money. They were eager to spread the new development to every part of the community to uplift the social status. The carpenters also, apart from building roofs, were making batten doors to replace locally made coverage for entrances. According to an informant, the lives of some who were able to afford these “white men’s innovations” were potentially endangered out of envy from those who could not (Omirinde, interviewed: July 4, 2005).

As mentioned earlier, the mass wedding during the Awon festival is one unique religio-cultural aspect of the life of Shao people. According to Abel A. Adewole, in Shao the number of brides given in marriage during the festival can sometimes range between eighty and hundred (Adewole, n.d.:31). The point is that, out of this great number, a single one may not be married to an outsider within a space of five to ten years. The introduction of Christianity also brought a change in this aspect of the people’s life. The first recorded marriage outside this recognized traditional marriage festival was conducted in Evangelical Church of West Africa between Solomon A. Oladele and Margaret I. Oladele on December 27, 1969 (Oladele n.d.:8). Another one was conducted in the Seventh-day Adventist church around the same period in 1970 between Joseph Ajayi and Abigael Alabi(Adelodun, interviewed: October 19, 2004). Prior to these foreign methods of establishing homes, the Awon festival was the dominant method of contracting marriage.

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<sup>1</sup> The Missionary for the Evangelical Church for West Africa (ECWA).

Another relevant aspect of the traditional method of marriage is the networking-family relationship as this endogamous method is practiced over the years. The reality is, in some ancestral compounds, twenty percent of the members may be related as in-law, co-in-law, uncle, aunt, niece, nephew, and cousin. In a ward, the percentage of relationship may be between forty and fifty. At a closer look, if one picks ten people at random from the community, it is not impossible that *seven* of them may be related in one way or the other.

In the religious sense, these related individuals, according to Coulanges (cited in Lessa and Vogt 1965), would have common ancestors (close or distant) and family deities (Orisa) that further strengthen them as a united group(p.92). In the case of Shao, some of them may meet at the same ancestral shrines for rituals. In relating this to the origin of religion and society, the same author further comments that: "...an ancient belief commands a man to honor his ancestor; the worship of the ancestor grouped a family around an altar. Thus, arose the first religion, the first prayers, and the first idea of duty and of moral" (Coulanges cited in Lessa and Vogt 1965:92). The idea of burying the dead in the room, which usually gave rise to ancestral shrines, was replaced by the use of the church cemeteries – usually in the outskirts of the town and for the general use of the church members. This altered the traditional ideas of ancestral veneration and subsequent family ties.

Another dimension to this social network is the inter-religious harmony. As of now, there is religious plurality in Shao and conversion into any of the three major religions here considered, are done indiscriminately. As a result of this, the writer can hardly identify a single ancestral home in Shao where adherents of the three religions are not present. The fact is, even though they profess different faiths, they are still bonded together with a common *ajobi* -ancestral chord- which is equally strong and essential to maintain (Cf.Awolalu 1991:117).

The coming of the foreign religions – Christianity and Islam – however, brought in a new dimension to this social network. Apart from the unity on the basis of the family relationship, there also exists strong bond between members of the same religious tradition, denomination and cult. In this age when traditional religion appears to be waning away due to the influence of the foreign religions in Shao, there exists a strong co-operation within the traditionalists. During different traditional festivals, they support one another to ensure successful ceremonies. They recognize themselves as colleagues in the

same religious tradition, though of different cults. The same understanding is also evident among the Muslims in Shao. Within the faith, members also belong to different Islamic societies. Irrespective of differences in paternal and maternal relationships, the brotherhood in the faith is a very powerful cohesive factor. The situation is not different among the general Christian body and the individual denominations in the town. Among the churches, members are also grouped into different societies to further strengthen the social bond. When all these are put together, one could see the reason why there is a strong solidarity among the people of Shao in spite of all pressures – external and internal.

### **Socio-Economy**

The predominant means of livelihood in Shao is peasant farming. The children traditionally joined their fathers in farming business and the more they are in number the larger the farm and the richer the man. However, the coming of the missionaries brought a change in the trend. History has it that, those who built the Seventh-day Adventist Church and later that of Reverend C. D. Porter's residence, caught the attentions of the youths in the community. It was the roofing<sup>2</sup> of the S.D.A. Church building at the market square and vocational training in the church school that inspired a church member, Abraham Adekola, to become the first carpenter in Shao (Oke 1996a:42,43). It was also in connection with this church arrangement, that some Seventh-day Adventist Church workers went with Elder Joseph Olaitan who later returned to be the first indigenous tailor in Shao (Amuda, interviewed: July 6, 2004). This opened the way for many others to leave farming for other professions. Later on, the fanciful work of an Igbomina mason, Robin Audu Ibrahim, in the construction of Reverend Porter's residence that challenged some young men who proceeded to become leading masons (bricklayers) in Shao. An informant testified that with the return of the newly trained artisans to Shao, a floodgate was opened for other young people in the community to learn similar trades (Omirinde, interviewed: July 4, 2005).

As in the economy of any community, the importance of road networks cannot be overemphasized. In the case of Shao, the distance between the community and the state capital is less than ten kilometres. However, attempts to avoid the nearby River Moro traditionally made the journey unavoidably long. The coming of Elder D.C. Babcock of the

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<sup>2</sup> The church was the first building ever to be roofed with iron sheets instead of the usual thatched houses in Shao.

S.D.A. mission brought a great relief to the people on this score. His work in the construction of a bridge over Moro River eased the link with the commercial city of Ilorin and subsequently facilitated inter-communal trade. According to the source, it was this construction that made the Emir to invite Babcock to work on the popular Amilengbe bridge over Asa River in Ilorin (Adelodun, interviewed: October 19, 2004).

### **Healthcare Delivery System**

The people of Shao are known, for their potent traditional herbal medicine. With this knowledge, the people cared for themselves medically. The coming of the first set of missionaries<sup>3</sup> in 1915 brought the “first aid“ form of medical care<sup>4\*\*</sup> along with the spread of the gospel and the establishment of educational institutions. In addition to this, the advent of the Sudan Interior Mission Missionaries, Reverend and Mrs. C.D Porter in 1952, made a considerable impact on Shao. According to Oke (1996) and one of the earliest converts, David Ajao, Porter came as a medical missionary and was handling the treatment of some ailments working from house to house along with the spread of the gospel. However, the volume of the health related works called for the establishment of a health centre. Between 1954 and 1956, the church’s dispensary was established in the town under the care of Reverend C.D. Porter (Oke 1996a:36; Ajao, interviewed: July 4, 2004). Commenting on the quality of services rendered by this establishment Oke(1996a) says:

the Dispensary built by the mission (ECWA) was receiving patronage from within and outside Shao. As a matter of fact, the bulk of its patients were from Ilorin. This was so because of the high quality of dedicated service the dispensary was offering. Unlike in government owned health institutions of that time, it was abomination to dilute medicines which should not be diluted. Another factor responsible for its high level of patronage was that it was never short of drugs. On top of it all was the belief among the workers, who were of course Christians that could only treat, it is Jesus that heals (Oke 1996a:36, 37).

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<sup>3</sup> This refers to D.C. Babcock and his gospel team that brought the Seventh-day Adventist Mission to Shao.

<sup>4</sup> The missionaries were treating minor ailments and dressing the people’s wounds using the Western approach.

Along with the welfare services provided at the church dispensary, Rev. Porter supported a young man, David Ajao. David served as a house-cleaner to Rev. Porter and was the first baptized and then ordained elder of the local church. He served for five year in the ECWA Church, Shao. Popularly known as *Alagba(Elder)*, his house became a mini-clinic after he left the Porter's house. The services rendered by David included dressing of general wounds as well as those from tribal marks <sup>5\*\*\*</sup> and circumcisions; and treatment of minor ailments. As the volume of his own work at home was also increasing, he brought in the services of his children who later became as skillful as himself in attending to their patients (Ajao, interviewed: July 4, 2004).

In the early days of Porter's medical services, he also had the support of some other foreign and indigenous nurses. A popular white nurse was Mrs Benith who served at a time when guinea worm and other dangerous diseases were plaguing the community. To reduce the plight, Reverend Porter counseled the people of Shao to sink wells instead of using rivers as sources of their water. This suggestion, according to an eye witness, was vehemently opposed by the Alawon <sup>6\*\*\*\*</sup>. The apprehension of the latter was that such a step would incur the wrath of the Awon goddess who was the source of the people's rivers. When Reverend Porter's advice was not heeded, he himself sunk the first well in Shao beside the church. Those courageous enough to use the water from the well did so without mishap. This, having disproved the belief of incurring Awon's wrath, led many people in the town to sink their own wells. The step brought great relief to the people as the problem of guinea worm and many other water-borne diseases were resolved (Ajao, interviewed: July 4, 2004).

### **Moral Life**

One aspect of the religious activities of the people of Shao that has also been mentioned is the use of traditional medicine and charms. In this respect, the community is not only known for the potency of the herbal power, but highly dreaded charms too. In the practical sense of it, "power" resides in Shao and this, sometimes, is not hidden. In the past, there were some parts of the community that could not be visited carelessly in the

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<sup>5</sup> Tribal facial marks were made with sharp knives and resulted open wounds were treated medically until they healed up. The same thing is applicable to circumcisions for both sexes. Here, David applied the Western medical approach learned from Rev. Porter.

<sup>6</sup> The Priest of Awon river goddess.

night. Any kind of charm is available in Shao. A quotation from Oke(1996) vividly depicts the scenario:

the town was popular for the potency of its charms and efficacy of its medicine... Shao was a notoriously wicked town where lethal charms were often freely used among the people against themselves, how much more against external foes. A stranger to the town would tread softly and be careful not to even laugh unnecessarily; otherwise his laughter could be misconstrued and thereby be dealt with accordingly without any physical contact with the stranger. This was part of the feature that characterized the people's faith in the use of traditional power (Oke 1996b:75).

In addition to the power of charms, there are various activities of witches and wizards. These sets of people are believed to cause much havoc with their mysterious power.

Such activities are not limited to Shao community rather, they cut across Yorubaland. According to Bolaji Idowu (1973), one's

...destiny may be altered for the worse by *Omo Ar' aiye*.... *Omo Ar' aiye* includes witches, secret cults with a bias towards evil practices, any who are given to evil practices or machinations. The Yoruba believe that *Omo Ar' aiye* is a dreadful reality (Idowu 1973:77).

Speaking in the same vein on Africa at large, Wilson (1971) identifies the "innate power to harm" through witchcraft as a major fear of Africa. According to Wilson, "medicines might be used for good or ill, but witchcraft was innately evil. The witch in Africa was the embodiment of evil in Africa just as the devil was in medieval Europe" (Wilson 1971:35).

Coming back to Shao, as a typical Yoruba and Africa traditional community, the popular opinion of the people is that great havoc had been done to the people of the community by the witches, wizards and sorcerers. In some cases it may result from envy, jealousy, competition or mere demonstration of power for the sake of it. However, the foregoing is not meant to paint the traditional beliefs in a negative light, for in the midst of this ruthlessness the society still frowns against the wicked ones. Among the people of Shao, those who are known to be in these categories are hardly reckoned with. It is generally

considered a shameful practice and their children as well as those close to them may find it difficult to get husbands and wives within the community. It is also claimed that those who used the power indiscriminately, due to the principle of retribution, usually do not “end” well. Mbon (cited in Olupona 1991) agrees with this when he says: "...in African traditional societies, no man lived unto himself that is to say, what one man did affect, directly or indirectly, other members of his society or community(p.102).

At this juncture, it is very important to assert that wickedness or misdeed of any sort is regarded as antisocial, if not in all then, in most religion. Speaking on African traditional code of conduct Mbiti says that it is meant to govern and guide "all social and religious actions and interactions in pre-colonial and pre-missions African societies" (Mbo cited in Olupona 1991:101). In line with this idea, Obasola (cited in Dopamu 2003) further elaborates that

...the hall mark of morality in any human society is to regulate those spheres of human life and conduct which no other aspect of human endeavour can curtail. It also regulates the personal and interpersonal relationships of people within an established social milieu thereby paring the way for social harmony, which endeavour socio-political development. Consequently, the development of persons – socially, politically, economically, etc, will be incomplete without “guiding light” of morality. Therefore, any human organization where morality is extricated from the polity will inexplicably lead to perdition (Obasola cited in Dopamu 2003:200).

In essence, the above source considers this clarification of standardized moral code of the traditional religion (even in Shao) before the coming of the foreign religions. To the people of the community, it is generally believed that “it is good to be good”.

Although, African traditional ethics oppose wickedness however, the coming of Christianity and Islam to a community like Shao added impetus to the crusade against wickedness. Apart from teaching the adherents of these religions to uphold the standard espoused in their scriptures, the misdeeds are usually attacked openly during public religious campaigns. These are held at various locations and periods in the community. In connection with human morality and the role of religion, Smith has identified four

dimensions. The first is the fact that “religions identify moral norms by means of explicit teachings or through the character ideals or moral exemplars they hold up for imitation...” secondly; religions also legitimate “morality by tracing its norms to a sacred source. In theistic traditions.... this source is usually the will of God”. The third is the religious teaching that whatever man does, there exists an inevitable “moral retribution”. That is, they always opine that reward and punishment are sure at the ultimate end in accordance to man’s deeds. The last but not the least is the means of restoration in case of moral defalcation. In other words, since retribution is sure, perfection is expected and this is difficult for man. Religions, therefore, provide means by which man can be relieved from guilt and moral defeat (Smith 1995:729-731).

From these efforts, it can be said that much has been achieved in the moral uprightness of the people. The changes are not limited to the power of charms, witches and wizards but in every moral ramification. It can therefore be said without any exaggeration that, the “Shao” of old are not the same as that of today when it comes to morality. This is not to say that there was nothing good about the people before the introduction of Christianity and Islam rather that there is a great improvement in the moral and social life of the people.

### **Role of Education**

Christianity got to Shao in 1915. It was brought by the Seventh day Adventists Mission through an American Missionary called Pastor David C. Babcock. He held the first congregational service around the palace on February 6, 1915 having been warmly received by the Ohoro, his Chiefs and the entire community. Although he started his missionary work in Nigeria at Erunmu near Ibadan around April/May 1914, and to Ipoti Ekiti from Shao, the latter was used as the Headquarters and home base for his missionary works in Nigeria (Babalola 2002:31;Cf. Agboola 2001:24-26).

By the year 1916, Babcock and his Gospel Team <sup>7</sup> started a village school, which later become a central boarding school for training young people from the three stations – Erunmu, Shao and Ipoti. The school was upgraded to the first Seventh-day Adventist formal school in Nigeria by the year 1918 (Seventh-day Adventist Church, Oke-Ila Orangun, 2002:21). Among the early converts who benefited from this educational system

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<sup>7</sup> He was working with his wife, a Sierra Leonean and a Ghanaian that came with him from Sierra Leone as well as one of the sons of the Baale (the Village Head) of Erunmu – his first station.

was Pa Nathaniel Olarogun in Oke Siniga ward. His son, Elder Joseph Oyewole Olarogun (pharmacist) was the first University graduate to come from Shao.

Another relevant point in this development is connected with the system of education embarked upon by the Seventh-day Adventist Mission. Up to the 1970s, pupils under the mission school were made to attend the Sabbath worship on Saturdays. This was strictly supervised by the teachers and attendance taken by the committed school prefects. Those who failed to turn up received strokes of cane on the assembly ground every Monday morning. However, for many of the pupils, including this writer, attendance was not burdensome; rather, an opportunity to keep away from the farm work with our parents – which of course, was not pleasant. In this way, majority of the pupils whose parents were not Christians imbibed the faith and are today serving in different capacities of the church – as ordained ministers and committed laymen. In this way, education was tied to religion to benefit the mission, the community, and the individuals connected with the system. The presence of the church and the growing school had positive impact on Shao as it was becoming most popular among the neighbouring communities due to the accompanied social changes. Although the school suffered many set backs, it was not without a legacy for the people. However, it must be stated that all these benefits are at the detriment of the traditional religion.

Also before the coming of the missionaries and their schools, as it was in many other traditional communities, traditional apron (*bante*)<sup>8</sup> was the popular wear for the young people. The introduction of shorts as part of the uniform for the pupils in Babcock's school met with great admiration. Among others who were not in the school, the pupils appeared smart, elegant, challenging and promising. The introduction of gramophone was also linked with the wave of civilization of this period. To hear people sing or give messages from a box-like “container” was unbelievable. “The white men are truly powerful!” were the thoughts of the people as they watched in admiration (Amuda, Interviewed: July 6, 2004). Other areas of attraction included the beautiful flowers that surrounded the church compound in the market before the church building was demolished. The relocation of the teachers' quarters from the market to the foot of Yelu hill magnified the beauty the quarters. A source gives the following graphic description of the scenery:

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<sup>8</sup>A triangular piece of cloth, with strings at the three angles. It is traditionally designed to cover the private part similar to a pant (underwear).

the mission house was well patterned. The orchard was flourishing very well and the fruits emits good odour. The lawns were well taken care of. The “milk bush”(flower) which were used as fence were well trimmed. The mission house was a tourist attraction to the photographers. The outlook of the mission was splendid. It was likened to an European orchard(Adewole n.d.:29).

## **Conclusion**

From the discussion so far, it is apparent that religion in general and Christianity in particular, had positively impacted Shao community. This is obvious when the missionary religion is considered along with the western education, healthcare delivery system and resultant general civilization. An insider, Wole Oke(1996a), expresses the value of the educational program as follows:

...the people of Shao could ... rightly say that if the Christian Missions had not come to their town, the opportunity for formal western education could have eluded them for ever or at best, it would have come too late for those who today constitute the vanguard of their development and advancement into modernity. If the missionaries had not persevered, ignorance would have enveloped the community, it would have kept them in perpetual darkness and irreversible backwardness (Oke 1996a: 42).

In the general sense, Bamigbose (cited in Lawal 2004) observes such relational changes among the Yoruba when he states that, the "... blend between traditional culture and modifications to such culture (resulting from the introduction of Christianity and Islam...) gives a balanced and authentic picture of what can be regarded as life and culture in today's Yoruba society (Bamgbose cited in Lawal, 2004: viii)." From these ideas, one can safely infer that religion is one of the factors that effect changes in the society. This article has attempted to prove this, using Shao community as a case study.

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- Daniel Oyelowo Omirinde, aged 72 years. The Iboo of Shao, Interviewed July 4, 2005.

## **PERSONAL INFORMATION**

The author, Adelowo Felix Adetunji, Ph.D. was born and raised in Shao – the community under consideration. I had my B.A. Religion (1989), M.A. Religion (1996) and Ph.D. thesis defended in 2006 and graduated in 2007. The subject of my thesis is, *Religion, Identity and Social Change in Shao Community of Kwara State of Nigeria*. My area of specialization is Comparative Religion.

An ordained minister of the gospel under the church, Seventh-day Adventist Mission, that pioneered the “concerned changes” in the community under review. After serving the Church in various capacities for over ten years, I was invited to lecture in the Religious Studies Department of the Church’s University – Babcock University. Currently, I am a Senior Lecturer and the Head of the Department. From these vantage points, I can authoritatively handle this topic.