

Title: Conversations

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Quote:

What Really is Esu?

by Ebun-Oluwa Kumuyi

Due to Christian syncretism in Nigeria, the Deity or Orisa Esu has become a Christian devil. There are many different reasons why and how this came about those reasons, and allow us to come to a better understanding of Olorun's

Esu has many different personalities and can do many things, as most Orishas are known as the trickster, the guarder of the crossroads, the gatekeeper of justice and justice maker. The latter task, in my scholarly opinion, is the main reason he decided to mask Esu as the "bad one."

In naming Esu as the trickster, let us refer to Odù Iwori-Ofun which says

Owon so ibi di ire agba lo da'fa fun ogejan, elegbe Ifá. Owon so ibi di ko gbogbo ire wa inu aye, oran ti ko ba dara ehin ni da si.

Nigbati Esu gbo pe awon ore meji so pe awon ko ni ja lai-lai nigbana kan fun-fun, apa kan si dudu; o si lo koja larin awon meji ore, o si da ija

This verse tells the story of two best friends who visited a Babalawo for a sacrifice to Olodumare through Ifá to the Babalawo that the friends needed to make a sacrifice to preserve their friendship. They had enough faith in their relationship that they would perform the sacrifice. Esu heard of this, and decided to put on a hat that was half white and half black. He went past the friends where one stood on the right, and the other at Esu's left. He told the same man, but argued over the color of his hat; one seeing only the white and the other seeing only the black. It turns out that through this disagreement their friendship was destroyed. If they performed the prescribed sacrifice to God, they would have died best friends instead of as enemies.

This is an example of Esu being the trickster, as well as him being a deity. If a sacrifice is a slight to God, a suggestion that you have more power than God, then a sacrifice is a slight to God, a suggestion that you have more power than God's destiny and deny His advice. Neither God, Orunmila nor Esu appreciate this behaviour. When this happens, humans are punished. Esu's role as the "trickster" was given to Europeans to convince our own people that God's messenger is really the devil.

Let us now compare Esu and the devil according to the Bible and verses that mention the devil was cast out of Heaven for competing with God. This is not true. There is no historical/mythical evidence through Yoruba text to back this assertion.

The devil makes his home in hell-fire and is the antithesis of anything Holy between Heaven and Earth, serving as God's messenger to man and carry them to Heaven. He is also the gatekeeper of Heaven, which the devil certainly is. Esu does not wait for humans to die so that he may carry them off to hell or evil, nor is he the father of evil. These are attributes of the Christian devil, not traditional Yoruba culture.

Many times Esu will force us to look at the ugliness within ourselves so that in true light, recognise the wrong and change it so that we are better able to face that makes us remember:

S'otito, s'ododo, ma s'ika - Orisa gbe iwa pele O!

This basically means to do good, and perform well without doing harm - to have a good character!

This is not to say that the Yoruba are naive enough to have a disbelief in evil. It would be foolish - especially of a culture that strongly believes in a balance between good and evil. If there exists good, there must also exist evil and our ancestors understood this. It is misunderstood, however, that Esu is the master of this evil when in fact he is not. We do have a belief in evil forces that parade around during the dark hours and in the night of nature. These forces work with those with iwa buruku (bad character) and bad goals on earth; it should be noted that those forces are not Orisa. It is said that Olodumare ni idajo - meaning that God is the owner of ALL judgement. Those who perform evil acts on Earth will eventually be judged by God and will have to face the consequences.

May the blessings of God be upon you forever and always, Ase!