

## AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION IN MODERN AFRICA

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### **Abstract**

*This paper discusses African Traditional Religion in Modern Africa. One would have expected to see the relics of African Traditional Religion (ATR) only in history books, archives and museums with the existence of Christianity and Islam that are on mission for centuries on the continent with teeming adherents but this folk religion is resilient, has practitioners and has embraced modern forms. This background of continued dynamic existence and impactful influences is the curiosity of this paper. Some decades ago, the debate in religious studies in more forums than one was whether African Traditional Religion had a future. It was believed that its adherents were few and old and could join their ancestors without successors-in-faith. But there came an unexpected phase in the history of this religion. Today, for instance, there is a twist as youths, educated elites and those who have other types of exposure to other cultures are busy practicing African Traditional Religion. The findings of this paper reveal that ancient practices like masquerade culture, groves and festivals have been revamped, dilapidated shrines have been re-built with modern materials and the traditional medicine men have left the obscure domains for the cities. Again, some members of other faiths are open or hidden supporters of afro-indigenous religion. This paper strives to find out what enlivens this religion and the pastoral prospects of Christianity under this circumstance. The methodology employed in this work is historic-descriptive which means that these historical facts have been studied over time and presented here using analytical frameworks.*

**Keywords:** African Traditional Religion, Cultural Dynamism, African Society, Modernity, Abrahamic Faiths.

### **Introduction**

Africa is one of the continents on earth whose indigenous peoples are notoriously religious (Mbiti, 1969:1). It is a blessed continent with rich traditional religious metaphysics where every ethnic nationality has a name for God and a type of religion that is used to worship him. God is a living fact in the religious consciousness of African people. Africans of early types were able to articulate in their thought-patterns the existence of a Supreme Being ranked far beyond themselves; an idea that may have come from the experience of the amazing, imposing qualities of rocks, rivers, plantations, caves and even death. These phenomena within their environments and the experiences of ultimate concerns could have impacted some great awe and quest for meaning on their minds. One of the effects of this search for meanings in metaphysical realities and their explanations is religion. These experiences constitute the African world view and their constant consistencies in behavioural patterns make up their way of life, that is, African culture.

The Philosophy that could speak to African Traditional Religion and access its depths would be African Philosophy. Other socio-religious orientations, thought-patterns and philosophies may evaluate it with values, world views and experiences that could be totally strange to it and therefore will misunderstand it and misinterpret it. This explains why some earliest missionaries, explorers, colonialists, researchers, anthropologists, ethnographers, and writers had the erroneous conclusions that Africans were incapable of conceptualizing God. And in the same view, that African folk religion was simply suspicion and superstitious beliefs and therefore was comprehensibly and comprehensively demonic, magical, devilish, and should simply be rejected and discarded. However, from the debris of their destructions, this religion still had its

gold in the forms of positive cultural values. One begins to wonder why African Traditional Religion has continued to exist in spite of the external influences from occidental sciences, Abrahamic faiths and promptings from acculturation. Africa has its peculiar science in its crafts, not as in witchcraft, but in the instances of rain making, traditional textile industries, blacksmithing, agriculture – cropping and animal husbandry, and many more. It is not fair for anyone to think that Africa had nothing to offer other civilizations when history has abundant evidences of plagiarism by other peoples who stole the African initial products and made them theirs as if the stolen items had no African trade marks.

In this work, therefore, we shall strive to discuss African Traditional Religion in modern Africa from the perspectives of conceptualization, its resilience, adaptability, and fresh orientations.

### **African Traditional Religion (ATR)**

- **Concept**

The first idea that is curious already in the study of this religion is conceptualization; there are issues with the nomenclature: Is it African Traditional Religion or African Traditional Religions? This question arises because there could be as many versions of this religion as there are ethnic diversities on the African continent. African Traditional Religion is the indigenous religion of Africans. No matter the plurality of experiences, all the versions express the one common relationship which Africans have with the divine borne out of African cosmology. In the words of Ugwu & Ugwueye (2004:4), “Africans also have their own religion and...It is called African Traditional Religion. It is the religious beliefs and practices of the Africans.” According to Ekwunife (1990:1), ATR refers to “those institutionalized beliefs and practices of indigenous religion of Africans which are rooted in the past African religious culture, transmitted to the present votaries by successive African forebears mainly through oral traditions (myths and folktales, songs and dances, liturgies, rituals, proverbs, pithy sayings and names), sacred specialists and persons, sacred space and objects and religious work of art, a religion which is slowly but constantly updated by each generation in the light of new experiences through the dialectical process of continuities and discontinuities.” This religion was founded by Africans’ forebears. In line with this thought, Mbiti (1975:24) noted that “African religion is the product of the thinking and experiences of our fore-fathers. They formed religious ideas, they formulated religious ceremonies and rituals, they held proverbs and myths, which carried religious meanings, and they evolved laws and customs, which safeguarded the life of the individual and his community”. African Traditional Religion is the articulated religious experience of African progenitors in their quest for meaning beyond themselves and this they bequeathed to their descendants who have continued with the practice across epochs and generations.

There are debates on why African Traditional Religion should not be referred to as paganism, primitive, animism, heathenism, Fetishism, Idolatry, Juju, Ancestor Worship or such other names understood as derogatory by some philosophers, scholars and practitioners of African Traditional Religion (Ugwu & Ugwueye, 2014:12-20). In this paper, we subscribe to African Traditional Religion as its universally acceptable name.

- **Characteristics**

Can it be said that Afro-folk religion belongs to the class of religions founded on Theo-genesis’ emanations? Can its origin be said to be Theo-genic? When one studies the patterns of worship and the world view of the practitioners of ATR in the light of Judaism, one could see how they are very akin to Hebraic religious metaphysics as revealed by God and accepted by him in the Old Testament like when God said to Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac to him and other patterns of sacrifice. There are divine manifestations of presence on mountains, under trees, around rivers and bodies of waters, roads and deserts. All these areas are also important sites of divine encounter in African Traditional Religion. In this light, one would argue that African Traditional Religion is a relic of Religion revealed by God in the Old Testament, which is Judaism but then, has been overtaken in Christ. So it can be understood to enjoy Theo-genic origin from this point of view. In this case it becomes arguable whether this religion is revealed or not revealed. If it were to have Theo-genic foundation, it is a revealed religion. However, the revelation by Christ supersedes the old theophanies in this allusion because in Christ the old has passed away (2 Thessalonians 2:17) and even though in the olden times God spoke to us to our ancestors through the prophets and in various ways like

through nature but today, he speaks to us through Christ (Hebrews 1: 1-3). So the revelation-characteristic of ATR, if any, does not enjoy the equal status and classification as found in Christianity and Judaism.

In another light, the Catholic Priest and Monk, Abraham Ojefua (1979:26) wrote that African Traditional Religion is not paganism peculiar to African religion as such. He continued: "It was the religion of the world led astray by the devil. Paganism in Africa today is what remains of the universal old paganism in the whole world – that is, in those countries now known as Europe, Asia, America and so on." The position of Ojefua represents the standpoint of a Christian and he is one.

African Traditional Religion is characterized by orality. This means that it is a religion handed down by oral tradition from one generation to another, from the forebears to the present age. It has "no written literature", wrote Awolalu (1976: 275 cited in Ugwu & Ugwueye, 2004: 4) "yet, it is written everywhere for those who care to see and read. It is largely written in the people's myths and folktales, in their songs and dances, in their liturgies and shrines and in their proverbs and pithy sayings". The fact that it has no scriptures explains its orality-character. It has no sacred texts or books that contain its revelations but all its doctrines and dictates are found in the consciousness of the African minds. As succinctly put by Metuh (1991: vii): "African Religions are non-scriptural religions. There are no documentary sources handed down by tradition as authentic sources of their religious beliefs. The societies in which these religions are found are preliterate societies. The resources available to a researcher are contained in the oral traditions and the religious practices of the people." The priests and practitioners of African Traditional Religion have retentive memories from which they draw the *how, what, when* and *why* of their beliefs and practices.

African Traditional Religion is indigenously African. This characteristic explains its roots and origins to the unknown African ancestors. No singular African progenitor or personality takes the glory as its founder as one can find in the founders of other religions. The influence of this religion is so great, so deep and it is so a part and parcel of the people that it is simply understood as culture. It is believed that every African is a member and practitioner of this religion; they are born into it and so there are no missionary workers looking for converts. Metuh (1991: vii) explains that "African Religions are part and parcel of the whole fabric of African cultural life. Religious phenomena are thus closely interwoven with social, psychological and moral dimensions." One of the basic philosophical-religious assumptions is that African Religion is a critical and indispensable component of African cosmology; they are inextricably interwoven with porous demarcations between the sacred and the secular.

The violations of its customs and observances attract the wrath of those who have left the shrines but have not reached the church or those who are still in the shrines and have not gone to Church or those who are in the church only in number but are not there in the name of the Christian God. The aggressive ways this religion is enforced or defended shows how strong the belief system is in Africa.

African Traditional Religion is traditional because it is "aboriginal and fundamental thing, which is handed down from generation to generation and is still practiced by living people today. Thus the word traditional serves the purpose of distinguishing African Religion from any other religion that has been brought to Africa through missionary or Islamic propagation"(Ugwu & Ugwueye, 2004:6). The contents of African Religion are got from an African experience within the context of an African environment.

African Traditional Religion is anthropocentric. This means that it is about man. Metuh (1991:109) agrees with the scholars Benjamin Ray, Mbiti and Booth that African Religions are in fact anthropocentric. The welfare of the human person is central to African worldview: hence we can see the philosophical thoughts found in the Igbo names like: *Mmaduka aku/ego, Nwakaego, Ndu bu isi* and even *Mmadu bu chi ibe ya/Mmadu abu chi*. The idea of God in this worldview is a Supreme Being who exists as if only to care for the human person.

African Traditional Religion is one with African Moral Awareness. In order to protect man and his community, ATR fosters peace and harmony through its ethics. It has a systematic ethical codes, *Nso ani, nso al' or nso ala* depending on one's Igbo dialect, which promotes good moral behaviour in the life of the individual and of the community.

- **Basic Beliefs in ATR**

These include:

1. The universal idea of God, the Creator-the Supreme Being. This Being has different names across Africa and his existence is affirmed by all indigenous peoples of Africa.
2. The existence of spirit forces – **Chi** (personal god, deities (gods/goddesses), like the *Ani* goddess, divinities, ancestors, the evil, malevolent spirits- *ekwensu, ajo mmuo, ejo ma*).
3. Sacrifice, priesthood, prayer –the medicine men, magician, divination, sacred places: shrines, grooves. Rites and rituals (*onyishi, ozo, lolo anyi, ede, iba mmanwu*), sacred arts and artifacts, staff, emblems and symbols.
4. Feasts and festivals – Ancestor worship, new yam festival, naming ceremony, music and dance, masquerades.
5. Peace and conflict resolution through *inu iyi* (oath-taking), *igba ndu* (covenant making), priesthood institution (*attama, eze mmuo*), *umu ada, umu okpu* (women groups).
6. The African morality – *nso ani, nso al'*, or *nso ala*, sense of justice. ATR is a religion with taboo subjects and moral values.

### **Resilience and Adaptability**

The debate about the future of ATR among scholars in the bygone decades may not be relevant in the contemporary dispensation. This is because from keen observation, ATR is alive and wielding influences among practitioners some of whom go in the open while others are clandestine in their versions of practice. The robust existence of folk religion in Africa has been expressed in the concepts such as 'neo-paganism' which means that the conceived pagan religion has taken a new dimension. Paganism as derived from the Latin *Paganus* which means 'uncultured', 'primitive' and 'un-developed' as a conception of ATR by earliest writers on the subject matter or the primordial missionaries have been settled as *extra viam* (out of the way). This means that it did not actually capture adequately the truest meaning of this religion. However, this is not the main occupation of this work.

Its focus is to discuss those factors perceived as what ATR hangs on and it is enliven by them. African Traditional Religion has refused to die; it has refused to belong to the past. In fact it is not only that it is in the present but it has breathes to exist even, perhaps, in the far future because African Traditional Religion is a societal religion and it is a psychological religion. So as far as there is an African society, then there may continue to be African Traditional Religion. And in so far as man has psychological issues, then African Traditional Religion may continue to thrive. Furthermore as far as Christianity and Islam do not arrest the religious appeal of some Africans, ATR will continue to exist in Africa. Finally as long as some Muslims and Christians do not truly practice their faith but resort to ATR for some solutions, ATR will continue to thrive. However, ATR has some positive values which constitute its critical invaluable components and these could assume Christian dimensions. And that is the whole effort of inculturation theology in the making. One can also see how inculturation process is facing a lot of challenges in the Church in Africa.

African Traditional Religion has new trends. It has acquired youthful vigour and fresh energies in its young practitioners. The death of ATR as predicted some decades ago was predicated on the fewness of its thoroughly old-aged practitioners and going by their age, human sentences were passed on the veracity of their life expectancy and eventual mortality. But in a dramatic twist, some young people took over the practices, some educated elites started calling for its revival and the affluent began to finance its operations and practices. In the new experience of old issues, some Muslims and Christians practice its doctrines. And some Muslims, Christian sects and independent African Churches uphold its values in holistic or syncretism proportions.

The ATR adopts values of modern culture to advance its course in more ways than one. The shrines which hitherto were built as thatched houses and walled with bamboo sticks, palm frond and sticks, dry palm leaves as thatched structures also have been demolished and rebuilt with modern building materials. The metamorphoses progressed from thatched house and thatched walls to zinc and from mud walls to block and brick walls. In its contemporary reality, shrines of indigenous religion enjoy modern architectural designs

and new face constructs of blocks, bricks and tiles, long span zinc, cement works, paintings. These appeal to the modern minds and satisfy contemporary accreditation indices.

Another interesting discovery made by this work is that some African Christians, clergy and laity, go by the family or personal names or surnames of gods, goddesses or objects and emblems that are rooted in African Traditional Religion. Examples of such names include *Odo, Enwe, Ani, Ugwu, Ezeugwu, Arua, Idenyi, Ezema, Ngwu et cetera*. Some of these names are those of masquerades, deities, emblems and symbols which are purely of African Traditional Religion. With these names, one has the consciousness of what these represent in the indigenous religious culture of the African and thus increases its resilient value. Some decided to change their names to English translations like from *Ugwu* to Hills. This action has not contributed to solutions or to any furtherance of Christian theology but has, on the contrary contributed to dislocations from bio-social roots, cultural patterns and affirmations of African personality.

### **Fresh Orientations and Practice**

African Traditional Society has fresh orientations and practice based on the force of dynamism of the human society. These new realities have permeated the structures and infrastructures of ATR in modern Africa. We shall highlight a few examples below:

#### **Shelter styles**

The society has new trends such as shelter styles in the wake of modernity. The shrines, masquerade centres, masquerade shelters now have new looks and modern shelter styles. It has refused to cling to old shelters, raffia palm leaves and sticks, or thatched mud houses; they now have beautified looks from new types of shelter, long span sheets, block walls, painted houses and some are even upstairs, a storey building. These places have been rebuilt to be decent enough for consultations and communion with the spirit according to the dictates of modernity and the taste of modern practitioners' appraisals and calculations.

#### **Tourism, carnivals and Public holidays**

The contemporary masquerade regime and many other feasts such as new yam festival across Africa are greeted with tourism potentials and fiesta of carnivals. The civil government at various levels promotes these events and provides the needed security to indigenes and tourists. Government officers and politicians participate actively to enlarge their political profiles of relevance. The economic dimension of this new trend guarantees its potency and continuity. In many places in Africa, ancient shrines, grooves, caves dedicated to deities are becoming pilgrimage centers and tourists' sites. In the wake of events such as these revivals, the traditional priests and practitioners of this folk religion have raised their voices for public holidays in its formal, national forms. The local informal ones enforced by the traditional institutions can no longer serve their needs as the activities have assumed expansive spread. They do not understand why Muslims enjoy public holidays during *Eid-Al-Fitr, Eid el Kabir* and *Eidel Maulud* and Christians enjoy same during Christmas, Good Friday and Easter and they do not have any during their feasts and festivals.

The calls from the practitioners of African Traditional Religion to have public holidays for their feasts, festivals and pilgrimages have been more frequent recently and in some cases had the added force of peaceful demonstrations and protests. In their views, Nigeria is a secular country and therefore should not marginalize against their religion; ATR should enjoy some annual public holidays the way Christians and Muslims do on the respective occasions of their feasts and festivals. Governor Aregbesola approved a two-day public holidays, August 20-21 annually in Ekiti State for the traditional worshippers (The Nation, February 2018; Ameh Comrade Godwin, Daily Post, August 16, 2016 & Adeola Badru, September 10, 2020). However, these calls for the recognitions are not united on the dates and durations to be approved for the public holidays.

#### **Social media**

African Traditional Religion makes use of social media and that is why one sees in print media advertisements about its feasts, warnings against the violations of its sacredness, etc. It is present in the electronic media too. It has also gone to radio broadcast to spread information about its feasts, festivals, and orientations. Originally, the attendants of different shrines which are known to render services for peace and

conflict resolution would struggle to reach the defendants which were herculean tasks but today, the attendants use phone calls, video calls to invite the defendants. We have cases like *Arusi ogwugwu, adoro ero* and *ube uhun'owerre* to mention but three. Still on the social media, the music in this religion has been waxed in cassettes and CD audios and videos which preserve them and these are sold and bought – an economic dimension. The religious feasts are now celebrated as programs on Television channels, radio again kept safe in memory cards and sold to people. How can this type of religion die when it has this high rate of social adaptability? The practitioners and sponsors are seriously moving it into depths in the psyche of the Africans and in the conscious embrace of modernity.

#### **Attire and costumes, food and drinks**

Come to think about it: the masquerades of today do not go bare-footed; they wear sandals, canvass or shoes. They even wear wrist watches and can speak English. Even about what is eaten as presents or items of sacrifice to the spirits have changed in African Traditional Religion. This explains why some practitioners of this religion who do not drink palm wine which was the only wine in existence and available at its origins now drink modern wine, wine as alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks, beer, and even in some cases mineral drinks. Even the spirits, some of them do not take kola nut again, that is why in sacrifices at fault roads or along river banks, one sees mineral drinks such as fanta and coke, malt, biscuits, so the spirits now eat what is available and taken as edibles among their worshippers and do not insist on ancient original items. The new yam festival, those who cannot eat yam due to sickness like diabetes would eat other food items like ground pea or even the healthy may not eat roasted yam or pounded yam (*utara ji, nri ji*) but opt for likes of semolina stuff or indomie noodles which hitherto were unknown to the spirits. This is social adaptability.

#### **African Traditional Medicine Men**

African traditional medicine men are no longer in the bushes, places unkempt and rural river banks. They have rushed to the city centers and their premium or remuneration is no longer fowl, cock, kola or limestone but money, huge sums and if patrons, clients and pilgrims are from overseas, some pay even in hard currencies. These medicine men captured the waves of urbanization where migration is moving from the countryside and they took it as necessary to meet the teeming population in those urban areas. And they are indeed getting patronage from across age, class and adherents of other belief systems. They are not just in the town unseen and unheard, nay, they organize flamboyant trade fairs that advertise in frequent and constant jingles in electronic media. These jingles last for weeks, months and are phrased in catchy words and music according to the best global practices in mass communication. They are there too on the pages of print media with their roots, herbs, powder, concoctions and oil with time schedules and venues.

People throng to those venues. Very important to their presence in the city centers and townships is the understanding that anything fetish around the medicine can scare people away; these native doctors accessed the services and scientific approvals of regulatory agencies like NAFDAC to retain them and sustain their trust and promote their business. And they will tell you that these drugs which hitherto had neither dosage prescriptions nor the firm grip of the psyche of their creative powers now have the approval of NAFDAC. This means that the elites, scientists should come and in some instances recommend medical tests. We know that African medicine and traditional health care delivery belong to African Traditional Religion but today their balms, mixtures, concoctions, roots and herbs are even sold around the churches and mosques and the large number of buyers are members of these faiths. Therefore the situation has not changed, the fears whether fanned into flames by suspicion, superstition or peculiar African experience are still down deep in the minds of many Africans and that is why every death must have been brought about by an enemy within the nuclear or extended family, circle of friendship or associates or in the neighbourhood.

When thunder strikes or lightning remains frequent, the enemy is at work and so the protective powers against natural odds and social mishaps even when the correlation is absent with these natural causes are attributed to gods, violations in the spiritual realm and so on. Therefore charms are still made for protection even today. This informs one why some politicians in the court apart from the engagement of the services of lawyers go to the electoral tribunals with charms or even engage the real active presence of the medicine men in the court doing some funny manipulations to make the judges stammer or thwart judgments to their

favour. In this example one can see the extent they believe in this religion. Sometimes during road accidents, to evacuate the driver and passengers, charms had been discovered; may be charms for safe journey assurance and smooth trip but it ended that way. Again, many who have been caught in the very act of robbery, banditry, insurgency and extreme violence, kidnapping, cattle rustling and militancy, have been found to go on operations with charms. Those who were projecting the establishment of Islamic caliphate were searched and their abode ransacked by security operatives, no Quran was found but charms and many instruments for active sexual expressions were found (Premium Times Newspaper, September 8, 2015 cited in Ele, 2019 p.27). In the same vein, Jacob Zenn (2015:1) wrote: "Ironically, despite Boko Haram's Salafi proclamations, many of its foot soldiers reportedly use drugs, charms and amulets and have low levels of religious education." These were contrary to Islam but are condoned in ATR. So one can now see the connection or the contradiction depending on one's perspective how they want to use ATR to advance Islam.

### **Economic viability**

The masquerades on the road beg for money and make daily bread from the road users. The producers of masquerade attires, costumes and goods connected to ATR do not want the collapse of their economic fortunes and empire. The Oath taking and covenant making exercises in shrines yield lot money for the owners or custodians of those places on steady basis as there are conflict escalations and too many a party believe that they can get speedy trial and justice in shrines.

How can African Traditional Religion die when it has huge patrons from other religions such as Islam and Christianity? It is also good to note that we now have herbal trade fair that lasts for weeks and months in big cities across Africa. In the ancient times, one is called to the role of medicine men (**dibia afa, dibia aja**) by gods ascertained through the interpretation of strange phenomena, divination or by inheritance from one's family. Today, traditional medicine is learnt as a commercial enterprise. It has economic viability and serves as a means of livelihood.

### **Government's Approval**

It is good to remark that African Traditional Religion is aware of the power which the civil government has, it does not rely on the approval of traditional institutions only, it goes on to take the certificates and approval of government. This is why they inform the public that these herbs has, in the case of Nigeria, NAFDAC approval and they are moving for even traditional medicine to have faculties and departments in tertiary institutions. So it became very clever to expunge whatever could be said to be dirty, archaic, and made them beautiful. This is how African Traditional Religious values have moved on in the society that formed it in the first place by its forebears and adapted to modern forms.

### **Modern upgrades**

African Traditional Religion adapts its symbols to the products of petro-chemical industries. In shrines today one sees plastic seats and for sacrifices one sees plastic baby toys that are used thus making room for modern upgrades. It is no longer the old wooden seats, palm wine, camwood powder, *odo* and calabash clay/chalk (*nzu*) but mineral drinks, perfumes, lip stick, modern powder and such other items in vogue in the modern times. These are used now in traditional religious practices instead of the old ones in more cases than one.

### **Psychological dimension**

One of the origins of African Traditional Religion is fear. Man fears the unknown, he fears powers beyond himself, and he is ready to surrender to these powers provided that he lives on. One can ask to which extent those fears that initiated this religion in the first place have gone? The fears are still with man and his mind. The fear of barrenness and possible discontinuity in the family line which informs the critical aspect of every Morning Prayer in African Traditional Society that family's compound would not grow weed which means the blessings of procreation and human presence in the family. And you observe that the African family is family of the dead linked with the living in the present and must continue into the future in the yet unborn. So sacrifices are still offered today to ancient shrines that are believed to be the cause of fertility in families. At some other times the spirit of re-incarnation in the fantasies of *ogbanje* syndrome are sacrificed to even

secretly. You may not see shrines in the compounds and premises of some beautiful modern houses but that does not mean that the relics are not in the minds of some of the occupants.

African Traditional Religion permeates the religious doctrines of some African Churches in many ways in order to fight fear. The traditional way of finding out whether the spirits are happy or angry with someone wears a new face today. So African Traditional Religion has taken a new look, a new style, a new dimension namely: there is now divination through prophets and prophetesses, founders and pastors, this is a permeation and influence of African Traditional Religion in new religious expressions mainly in the contexts of Independent African Churches. It is a well-known fact with overwhelming evidences that some pastors recommend that their followers to go and appease their forefathers using the African Traditional Religious forms. One wonders at the level of syncretism that is found in the non-folk religions and indigenous religious partnership.

African Traditional Religion has continued with its grips as it influences the mental frameworks and conscious dispositions of Christians and Muslims in Africa. As far as something is in one's mind and that mind in which it occupies is not yet dead, then mental concept is alive.

You see a new trend in the prayers in the families which will begin or end with charm excavations, spraying of salt or any liquid from the pastor to ward off witches, wizards, and wicked persons, machinations that lead to untimely death, retrogression and diseases. These are drawn from ancient formulae of African Traditional Religion.

### **New promotions**

Another factor that promotes the survival of ATR is the infidelity of some Christians and Muslims to their respective faiths. When people projected that ATR would die, they saw the practitioners as a generation that was going without successors-in-faith but in a sudden twist the youths became the protectors and practitioners of this faith. The elites, the wealthy, and the exposed, even those in diasporas, come back at the various instances of this religion to grace the occasions of feasts, festivals, divinations and sacrifices. If the youths have been described as the 'owners' of tomorrow and ATR is active, alive and functioning in their hearts, minds and actions, what it means is that this religion will thrive in future counting from this generation. Many of these new promoters of ATR, unfortunately, have affiliations to either Christianity or Islam.

### **Peace and Conflict Resolution**

Some people engage in oath taking and covenant making before shrines and idols appealing to their authorities as they resolve disputes or find the paths to peace. There is a common belief that the Christian God is very merciful and gives sinners time to repent but the gods of ATR mete out punishment which include sickness, afflictions or death to offenders and defaulters instantly. In modern Africa, many troop to these shrines to activate their protection and invite them to witness to agreements and resolutions. Some have even called on the government to swear-in politicians into offices by these idols and not with the Quran or Bible to ensure that they respect the code of office or die. The shrines are not in the constitutional provisions of nations for such a function but politicians should in conscience and obedience to God serve Africans with love and sincerity.

### **Links to Urbanization**

There are links to urbanization. The *inyama* cults have left the villages to the urban areas. You see the *inyama* women and the men clothed in red or sometimes white exhibiting their traditional practices in the cities; they live in cities or become available in such places in order to render services to their clients. Masquerades (*Akatakpa, oriokpa, odo, et cetera*) have left the rural paths and village squares to the cities and major roads. The masquerade cults that practice in urban areas have shown great violations of human freedoms in many examples. (Ele, 2008: 86-90). The rural-urban drift has pre-disposed the practitioners of ATR to find their way to developed parts of Africa to practice their faith. This phenomenon is common that one sees connections with economic viability found in cities or thirst for relevance among the populations found in urban areas in modern Africa. In some areas, some developmental projects were designed to



accommodate the spaces of idols and shrines or abandoned entirely if these structures and infrastructures would destroy those spaces. This tells you the much premium placed on this religion in some communities across Africa.

### **Conclusion**

In face of this robust dynamics and resilience of ATR in modern Africa, what are the prospects of Christianity on the African continent, one may ask? The answer is not far-fetched: the prospects of Christianity in Africa are huge. However, Christians must be truly Christian and can still truly maintain African identity as a people without becoming practitioners of African Traditional Religion. Christian Theology has to necessarily offer solutions to issues in African cosmology that attract Africans to the old faith of their ancestors. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is mightily potent that Africans can advance to the peak of civilization and gain salvation by it. African Traditional Religion and Culture are positive preparations for the reception of the gospel of Christ (*Praeparatio Evangelica*) and not its equal or substitute. Understood from this perspective, one sees the need for proper catechesis, new evangelization, inculturation process, inter-religious dialogue and authentic Christian witness. African Traditional Religion has some positive cultural values which are intrinsically and extrinsically good and do not violate the sacred values of the gospel. These aspects like sacredness of human life should be respected by everyone no matter the region or religion.

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