

AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY

IN LOCAL AND GLOBAL CONTEXTS

A Festschrift in Honour of
Rev. Prof. Isaac Deji Ayegboyin^{FNAL}
Professor of Church History and African Christianity

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A Festschrift in Honour of
Rev. Professor Isaac Deji Ayegboyin *FNAL @ 70*
(*Religious Studies Series, Volume 7*)

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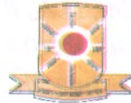
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Chapter Sixteen

A Philosophical Analysis of the Role of Indigenous Religion in the Growth and Expansion of Christianity in Africa

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Abstract

Religion plays a dominant role in the life of the average African. Long before the advent of Christianity, Africans have been actively practising their indigenous religion. Several scholars have focused on various aspects of the history of Christianity in Africa with little attention paid to the contributions of the Indigenous religion to Christianity, especially in the area of its growth and expansion. This paper seeks to address this lacuna with the view to providing answers to questions on the influences of the indigenous religion of the people on Christianity in Africa. The interaction of Christianity with the indigenous religion often leads to the attitude of skepticism, especially in Christian circles. Contrary to the erroneous belief that African indigenous religion is anti-Christianity, it has actually contributed to its growth and expansion in Africa. This study adopts Descartes's methodological skepticism which has its roots in epistemology, in its analysis of the contributions of the Indigenous religion to Christianity.

Key words: African Indigenous Religion, Growth and Expansion, Christianity in Africa, Methodological Skepticism

Introduction

History reveals to us that although Christianity was actively practised in Africa, some parts of Africa were also practising the indigenous religion of their forefathers, passed down from one generation to another. Therefore, it would be wrong to suggest that Christianity was not African; it would also be wrong to also think that Christianity was the indigenous religion of Africans. This is because the missionaries brought Christianity to some parts of Africa. Today, Christianity occupies a significant position as a religion in Africa, practiced by Africans. The relationship between Christianity and the Indigenous Religion has not been too cordial, especially since the missionaries asked of their new converts, a total renunciation of their indigenous religion. According to Awolalu, all new converts were taught in the mission houses and were encouraged to look down upon their religion and culture. Mission schools later sprang up all over Yoruba land. The people educated in these schools were taught the Scriptures and the 3Rs (Reading, 'Riting and 'Rithmetic) and as such they became transformed and bade *adieu* to their old faith, in this way, traditional life and family structure became deeply disrupted. Awolalu also adds succinctly, that "the results of such Western education remain with us today."¹ Thus, it is very easy to reason therefore that the indigenous religion of the people is anti-Christianity. This is not the case, and this is the issue this study seeks to address. This will be done by tracing the history of Christianity in Africa to its contact with the indigenous religion. This reveals a number of reactions from Africans to the new religion, Christianity. It also includes the different missionary activities and their contacts with different African tribes, with a view to identifying the various ways the indigenous religion of the people has contributed to the growth and expansion of Christianity.

On the other hand, philosophy as a discipline has played an active role in the history of humanity. It is the critique of the ideas we live by. Although philosophy has various subdivisions and approaches, epistemology, which is basically the theory of knowledge, is highly crucial to this study. This is because this study seeks to investigate and provide knowledge on the role of indigenous religion to Christianity. Since this study also seeks to correct the notion that the indigenous religion is anti-Christianity, epistemology becomes highly relevant. There are different approaches to epistemology; this study adopts Descartes's methodological skepticism² in addressing the problem of skepticism in its bid to answer its research questions.

History of Christianity in Africa

Christianity is believed to be as old as indigenous African religion. According to history, Christianity had been in existence in Africa long before the establishment of Islam in the seventh century particularly in the northern part of Africa, in places like Egypt, the Sudan and Ethiopia that have produced such scholars and theologians like Tertullian, Origen, Clement of Alexandria, Augustine of Hippo and so on³. According to ancient tradition, St. Mark was the one who established the church in Egypt that later became one of the great churches of Christianity⁴. It is also argued that the origin of African Christianity has its links to

¹J. Awolalu. 1979. *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites*. Essex: Longman Group Limited.191

²Descartes's methodological skepticism is an approach that takes no belief for granted but calls for a fresh look at ideas or notions regardless of how long and wide they have been held or accepted.

³J. S. Mbiti, 1976, *African Religions and Philosophy*, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 229.

⁴Z. Nthamburi, *Toward Indigenization of Christianity in Africa: a Missiological Task in International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 112, Journals.sagepub.com

the church of Ethiopia.⁵ This may not be far from truth because, long before the birth of Christ, Ethiopia has already had contacts with the Jews as recorded in the 1Kings 10: 1-13. Immediately after his birth, Jesus was taken to Egypt for an asylum to prevent him from being killed by King Herod. Again, the Ethiopian eunuch who met Philip on his way back to Ethiopia from Jerusalem is also considered to be a history of Christianity in Africa. The eunuch believed the gospel of Christ and was baptized by Philip, Lk8:27-29.⁶ According to Daughrity, the account of the day of Pentecost in the Acts of the Apostles 2:1-13 presents people from Egypt and Libya and Cyrene preaching to Greeks in Antioch was the birth date of Christianity in which Africans were not left behind.⁷

West Africa came in contact with Christianity through the missionary efforts of Europe in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. According to Babalola, the kind of Christianity the Portuguese brought to West Africa was the Catholic variety, developed in the culture of Western Europe with the aim of transforming the African faithful into carbon copies of the Portuguese. This is one negative effect of colonisation, the effect of which we are still battling with in Africa till today. When they first came, it was through their trading stations in West Africa, particularly in Benin, Warri, Eburnia, Island of Sao Tome and Angola, while the French, one of the runner ships, occupied Senegal. Initially, the Portuguese were certain of a successful mission due to some similarities in culture and political system.⁸ This gave them the false impression of success but later led to their failure by the hostility they received. The people of West Africa displayed the attitude that they were neither ready nor had any serious intention of adopting the new religion particularly in Benin where Christianity remained a minority religion and confined to the palace of the Oba. However, their mission to Warri was successful because Christianity persisted there for more than 200 years.

When the Portuguese came to Gold Coast (now Ghana), in the fifteenth century, they came along with Roman Catholic priests who introduced Christianity to Elmina in 1482. From there, they visited many places like Senegal, Sierra-Leone, Liberia and Ivory Coast, all in unsuccessful attempts to start a settled mission. In 1642, they took all their priests and left so that there was no one to continue their work. However, in 1752, Anglican Church began the work at Cape Coast through Rev. Thomas Thompson.

To a certain level, the missionary expansion in West Africa was successful, particularly in places where settlement and administration provided a solid foundation such as Atlantic Islands: Cape Verde Islands, Sao Tome and Principe where the Portuguese exercised full authority even in politics. The situation in Angola was also the same. According to Babalola, some factors were responsible for the success recorded by these early missionaries.⁹ Firstly, some African rulers had a material reason for declaring their support for Christianity. Some wanted independence while others were in need of help against their external

⁵ M. Wandusim, 2015, *Christianity in Africa: a Beacon of Hope for Christianity in Europe*, *Journal of Advocacy, Research and Education* vi(2), 15.1

⁶ S. Kim and K. Kim, 2008, *Christianity as a World Religion*, London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 64.

⁷ D. Daughrity, 2014, *Accessing Christianity in Africa's Transforming Context*, *international review of mission* v/103 (2) 348-362.

⁸ E. Babalola, 1981, *Christianity in West Africa: an Historical Analysis*, Ado-Ekiti, Bagboye & Co Press (Nig.) Ltd, 7.

⁹ E. Babalola E.O. 1981, *Christianity in West Africa: an Historical Analysis*, 7.

aggressors. Some also wanted dominion over others by means of expansion. Thus, they accepted Christianity without questions or full understanding of the religion and the implications of their acceptance. A very good example was the case of the *Egbas* and their neighboring Dahomians, now Benin republic. Also, the *Olu* of Warri, who wanted his freedom and independence from Benin, accepted Christianity to seek the Portuguese support. Secondly, when the Portuguese came to Africa, they came along with their trade and religion. Therefore, some African rulers embraced Christianity as a result of commerce. The rulers also embraced Christianity as a result of unlimited divine right emphasized in Catholic circles in Europe that is different from checks and balances which do not allow any ruler to become autocratic. They embraced Christianity with a notion that it would give them more access or unlimited power over their subjects. As noted earlier, when missionaries first came to Nigeria, they came through Warri/Benin axis. However, because the natives were not ready to embrace new religion, their mission failed, even though the expedition later became a success.

The Role of Indigenous Religion in the Growth and Expansion of Christianity

According to Adewale, it was in 1842 that Thomas Birch Freeman, a Methodist missionary and colonial official in West Africa made a brief appearance and was ushered in with a rousing and hearty welcome. However, this was made possible as a result of *Ifa* divination.¹⁰ As it is a known fact, the tradition of the Yoruba is that the king must consult the oracle on a daily basis, usually in the morning, to ascertain what the day holds for the king, his household and the entire people. So it happened in the house of Sodeke, the leader and Balogun of *Egba* at that time where, through consultation of *Ifa* oracle, the prediction of the coming of the whites was made. Although *Ifá* did not mention whites (*òyìnbó*) in the revelation, it was very clear that the reference was made to them. The way and manner it described them through the *odù* (divination) that came out and further clarifications made through the same means, when Freeman eventually came, he also confirmed the fact. According to the divine message, *Ifá* revealed that *Ègbá* people would encounter *omọ tá a bí lóòjọ, tó dàgbà lóòjọ* – a child born that grew up the same day. This was unclear and a riddle to the *Ègbás*. However, when the foreigners eventually came and the oracle was consulted again to confirm whether the “white man” was the one the oracle was talking about some twenty years ago and the oracle says yes with a further assurance that the union would signal peace, progress of the town and its people. It was then they realised and saw what *Ifá* was talking about. That is, the skin colour of the white man that retains the original colour of his birth till old age. This was the parable and unclear language of description *Ifá* speaks since the word *Òyìnbó* was not in Yorùbá dictionary at that time.

On a different note, there were indications that the first church, (*Aké* church) was reportedly burnt down in 1846 by the traditionalists. This act was probably due to the fear of becoming unpopular because people of *Ègbá* were embracing the new religion, a religion that promised more hope than the indigenous religion they were practising before its arrival. However, one should note that this may not be the actual reason or reasons for the burning of the church (if the church was actually burnt). Possibly, the Christians must have offended them in a way; if Christians were not wanted, they could have been resisted from the first day they stepped into *Egba*-land. Again, they could not have possibly attacked the Christians

¹⁰ S. Adewale, The Role of *Ifá* in the Work of 19th century missionaries in *Orita*, *Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies*, xii/ 1 June 1978, 26.

because when the missionaries were coming, they did not come with their congregation. Rather, it was part of these traditional worshippers who had been waiting eagerly for their arrival they took as members. Therefore, in their own view, attacking the converts means attacking their own blood and relations.

Christianity was able to grow because of ideas and practices which could be fused with traditional religion. In the words of Babalola, "The missionaries always emphasized points of similarity and in their early consults; they made use of local interpreters who inevitably translated Christian concept by references to traditional religion"¹¹ Christianity could only make sense to these new converts only within the context of the established belief systems of the Indigenous religion. Christianity was able to grow and expand because it was situated within the contexts of the belief system of the indigenous religion.

It should be pointed out that the established belief in God, ingrained in the indigenous religion of Africans aided their understanding of the message of the gospel that the missionaries brought to them. It is erroneously held that the idea of God is monotonously held by non-Africans. The wrong belief is that it is the emergence of foreign religions that introduced the concept of God to the Africans. Idowu, while quoting Dr Edwin Smith's encounter with the eminent biographer Emil Ludwig, shows the myopic view of some researchers who think they know Africans. Ludwig who was curious about the business of missionaries in Africa, was plainly puzzled and expressed his perplexity with the question, 'How can the untutored African conceive God? How can this be? Deity is a philosophical concept which savages are incapable of framing?'¹² This shows the obvious thinking in the minds of some scholars about Africans as regards the existence of God. What some of them fail to understand is that, long before they (foreign missionaries) came to Africa, the idea of a Supreme Being had been well established among the African peoples, and different African communities have a indigenous conception of God.

There are different names to express the idea or notion of the Supreme Being in different languages representing the different ethnic groups in Africa. Some great countries, like Nigeria, have the expression of God in about 250 languages, while Tanzania has around 100, and around 40 are used in Kenya. These names, reserved for God and God alone, show His activities and benevolence towards His creation. According to an online account:

Most of these names are encoded in etymologies which describe the qualities and functions of such supreme beings. Examples are Olódūmarè of the Yorùbá of Nigeria and Mulungu of the Bantu-speaking peoples of East Africa. Ancient names express the inexplicable nature, character, essence, and attributes of a being who is an almighty, all-powerful, ever-present creator, and who is supreme in all senses of supremacy. Furthermore, the etymologies of these descriptive names divulge intrinsic and functional meanings and functional spatial locations which identify supreme beings with the nature of such locations. Both the ancient and descriptive names

¹¹ E. Babalola, 1981, *Christianity in West Africa: an Historical Analysis*, 90-95.

¹² E. Idowu. 1996. *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief* (Revised and Enlarged Ed.) Lagos: Longman. 28

of the Supreme Being, however, express an intrinsic reality of the Supreme Being.¹³

The Yorùbá use the name *Olódùmarè*, while the Ibo use the name *Chukwu*, which is made up of *Chi* and *Ukwu*. *Chi* means Source, Being or Spirit and *Ukwu* represents great, immense or un-dimensional. Similarly, the Efik use the name *Abasi Ibom*. The meaning of *Abasi* is God and *Ibom* means above. It is true that the etymology of several of the African names of God have not been analysed satisfactorily. This is basically as a result of their antiquity and also because ancient Africans have not left us with records of their theology. However, the ones that have been so far analysed reveal that the names attributed to God alone cannot be seen as only titles. These names show how the people describe the nature of God. It also shows the way Africans have experienced the acts of God. Idowu says succinctly, "Besides the names, Africa is very rich in attributes of God which show unmistakably that to them, the Deity is the living one who is the ever present, ever active and ever-acting reality in the world."¹⁴ Among the Yorùbá, three prominent names among others are used to identify God. *Olórun*, translated directly as God as used in the contemporary Yorùbá language and used conspicuously in the Yorùbá Bible. The second one is *Elédàá*, which means Creator or He who creates and *Olódùmarè* which means Almighty or the Supreme Being. Awolalu affirms Yorùbá names to express God. According to him, "from our investigations, we know and uphold that *Olórun* is the same Being as *Olódùmarè* as well as *Elédàá*."¹⁵ Of all these three names for God, the one whose etymology is not so clear and obvious is *Olódùmarè*. According to Idowu, the name *Olódùmarè* is not as fully self-explanatory as we may have been led to expect. He believes this may have been as a result of the fact that *Olódùmarè* is an ancient and unique name, whose second part's etymology has been a subject of much guesswork and debate. "By calling Him *Olódùmarè*, the Yorùbá think of Him as one who possesses superlative greatness and fullness of all excellent attributes, unique in heaven and on earth and supreme over all."¹⁶

The belief in the existence of God is a sure reality among the Yorùbá and this is clearly revealed in the religion and other aspects of existence of the people. Awolalu reiterates further that the existence of the Supreme Being is taken as a matter of course among the Yorùbá. He says that it is rare, if not impossible, to come across a Yorùbá who will doubt the existence of the Supreme Being or claim to be an atheist. If there is anyone like that, further investigation will reveal that he has been exposed to non-African cultural influences. The main thinking here, as expressed by Awolalu, is that an indigenous Yorùbá has a belief in the existence of a self-existent Being who is believed to be responsible for the creation and maintenance of heaven and earth, men and women.¹⁷ This shows that the Yorùbá have an established belief system on the existence of a Supreme Being long before the arrival of Christianity. The concept God or Jehovah made sense to a Yoruba because he already understood *Olodumare*, to an Ibo because he knew *Chukwu* or to the Efik because he already knew *Abasi Ibom*.

¹³God: African Supreme Beings Retrieved 11th December, 2016 from <http://www.encyclopedia.com/environment/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/god-african-supreme-beings>

¹⁴E. Idowu. 1973. *African traditional Religion: A Definition*. Np.: Fountain Publications. 150

¹⁵J. Awolalu. 1979. *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites*. Essex: Longman Group Limited, 9

¹⁶E. Idowu. 1973. *African traditional Religion: A Definition*, 31-35

¹⁷J. Awolalu. 1979. *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites*, 3

Christianity was/is able to grow as a result of adaptation of some relics of indigenous religious belief system that gives the indigenous religious people sense of belonging, and not a total cut off from their roots. This gave Christianity opportunity to expand through establishment of independent churches such as The Eternal Sacred Order of The Cherubim and Seraphim (C&S), Christ Apostolic Church (C.A.C), The Church of the Lord (Aladura), Celestial Church of Christ (CCC) and many more. These churches today are well spread with branches in most states in Nigeria, Africa and other continent of the world. Again, the prayer pattern of some African indigenous Churches today especially, the fire brand ones like C.A.C, Mountain of Fire and Ministries (MFM), the Church of the Lord *Aládurà*, centre on some indigenous religious beliefs. Thus, such beliefs contribute to the growth and expansion of Christianity. Beliefs in enemies and witchcraft drive a good number of people to some of the churches mentioned above where they hope and believe that Jesus will not compromise or bargain with enemies just like some *Babaláwo* will do with witches and wizards. At the same time, they believe that their prayers would be answered there.

It is also believed in some quarters that some independent and privately owned churches seek the help of indigenous religion in terms of charm preparation to attract more members. This makes it difficult in differentiating the genuine prophets from the fake ones. Such prophets could be called fake because they patronize secretly, what they condemn openly. With charms and rituals like *àwúre awórò*, *olúgbomì* and *àfòṣe* thus, they will speak, command and foretell to people's life and it will come to fulfillment almost immediately. It is believed that the current economic situation of Nigeria has led to the "calling" of some of these fake prophets, making such ministries an escape route from economic hardship. This activity is not limited to Yorubaland or Nigeria alone; rather, it occurs in other parts of Africa. Emmanuel Okogba¹⁸ of Vanguard newspaper reprinted a case of a pastor, Anthony Obo of God's Commandment Ministry who was paraded by the police for killing a baby for ritual purposes in Cross River State. The pastor denied this to be true, he claimed that the blood found in the bucket in his church was that of a goat and chicken for his baby dedication. Thus, one may wonder what kind of dedication this was. Nonetheless, there are still genuine men of God, the upsurge in the rise of fake ones makes it easy for people to generalize and conclude that prophets or men of God make use of charms or rituals. However, by their 'fruits', they shall be known and time will also reveal what such men are truly are.

The fact that African indigenous people can display their cultural and religious practices freely, at the same time, do not cut them off completely assisted the growth of Christianity in Nigeria and Africa at large. This is further seen in the areas of rituals and sacrifices. This is commonly found among African indigenous churches like C & S churches, and CCC. This practice is also established in African Traditional Religion. A very good example is *ìwẹ̀ odò* – spiritual bath in a flowing river that is common in CCC. It is a practice believed to have been influenced by *ìtẹ́fá* which is initiation rites of *omọ awo* – *Ifá* apprentice or would be *Babaláwo*¹⁹.

Another area where African indigenous religion has assisted the growth, promotion and extension of Christianity is in the area of worship. It was African indigenous churches like

¹⁸ Emmanuel Okogba, 2017, *Calabar Church Ritual, Saga; Ritual Items are Drama Costume; Blood is From Goat and Chicken*, <https://www.vanguardngr.com> retrieved on 26/10/2018.

¹⁹ S. Olaleye 2015, The Role of Ifa in the "Born Again" Syndrome as Found in Itẹ́fá – Initiation Rites, *Agowoye Journal of Languages and Literary Studies Olabisi Onabanjo University*, Vol. 6, 34.

C&S, CCC that broke away from their parent European churches that introduced and incorporated African elements like drumming, dancing, clapping, vision, trances and prophecies into Christianity worship.²⁰ Although some of these practices could be found in the Bible, the Europeans preferred a placid form of worship. The indigenous mode of worship is different and livelier as compared to the more serene European mode of singing hymns without any form of dance that a typical African may say looks like a funeral service. Today, all kinds of traditional drums like *bàtá*, *gángan*, *omele*, *ìyál'ù*, *agogo*, *ṣekèrè* etc that are associated with *Òrìṣà* before are now freely used in the churches. This has helped in attracting many who also enjoy some forms of entertainment in worship associated with such churches.

The Indigenous religion also aided the formation and establishment of some indigenous churches in Africa today particularly in Yoruba-land in Nigeria. Churches like the African church, (Bethel), the United African Methodist church (*Èlèja*), and so on was as a result of the fact that some cultural and religious practices like polygamy was not allowed in the marriage system of European churches that brought Christianity to the country²¹. Directly or indirectly, the inability to abandon some cultural and religious practices of Africa led to the formation of these churches which are still growing till today.

Memorial lectures, remembrance and honorarium that are common practices in Africa today among Christians and other religious sects are part of activities of traditional religious practices that are used in promoting Christianity today. It is an idea believed to have been copied from ancestral veneration and rites that is peculiar to African indigenous religion particularly, the celebration of *Egúngún* festival that is done annually to remember the dead but living ancestors²².

Through the establishment or association with Christianity, the new religion brought its benefits and development such as Western form of education, science and technology that paved way for modernity. On a different note, it is important to also mention a few of the negative effects of this interaction of these two religions. A central issue is the problem of confused identity which has emerged as people have neglected their euphoric *Orisa* names for names found in the Bible; these are names situated culturally in Biblical times and names that most people know little or no meaning of. Many of these euphoric names that are not changed completely have been repackaged and remodeled to suit Christianity. Such names like Ogunbiyi, Esubiyi, Esugbemi, Esusanya, Fayemi, Fasayo and so on have been changed to Jesubiyi, Oluwasanya, Oluwasayo.²³ Interestingly, some peculiar names like Ogundiwin or Esudiwin cannot undergo similar metamorphosis with the common prefix in name change- *Jesu* or *Oluwa*. Bearers of such names face the dilemma of leaving the name as it is or complete name change as they attempt to obliterate their heritage in the embrace of Christianity. Some others have even undergone complete name change, adopting such names like John, Matthew, Mark, Mary, Phoebe, Lydia and several others that even the bearers may not know what they mean. As a result of this, many families have left their background completely. This is coupled with the types of sermons some contemporary Pentecostal pastors are preaching. They see the devil or evil and even demonize everything traditional. Some even

²⁰D. Ayegboyin & S. Ishola, 1997, *African Indigenous Churches*, Lagos: Greater Heights Publication, 24.

²¹J. Ayantayo & S. Fatokun, 2012, *African Religion and Culture, A Textbook for GES 102*, Ibadan: The General Studies Programme (GSP) Unit, University of Ibadan, 73.

²²S. Abioye 2010, *Basic Text on West African Traditional Religion*, Ilorin: Ray-Hig Int. Ent. 130.

²³A. Somadhi, 2005, *1,000+ (African) Orisa Yoruba Names*, U.S.A. Ile Orunmila Communications, 13.

go to the extent of telling their congregation that their association with their extended families brings evil to them. They trace the sources of any problems that a Christian may be having to the realm of religion to discourage people from facing the reality, even if the problem is traceable to economic, social and political realities.²⁴ In a way, this notion is used as a bait to draw members to such churches, contributing also to their growth.

However, in recent years, the indigenous religion of the people is practised openly, enjoying support publicly by either Christians or Muslims like the famous *Ọsun* festival, *Agemo* festival or the *Eyo* festival just to name a few. These festivals also enjoy massive publicity and attendance locally and internationally, also enjoying sponsorship from different big companies and organisations. This shows that the indigenous religion of the people is not totally eroded.

Descartes's Methodological Skepticism and the Contributions of Indigenous Religion to Christianity in Africa

Skepticism is generally an attitude of doubt towards certain ideas or knowledge. A skeptical attitude calls to question certain beliefs or ideas, established or not. Skepticism is akin to any display of rationality, making it very easy for any rational person to display signs of skepticism. It should be pointed out at this juncture, that there is a difference between philosophical skepticism and methodological skepticism. While philosophical skepticism is an approach that calls to question the probability of certain knowledge, methodological skepticism subjects all knowledge claims to scrutiny with the primary goal of differentiating the truth from the false. The interaction of Christianity with the indigenous religion often leads to the attitude of skepticism, especially in Christian circles. This skeptical attitude may hastily lead to a display of hostility. A methodological skeptical approach to the interactions of the two religions reveals the areas in which the Indigenous religion has aided the growth of Christianity in Africa.

However, it is still possible to remain unconvinced and persist in skepticism of the roles of indigenous religion to Christianity in Africa. This is where Descartes's Methodological Skepticism, also called "methodological doubt", comes in. According to Horner and Westacott, "the most famous attempt in the history of philosophy to tackle the problem of doubt, to refute skepticism by showing that we can be absolutely certain about some things, was made by French philosopher René Descartes (1596-1650)."²⁵ Descartes's methodological skepticism is very apt as far as the analysis of the role of indigenous religion in the growth and expansion of Christianity in Africa is concerned. Methodological skepticism is a method which Descartes used in his *Meditations* to confront issues of doubt as far as certain beliefs were concerned. This was in the early seventeenth era, a period of extreme skepticism, the time when people were encouraged to challenge established authorities and belief systems. Descartes made use of a bizarre hypothesis in his method of attaining certainty on issues of knowledge. He used the quest of proving to someone that there are rotten apples in a barrel, the rotten apple here signifies a false belief. Juxtaposing Descartes's quest with the task at hand, a crucial question emerges; has the indigenous religion contributed to the growth

²⁴ C. Kumolu, 2017, *Religious Practices Destroying Nigerians*, <https://www.vanguardngr.com> retrieved 25/10/2015

²⁵ C. Horner & E. Westacott. 2000. *Thinking Through Philosophy :An Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 32

and expansion of Christianity in Africa? There has been an attempt to answer this question, in this study, which could still be enclosed with clouds of skepticism in any rational mind. Descartes method is simple;

The method of rummaging through the barrel and throwing out any rotten apples one finds has an obvious flaw: it is quite possible to miss one and, to continue the analogy, this remaining rotten apple could infest the rest. Therefore, a much better method is to empty out the barrel completely and then put back only those apples one is sure are healthy. This is how methodological doubt works. It forces me to take nothing for granted, to take a fresh look at even those beliefs that I have held for longest, or are most widely accepted, or are supported by the most respected authorities.²⁶

As we rummage through the 'barrel' of beliefs on the interactions of Christianity with indigenous religion, we will be confronted with an array of beliefs. A few of such beliefs have been discussed in this paper, for the sake of emphasis; some of them are highlighted below:

- Historical reports make it known that indigenous religion through *Ifa* ushered in Christianity and nurtured it to maturity.
- Christianity was able to grow because of ideas and practices which could be fused with the indigenous religion.
- The established belief in God, ingrained in the indigenous religion of Africans aided their understanding of the message of the gospel that the missionaries brought with them.
- Christianity was/is able to grow as a result of adaptation of some relics of indigenous religious belief system.
- It is also believed in some quarters that some churches seek the help of indigenous religion in terms of charm preparation to attract more members.
- The integration of indigenous worship; drumming, dancing, clapping, vision, trances and prophecies into Christianity worship aided its growth.
- The inability to abandon the cultural and religious practices of Africa led to the formation of some churches such as the African church, (Bethel), the united African Methodist church (*Ejéja*), which they are still growing till today.

As Descartes posits, rather than rummaging through the barrel, the better approach is to empty out the barrel and return only those that are healthy. As the Yoruba will say; "*ká dà lé, ká tun sà*", which means; let us empty them out to pick them up again. The skepticism towards the contributions of indigenous religion to the growth of Christianity should be approached with this method. Nothing should be taken for granted, prejudice, bias, pre-judgment or misconception will be destructive in this task. An objective assessment will allow a fresh look at the issues listed above and several other similar notions.

²⁶ C.Horner & E. Westacott. 2000. *Thinking Through Philosophy: An Introduction*. 32-33

Conclusion

No doubt, an objective view of the interface of the two religions discussed in this paper reveals the influences of the indigenous religion of the people on Christianity in Africa. If the purpose of an objective analysis of these interactions is to seek knowledge on the historical events that have taken place and their outcomes, then, the task is simple. However, if the purpose is different, one smeared with preconceived notions of judgment, then, the task remains complex. To such minds, no matter what is said or discussed, nothing good can be seen from such religious interface. Objectivity is necessary in order to have a truthful view at the historical events that heralded Christianity in Africa and its development over the years. A neutral and fair analysis remains crucial to appreciate some of the roles of indigenous religion in the growth and expansion of Christianity in Africa.

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