

Testimony of Lucien, former priest of Tohossou and adherent of Oro in Benin.

As told to Lorella Rouster

During summer 2008 seminars in Bohicon, Benin

When I was born, my parents dedicated me to a marine spirit called Tohossou (Torkorsu), king of the water. His symbol looks something like a pipe with each end bent in a different direction, and he represents twins. People in my country believe that if a baby dies before getting teeth, he will become Tohossou.

As I grew, I was always told to serve the fetish well so that my life would be happy.

When I was in class 1, I underwent a ceremony of purification. It was my first examination, but I obtained no good results. I went up to class 4 and then left school.

My mother was a Yoruba from Nigeria. She did masquerades to call the spirits of the dead. She believed they were the incarnation of dead spirits. She had been dedicated to the spirit of the dead.

We believed that it was good to be initiated into the shrines. We called them couvants in Benin. If one was not initiated, others might harm him. We knew that all the vodun (fetishes or idol spirits) collaborated together.

When I was older I entered a secret spirit society and they started teaching me how to kill people and put afflictions in their lives. We were especially fixed on cursing those who had made known the secrets of the group. Giving out group secrets was one of the most highly forbidden taboos.

It was rare that we harmed others, although we did hurt those who refused to join the group. We would also curse the person's belongings until they were forced to surrender.

I was also in another group called Oro. In the night, we would make noises like someone turning. People were so afraid of those strange noises. Because of them, women could not go out in the night, nor could uninitiated men.

We claimed the noises were made by the Oro spirit, but in reality we made those noises by spinning something made with rope or wire. In the night, we would separate into groups and go to the corners of the village. We would spin our instruments and make whirring noises. When done in a group, it gave the impression that it was everywhere.

One day one of the ropes broke and the thing on the end sailed off and landed near a house. The group punished the one who let his rope break, because it could have

caused our secret to become known. We should all have been flogged, but instead the leaders allowed us to just buy drinks for them.

When I realized how these groups killed people, I was appalled and left the group. At that time, my father died. He was a Roman Catholic who had also practiced vodun. When I went through his belongings, I found a New Testament. I had never seen one before.

I began reading the New Testament. I was so surprised to see that its main message was one of love. I was attracted to that, which was so different from what I had experienced in vodun.

I started attending the Roman Catholic church. Later someone invited me to a Pentecostal Church. It was there that I was born again. I now serve God in the "Living God Church".

Of course after I left, the vodun groups hated me and tried to harm me, but God has protected me up until this day. I praise His name and I beg all my fellow countrymen to leave vodun and to turn to the true and living God who gives them life, who loves them so much, who is ready to forgive their sins and give them true and abundant life in a way that the vodun never can.

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