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**Review Article**

# **The Influence of Westernised and Hybridised Christianity on the Appreciation of Traditional Art in Nigeria**

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**Abstract:** Christianity has been an active agent of westernisation and modernisation in contemporary Nigeria. Being more westernised than *nigerianised*, the phenomenon has, in many respects, challenged the idea of traditional African culture and art. Hinging on radical, though arguable exegeses of the Bible, neo Pentecostal Christian vitalities have questioned and utterly demonised core Nigerian cultural values, particularly traditional African art. This paper challenges the thesis that traditional art is inextricably connected with ancestral worship and inherently satanic. Though some of its constitutive elements – notably statutes of deities and goddesses as well as masks and artefacts associated with rituals – may have some connections with specific tenets of animism and idol worshiping, other aspects as ‘clean’ textile products, relevant rhythms within traditional music and architectural designs are visibly not antithetical to Christianity. It will therefore be expedient to delicately sort syncretic arts from the “spiritually poisonous” ones. Only syncretic art (those that may be concurrent to the concept of practicing Christianity) should be combated within Christian circles. This is in line with the fact that, external campaigns aimed at destroying traditional Nigerian art are not only anti-Africanist but clear violations of the principle of secularity of the state, spelt out by the Nigerian Constitution.

**Keywords:** Traditional African Art, Folk Culture, Pentecostal Christianity, Westernisation, Africanisation

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## **1. Introduction**

The phenomenon of de-culturalisation has remained a real social problem in contemporary Africa in general and Nigeria in particular. According to some Afro-centric critics, anthropologists, and globalisation scholars, this progressive de-culturalisation has come through the inter-related processes of modernisation, cultural imperialism and globalisation [1-3]. Most Afro-centric critics strongly argue that the modernisation of African cultures has engendered a drastic change in the broader values, norms and attitudes of the larger contexts in which African people find themselves. In multiple and complex ways, this process of modernisation has been a vector of westernisation (western cultural imperialism) which in turn has entailed the cloning of African people into westerners. According to Ojukwu and Ezenandu, arguments grounded on the theory of modernity (otherwise called modernisation) stipulate that tradition is outdated, antiquated and unnecessary [4, p.23]. With this, traditional

values should be carefully wiped out by the process of development or civilisation. Such arguments actually denote “the transformation of the disparate groups into an integrated and consolidated polity by eliminating the residual set of values, norms and structures of the ‘tribal man’, and institutionalising a new set of modern and progressive values” [4, p.23]. In the same line of argument, Matunhu underscores the deleterious effects of modernisation and westernisation on the African mind set and cultural values. He insightfully contends that the ideas of modernisation have seriously impoverished Africa. The paradigm actually failed to recognise the creativity and initiative of Africans. Its “emphasis on the supremacy of the metropolis [the west] in the development of Africa is a cause of concern in contemporary discourse on Africa’s development. It is this supremacy of the metropolis that [has altered] Africa’s superstructure of beliefs and value system” [1, p.67].

The Christian religion equally has been one of the principal vectors of this modernisation, westernisation or cultural imperialism in Africa. In effect, the version of Christianity imported and implanted in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular has been – and is still – undoubtedly westernised and somehow anti-Africanist. Though there have been some versions of hybrid (ised), indigenised or ‘nigerianised’ Christian doctrines, liturgies and denominations in the continent, Christianity – in its ideological and practical facets – has predominantly been westernised [2-3, 5-6]. Some specific forms of Christianity have for instance proven to be a staunch antithetical force to some core African traditional values, especially those considered – sometimes arbitrarily – as repugnant, barbarous, and dehumanising. Modernisation (through the instrumentality Christianity) has equally advocated the *demonisation* of valuable cultural practices and products, especially those associated with the African religion or cosmology (animism). In line with this, it has been documented that, under the guise of spiritual purism and evangelism, most Christian missionary bodies and enterprises acting in Africa (particularly the fundamental Pentecostals and charismatic vitalities) have been launching anti-animism and anti-sorcery campaigns which, as collateral damages, have tended to orchestrate a random inhalation of valuable African cultural traditions and values. Amadi pointedly notes for instance that, Christian evangelical campaigns have often confused religion with culture, and in their crusades against what they call heathenism, they tend to advocate the destruction of works of art as well as the institution of bans on cultural dances and time-honoured rituals which could provide peep-holes into the remote past [6, p.68].

Christianity continues to be a strong censorial force in contemporary Nigeria. Its influence is greatly exerted and felt in the various cultural industries notably cinema, music, the arts, tourism among others. The Christian religion has thus been a solid prism through which critics have been appreciating works of art and the art industry as a whole. However, it has been argued that such appreciation of (traditional) art by Christians – especially the Pentecostal or charismatic churches – is often so radical, puritanical and sometimes relatively unbiblical. In some cases, these Christian appreciations of the arts have tended to be mere expressions of dogmatism and misplaced religious fanaticism [9]. No doubt, Yemisi refers to such charismatic and radical movements as acts of “misinformed religious jingoists” [10, p.92]. It has equally been argued that Christians’ negative attitude towards Nigerian folk or traditional art is more attributed to the fact that they have over years, been westernised. This paper seeks to demonstrate this fact. It critically examines Nigerian Christians’ perspective on traditional art, in view of showing that it is highly westernised. It is divided into three principal parts. The first part shows how Christian practices and traditions in Africa are progressively westernised. The second part presents a modern Christian perspective on traditional art and the third part makes a case for selected aspects of traditional Nigerian art.

## 2. Conceptual Framework

Before delving into the crux of the matter, it appears very strategic to conceptually define a number of terms employed in the paper. In line with this, this conceptual framework gives attention to three terms namely westernisation, African folk art and African traditional art.

### 2.1. Westernisation

Westernisation (otherwise called Europeanisation or occidentalisation) is a very elusive concept which could mean different things to different critics, nations or cultures. However, a generic definition of the concept states that it is a social process whereby a given nation or society systematically comes under or adopts/absorbs western cultural values at multiple levels of its life. In a nutshell the concept refers to the conversion or adoption of western traditions and customs. Some of these western cultural values include humanitarianism (an active concern for the welfare of all human beings regardless of sex, social/economic position, religion, education, sex); equalitarianism (a democratic value systematically geared at minimising social inequalities, reduction of poverty and liberty for all), secularisation (system through which religion does not govern affairs of the state) among others [11-12]. Some of the basic western socio-cultural traditions have their roots in religious (mostly Christian) beliefs and cultural celebrations while economic and political philosophies are basically inspired by more recent founding principles of the United States of America and her imperialist allies.

In most Third World (African) countries, westernisation is often employed to evaluate social transformations observable in hitherto rural, traditionalist and primitive communities. In line with this, the phenomenon is constructed as a process of social and cultural mobility in traditional social structures. Closely related to this construction/conception are definitions which associate the process of westernisation with colonialism or modernisation. Such definitions stipulate that westernisation refers to the remarkable changes in traditional African societies which are derived from European colonial system. Such changes are perceptible in areas such as technology, ideology, values and institutions [11, 13]. It has also become a common practice among Afro-centric critics to derogatorily associate westernisation with cultural imperialism. In line with this Slaten critically reviews this tendency remarking that:

Westernisation” has an air of cultural superiority. Sometimes implicit in the usage of this term is the idea that to be like the West is progress, toward a more civilised and ideal world. But one needn’t look too far to point out problems in the West that are hardly desirable — e.g., greed in corporate culture or hyper-consumerism. So, when someone says or writes that a place is “Westernised”, what do they really mean? Usually they should be saying “developed”, “capitalist”, “democratic”, or “consumerist”. These words carry much more specific meaning than “Westernised”; furthermore, they don’t assume that the West somehow has ownership of these

concepts. [12, p.45].

In the context of globalisation, westernisation assumes a wider meaning. It is construed as the proliferation of political, economic and social ideals that are typically associated with western economically advanced nations (particularly the United States of America). Westernisation in such a context is construed as the widespread presence and adoption of these Western – mostly American – customs and traditions; and standardization of these customs and traditions to the extent that they are expected to reign in all social structures in the world. A good example is the widespread use of the English language in such domains as business, information and communication technologies (ICTs) and professional interactions. The key role of the English language in these domains reveals a tenet of westernisation. Another good example is the consumerism or MacDonaldisation culture which is becoming widespread in many parts of the world; the liberal system characterised by the free markets system as well as Hollywood fashion among others.

## **2.2. Folk Art**

Otherwise called traditional art, folk could be viewed as the art of distinctive societies or sub-cultures. It is a type of art which complexly develops its styles, forms, techniques and subject matters within the history and cultural context of a particular social group. According to Bess, folk art comprises the ensemble of traditions and socio-cultural practices of closely connected groups, preserving cultural and community identity through a wide range of artistic expressions such as music, dance and craft as well as traditions such as storytelling and folk games [14]. Folk art is therefore associated with the various artistic expressions derived from the collective cultural root of a people. Such expressions take the form of celebrations, dance, rituals, object and stories passed on from neighbour to neighbour, generation to generation, from elder to children and from artist to apprentice.

## **2.3. African Traditional Art**

Defining African art is a complex task since being African is more than just a matter of geography. The complexity of deriving such a definition is exacerbated by the phenomenon of travelling cultures and the continuous creolisation of world cultures. However, put simply, traditional African art is envisaged as a type of art which perfectly reflect the culture and religion of the African people. This is in line with the popular maxims that, African traditional religion is an integral part of the African culture and that, traditional art expresses and often constitutes part of the African traditional religion. As Azeez puts it, traditional African religion is systematically blended with culture and it will be extremely difficult for anybody to clearly dissociate religion and culture [15, p.28]. “Nevertheless it is, the distinctiveness of religion that gives direction, goal, and completion to culture. Without religion, culture will have no goal or destination. Religion affects the cultural dimension” [15, p.28]. Azeez further explains that given the fact that the African culture is interwoven with

African religion (ancestral worship), traditional African art operates as “a mediating factor within both religion and culture in Africa” [15, p.32].

African traditional arts have basically been defined in relation to Western civilisation or culture. Definitions of the concepts have varied based on school of thoughts and periods. Eurocentric conceptualisations mainly equated traditional African art to ‘primitive’ art and ‘demonic art’. As Burt succinctly explains, early Western scholars interested in African art considered most inhabitants of Africa, to represent “savage” or peoples who were still in a kind of “primitive” stages of cultural development; and insofar as their artefacts seemed to be versions of the arts which were a mark of so-called “civilisation”, these became “primitive art” [16, p.5]. Traditional African art may also be viewed as ritualistic art, given the fact that it is often incorporated to ritual practices as well as some other traditions in the traditional African religion. The strong influence of rituals on art in the African milieu becomes even more glaring with the consideration of the fact that “both art and religion are considered twins of the same transcendental offshoot” [16].

## **3. Exploring Ways in Which Nigerian Christianity Is Westernised or Hybridised**

The origin and nature of Christianity as a religious tradition has been subject to controversy. While a good number of afro-centric theorists and observers have arguably branded it ‘the Whiteman’s religion’ (following the active role European missionaries and West-based religious enterprises played in its importation and “often forceful” implantation in Black Africa), others (mostly euro-centric critics) have vehemently sought to debunk the above mentioned thesis or myth. Critics such as Broussard view the myth of the western origin and character of Christianity as an unfounded and racist postulation which runs counter to the biblical logic which stipulates that God loves and seeks the salvation of all nations irrespective of their races, sex and social status [17]. Broussard additionally equates such a myth to a stumbling block for many Christians of African descent. Broussard however concedes that such a myth can be debunked with a variety of empirical arguments. One of these arguments is the fact that Africans played a determinant role in the growth of the Christian faith some 2000 years ago (even before the debut of the colonial period). In the same line of argument, scholars such as Iheanacho view the proliferation and ubiquity of churches, related institutions and Christian faithfuls in the Black Continent as a strong indicator of Christianity’s growth to the status of an African (ised) religion [18]. Using Nigeria as a case study, she passionately argues that Christian traditions have so permeated all aspects of the Nigerian social system that it may not be an overstatement to say that it has attained the level of an indigenous religion in the country. It is however important to note that such a position is arguable on various grounds, one of which is the fact that a good number of Nigerian Christian

vitalities are principally driven by western concepts such as prosperity theologies. Some continue to heavily depend on the financial support and spiritual philosophy of western Christian structures. In view of all these, some scholars prefer to employ the term “African Christianity” to denote neo Christian practices and traditions prevalent, in African countries.

African Christianity is believed to differ from western Christianity in that, it is more grounded in an intense spiritual hunger, given Africans’ great attachment to supernatural values. African Christianity – as practiced by the new Pentecostal sects and Charismatic churches – is based on a gospel which has integrated the African belief that human events are controlled by a pantheon of spiritual powers as well as phenomena such as bad luck, and good luck. By such an Africanized Christian tradition, pastors are substituted for fetishists and traditional prophet/practitioners. Though they demonise traditional religious practices (ancestral worship) and always adopt the posture of modern social forces, African churches, especially the Pentecostals, interpret Christianity from the prism of a wide range of existing religious myths, especially the traditional search for supernatural power and dominion. All this is in tune with Hollenweger’s theory stipulating that theology is variably shaped by the cultural system or context in which it is applied [19, p.29].

Despite the pertinence of these theses, and postulations supporting the African origin, the “africanisation”, or “tropicalisation” of Christianity, and African peoples’ appropriation of Christianity, there exists/persists a popular assumption which stresses that Christianity has phenomenologically been westernised through a complex mix of cultural processes including syncretism, modernisation of the gospel and Christian traditions, inculturation among others. According to Weerstra, it will be expedient to go from the premise that the western version of Christianity – which the African continent has inherited – is already too westernized [20, p.130]. He underscores this westernization as a serious danger to the survival and progress of true Christianity not only in Europe but also in other parts of the world, notably Africa.

Christianity in the West has become syncretistic [...] because it has mixed incompatible elements, beliefs and values, especially worldview assumptions, that were never meant to be mixed. In the process, western Christianity has lost much of its biblical apostolic roots and therefore is no longer living and working and doing missions with a full deck – we no longer live the reality of these biblical faith and life as God reveals it in His Word. [...] The Gospel in the West, including the Christian way of live, needs to be dewesternised of its non-Christian elements (of paganism disguised in modern dress). [p.130].

As earlier noted, the situation described in the quotation above is not confined to the western society. Indeed, westernisation has since been a visible reality in African churches. Even in the Christian sects often christened Africanised or indigenised, subtle aspects of the western culture continue to prevail even though such a prevalence is circumstantial and to an extent. A good illustration is the

westernised dress code implicitly and explicitly advocated in most African churches. The three pieces suit and tie are for instance, systematically adopted as a standard attire for the sacerdotal service in most Pentecostal churches. Besides considering attending the spiritual programs organised by Nigerian churches, one needs to consult the types of visuals used through print or audio-visual communications to advertise these churches and their programs, to confirm Christian church men’s adherence to westernised dress styles. Additionally, modern/western dress and hair styles, including mini-skirt, female trousers and artificial hair designs are tolerated in many new African churches. In his daily devotional piece (titled *Open Heaven*), E. A. Adeboye, founder of the Redeem Christian Church of Nigeria, fervently decries such a situation as he contends that:

You will observe that being sparsely dressed is more common among the wealthy and enlightened. If you look at what the world regards as fashion today, particularly in the western developed countries with all their wealth and level of comfort, a greater percentage of such fashion styles tend towards nakedness. If the lady’s breasts are not exposed, that dressing is regarded as old fashioned. So much havoc has been done to the church of God in the name of fashion. Instead of the world to look to the church for healthy, sane dressing, it is the church that is looking to the world for fashion. [...] Today, provocative dressing is all over the church of God. There are some churches you will go to and will be wondering whether you are in a brothel. [21].

Additionally, the liturgy adopted by some of Nigerian churches dominantly incorporate musical and cultural artefacts from the west; for instance, western gospel music as rap and beat (R&B), disco, classical music and the like. New Pentecostal churches in particular mainly present themselves as modern and progressive social forces; which implies a relative adherence to some western cultural models. Multifaceted efforts are made to imitate and partially resemble west-based Christian churches. In line with this, west-based or western Christianity continues to be a model partially – and often patchily – copied by the African Christian churches. This is somehow viewed in the adoption by most Nigerian new Pentecostal churches of the American concept of prosperity.

A good number of African sociologists and anthropologists have interpreted the prevalence of the prosperity gospel paradigm in many revival Nigerian churches as a phenomenal response to the socio-economic changes and challenges faced by Christian quarters in Nigeria. Other schools of thought have rather described the tradition as being perfectly in line with some African cultural values. However, it remains evident that prosperity gospel is dominantly western and clearly materialist in nature/inclination. It actually represents an import from America. The concept may have been Africanised to a minimal extent, but it remains egregious vestiges of western Christianity which are visible enough in numerous Pentecostal Christian denominations and charismatic religious vitalities in Nigeria.

Other aspects of westernisation could be illustrated by the

prevalence in Nigerian Christian practices of such beliefs and paradigms as scientific rationalism, materialism, secular humanism, consumerism, relativism which, in effect, constitute “the bedrock of western civilisation and post-modern culture” [20, p.131]. Though accentuated in modern times, the westernisation of Christianity – in Europe as well as in Africa – has been an old process. This is evidenced by the fact that the versions of Christianity sold to and implanted in Africa have been dominantly westernised. Like its kissing cousin (colonialism), western Christianity aimed at a form of cultural assimilation. In the name of evangelisation, civilisation and education, efforts were tremendously made by early missionaries to destroy both harmful and ‘tolerable’ (useful and vital) aspects of African traditions. Such efforts have systematically provoked the demonization of some core African cultural values. As Maduka succinctly puts it, though inculturation was sometimes used to adapt the Gospel to the African context, most Christian missionary expeditions were geared towards the progressive annihilation of the African tradition, in favour of the Western culture. Inculturation has not been able to totally ‘purify’ Christianity of its “presumed toxic” western blood [5, p.12-13]. It may not even be an overstatement to enthuse that such a purification is just utopian and impossible. As Maduka pointedly remarks,

It is clear therefore that although progress has been made in the manner used by Christianity to spread its message in Africa, especially in terms of giving some modicum of respect to the integrity of the African culture, in the long run African religion will disappear, for it is assumed that it contains some impurities that will be removed through inculturation. The spirit of the Gospel informs what remains after it is purified. [5, p.13].

In some cases, western Christian missionary merely replaced purely animist practices with western forms of idol worship. A good example is the propagation or proliferation of statues of Jesus and Mary as well as crucifixes, commonly used for worship in some Christian denominations. The use of such “relics” and religious artefacts is in no way different from the African tradition of using statues or statuettes of divinities for worship and prayer. These artefacts have tremendously been absorbed into indigenous culture and have received veneration which in no way is different from the one accorded to fetish objects. With this, it is somehow evident that some components of Western missionary strategies were basically aimed at supplanting local cultural values in favour of western ones.

Another weapon used by Western missionary bodies to facilitate the westernisation of Christianity was their education curriculum which, unarguably, was antithetical to the growth and survival of some praiseworthy African values. In effect, missionary education curriculum brought about the mental impoverishment of African by systematically deemphasizing the relevance of African values and culture. Contrarily, it glorified the western frame of mind and the White’s cultural values. As Matunhu insightfully contends, the basic idea of this educational system was to ultimately

disorient the minds and identity of the blacks [1, p.69]. Such a disorientation was strategic for the exploitation of the continent’s human and non-human resources.

The sustained efforts by Christian missionary enterprises in Africa with respect to westernising vital aspects of the African culture are still palpable today. It is easily perceptible that the Christian religion has transformed many aspects of African culture; for instance hair style, dress style and food habits among other components of the African worldview. It should be noted here that this westernisation process is greatly – though partially – facilitated by African’s inferiority complex which has made many members of African communities to be spiritually and culturally vulnerable and to consequently venerate even the glaringly questionable tenets of the various doctrines propagated by the Western Christian missions. Zeroing down to the Nigerian context, it may be argued that it is so ironical that while leading in the eternal fight against the western imperialism, the Nigerian man still identifies himself most intimately with the culture of the Whiteman – he officially claims to be fighting, through the adoption of cultural protectionist policies like indigenization, and other forms of affirmative action. As Nwadior puts it, “perhaps nowhere else in Africa are the white man clothing style, eating habits, Medicare, mode of worship, language and educational system as popular as they are in Nigeria” [22, p.97]. In the same line of argument, Odinye and Odinye passionately decry that:

Many Nigerian have been converted to Christianity and some do not value their traditional values again as a result of their belief in Christianity. The western wedding has been fashioned by many people in Nigeria as the modern type of wedding and they believe that marriage is not complete without the western type of wedding. So they combine the western and the traditional wedding together [...] Western fashions and styles have been adopted as a model although some people still wear Nigerian clothes. Western wedding dresses and men’s suites have been adopted for church weddings. [3, p.112].

Though Western Christianity has been instrumental in eradicating or combating some harmful and unbiblical cultural practices in Africa notably, the killing of twins, human sacrifices, sorcery, slavery and slave trade, the burying of chief of living human beings (slaves and wives) among others, a good number of Christian doctrines and denominational injunctions are not always biblical. Some are merely subjective interpretations of biblical scriptures, aimed at magnifying the western culture and advocating westernisation. As perfectly diagnosed by Otedo, these charismatic groups and neo-Pentecostal Christian vitalities are defectively adapting the concept of born-again Christianity to the African context [23]. Putting this concept in local Nigerian parlance, “‘it is shacking them like ogogoro’. This implies that the new-wave Christians are getting drunk on the concept of born-again Christianity, and they are waging a war against all the traditions that make up the culture of the land”. This will be discussed in greater details in subsequent sections of this essay.

#### 4. Modern Christianity and Traditional Nigerian Art

Christian churches have always adopted divergent attitudes towards traditional Nigerian art. The early missionaries, in their epic saga in Nigeria proffered concurrent approaches to dealing with Nigerian traditional art. While the Protestant church categorically demonised Nigerian traditional art associating it with magic and paganism, the Catholic mission initially questioned the tolerance of such an art but *a posteriori*, sought to encourage selected aspects of Nigerian traditional art. Early missionaries generally associated traditional wood carving with idol worshiping and promptly initiated campaigns involving the burning and destruction of such “fetishes”. However, with the Catholic Church’s adoption of the inculturation paradigm, Catholic missionaries’ position on African traditional art was tremendously reformed. In line with this Pope Pius XII ruled that African traditional cultures were not to be diabolised and combated to extinction by missionaries unless such cultures prove to be “inseparably linked to the error of immorality”. In accordance with such a papal ruling, the Catholic missionaries resorted to adapting indigenous art (as Yoruba art) for Christian and evangelistic purposes. An egregious example is the Oye-Ekiti Workshop (1947-1954), founded by the Rev. Dr. Patrick M. Kelly with the purpose of developing a novel Yoruba Christian style of art. Though faced with mixed reviews, the Oye-Ekiti workshop epitomizes missionaries’ enthusiasm at Africanizing religious art; thus giving a modicum of attention to indigenous culture, particularly the Yoruba culture and art.

The Yoruba art was envisaged for such a project because its source (the Yoruba people) was considered a prototype of race not too much corrupted by pagan traditions. As argued by Jones (2014), *Ifa/Orisha* – the traditional spiritual practice of the Yoruba nation – was, according to such indigenization and inculturation policies, viewed as a system that had prepared the endogenous people to receive the full revelation of God in Christ. Their belief in phenomena and traditions like a spirit world, divine intervention, the necessity of sacrifice, the importance of community, and their practice of virtues like hospitality, could be exploited by the missionaries “as bridges, points of crossover, to the gospel. Some of their religious practices would need to be redirected and amended, but surely their impulse to connect to a higher power is God-honouring” [24]. This pro-African traditional art enthusiasm seems to have seriously animated the Catholic Church in Nigeria in contemporary times. The Catholic Church has continuously contributed – in no small measure – to the survival and promotion of art in Contemporary Nigeria. According to Onobrakpeya, the Catholic Church has always had immense contribution to the development of traditional Nigeria art within the last 60 years [9, p.91]. Buttressing his position, he cites pertinent artistic projects such as St Paul Catholic Church in Ebute Meta which is like a museum, splendidly adorned with sculptures (mainly carvings) by Fakeye, Osifo, Otoro and the paintings of the Stations of the Cross by Bruce Onobrakpeya. He likewise cites Demas Nwoko’s development

of a Nigerian architectural style which has been employed to build the Dominican monastery in Ewu, Delta State. By such traditional-art-friendly projects, the Catholic Church and other historic churches in Nigeria have proven to be relatively culturalist in orientation. They proffer reformation, rather than destruction as working solution to the ongoing dispute over supremacy and legitimacy between Christianity and Culture in Nigeria. They furthermore, strongly believe in a fruitful compatibility between religion and “Clean African Culture”. Traditional art and religion must, accordingly, be encouraged to coexist for harmony and fruitful evangelism to blossom. They insist that traditional art is not automatically synonymous with idol veneration.

Despite these traditional-art-friendly projects, Christians’ attitudes towards traditional arts remain overwhelmingly negative. The neo Pentecostal denominations and charismatic groups put forth a multifaceted resistance against traditional art. They do not limit themselves to a vehement castigation of traditional art but often power or stage destruction campaigns by which valuable artistic productions are savagely damaged. Such destructions have often caused retaliations from proponents of traditional arts, culminating in violent conflicts between cultural protectionist and extremist Christians as well as in brutal attacks on churches. Otedo reports an egregious case in Nsirimo village (Umuahia Town, Abia State – Nigeria) in which, members of a Pentecostal denomination (the Charismatic Renewal Movement) went on rampage against the culture of the land; and their ‘aggression’ degenerated to the burning and complete destruction of a local church. In their radical campaign, the overzealous born-again Christians attacked (felled) a couple of peculiar, ancient trees, which had already been approved by the State government for the Tourist Attraction Development Project [23]. They additionally destroyed the village shrines. In retaliation, infuriated youths from the community promptly marched to the local church on December and set it ablaze. “The message from the youths was very clear: ‘You destroy our culture; we destroy what you claim to be your culture’” [23].

The anti- traditional art movements launched by some Nigerian charismatic churches are backed by an impressive number of biblical injunctions or interdictions – which, sometimes, simply represent questionable interpretations of the Holy Scriptures. Based on such an appraisal, Yemisi equates such anti-folk art movements with acts of “misinformed religious jingoists” [10]. Some of the biblical references brandished by these Christian revivalists include Exodus 20:4, Romans 1:21, and the like, which explicitly or implicitly forbid them (Christians) from engineering graven images of God or any pictorial representation of the God’s incorruptible glory [10, p.92]. Other anti-art tendencies are grounded on biblical injunctions against idol worship. They associate traditional art with ancestral worship and spiriticism. This is in line with popular Euro-centric constructions stipulating that African traditional art is ritualistic and solidly connected with animism. In tandem with this, Azeez opines that: “African art is the type of art that reflects the culture of a people and since culture and religion are two inseparable ways

of life, we can then say that religion influences African art and it is this reason that will make indigenous or traditional art to remain art of religion” [15, p.32].

However, it must be underscored that traditional African art is not automatically connected with ancestral worship. Though certain elements – notably statutes of deities and goddesses as well as initiation mask – may have some connection with paganism and idol worshiping, other aspects such as ‘clean’ textile products and specific architectural designs among others, are visibly not antithetical to Christianity. African traditional art is perhaps a potential vector of syncreticism which should be combated. However, it will be expedient to intelligently sort aspects of this art which may be concurrent to the concept of practicing Christianity. By randomly demonizing traditional art in guise of advocating spiritual purism, radical Christianity – in the form of charismatic groups – systematically paves the way for the radical erosion of the core Nigerian values and the firm implantation of the Western cultures.

## 5. Conclusion

The Christian religion has been part of the main vectors of modernisation, and westernisation / cultural imperialism in Nigeria. Indeed the version of Christianity practiced in most Nigerian churches has – from numerous evidences – been westernised and somehow fashioned to be anti-Africanist. Though there have been some versions of hybrid (ised), indigenised or ‘nigerianised’ Christian theologies, liturgies and denominations in the country, Christianity – in its ideological and practical facets – has predominantly been westernised. Christianity has for instance proven to be a staunch antithetical force to some core African traditional values, especially those considered – sometimes arbitrarily – as repugnant, barbarous, and dehumanising. In line with these, neo Pentecostal vitalities and charismatic renewal movements have utterly demonised traditional Nigerian art, based on the arguable illumination that the phenomenon is inextricably linked to animism thus to idol worship.

This paper has however argued that traditional art is not always connected to ancestral worship. Though certain elements – notably statutes of deities and goddesses as well as initiation masks – may plausibly be associated with various tenets of animism and idol worshiping, other aspects such as “Clean” textile products, specific rhythms within traditional music and architectural designs are visibly not antithetical to Christianity. It will therefore be expedient and more strategic to critically sort those “spiritually poisonous” aspects of the art (those that may be concurrent to the concept of practicing Christianity) which deserve to be combated exclusively within Christian circles. It will also be expedient to confine anti traditional art campaigns to church context. This is in line with the fact that external campaigns aimed at destroying traditional Nigerian art are not only anti-Africanist but clear violations of the principle of secularity of the state, promulgated by the Nigerian Constitution.

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