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## **New religious movements in Africa: Neo traditionalist movements perspective**

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### **Abstract**

Neo religious movements is a term often used to describe a wide range of movements that developed in the tail end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (the 1960s and 1970s). It is a counter culture in response to the imposition of colonial and the early missionary enterprise. In Africa, it is a modern religious movement that emerged as a creative and innovative response to the historically and unprecedented change in the religio-cultural life of African religiosity. It is a global phenomenal upsurge that cuts across all forms and strata of religious types. However, the thrust of this work is centered on “neo traditionalist movements in Africa” as a modern form of the already existing African religions. From the historical perspective, it is observed that colonial and missionary label of African religions as primitive, fetish, idolatrous, heathen among others were repugnant designations. It is in this light that the African traditional religion seeks not only to defend itself from these western missionary and colonial derogations but to present its rightful place in the annals of modern world religions in its dynamic new form, here presented as new religious movement. Having survived the missionary/ colonial suppression as a primordial religion of Africa especially in Nigeria, it developed from a nationalist movement to its contemporary modern form as a secularized Godianism just as every known religion of mankind remains dynamic in tandem to the trend of globalization.

**Keywords:** religious, Traditionalist, perspective, unprecedented

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### **Introduction**

For those who are acquainted with the religious trends in Africa, it is not strange to say that the African religious landscape had witnessed the emergence of new categories of religious movements which scholars refer to as neo-traditional religious movements within the last five decades. It is unfortunate that due to its recent arrival in the religious scene at the present, there are few literatures for much to be known about their epoch and relevance in the religious space of most African countries. Nevertheless, it is not in contention that this new religious form has come to stay and is flourishing rapidly especially in sub-Saharan Africa. Bamigboye (2013:1) <sup>[5]</sup>. opined that this historical epoch is attributed to the reaction of African traditionalists towards the loathsome pride, racism, insults and European cultural and religious hegemony that characterized the evangelical spirit in the western missionary enterprise. As envisaged, this apparent denigration of African religious and traditional world view by the western missionaries resulted into what scholars of African religion today term “new religious movement (NRMs)” which has its forms in the three main religions in Africa, namely; Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion. Interestingly, these new religious groups only constitute a significant filament of African religious demography; however, the phenomenon has also earned considerable scholarly attention since about the sixth decade of the last century (Adogame and Jafta 2007:271-272) <sup>[2]</sup>.

The new movements make a conscious retreat to primordial indigenous forms of religion, a phenomenon which copiously provides leverage for Africans to seek their freedom to reformulate and revive indigenous beliefs and cultural traditions. The overwhelming paradigms provide platform for this research.

The research focuses attention on the dramatic emergence, typologies and the interventionist impact of neo-traditional religious movements in Africa since their emergence in the last century with special reference to Nigeria. The research also flashed briefly on the dialogue and relationship that exists between Christianity and neo-traditional groups. The thesis of this work, therefore, is “freedom of Africans to rehabilitate and express African traditional religions in new forms that resonate with the “africaness” of Africans which is relevant to the revolutionary impact of neo-traditional religious movements (NTRMS) in contemporary Africa.

### **Definition of Some Basic Concepts**

#### **Neo: Traditional Movements**

This term denotes a conscious renewal or revival of what is considered to be tradition and to distinguish this new form from what was hitherto referred to as primitive or traditional form of religious expression of Africans. It is thus rendered, especially, given the fact that neo-religious movements go all-out for the renewal of indigenous religions in new forms that are relevant to the present and future context (Marleen De Witt, <http://www.Researchgate.net>). According to Thompson Gale (2005) <sup>[10]</sup>, Neo-traditionalist movement is one of the gallant fits by which African traditional religions have shown a remarkable capacity for survival under the impact of modernization and the spread of Christianity and Islam. In the same vein, “traditional philosophies, rituals and symbols –reconstructed or otherwise have proved an effective and efficient means of legitimizing the social order and of garnering resistance to political, cultural and economic domination” (Gale,2005) <sup>[10]</sup>.

## African Religion

Given that the complex nature of religion as a subjective human phenomenon, it becomes difficult to give a straight-jacket definition that would be comprehensive enough to capture all its essential aspects. However, Mbiti (1991:11-14)<sup>[18]</sup>, proposes five essential components which together, makes up a religion. These include but not limited to beliefs and practices, ceremonies and festivals, religious objects and places, values and morals, and religious leaders. For the purpose of this work, African religion can be defined as a system of traditional beliefs, roles, norms and values that are organized around the sacred realm which binds the people and vitalize the aggregated cultural heritage thereof.

## Godianism

Godianism is a new religious movement that emerged in Nigeria in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The movement emerged in opposition to western colonialism and religious conception. Its founder and supreme spiritual teacher is Ahanyi, Kalu Onu Kama Onyioha, popularly known as chief K.O.K Onyioha. He averred that his intention in establishing Godian religion is to correct the notion that African traditional religions are “pagan” and “heathen”. These two words “paganism” and “heathenism” were the most common words used by the colonialists and their Christian missionary cronies, when referring to the religious beliefs that existed in Africa. It is no gain saying that this derogation was as a result of their (the western) ignorance of the principles and the doctrines for which the African religions stood. He was optimistic that “at least now, they know and are aware that what they once mischievously labeled as paganism and heathenism were neither pagan nor heathen but a religion and spirituality which had stimulated the growth and development of great cultures and civilizations in Africa”. Godianism combined the traditional beliefs of the Igbos (the indigenous people of eastern Nigeria), with the new interpretation of Christianity. Thus, it has affirmed its existence as a syncretistic movement with the adoption of its first name as the national church of Nigeria in its political nationalistic colorations and later as Godianism; a neo and modernized form of African traditional religion. Godianism is a neo-traditionalist movement that anchored the believe in a single God in the African continent whose religion is characterized by polytheism (Idowu, ORITA, vol.1, 1967)<sup>[13]</sup>.

In Godianism, the understanding of the supreme creator God, is being identified by the names “Godian” or “chineke”. The belief system which has its own holy text and place of worship, inspired and adopted many worship and rituals from African traditional beliefs, worship centers and some practices from Christianity, and such beliefs as “Kama” and reincarnation from the Indian religions. Although it has been observed that Godianism in her nationalistic and regional motifs, has been spreading with the claim of being a universal belief system of Africans; it is in this regard that the *Concise Oxford Dictionary of World Religions (2019)* describes Godianism as a Nigerian remodeling of African religions as a new modern faith, formed by the amalgamation in 1963 between the cult of *Aruosa* (holy place or alter of Edo national church) and the national church of Nigeria. Despite borrowing some externalities of Christian forms, the movement repudiates Christianity as a foreign religion. It rather represents pride in Africa, rather than a dynamic religious development (Gale, 2005)<sup>[10]</sup>.

Tracing its roots to the National church later known as the National church of Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC), Godianism propagates African traditional religion and also promotes an intellectual interpretation of African cultural values which includes the compilation of the oral scriptures of African peoples in a written form, and seek to provide a harmonizing philosophy that would reform and perpetuate the liturgical variations in traditional religion. The Movement in 1993 built a Godian academy, which is situated at Ukwa Ukwu in Nkporo, Abia state in Nigeria, to facilitate learning and research and the showcasing of the spirituality of Africans. It promotes the publication of literary materials such as the “Godianism series” of Papers Published after a conference in 1997. The movement has also developed its own Aquarian calendar using an African system of Igbo months, (*‘godianism-new Religious movements’* <http://what-when-how.com> Retrieved 03/01/2020) weeks and days names such as; *Izu* for week, *Eke, Ori, Afor, Nkwo* for the four days that make the Igbo week.

Godianism often organizes a Pan African revival of traditional religion and culture through active participation in festivals such as *FESTAC* in Nigeria and *PANAFEST* in Ghana. It was instrumental in the formation of the council of religions in Nigeria and sponsored the building of shrines. It is observed also that it has formed a continental organization to unite all traditional religions in Africa called the “Organization of Traditional Religions of Africa (OTRA)”. In 1982 for instance, chief Onyioha negotiated with Osofo Okomfo Damuah of Ghana’s *Afrikania Mission* who later agreed to join in the Godian mission. Godianism also links up through various projects within the African diaspora (<http://what-when-how.com> Retrieved 03/01/2020).

## The origin and emergence of Neo-traditional African religion.

Richard Gehman (2005)<sup>[12]</sup>, in his classic work on African traditional religion, described Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* as a graphic description of the way African cultures are fast disintegrating. Gehman regrettably contends that since the advent of colonialism and the introduction of Christianity, the entire African worldview appears altered beyond recognition. With the invasion of western forms of education, technology, industry, urbanization and most recently secularism, he said, the African traditional worldview and indeed the way of life of the people are increasingly becoming irrelevant and uninterestingly coming down heavily under the threat of cultural extinction. As it was observed earlier in this paper, the repugnant and denigration of African religious and cultural traditions by the colonialists and their missionary forbearers, resulted to protests from both the African Christian converts and the African traditionalist elements. Like their counterparts in the African initiated churches (AICs), the emergence of neo-traditional religious movements came from certain shared political and religious experiences of Africans. That these new religious and cultural traditional forms came into existence through the initiative of the concerned indigenous Africans who felt that matters of African affairs, especially their traditional religion should be expressed in African perspective and worldview (Ogunrinade, <http://www.cyberjournal.com>). Ogunrinade further gave three main reasons which motivated these African

initiatives as; the continued attitude of discrimination and the de-africanization of the natives by both missionaries and colonialists which robbed the Africans of their personhood once they became Christians and came under their protectorate (Aldred 1995:12) [3]. This makes it difficult and proved improper for one to become a Christian and an authentic African at the same time.

Bamigboye (2013:5-8) [5]. Reiterated from the South African experience that the missionaries came in collaboration with the explorers and colonizers whose influence rendered African religious beliefs and practices irrelevant. This undue influence humiliated and alienated Africans from their own culture and religion and made everything African to be considered “pagan” and evil while everything European was taught to be good, godly and salvific. Secondly, as a result of this unwarranted spiritual pride exhibited by the European evangelists and missionaries, Africans in turn had a bitter feeling of dissatisfaction to the Christian message which the missionaries proclaimed. They also perceived that the pattern of missionary Christianization merely replaced one culture for another, and hardly attacked their core allegiance (Duncan and Kalu, 2007:250) [2, 8]. The resultant effect of this was that African converts of the church had the creeds in their hands and mouths, but their primordial religious beliefs were in their hearts. In the third place, there was an apparent necessity for Africans to fill the spiritual vacuum created in their souls by the dysfunctional missionary evangelization. This desire ignited the effort to imprint “Africaness” on the message which Christianity proclaims to Africans. It also induced the effort to reshaping the interior of a prevalent religious traditions by redirecting the core message of deeply felt-needs within the African community thereby, providing an African answer to African questions in the spheres of socio-economic, politico-cultural and religious needs of the natives by appealing to the supernatural intervention and anchor (Duncan and Kalu, 2007:246) [2, 8].

From the foregoing therefore, it can be said here that Neo-traditional religious movements in Africa emerged as functionalist and reactionary organizations to protest the perceived oppressive and exploitative traditions of orthodox Christianity. These religious types tagged neo-traditionalism are essential apologetic brands, geared to defend the “africaness” of Africans and fight against religious imperialism. It should be recalled however, that these reasons are not much different from the general reasons for the emergence of New religious movements in the Sub-Saharan Africa. Rather, within its expanded scope, subsumes ogunrinade’s classifications. Among the eight reasons posited by Owete and Iheanacho (2009:144-148) [25], also located the reasons and circumstances that gave rise to the emergence of the Neo-traditionalist movements in Africa. It is expedient here that we give the summaries of such factors or reasons:

### **Political independence**

it was earlier mentioned in this work that the quest for political independence among Africans was sported as one of the main reasons for the emergence of new religious movements in general, and neo-traditionalist movement in Africa in particular. In Nigeria for instance, the history of Godianism started as a national church and a nationalist movement for independence. In Zaire

(former Belgian Congo) prophet Simon Kimbangu’s “Kimbanguist” religious movement has the antecedents of colonial and independent struggle. This is also the case with the Ethiopian churches in south Africa, the original church of the white bird in Zimbabwe (Rhodesia) among others (Owete ed (2013:144) [24]. The second reason was the religious motive. This was the desire to make the African traditional liturgy and practice indigenous and internalized by Africans. This is the background of such terms or terminologies as “African spirituality”, “Africanism”, African religiosity, Ethiopianism and Godianism” among others even within Christianity. Peels (1968) observing the early African churches among the Yoruba of Nigeria posits that “the real motive of the founders was the conviction that the (missionary) churches were still exotic institutions, and would remain so until, led by Africans, they purge themselves of their adventitious and essential European cultural trappings”.

*The culture conflict:* As another reason, this is the absence of liturgical emphasis that reflect the people’s cultural milieu that led to loss of cultural and religious sensitivity and eventual search for African cultural identity. Finally, was the search for cultural revival and renewal. Initially, the Christian converts from Africa embraced the Christian faith with the hope of attaining personal liberation, identity and independence, oriented in love as herald in the experience of direct communion with Christ. But failure to realize this motive in Christianity that is projected by the European missionaries, the Africans resorted to their traditional religion which they believe offered practical hope. This concern has caused the formation of new groups throughout the history of the church within Christianity.

### **Typologies of Neo: Traditional Religious Movements In Africa**

Neo-traditional religious movements are not isolated phenomena, rather, they are part of a broader religious field whose development should be understood in interaction with other religious movements (De Witte, 2012) [16]. Its forms are inherently global phenomena which appeal to local traditions and articulate the ways in which these are intimately connected to the global spread of other world religions such as Christianity and Islam. Neo-traditional African religious movements are extremely diverse in terms of background, teachings, practices, development and followership. Elizabeth Isichei (1995) [15], distinguished between two broad types of neo-traditional forms as: the movements founded by the educated (Africans) in the name of neo-tradition patriotism, and cultural groups (spiritual neo-traditional cults) which merely incorporate Christian elements in an older worldview and praxis. The former groups are urban-based nationalists, characterized by an intellectual and strong ideological approach to traditional religion. They are hardly concerned with spirit powers, healing rituals or witchcraft eradication, but with public representation. Though they have been less successful in gaining mass followings, they consciously make use of the media and have their cause to promote and gain considerable public voice, space and visibility. The later are spiritual neo-traditional cults whose strong emphasis is on spiritual forces and ritual actions which tend to be on ethnic group and locality, and are based mostly on rural areas from where they emerged. They have often demonstrated greater vitality and spiritual powers for survival than the intellectualist movements.

Isichei (1995:145) <sup>[15]</sup>, further illustrates with the “Igbe” cult in western Niger Delta, which incorporates traditional symbolism (Kaolia and secret Language), together with Christian elements (the bible, congregational worship, etc.) as cult objects. This variety is mainly concerned with witchcraft eradication. According to her, many neo-traditional groups can be placed somewhere in-between the first and the second spectrum on this scale and combine elements of both sides or shift emphasis over the course of their development. In their separate works, Gecaga (2007) <sup>[11]</sup>, Ogot and Chieng (1972) <sup>[22]</sup>, and Wumue (2011) are unanimous that some traditionalist groups have a local or regional vision of revitalization of indigenous religions; others are nationally or Pan-African oriented while some have links to national governments. Among this include but not limited to; the afrikania mission in Ghana, founded by Kwabene Damuah in 1982; Mumboism in East Africa, Dini ya Msambwa, and the religion of ancestral spirits of Kenya; founded by Elijah Masinde (1910-1987) in 1944. The Karinga initiation guilds started also in Kenya in the 1920s with the aim of preserving traditional rites of passage and female circumcision. Today, they have embraced the structure and appearance of a church by ordaining bishops and rural deans. It should be noted that one of the distinguishing characteristics of Neo-traditional movements is in their concern with clarity in separating the authentic tradition from its entanglement with Christian mission of any culture (Thomas Gale, 2005:14) <sup>[10]</sup>. In this order according to Gale, belongs the *Mungiki*(masses) movement of Kenya, which began in the 1980s as the “tent of the living God movement” for the purpose of extracting authentic *Gikuyu* culture from the ambiguity to which it had been reduced by Christianity. The *Mungiki* movement is greatly influenced by *Mau-mau* ideology in proclaiming that they are fighting for land, freedom and religion.

Others are; the church of the Black ancestors in south Africa, the *Bwiti* cult of the Fang people of Gabon in central Africa. In Nigeria, such neo-traditional movements arose between the 1930s-1960s. First was the neo-traditional church of the *Ijo orun orumila* which purpose was to ensure that the core elements of their religious culture were not destroyed. This fused traditional ancestral cults with Christian symbolism theology and prophetic leadership by a charismatic prophet tagged a messiah (Gecaga, 2007) <sup>[11]</sup>. In the 1960s also arose in Nigeria the *holy Arousa Cult* as Edo national church which developed from Bini traditional religion. This later merged with the neo-traditional national church of Nigeria, to form Godianism, which focus is on the belief in a single unifying God of Africa as understood in ancient Egyptian sources.

#### **Godianism as a Neo: Traditional movement in nigeria**

Godianism is a neo-African traditional movement that emerged in Nigeria in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Godianism combined the traditional beliefs of the Igbo, the indigenous people of eastern Nigeria, with the new interpretation of Christianity. It traces its origin to the national church, later known as the national church of Nigeria and Cameroons which was formed when the missionary churches in Nigeria (Enugu and Yaba) refused to hold a memorial service for twenty-two colliery miners who were killed by the colonial police in Enugu, Nigeria in 1949, for striking in nationalist struggle for independence. The church changed its name to Godianism in 1962 with chief

K.O.K.Onyioha as its first high priest. It was then the movement shifted from political nationalism to the promotion of African traditional religion without losing sight of its goals of Pan-Africanism and its advocacy for African culture. (‘*godianism-new Religious movements*’<http://what-when-how.com> Retrieved 03/01/2020)

Though Godianism began as an African revivalist movement seeking to give identity, respectability and unity to the black race, but today, it has universalized its message by stressing love and harmony as the essence of true spirituality. It teaches that other religions such as Islam, Hinduism, and Christianity are liturgical variations and cultural expressions of the same spiritual truth. The movement sees itself in relation to other religions as a harmonizing power, which aims to bring about all religious conceptual unity. This religious movement is spread in many parts of Africa with a national consciousness coloration. It lays claim to be a universal belief system with its own institutions and rules, founder, sacred book, temple, teaching, worship, rituals, festivals and a peculiar moral movement that enjoys a considerable number of followers in the African continent. It should also be noted that Godianism also inherited so many things from Christianity such as conception of temple, communion, marriage, funeral, ceremonies, churches and clergy building as the influence of modernization upon the primordia religion (ATR). As Christianity lays emphasis on “believe in Christ” Godianism sees itself as the new saviour of Africa and advocates a single- god- belief in a continent where there were many gods as practical syncretism.

#### **Impact of Neo: Traditional Religious Movements In Africa**

It has remained a contemporary question in the age of modernization and secularization of religions, the relevance of African traditional religions; if it holds any sway of influence in any varied form. This section therefore probes the survival and impact of African religion in the religious space of Africa. It has been said earlier that African traditional religions have over the decades, courageously put up against all odds to survive in the midst of alien religions of Africa. Excitedly, Thomas Gale (2005:14) <sup>[10]</sup>, made some profound allusions to this demonstrated capacity in ATR survival when he observed that “African traditional religions have shown a remarkable capacity for survival under the impact of modernization and the spread of Christianity and Islam”. Some scholars express surprise that ATR still survives the threat to its existence at the time of Nigeria’s independence from colonial rule in 1960, when there were speculations in some quarters that ATR was on its way towards extinction considering the factors both in the Nigeria’s religious landscape and the rest of modern Africa (Maxey and Ozodo, 2017:121) <sup>[17]</sup>. To some, it appeared obvious that Christianity, Islam and secularism were destined to triumph to the point of forcing ATR out of the African religious arena. Emmanuel Twesigye was one of the respected scholars (Anthropologist) who wrongly predicted that folk religions of the world would disappear within ten or twenty years.

Despite these expectations and predictions to the contrary, ATR is alive and thrives in the African continent in varied neo-religious forms. Even where it appears weak and neglected, it is often seen as “down but not out”, proving to be stronger than it was few decades ago following Twesigye’s prediction (Marxey

& Ozodo, 2017:121) <sup>[17]</sup>. In Nigeria for instance, ATR has become a formidable and essential element of indigenous knowledge systems after independence; several measures have been taken by health workers and in parliament to give recognition to African indigenous healers in their practice of traditional medicine. It is not in doubt that today, the orthodox Christianity in Africa is yet to fathom or successfully replace the African traditional religious mindset which dominates the entire world of the average African.

Remarking on the phenomenal survival of ATR, Bascon and Herskovits (1959) <sup>[6]</sup>, observed that despite the intensity of Christian missionary effort and the thousand years of Muslim proselytism in various parts of Africa, African religions continued to thrive and manifest vitality everywhere. This is often seen in the worship of African deities, the homage paid to ancestors, and the recourse to divination, magic and other rituals. Rather than going into extinction from all appearances, Idowu (1967) <sup>[13]</sup>. Observed also that ATR is a “a living religion... It is a contemporary living reality”. Identifying with these, Vincent Mulago (1991:128) underscores the variety of the living reality of ATR in stating that

*A superficial observer might make this mistake (of believing) that ATR is disappearing, but for anyone who lives in real contact with Africans, the question does not arise .... The future of African religions is not at all problematic for our generation. They have their place and play their role at every level of our societies.*

By this, the author meant that African religions are functionally relevant and adequately potent in resolving the existential needs of Africans, especially in times of emergency. This is to say that neo-traditional religions aptly resonate with the African worldview. Thus, a correct understanding of the traditional African mindset is imperatively germane to the understanding of why neo-traditional religious forms remain relevant in the religious landscape of Africa. As interventionist group, African traditionalism seeks to rehabilitate the battered African religions and cultural traditions, which aggregates and perpetrates the African worldview, including the invisible spirit world. It should be noted that African indigenous religious worldview conceives of the universe in three levels; at the top is the creator God who is assumed to be benevolent but is remote and largely inaccessible; below that are the realm of angels demons and the ancestral spirits. At the bottom is the visible created world inhabited by human beings (Maxey and Ozodo, 2017:124) <sup>[17]</sup>. To them, Africans do not communicate directly with the creator God because He is understood to be too far away and separated from them by the invisible spirit world and more remote realm of angels and demons and the closer realm of the ancestral spirits. So it suffices to say that neo-traditionalism takes quite seriously the issue of the African worldview which is the reality of the invisible spirit world. This explains much of the reason for the continued survival and remarkable success that has over time earned relevance to this religious form in Africa.

In contrast to the orthodox Christianity whose relationship with God is mostly in the realm of ideas based on the 18<sup>th</sup> century enlightenment reason and secularism, African traditionalist mindset tends to be in the realm of pragmatic. African traditional worldview in general has to do with solving the practical daily

existential problems of its adherents. While the missionary religion tends to either ignore or directly oppose the preoccupation of Africans with the spirit world which often left many African Christians in confusion and in most cases with deeply embedded syncretism; neo-traditionalism endorses the reality of the spirit world and seriously takes the active powers of ancestral spirits in response to the human physical, material and spiritual needs. This in turn fills the gap left by the disconnect between the missionary worldview and that of the Africans (Maxey and Ozodo, 2017:123) <sup>[17]</sup>.

However, the challenge within the African worldview which the new religious movements in Africa, especially, Neo-traditionalism are enjoying greatly is how to manipulate and oppose the unpredictable realms of ancestral spirits, angelic and demonic spirits to enable one to experience the benevolence care of the supreme God. Elucidating this fact, Maxey and Ozodo (2017) <sup>[17]</sup>, submit that the appeasing of the ancestral spirits and overcoming the evil or demonic forces hence becomes the primary motivation within African worldview and of course the African indigenous religion. Such appeasement involves sacrifice, libation, and engagement of priests or witch doctors with special power to counter spirits. The above analysis explains why neo-traditional religious movements are not only surviving the heat from radical forms of Christianity and Islam, but as it were, they are conveniently gaining phenomenal success and attraction among native Africans including the Christian elements who still stop (though secretly) at the shrines of the African traditional religious priests, especially in times of emergency.

It should be concluded here in view of the above, therefore, that for the fact that ATR tends to be anthropocentric not Theocentric as the missionary religions (this- world- centered and not next- world- centered), it becomes difficult for Christianity or Islam whose main benefits are in the next world to replace it. Hence, Lois Fuller (2001:122) <sup>[9]</sup>, affirms that any religion that focuses primarily on heaven or paradise, and the reward of the after-life may not have enough attraction or sympathy to suppliant ATR. While others are emphasizing in the next life, the power of Jesus over the powers of evil right now means much more to the ATR and its adherents.

### **Christainty and African Neo: Traditional Religions In Dialogue**

The sporadic increase in the development of new religious forms among the two alien religions in Africa (Christianity and Islam) and the renewal and invigoration of African Religions into Neo – Traditional forms in the postcolonial Africa, have instigated a real concern for inter – religious dialogue. This call may probably provide answer to the long agitated question for a possible synergy among religions in Africa; as to what extent can the two dichotomized religions (Christianity and ATR in this context), come to a common ground either by tolerance or compromise. It can be objectively argued that such a synergy may only be possible through sincere dialogue that will in- cooperate some basic tenets of Christianity and cultural elements of African traditions; a possibility which should of necessity, follow the trans – cultural character of Christianity and the susceptibility of human culture to the forces of modernization. This is because, to some scholars, human culture can be said to be morally neither

inherent good nor bad. While Christianity is trans-cultural in the sense that it adapts to any aspects of human culture that are not contrary to its moral and spiritual principles, at the same time, it displaces the aspects of culture which it is not in agreement with (Marxey and Ozodo, 2017: 121-122) <sup>[17]</sup>.

If this is true, it therefore means that since the African cultural mindset is neither good nor bad in itself, that makes it adaptable to the Christian transformative influence whenever the two encounter themselves. As for the trans-cultural character of Christianity, it is not best to identify with Mbiti's (1970:236) <sup>[18]</sup> allusion that "Christianity is always a beggar seeking food and drinks, cover and shelter from cultures it encounters in its never-ending and wandering journeys." This may equally sound derogatory and may result to attending the dialogue with prejudice. However, Mbiti can be interpreted as saying that an honest and vibrant synergy between Christianity and African cultural traditions cannot be achieved in the absence of the cultural and contextual realities of its host community (Tennent 2007: 193) <sup>[28]</sup>.

In view of this, it is sufficed here to say therefore, that any sustainable relationship between Christianity and ATR must necessarily be a cultural merit and not a token. However, caution must be applied in embarking on such level of contextualization to avoid the problem of syncretism and universality which African religions have been accused from the onset (Ikpen, 2005:299-300) <sup>[14]</sup>. Moreso, any advocacy for a religious dialogue between Christianity and ATR in their ancient or modern forms (new religious movements), must take into cognizance, the fact that an inherent irreconcilable dichotomy already exists between the two forms of religion. Although ATR as a primordial religion in Africa did much to accommodate Christianity and to prepare the African continent for the receiving of the full revelation of God through Jesus Christ, it still falls short of the heart of Christianity. It can be summarized here that the relationship between Christianity and the ATR can be approached and characterized by a paradoxical dialectic of opposition and mutual tolerance where need be, rather than a wholesome compromise.

### Conclusion

This article has attempted to discuss the emergence, typologies and impact of neo-traditional movements in Africa. The work has also identified the denigration of African religions and traditions by the European missionaries and their colonialist officials, and the desire to rehabilitating and reviving African religious and cultural traditions as the two main causality factors that precipitated the emergence of neo-traditionalist movements in Africa. As a reactionist and interventionist religious types, neo-traditional religious groups are often faced with the challenge of surviving in the presence of radical forms of Christianity, Islam and secularism as new-religious movements as well. However, it is observed that neo-traditional religions of Africa are still gaining much attraction and landmark success due to its relevance and pragmatism which offers solution to the existential needs of its adherents. This makes the religious brand flourish on the African continent and beyond. This paper concludes on a suggestive note for ecumenical synergy that will allow for religious tolerance between the primordial African religions and

the foreign religions of Africa (Christianity, Islam and secularism) for a harmonious and peaceful society.

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