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# Christianity and the Secularization of Africa

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Christian missionaries to Africa in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, believing that traditional African religions were demonic, sought to de-spiritualize the African space of its spiritual resources and re-sacralize it through Christian spirituality. According to scholars of secularization in Africa, including Herman Paul, Abel Ngarsouledé, Dick Seed, and Benno van den Toren, the unintended consequence of the missionaries' approach was the gradual secularization of African communities. Today, ironically, the process of secularization even extends to Christianity itself, which seems to be reaping a secular harvest from the very seeds missionaries sowed. This paper will briefly discuss secularization theory, review the arguments of Toren, Paul, Ngarsouledé, and Seed on secularization in Africa, and conclude with an analysis of the implications of secularization in Africa.

## Conceptualizing Secularization

At this point readers might well be scratching their heads. How can Africa be considered a secular continent? Isn't it the most religious region of the world? Might it not also be said that secularization is not even an African concept but a term imported from the West? Isn't it likely, therefore, that secularization in Africa will have distinctive features to the extent that one should not even speak of African secularization?

The term secularism has continued to stimulate controversies and conflict in both global and local contexts just as its meanings have continued to evolve. Peter Beyer, for instance, views secularization in terms of "de-institutionalisation of churched religion."[1] According to him, secularization can be regarded as a differentiation between the religious and non-religious and a "decline of individual religious consciousness and performance of religion."[2] Although it is common in the West to talk about decline in religious demography, it is not so when individual commitment is measured. In such situations, it becomes clear that there is a shift from "believing and belonging" to "believing without belonging" and finally to "belonging without believing."[3]

Tariq Modood says that ideally secularism is a total separation between the religious and the political so that they do not interference in each other's activities. This is a popular view that Modood puts succinctly: "non-domination of political authority by religious authority."[4] Concentrating on Western Europe, Modood observes that post-secularist literature continues to

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[1] Peter Beyer, "Socially Engaged Religion in a Post-Westphalian Global Context: Remolding the Secular//Religious Distinction," *Sociology of Religion*, 73:2 (Summer 2012): 109-129, 119.

[2] Beyer, 119.

[3] Beyer, 120.

[4] Tariq Modood, "Is there a Crisis of Secularism in Western Europe?" *Sociology of Religion*, 73:2 (Summer 2012):130-149, 130.

emphasize that secularism has lost its grip on Western society and is now waning; moreover, the growing de-secularization across the globe testifies to the validity of post-secular arguments.[5] Clearly, he writes, "religion has [not] disappeared or is about to, but for many, it has become more in the form of 'belief without belonging.'"[6] This state of religion in Western Europe, Modood explains, is "highly compatible with political secularism if not scientism or other rationalistic philosophies. Whether the decline of traditional religion is being replaced by no religion or new ways of being religious or spiritual, neither is creating a challenge to political secularism."[7] Hence, Modood prefers to speak of a post-secular Western Europe.

Bigger questions are raised here. Though many scholars speak of secularization in Africa, when did it start and why is Africa still in the era of secularization when Western Europe has moved on to a post-secular period? These questions are critical because Africa has been described as the most religious continent in the world. The reports of a WIN/Gallup International survey in 2015 show that more than eight out of ten people in Africa confess to being religious.[8] How then can Africa be considered as secular when there seems to be no diminishment of religiosity on the continent? While the West and America are talking about resurgence, re-sacralization, re-institutionalization, re-churching, and desecularization, Africa is still simply described as religious.

Jonathan Fox sees secularism from the political dimension. He argues that secularism could be absolute or near-absolute depending on the constitution of the state in question. He acknowledges the fact that separationism – the principle of separation of church and state – is central to the doctrine of secularism in political and religious discourse. Fox says that separationism at

> its most basic level, constitutes a state neutrality toward religion where the state, at least officially, gives preference to no particular religion but does not restrict the presence of religion in the public sphere; in contrast the secularist–laicist model specifically declares that not only does the state not support any religion, it also restricts the presence of religion in the public sphere. These restrictions can include restrictions on public religious activities and on religious institutions.[9]

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[5] Modood, 131.

[6] Modood, 132.

[7] Modood, 132-133.

[8] See http://m.mgafrica.com/article/2015-04-13-no-surprises-hereafrica-is-the-most-religious-continent-but-who-isnt-is accessed 19th July, 2016; See also Richard Allen Greene, "Africans among World's most religious people, study finds" http://edition.cnn.com/2010-WORLD/africa//04//15/africa.religion/ accessed 19th July, 2016.

[9] Jonathan Fox, "Separation of Religion and State and Secularism in Theory and in Practice," *Religion, State and Society*, 39:4 (2011): 384-401, 385.

Fox's thesis is particularly relevant to Nigeria, where there is currently much controversy about the religious status of the country in academia. While many Christians believe that Nigeria is a secular country, most Muslims maintain that Nigeria it is a multi-religious state. Both sides of the divide have recourse to the constitution to back up their positions. Christians, both in academia and elsewhere, observe that the constitution provides that no religion should be adopted by the state; hence the nation *de jure* is a secular state.  For Muslims, however, Nigeria is best seen as a multi-religious state because secularism suggests the absence of God. In fact, a constitution that recognizes and provides for *sharia* courts up to the appellate level cannot be said to be secular; or it may be a special kind of secularity. Unexpressed in this argument is the reality that Nigeria is tilting towards becoming an Islamic state. While debatable in theory, it nonetheless is a demonstrable fact at both governmental and personal levels.[10] As Fox observes, the wording of a constitution is not always operationalized since at the federal level the constitution may seem to be observed but the case may actually be different at both state and local government levels. According to him, "even when national governments respect their constitutions, local governments often do not. For example, Nigeria's 1999 constitution bans both national and local governments from adopting 'any religion as [the] state religion,' but from 2000 many of Nigeria's Muslim-majority states began adopting aspects of *sharia* (Muslim religious) law as state law."[11]

The bone of contention here is the meaning of secularity.  The Christians believe that being secular does not necessarily mean being godless or the absence of private spirituality. For them religion and state are separate but can intervene in each other's spheres for the purpose of national development. Muslims, in contrast, believe that being secular is to eject God from the realm of human affairs, which is preposterous to Muslims. For them the state and religion do not necessarily have to be separated; in fact, the state, according to some, should be controlled by religious laws. Finally, from the perspective of a Western scholar, Charles Taylor argues that religion should be removed from the public space,[12] and Jan Weiland argues that the thrust of secularization is the complete obliteration of "the triune God."[13] The clear implication of this position is that secularization is purposefully against Christianity.

Another level of debate on secularism has to do with the relationship or interaction between Christianity and African Traditional Religion or what some scholars are now simply referring to as African Religion or AFREL.[14] African Religion has had its own position on the status of

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[10] Benson O. Igboin, "'The President of Nigeria has no final say': Sharia law Controversies and Implications for Nigeria," *Politics and Religion*, 8/2 (Autumn 2014): 265-290.

[11] Fox, 395.

[12] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 424.

[13] Cited in Ngarsouledé, 89.

[14] Ade P. Dopamu is a proponent of this approach. See Ade P. Dopamu, "African Religion (Afrel) and National Security in Yoruba Perspective," M. A. Folorunsho, et al. eds. *Religion and National Security*, Ijebu—Ode: Alamek Press Ltd, 2006; Ade Dopamu, "The Yoruba Religious System," *Africa Update*, 6/3 (Summer 1999) available at http://web.ccsu.edu/afstudy/supdt99.htm see also Akiti G. Alamu, "Exploring Indigenous Religious Tenets for Democratic Sustainability in Contemporary Nigerian Society," Munyaradzi Mawere and Tendai R. Mwanaka,

secularity on the continent. From this perspective, religious space is composite as both the sacred and profane are within the control of God. The ancestors played key roles in maintaining the harmony of the space, which is occupied by both animate and inanimate beings. But the concept did not go unchallenged by Christians who condemned and even demonized many religious practices in Africa in the process of evangelization. Consequently, Christianity has not been able to fully penetrate the African consciousness or root out the traditional African beliefs that it abhorred.  More importantly, as Christianity struggled for dominance in Africa, Christians learned that their religion was more superficial, materialistic, and secular than they had thought possible.  To be sure, Christians thought that they had a more deeply spiritual religion than the African Religion that they encountered, but the modern resurgence of African Religion and its syncretism with Christianity starkly demonstrates that Christians may not have succeeded as much as they had imaged.

**Scholars of Secularization**
A number of recent scholars have studied the gradual secularization of African communities that resulted from Africa's encounter with the West, especially Western missionaries.  This article will examine the thought of four of them: Herman Paul, Abel Ngarsouledé, Dick Seed, and Benno van den Toren.

Herman Paul believes that the concept of secularization was forced upon Africa as a result of its interaction with the West. He recalls that when the Roman Catholic Secretariat published the proceedings of a conference on "Secularisation in Africa" in 1973, a time when secularization theory was already rife in the West, almost all discussions in that conference were Western-based. This suggests that secularization might not have been an issue in Africa then. The conversation included such themes as religious belonging, church attendance, and church membership. It was these Western paradigms that were used as yardsticks to measure Christianity and secularization in Africa. Yet even today these paradigms cannot be used to adequately discuss secularization in most African countries as they still can be in the West. For instance, while church attendance is dwindling in the West, the proliferation of well-attended churches in Africa does not alleviate fears of a deeper secularization.  In other words, it is counterproductive to apply the same conceptual understandings and measuring tools for secularization in the West as in Africa.

It is important to note that predictions of secularization in the West have proven to be overstated.  Paul argues that among Western academics secularization "has fallen in disgrace"[15] because the predictions of such secular prophets as Peter Berger, Harvey Cox and others have fallen ridiculously short.  Though they argued that the number of Christians in the twenty-first century would be so insignificant that they would not be able to resist a global secular campaign,

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*Democracy, Good Governance and Development in Africa*, Bamenda: Langa Research & Publishing Common Initiative Group, 2015, 215.

[15] Herman Paul, "Secularization in Africa: A Research Desideratum," *Cairo Journal of Theology*, 2 (2015): 67-75, 69; http://journal.etsc.org.

the reality has been a religious resurgence of global proportion, and today scholars speak of a post-secular West.

Paul observes that a different set of questions should be applied to the West and Africa when addressing the issue of secularization. According to his analysis, the West has much to learn and appropriate from Africa in re-sacralizing Christianity in the West and escaping from the consequences of the "eschatology of decline."[16] As for Africa, Paul draws attention to the secularizing contents of Christian practice on the continent. Rather than focus on the spiritual, many of these practices suggest a here-and-now interest, which can be described as "eschatopraxis" – that is, rehearsing the heavenly future in the present.[17]

Abel Ngarsouledé's sociological and theological insights into secularization in Africa are a good place to start to appreciate the definitional possibilities of secularization. For him, the core appeal of secularism in the West is that rationalism has taken over the explanatory place in society that was traditionally reserved for religion. Now almost everything can be explained rationally or naturalistically without recourse to religion. This has led to the abandonment of religious belief and a decrease in the influence that religion wields in the public square. But, according to Ngarsouledé, such a definitional stricture cannot be sustained as secularization "is both a process and an outcome."[18] He posits that secularization is "the process by which a society transitions from a close identification of religion and the state to one of near total separation."[19]

Ngarsouledé argues that Africa as a whole is as secularized as Europe. He hinges this assertion on the features of secularization observable in both continents, which include disenchantment, desacralization of power, deliberate emancipation from religion, acceptance of secularity, social transformation, decline of religion, rationalization, pluralization, privatization, atomization, and more. What all these aspects of secularization have in common is the rejection or abandonment of religion in human affairs. As God and religion are demythologized and demystified, he explains, they become at best only one part of the human rational enterprise. However, as interesting as Ngarsouledé insights may be, it is difficult to ascertain whether they are all applicable in Africa. In fact, as he himself recognizes, "Kenya is the only African country that shares with the West a decline of religion. In addition to what is shared by both continents, the re-enchantment and alternation of beliefs appear to be unique aspects of secularization in sub-Saharan Africa."[20]

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[16] Paul, 71.

[17] Ted Peters, *God – The World's Future: Systematic Theology for a New Era* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000).

[18] Ngarsouledé, 89.

[19] Ngarsouledé, 89.

[20] Ngarsouledé, 92.

The problem here is that Kenya cannot be used in a sweeping way as a representative of the whole of the continent. Not only does Kenya have a more sizable European population than most African countries, its Christians tend to be highly elitist. The social status or class differentiation that Kenyan Christians introduced into the church inexorably discouraged the masses from church attendance. Thus Christianity in Kenya is regarded as a privileged faith. In reality, church attendance by the affluent is not primarily for spiritual self-development but for self-justification as congregants are treated to sermons propounding an "economic rationalism" that ultimately favors them. Consequently, youth decide to patronize spaces that Christians ordinarily demonize such as clubs, cinemas, discos, and similar venues.[21] This has certainly helped to foster Kenya's religious decline, but extrapolating from Kenya's growing secularity to the whole of Africa would be mistaken.

Ngarsouledé explains the implications of secularization in Africa to include the absence, silence, impotence, indifference, or injustice of God. These thoughts are echoed by Kenya's intellectuals, students, and business persons. According to Ngarsouledé, the theological consequences of secularization in Africa as in Europe are critical to the Christian faith. Whether or not intellectuals are caught between rationalism and tradition, several studies have shown that those whose commitment to Christianity has been lost in the labyrinth of life often have recourse to African Religion.[22] In such cases, Christianity's loss is pluralism's gain.  As a Christian, Ngarsouledé is seeking ways to re-mystify Christianity in face of the trend toward secularization in Africa. This can be achieved, he believes, through the development of a more holistic theology, one that embraces our entire humanity.

Dick Seed looks at the problem from a different perspective.  The question he asks is how Africans, who have been described as "incurably" and "notoriously" religious, can now be regarded as secular, as people without God? This paradox may be more apparent than real as the description of Africans as notoriously religious is a matter of debate.[23] Even though this is not the place to pursue the various threads of this debate, it is important to note that it is an exaggeration to assert that all Africans are incurably religious. Be that as it may, it is also plausible, as Seed argues, that most Africans are indeed religious. The level of their religiosity may be arguable but the fact that religion plays critical roles in the lives of most of them can be safely assumed.

Seed argues that the communal and cosmic structure of traditional African religion provides a sound philosophical template to discuss its religiosity. The symbiotic relationship between the mundane and the sacred, the physical and the spiritual, and the roles that ancestors play in it give a clear impression of a religionized space. According to him, in Africa "existence is viewed in terms of an integrated and indivisible whole. All human beings and nature are animated by a

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[21] Jan Platvoet & Henk van Rinsum, "Is Africa Incurably Religious?" *Exchange* (January 2003): 21 DOI: 10.1163/157254303X00190
[22] Ngarsouledé, 97.
[23] Platvoet and Van Rinsum, 21.

basic 'vital force.' Human beings and nature are bound together in a symbiotic relationship. This relationship extends to the spiritual world."[24] In this composite relationship, the ancestors mediate between the physical and the supersensible world. This suggests, therefore, that there is a thin line between "the sacred and the secular."[25]

Seed contends that it is difficult to view traditional Africa as secular. The elements of secularization observable in Africa today can be traced to modernization, globalization, and technology; and to a large extent they have been mediated to Africans through the educational system bequeathed by the West that is humanist in origin, orientation, and content. Seed argues that John Dewey played a significant role in developing this secularized or humanist educational system, a system that colonized Africans "innocuously" imbibed. The inability of Africans to reverse or reject this secularization and establish an educational system based on their own cultural and religious thinking and context is easily understood by their awe of the West's intellectual and technological prowess. In addition, Western aid was largely tied to secular philosophy or demands, which once accepted fostered the acceptance of secular ideologies.[26]

Finally, Benno van den Toren challenges the religious notoriety and incurability thesis from the perspective of African neo-Pentecostalism, which seems to have assumed the face of African religiosity. While agreeing that modernity may not necessarily lead to secularization as the growth of African neo-Pentecostalism critically shows, he posits that the relationship between neo-Pentecostalism and secularization is more intricate than many have thought. The role of African neo-Pentecostalism is ambivalent in the sense that while, on the one hand, it may seem to challenge secularization, on the other hand, it clearly fosters it. Put differently, African neo-Pentecostalism can be both a cure to secularization and vulnerable to it.[27]
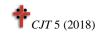
Toren advances a number of reasons to support his position. He notes that even though there may not be "overt atheism, agnosticism or, more generally, the erosion of belief in the supernatural"[28] in Africa, there is a growing de-sacralization of the world. Because of this, the sacrality that defined the traditional African cosmos has been replaced by a so-called Christian worldview. Consequently, for most Africans the cosmos is now less sacred and political powers have lost their sacrality because they were once believed to have been derived from the supernatural. This spirals into belief in a pluralization of powers and values that are in contention. Consequently, individual religious commitment has faltered as non-religious explanations of life are available as never before. Unfortunately, neo-Pentecostalism has not met this challenge as it is often presented as a means to meet worldly needs rather than deeply

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[24] Dick Seed, "Western Secularism, African Worldviews, and the Church," *Cairo Journal of Theology*, 2 (2015): 76-87, 78; http://journal.etsc.org
[25] Seed, 79.
[26] Seed, 77.
[27]Benno van den Toren, "African Neo-Pentecostalism in the face of Secularization: Problems and Possibilities," *Cairo Journal of Theology*, 2 (2015): 103-120, 104; http://journal.etsc.org
[28] Toren, 105.

spiritual yearnings.

These four authors share the belief that Christianity is a victim of secularization in Africa, and they argue that re-mystifying Christianity in Africa would help global Christianity to recover its lost spirituality. Unfortunately, they are all silent about the ways in which Christianity should strive to re-mystify the African religious space. They have also failed to establish that there is something that can be called African secularization. Instead they argue that there is secularization in Africa. While I agree that Christianity is a victim of secularization, I shall demonstrate further, as Toren did, that Christianity played a critical role in secularizing the African religious space.

## The Demonization of African Religious Space and its Implications

It is not necessary to review how the many Christian missionaries, Western anthropologists, and colonialists demonized Africa and Africans. Let three examples suffice. First, C. P. Groves described Africa as the "Dark Continent," a term resonant through many decades.[29] Second, the Oxford historian Trevor-Roper said that Africa had no history that was worth teaching: "Perhaps in the future there would be some African history to teach. But at the present there is none; there is only the history of Europeans in Africa. The rest is darkness, and darkness is not the subject of history."[30] As if these derogatory remarks were not enough, Antonio de Oliveira Salazar, who was the leader of the Fascist regime of Estado Novo, said, "Africa does not exist."[31] Salazar's racist disposition was so obvious that the Portuguese would not agree to negotiate with African leaders. He regarded them as non-humans, and the Portuguese exploited Africa for all it was worth. Though such attitudes have been vigorously challenged, they do not die easily – least of all in law as by the "stroke of a pen." Curtis Keim, for instance, has shown how the erroneous beliefs about Africa continue to be entrenched in the United States by being propagated through various media and readily received by a willing audience.[32]

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[29] See C. M. Ezekwugo, *Philosophical Concepts* (Enugu: Agatha Series Publishers Limited, 1992), 257.

[30] H. Trevor-Roper, Rise of Christian Europe (London: Thames and Hudson, 1964), 9.

[31] See Amilcar Cabral, National Liberation and Culture. Occasional Paper No 57 Syracuse: Maxwell Graduate School, 1970, 138- l54, and James R. Bell, "Africa Does Exist: Amilcar Cabral at War," https://jrbml.wordpress.com/2015/06/24/africa-does-exist-amilcar-cabral-at-war/ accessed 19th May, 2017; Benson O. Igboin, "Afrocentrism: Recalling the Will of the Past for the Future," *Cameron Journal of Commonwealth Studies*, 3/2 (2016): 44-60.

[32] Curtis Keim, *Mistaking Africa: Curiosities and Inventions of the American Mind*, 3rd ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 2014).

Bolaji Idowu,[33] among others, has systematically refuted erroneous labels and stereotypes, but leading African theologians and philosophers have often and rightly been accused of using Western paradigms to defend African religious beliefs and practices, while also forging some convergences between Christianity and African Religion.[34] Such terms as primitive, savage, native, paganism, heathenism, idolatry, fetishism, and animism, which were used to describe Africa, did not originate from Africa. They were marshaled by Westerners to derogate African religion, culture, and cosmic space. In effect, they were terms utilized to destroy African Religion. The Africans were made to believe that their beliefs were not supernatural because a truly supernatural religion − Christianity − had come to relieve them of their false religious yokes.[35]

The implications of these ideas for the secularization of African can be summed up in seven points.
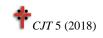
First, Western Christians, by condemning the religious practices of African Religion, inexorably introduced a secular language. Earlier missionaries introduced their languages, especially English and French, whose words and phrases do not all have correspondences in African languages. In attempting to translate ideas into local languages, meanings were often either corrupted or, when they did not fit into African context, entirely new meanings were given. Since the missionaries believed that African languages derogated their religious beliefs, only a few were interested in learning them. This introduced otherness and dualism, which were strange to the African composite cosmos. But the import here is that half-understood foreign words superimposed on African languages tended to desacralize African space for both Christians and adherents of African Religion. Even today, most Pentecostals in Africa have

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[33] E. Bolaji Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition* (London: SCM Press, 1973), chapter four.

[34] Toyin Falola, *The Humanities in Africa: Knowledge Production, Universities, and the Transformation of Society* (Austin, Texas: Pan-African University Press, 2016), 266 268; John A. I. Bewaji, *Narratives of Struggle: The Philosophy and Politics of Development* (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2012).

[35] Yet there is a clear connection between traditional African spirituality and certain aspects of Christian spirituality, especially Pentecostalism. As Toren argues, African neo-Pentecostalism has steadily invoked the traditional African religious resources as its basis for flourishing. African neo-Pentecostalism holds the belief that African space is highly spiritual; in fact, there are very many malignant spiritual forces that human beings have to contend with. "Neo-Pentecostals take the power of amulets and fetishes with utter seriousness" and consequently reject them "but also provide alternatives in the forms of anointing oil, blessed water, calendars, or handkerchiefs" (see Toren, 113). It is this form of "neo-belief'" (which is a syncretism of African Religion and Christianity) characterized by neo-Pentecostalism that leads to militarization of prayer (see Benson O. Igboin and Babatunde Adedibu, "'Power Must Change Hands' in Nigeria: The Militarisation of Prayer and the Quest for Better Life" [forthcoming]). In this scenario, almost everything African has to go through the process of exorcism or sanctification in order to make them beneficial and safe for human consumption (see Lydia Boyd, *Preaching Prevention: Born-Again Christianity and the Moral Politics of AIDS in Uganda* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2015), 123.) This is called deliverance prayer. "Deliverance prayer is different from other forms of prayer and spiritual reflection in that it is specifically intended as a mode of identifying the influence of evil in one's life and providing the means to "deliver" one from it." (See Boyd, 117.)

abandoned African languages, preferring foreign ones. In their bid to keep their audiences awake by stimulating their emotions, they employ crass expressions. For instance, it is not infrequent to hear pastors say: "God will *embarrass* you with blessings," "God has rejected your kwashiorkor halleluiah," "your halleluiah is not born again," "this day is dancesco and praisesco to the Lord," etc., thus secularizing God himself in the process.[36]

Anyone versed in African languages would appreciate the deep spiritual resources that could have enriched Christianity if missionaries and African Pentecostals had fully accepted and utilized them. In fact, when the gospel is preached in African languages, Africans come to appreciate and understand it more deeply than when it is presented in English. But the demonization of African languages also meant in the long run the secularization of Christianity itself. Keim puts it succinctly: "anyone who wants to study Africa in depth needs to learn African languages, because language is the major key to understanding how people mentally organize the world around them."[37]

Second, in attempting to demonstrate superior power, Christians have often desecrated sacred spaces such as rivers, forests, and totems. For example, I grew up knowing that there were sacred forests and rivers in my hometown. As late as the 1980s, Pentecostal youth who believed that they had been empowered by the Holy Ghost went wild, killing pythons and fish, and felling trees held sacred by the people. They vehemently preached that there were no powers in those objects and that they were made to be conquered. Although they did not die as many believed they would, the effects of unrestricted deforestation and desacralization of the rivers are being borne by all today. It is ironic, therefore, that many of these zealous youth have grown up to preach about greening the environment. Since Christianity presented the environment as a space to be conquered, exploited, and desacralized, Christians must now struggle to come to terms with the effects of avid urbanization.

Third, the fulcrum of the family and its values were secularized by Christianity. As Boyd observes, traditional African homes that formerly were strictly private were brought into the public sphere. The moral authority of the home was challenged and reformed in accordance with Christian belief. Consequently, homes were divested of their sacredness, a practice many believe introduced or escalated the rate of divorce and separation of spouses.[38] "A prominent group of traditionalists," Boyd explains, "argued that these relationships were necessary for morally sound families and marriages, and that to do away with the bridewealth ceremonies that emphasized such ties (a move encouraged by Western missionaries) posed a threat to social stability during a period of upheaval and change."[39] Boyd further observes that "the church's foremost concern

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[36] But in critical moments they can resort to code-switching. See Benson O. Igboin, "An Analysis of Code-switching in Christian Text and Context" (forthcoming).

[37] Keim, 4.

[38] Simon O. Ehiabhi, "The Impact of Colonial Rule on Uromi Political and Social Institutions," Unpublished PhD Thesis submitted to the Department of History and International Studies, University of Benin, Nigeria, 2012.

[39] Boyd, 57-58.

seemed to center on Ugandan marriage" in order to entrench Christian practices, thus removing African customary practices.[40]

> For both the church and the colonial state, marriage was understood to be at the center of the creation of a modern civil society; as an institution, a monogamous state-sanctioned marriage emphasized ideas about the obligations and rights of citizenship and the behaviors associated with democratic free will. The church recognized marriages that had been sealed not by bridewealth exchange but by an oath of consent, the assertion ("I do") by two individual parties that stated their intent to marry. Christian and state-sanctioned marriage introduced new ways of thinking of the self – as rights-bearing and autonomous – as well as new ways of thinking of one's relationships with others. People were taught to consider marriage a union between two "consenting" individuals rather than a relationship that joined two extended families and organized a broader set of kin-based relationships and obligations.[41]

Fourth, the communal system of living was secularized by Christianity. Communal solidarity was de-emphasized and replaced by an atomized individualism that strains relationships. Since salvation is personal, communal effort and cooperation came under attack. This is why no matter how the church tries to create a community within itself, it has not succeeded in building an organic one as strong as the traditional one once was because the people still have recourse to their relatives outside the church. Moreover, Pentecostals continue to demonize such communal affiliations outside the church community. Its replication within the church has been problematic because the rules and love that guide relationships are not as strictly observed inside as they were outside. For instance, any Tom, Dick, or Harry can profess to belong to a church community, and free entry to the church community has resulted in what some Pentecostal preachers refer to as "sinning Christians."[42] Finally, by replacing African communalism with individualism, Christianity promoted a materialistic cosmos in which wealth has become the measure of spirituality. This in turn has created a cultural environment in which the Prosperity Gospel can thrive. An albatross around the neck of Christian spirituality in Africa, the Prosperity Gospel is nonetheless promoted or tacitly accepted by many churches, and any church that rejects it risks losing its members to more accommodating competitors.

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[40] Boyd, 61.

[41] Boyd, 62.

[42] Pastor William F. Kumuyi of the Deeper Life Bible Church has consistently preached that many people who call themselves Christians in the church are really sinners. Unfortunately, unlike the traditional community, those who do not represent the church well are hardly sent on exile in order to keep the sanctity of the church.

Fifth, the syncretism of Christian and African metaphysics has promoted a form of secularization. This is due to Christianity's demeaning of African ancestors as powerless and unable to protect the families they left behind, and by the teaching that a person faces judgment in the afterlife. Perhaps, because African people would not give up their belief in the ancestors, Christians, particularly Catholics, creatively recast Jesus as a proto-ancestor. In this teaching, Jesus is the first Ancestor who is able to meet with African ancestors for the benefit of the living. Adherents of this belief limit sacrifices and libations to ancestors to those offered in the Church to the Proto-Ancestor.[43] Of course, this belief has partly altered the basis of ancestorship in Africa.[44]

Sixth, there has been a "re-worlding"[45] of the traditional African cosmos so that it is presented as having been essentially secular before the advent of Christianity. In this view, the spiritual aspects of African Religion are de-emphasized while its anthropocentric values are exaggerated. It is argued that Africans lived to fulfill life here on earth with little regard for the hereafter. This world, it is said, was the scene of life's drama, and this drama was played out in both the natural and supernatural spheres since the cosmos is composite. Health and prosperity in this world thus became the chief pursuits of life.[46] While this may not be altogether true, it is a fact that no human society, belief, or ideology lacks some anthropocentric consideration for life, not even Christianity in its purest form. The fact is that most people live their lives "struggling" to obtain as many earthly goods and achieve as much worldly success as possible. While doing this, Africans believed that any moral breaches they might commit along the way would be punished by the ancestors. Even those who argue for an anthropocentric African cosmos do not completely deny the critical role that ancestor belief has played in ensuring that moral principles were respected in the community.[47] Moreover, as people grow older, spirituality often becomes a priority. Older people find respite in communion with the ancestors, and they generally have time to re-assess their lives in preparation for the next world. They also generally desire that their children will someday venerate them as ancestors, a hope that can influence for the better their behavior.[48] Therefore, even though there were strong tendencies towards an anthropocentric

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[43] Ferdinand, C. Ezekwonna, *African Communitarian Ethic: The Basis for the Moral Conscience and Autonomy of the Individual – Igbo Culture as a Case Study*, (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005); Alex Jebadu, *African Ancestral Veneration and the Possibility of its Incorporation into Catholic Devotion* (Rome: Collegio del Verbo Divino, 2006).

[44] Benson O. Igboin, "Revisiting the Basis of the Metaphysics of Ancestorship in Contemporary Africa" In Danoye Oguntola-Laguda, ed. *Death and Life after Death in African Philosophy and Religions: A Multidisciplinary Engagement* (Harare: Africa Institute for Culture, Dialogue, Peace and Tolerance Studies, 2014), 79-97.

[45] See Babatunde Adedibu, "From House Cell to Warehouse Churches: The Reworlding of the British Christian Landscape by African Pentecostal Churches in London" *EPHA: Ekpoma Journal of Religious Studies*, 10/1&2 (June 2015): 190-233.

[46] N. H. Ngada and K. E. Mofokeng, *African Christian Witness* (Pietermaritzburg: RSA Cluster, 2001), 15.

[47] Benezet Bujo, *The Ethical Dimension of Community: The African Model and the Dialogue between North and South*, (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1998).

[48] Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (London: Heinemann, 1958); Benson O. Igboin and Oluchi J. Igili, "Like Father, Unlike Son: A Reconstruction of the Meta-life of Unoka in Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart," *Southern Semiotic Review*, 5/1: (2015): 143-163; Igboin, "Revisiting the Basis of the Metaphysics of Ancestorship in

view of life in traditional Africa, it should not be concluded that this was a secular world before the advent of Christianity.

Seventh, there is a "double dualism" in African Pentecostalism. First, African Pentecostals believe that the devil is a "warrior" who is well-equipped to fight, has wounded and defeated many Christians, and can only be conquered by the power of God. Second, African Pentecostals also assume that indigenous African practices are in opposition to Christianity and must be destroyed. In many instances, when God has not been "quick to answer" prayers for the destruction of evil forces, some African Pentecostals have engaged in iconoclasm. That is, African Pentecostals have destroyed many traditional religious paraphernalia to demonstrate victory over opposing traditions and practices.[49] As a result, traditional religious adherents often distain Christians for their apparent fanaticism.

**Conclusion**

The secularization that exists in Africa, though due to exposure to Western influences, is not the same as its counterpart in the West. The neat separation of religion from secular institutions in the West cannot be said to have taken place entirely in Africa. Hence, instead of secularization *in* Africa, this article has argued for the secularization *of* Africa. This secularization is a legacy of the colonial era in which Christian missionaries demonized and desacralized African Religion. But having succeeded in de-spiritualizing the African religious space, Christians failed to effectively re-spiritualize it with its own mode of spirituality. The irony here is that Christians have fallen into a trap of their own making as they now must operate in a secular space and deal with the effects of secularization within their own faith. Despite these challenges, many Western scholars – such as Toren, Paul, Ngarsouledé, and Seed – continue to believe that African Christianity retains a high level of spirituality and may yet engage in a "reverse mission" that will result in the re-spiritualization and re-sacralization of the West. This may be, but African Christianity's first task must be to re-mystify African religious space in order for the gospel message to penetrate more deeply into the hearts of the African people.

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Contemporary Africa"; Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Nairobi: Paulines, 1997).

[49] See "Pastor who destroyed Shrine in Ogun Speaks," *Premium Times*, premiumtimesng.com accessed 17th May, 2017.