COLONIALISM: NEXUS FOR MYRIAD RELIGIOUS CONTENTIONS IN POST-COLONIAL IGBOLAND (AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW)

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Abstract

The contact between African Traditional Religion (ATR) and Christianity is inextricably linked to European economic activities that culminated into colonialism. The contact was in fact, between two opposing cultures –African and European. Christianity since its introduction is perceived as an embodiment of Western culture, civilization and education. Over time, scholars have expressed opinions on the impact and influence of one religion over another. Many pro-Christian scholars maintain covertly and overtly that Christianity overwhelmingly overshadowed African Traditional Religion, and by extension, culture, tradition, customs and norms. Similarly, traditionalist scholars and adherents of ATR have conscientiously decried the extant views of the pro-Christian scholars as purely pretentious and presumptuous. Rather, the argument has been that ATR has remained very active and potent in spite of the perceived domineering posture of the Christian religion. References are made to the seeming clandestine cooperation between adherents of the two religions. There are obvious issues relating to oracular consultations, the use of magic and charms or voodoo powers which are characteristic features of ATR. Aspects of these features of ATR appear also identified among many Christian bodies. Outwardly, both religions appear to be at loggerheads, but inwardly, their cooperation is seemingly certain. There is palpable shift from the initial situation of "*nemo dat quad non habet*" (none gives to the other, what it does not have), to a more mutually interactive relationship. This paper attempts to re-examine and re-asses the contentions between ATR and Christianity in Nigeria. It questions the sanctity of the Christian religion against its unsuspecting mutual relations and romance with ATR in present day Nigeria. The historical-descriptive design was adopted and it was approached thematically, analytically and chronologically. Primary and secondary materials were consulted. The conclusion is interspersed with suggestions.

Key words: Colonialism, Nexus and Contentions, African Traditional Religion, Religion and Christianity

Introduction

Since the advent of Christianity in Nigeria, its relationship with African Traditional Religion (ATR) has been shrouded in contentions and tensions arising from mutual antagonism for superiority and dominance. There has been constant disillusionment, suspicion and conflict of all forms through the activities of European merchants and missionaries. The contact between the two religions is apparently, one between two opposing cultures. The Christian missionaries under colonial powers, criticized, condemned and even destroyed aspects of elements of worship of ATR. In order to advance the fortunes of Christianity, ATR and its adherents were branded inferior, barbaric, fetish and evil. All manner of derogatory and dehumanizing adjectives were used against adherents of ATR by Christian converts. The absence of any form of dialogue between the two religions during their contact raised varied grey areas that strayed into post-colonial Nigeria. Over the years, Christian faithfuls have come to terms that the fight began by the forceful conversion of those branded 'heathen', as Christians have not helped matters. In fact,

there is the realization that the two religions have the same goal -the worship of an unseen God, the Supreme Being - and to gain salvation, albeit through different means.

The myriad contentions between Christianity and ATR was ignited largely by the means and manner adopted by the earlier missionaries to suppress ATR. Their emphasis on superiority of Christianity over ATR kept their adherents at logger heads. But over time, Christianity has tapped into the characteristic features of ATR to combine same in its form of worship. Seemingly, the same Christian faithful who condemn ATR openly, also patronize ATR in secret. In recent times, the version of Christians we have, who also practice ATR is alarming. It appeared the nature of conversions and colonial anti-ATR laws, placed embargo on open relations between adherents of Christianity and ATR. In this regard, Mercado writers that,

> The missionary version of Christianity accepted by Africans (under colonial rule) can be described as hypocritical because many African Christians still patronizes ATR, especially, in times of emergency. This means that the influence of ATR is still strong especially in moment of crisis. (Mercado 2004, 2005, 104).

In our today's world, most people who claim conversion to Christianity continuously visit and patronize diviners at their shrine. Bascom and Herskovits (1959:3) explains that,

> Despite the intensity of the Christian missionary effort and the thousand years of Muslim proselytizing which have marked the various parts of Africa, African religion continued to manifest vitality every where. This is to be seen in worship of African deities, the homage to ancestors and the recourse to divination, magic and other rituals.

Mbiti strongly expresses similar view thus "many millions of Africans are followers of more than one religion, even if they may register or be counted in census as adherents of only one religion is correct" (Mbiti 1970:30).

One common fact since the introduction of Christianity and its spread and the practice of ATR by Christians is that it is done in secret. The reason for this secret practice is found in the intolerable way Christianity opposed ATR in its advent. In this clime, Denis (2006:310-323; Mills 1995:153-172) thinks

> The reason for the secret practice was that the missionaries, by the 19th century, whether they were Congregational, Methodist, Anglican and Lutheran or Catholic, were aggressively opposed to traditional African practices that they considered barbaric and based on superstition.

In the 20th century, this notion about ATR practices remained same in the minds of the colonizing European missionaries. However, despite the holistic condemnation of ATR and its agents by European Missionaries, ATR practices have continued even at this present age of globalization. For instance, Dennis notes that, "since the birth of democracy in south Africa, this religion has occupied an important position in public life" (Dennis 2006: 310-323). He went further to state that in Nigeria after independence, ATR has become an essential element of indigenous knowledge systems. Several steps have been taken by health workers and in parliament to give recognition to African indigenous healers and Christian churches in South Africa openly advocate dialogue with ATR. (Dennis 2006: 310-323)

This paper discusses how colonialism is the nexus for myriad contentions extant in the nature of relations between adherents of ATR and Christianity in post-colonial Africa, particularly, in

Nigeria. It points out issues that strained the relations. These grey areas are re-appraised with a view to providing for greater religious dialogue between Christianity and ATR.

Conceptual Clarifications
Certain concepts need clarification for better understanding of our discourse. One such concept for this *expose* is colonialism. The concept obviously is at the threshold of the myriad contentions between Christianity and ATR. This claim is exemplified in its activities in Nigeria during its hay days. Colonialism is not a new concept in the history of Africa. From the years 1900s to the early 1960s, almost all the countries in African were under foreign rule. Colonialism is a concept that explains one county's domination of another country or people, usually achieved through aggressive, often military actions. Simply put, the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary gives the word meaning of colonialism as "the practice by which a powerful country controls another country and countries" (Hornby 2006: 281)

Njoku (2001:137) writes that "colonialism was imposed on Nigeria by force; and it continued to be resisted well into the second decade of the 20th century. The colonizing powers decided to foist on the people coercive administrative instruments intended to extract their obedience and submission". In fact, it was through the use of force that the colonial rulers foisted Christianity and other Western systems and ideologies on Africans. They imposed Christian doctrines that were incongruous with age-long ATR practices. Consequently, the foundation for the myriad contentions and controversies between the two religions were laid. Colonial rule and its attendant use of force emboldened most Christian converts to challenge the foundation of ATR. The struggle that ensued between both religions gifted colonial rule as the nexus for the contentions that followed.

Conceptually, other concepts that deserve some insight include religion, ATR and Christianity. Scholars have expressed varied perspectives on religion. The *Chamber Twentieth Century Dictionary* (1983) sees religion as the "belief in, recognition or awakened sense of a higher unseen controlling power or powers, with the emotion and morality connected therewith, (as well as) rites or worship".

Scholars like Glock and Stark writes of religion as an "institutionalized (and integrated) system of symbols, beliefs, values and practices focused on the ultimate meaning" (Glock and Stark 1965:1). Similarly, Margaret Peil sees religion as "the belief systems, moral norms and values held by members of a society" (Peil 197:2130).

From the foregoing, it is suggestive that religion is inextricably linked to a belief in a Supernatural Being; to a power or powers above man. The extant features of religion in this regard, lie in the belief in the Supernatural Being, who according to Anih "though may not be seen physically, is believed to be existent and imbued with supernatural qualities" (Anih 1992: 12). The features of religion appear in any way not to have drawn physical barriers between one religious beliefs or groups or systems from another. Rather there seems to be some consensus on an unseen power or powers above man.

Man is perceived as a religious being by nature (homo religious) whose effort is geared towards establishing steady contact with the Supernatural Being -God, whether directly or indirectly.

Man's consistent effort to commune with God is drawn from his nature as a being composed of two units; the body and soul. Therefore, man is believed to be existent in two inter-linked worlds- the mortal and immortal worlds apart. This undulating fact about the dual nature of man may no doubt, raise apparent paradox. Religion at this point comes into full manifestation in the life and existence of man. By this therefore, man's quest to remain linked with the supernatural world becomes an intrinsic part in his living.

Nonetheless, the origin of religion has in most part being elusive and to a large extent remained a mirage. Hans Schoeps writes that "the origin of religion remains hidden from our knowledge for the fact that we possess no evidence of the beginnings of religion" (Hans 1964). He contends that, nowhere on earth have people been found who are above man. Since the introduction of the Christian religion into Nigeria, there has arisen the question of; which is the real and true religion? There is disparity in the right medium of worship. For instance, polytheism associated with ATR is the worship of the Supernatural Being -God through a plethora of deities. Christianity on the other hand preaches the worship of the Supernatural Being through one channel -Jesus Christ. This disparity in the medium of worship of the Supernatural Being has been at the threshold of the contentions between ATR and Christianity in Nigeria. To this we shall return anon.

At this juncture, a brief insight into the two religions in contention, ATR and Christianity would suffice. Attempt has been made here to examine aspects of the characteristic features of ATR and subsequently, the introduction of Christianity and the areas of contentions.

African Traditional Religion; Beliefs, Agents and Process of Worship
What indeed is African traditional Religion (ATR)? Or put differently, is there any such thing as African Traditional Religion? These questions are relevant and necessary that we consider them because of the nature and focus of this discourse. Historically, during the early years of missionary activities in Africa culminating in colonialism, European travelers, anthropologists and historians, there was no acceptance of any existence of anything called African history and ATR (Fage 1970:1). The struggle that ensued between adherents was when colonial rulers tried to condemn what they thought never existed. Consequently, the Europeans believed, the one without history cannot have religion (Denis 2006: 312). However, some anthropologists were of the view that "untutored" Africans cannot know God as the idea of God is philosophical. To the missionaries in the early days, Africans were not fully human; they prohibited polygamy, initiation rites, ancestor reverence and other indigenous practices (Mercado 2004:99). Africa Traditional Religion is "the inborn and aboriginal religion of Africans, embraced by the forefathers of the present generations. It is described as the religion that emerged from sustaining of the forebears of the present generation of Africans passed from generation to generation (Awolalu 1991:111). It is the religion without a founder, as "the founder cannot be found no matter how far we go back to history" (Awolalu 1991:111).

Africans are deeply religious and the culture of Africa is simply religion. Everything about African culture is religious, hence the emphasis on religion by Africans. Religion in a more cynical expression is "a daughter of hope and fear, explaining to ignorance, the nature of the unknowable" (Ambrose 1988: 8). Religion could be private or social. It could also be natural or divine. A natural religion is founded on human knowledge and experience. Like all other primary

religions the world over, African Traditional Religion "does not claim any special revelations from God" (Ozigbo 1989: 60). Religion is also hinged on faith -belief in an unseen Supernatural Being. ATR is the belief of the forefathers on the existence of the Supreme God, divinities, spirit beings, ancestors and mysterious powers, good and evil and the after life (Ademo 2011).

ATR is a natural religion and therefore has its belief systems, agents and process of worship. Most times, it has been referred to as "ancestor worship". These ancestors as Agbodike contends "are believed by the Igbo to be their dead who have been transformed into the world of spirit. In their spiritual form, they are believed to be the protectors, who ensure the security and wellbeing of their kits and kin still living. The ancestors were also believed to take active interests in family and community affairs and were involved in all aspects of life of the African, whether in joy or sorrow" (Agbodike 1999:110). Ancestor reverence in ATR is exemplified in the worship of the unseen Supreme Being -through stones, rivers, earth, trees, animals, and wind and carved objects among others.

For the Igbo for instance, the principal God is called Chineke-"creator God" or Chi-ukwu-"the Great God". There are a pantheon of Gods after Chineke or Chukwu, such as, Anyanwu-"the Sun god", Igwe -the sky god" Amadi-oha -" the god of thunder and lightening" and Ala "the earth goddess" (Ilogu 1974:36). There is the spirit world, the abode of the creator, the deities, the disembodied and malignant spirits as well as ancestral spirits. The Spiritual and the worldly could communicate, commingle and coalesce but yet maintain their uniqueness and functions (Agbodike 1999: 110-111)   In   a similar vein Edmund Ilogu contends that;

> The relationship between man and the spirit world is maintained through many channels. Obedience to the codes of behaviour and the custom (*omenani*) approved by the ancestors and enforced by the earth goddess through priests and titled elders and heads of various extended families, is the most important channel (Ilogu 1974: 39).

The concept of the worship of the Supernatural Being –God, is argued, could be likened to the concept of pluralism in God-head, which in the Christian faith is evinced in the doctrine of the Trinity. However, this would not derail our focus, but provides an insight to explain the relationship between the two religions interrogated. It should be noted that ATR borders on a common belief in a Supernatural Being, who is worshipped through a plethora of small gods, deities and ancestors. The basic agents have been the spirit, titled elders and heads of various extended families and the priests of deities. They serve as intermediaries between the world of the spirit and the world of man. This is the foundation of ATR in Nigeria. Hence, Ozigbo states that "each of Nigeria's over 350 ethnicities has its brand of traditional religion which students of religion now popularly style African Traditional Religion" ATR (Ozigbo 1989).

Select Contentious issues in Essential Characteristics of African Traditional Religion
The main characteristics of ATR are typified in the African cosmology, philosophy and culture. To understand ATR is to explore and have a sound knowledge of the important themes intrinsic in African cosmology. Four key aspects of characteristics of ATR as concerns this discourse are considered viz; ancestor veneration, sacrifices, life after death, and salvation in ATR.

Ancestor Veneration is believed to be the aspiration of each and every individual person is to reach the spirit world of one's ancestors, to be venerated by ones descendants as an ancestor and

eventually be reincarnated (Oborji 2002: 24). Ancestors are seen as people who have made it to the spirit land and venerated by their descendants. Consequently, they are regarded as part of the elders of the families with enhanced powers to bless, protect or punish the families. They are invoked to share at gatherings, ceremonies and ritual communion and are seen as symbol of peace, unity and prosperity in the family. They are believed to be next to the divinities in the hierarchy (Oborji 2002: 24). These ancestors in Igbo religion act as intermediaries between God and members of their families.

In ATR, propitiatory sacrifices are considered major aspects through which Africans strive to deliver themselves from the expected effects of evil. These sacrifices involve the offering of blood, in the form of human beings, animals, but offering do not involve blood but the giving of such gifts as food, oil, water, yam among other things. The involvement of blood in sacrifices presupposes the height of the seriousness of the evil. It could be seen as a means of reconciling and restoring fellowship with God, gods, ancestors and the society. Ikenga-Metuh (1991: 80) contends that there are only two classifications of the aim of sacrifices in ATR. Firstly, there are sacrifices with positive aim of actualizing in nature and amongst men, the abiding and self-subsistent divine life. Secondly, sacrifices with negative aim, atoning sacrifices or peace offering in order to ward off danger of false piety, so as to cause sickness or cease. The issue of life after death encapsulates the whole essence and motivation in the ATR which is the desire of life and its transition to the world of the ancestors. Life in ATR is considered a continuum. A paramount interest of note among ATR adherent is the belief to have access to the eschatological realm of existence through rituals. This is achievable by invoking the powers of divinities to renew and revitalize their potentials, so as to put right, broken relationship during their life time. People's hope according to Ikenga-Metuh, is to join the rank of the ancestors in the spirit world, with all its right and benefits and use their enhanced powers for the benefits of their families or clans (Ikenga- Metuh 1987:262). In addition, there is an after life that has to do with the continuing relationship of the dead with the living, but not as the final end of humanity or the world (Ikenga-Metuh. 1987:263)

Salvation in African Traditional Religion appears contentious. This view stems from the continuous debate over the question: Is there salvation outside the visible institutional Christian church? This question tends to underscore the need to ascertain whether any religion could bring salvation to its adherents or not. Salvation is one of the key areas of contentions between ATR and Christianity. According to Ademo David (2011), three important aspects of salvation should be recognised. Firstly, salvation in ATR is believed to start with humanity's basic equality before God. This suggests that God is present within the whole of mankind, of course, in different ways whether through the agency of the law or through the workings of conscience for the other. All people are subject to sin and God's wrath, just as all are open to the saving grace of God. Secondly, as Kalilombe stated, there is the existence of cosmic covenant of love between God and mankind by creation (Genesis). Humankind may break this covenant through sin and infidelity, but again and again God renews it and reaffirms his salvation intention to all mankind (Kalilombe 1981: 62-63).

Thirdly, there appears to be the high belief that in all serious efforts of humankind to make sense or respond to God's cosmic presence and cosmic covenant in life and destiny, God has been in and with His people. Simply put, the spirit of God has indeed filled the earth (Ademo 2011).

From the foregoing, it could be safe to say that ATR system of ancestors were not merely tolerated by God; "they were the results of efforts of African cultures wherein the spirit of God was an active agent" (Kalilombe 1981: 67). It seems therefore a statement of fact that ATR has been a medium, through which God has been communicating with the traditional Africans until the advent of Christianity (Kalilombe 1981: 65). Oborji added that ATR is based on the African's pre-Christian idea of salvation and the security of life and a religion on quest for long life (Oborji 2002: 28).

> Approaching the concept of salvation holistically, Oborji is of the view that,
> The final end and the aspiration of all, every person, is to reach the spirit land of one's ancestors, to be venerated by one's descendants as an ancestor, and eventually (at least in some tradition) to be reincarnated. Ancestors therefore, are people who have made it to the spirit land and being venerated by their descendants. The ancestors are not worshipped by the Africans; rather they are regarded as the elder members of the family. As spirits, they have enhanced power which they are believed to use mainly to protect the interest of their families, or clan. In the hierarchy of beings, after the Supreme Being and the deities, come the ancestors (Oborji 2002:24).

More importantly, as already known among ATR adherents, death is not seen as the only requirement for achieving salvation or attaining the position of an ancestor. Old age, life lived very well according to the accepted standard of the groups, off-springs and appropriate funeral rituals are other important requirements for the salvation (Mbiti 1991: 68-69). In this instance, the highest one can hope for at death in ATR, is ancestral communion, life in the spirit world of ancestors (Oborji 2002:29). It is most probably due to the reason above that Vatican II provided answer to this contentious issue of salvation in a positive sense thus,

> Those also can attain to everlasting salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the gospel of Christ or His church, yet sincerely seek God and moved by grace strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience (Kalilombe 1981: 51).

These essential characteristics of ATR appear to be the areas of contention with Christianity on its advent through the effort to enforce its acceptance, spread and dominance by the colonial rulers.

The Introduction of Christianity and its spread in Nigeria
Christianity is one of the intrusive religions in Nigeria, particularly Igboland. Christianity had reached the periphery or the coastal areas in the late 18th century. But it reached Igboland in the middle of the 19th century. Ozigbo writes that

> Christianity was first preached in Igboland in 1841 during the Niger expedition. The religion was however established for the first time at Onitsha, in 1857. It was Rev. Ajayi Crowther who led the C.M.S mission to Onitsha which became the bridge-head and the window through which Christianity gained entry into vast recess of Igboland (Ozigbo 1999: 63).

The complementary efforts of Christianizing Igboland came from the Roman Catholic Holy Ghost Fathers from France in 1885 (Anyanwu, 2005:310). The arrival of the Catholic Church had sparked off rivalry and competition between the C.M.S and the Roman Catholic Mission (RCM). The Methodist Mission came into Oron part of Nigeria in 1893 and had spread to Igboland in 1910 through Ibibioland. The Qua Iboe mission also came into Igboland in 1917 to help in the Christianization of the area (Ozigbo 1999: 127). Furthermore, from the 1920's and

1930's a number of Christian sects, mostly from U.S.A and Britain, invaded Nigeria. They, with time, reached out to other parts of Nigeria. Some of these sects were; the Salvation Army, Christ Apostolic Church, Faith Tabernacle, Seventh Day Adventist and Jehovah witness. The religious ferment in Yorubland in the 1920's and 1930's gave rise to many other denominations (Ozigbo 2005: 127).

It is evidently clear that before the end of colonial rule, Christianity had reached almost every part of Nigeria and indeed Igboland. It has been argued that the invasion of Igboland and other parts of Nigeria in the 1950's and 1960's and beyond, by new denominations, changed the way and method Christianity have conducted their activities in the post-colonial era.

Contentions of Christianity against African Traditional Religion
An analysis of the extant contentions and malaise between Christianity and ATR worlds form the thrust of our discourse in this segment. These are indeed many and varied. They transcend cultures, belief systems, history and psychological aspects discussed earlier. Historically, Christianity from its earliest times maintained a negative attitude towards other religions and traditions of not only African but Asian religions. It is on record that as early as the period of Cyprian of Carthage (258 AD), he maintained vehemently that there was no salvation outside the Christian church (Gort 2008: 748). He had written that "he cannot have God for his father who does not have the church for his mother" (Gort 2008: 748). Most religions of other cultures are viewed as "non-Christian". They were perceived as expressions of "heathen unbelief and evil superstition" and the world outside the church came to be seen as the "kingdom of darkness" (Gort 2008: 748).

For over 1500 years or more, what Christians thought of other religious tradition was governed by the above perception. There existed those who challenged the prevailing thought and advocated a more accommodating model of encounter with other religions. Gort in his work outlined some of the church leaders who advocated for better understanding between Christianity and other religions (ATR). They included Pope Gregory the Great (c. 540-604), Raymond Lull (c. 1235 -1315), Bartholomew de la Casas (1474-1566), Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) and Robert de Nobili (1577-1656), (Gort 2008: 749). It is quite unfortunate to note that such protest against other religions by Christianity went unabated up to the modern time. Most especially, the missionaries during the colonial rule and Christians in post-colonial age of globalization are still guided by "unbridled feelings of superiority". Religion assumes a bipolar nature as it is private and public. At its personal or private level,   no one quarrels with his neighbours. But at its public or socialized state, religion became contentious. ATR unlike Christianity defies dating. Christianity traces its origin to the period 800-200BC, an era described by historians as the axial age, partly due to the enormous cultures that sprouted up at that material time.   Marshall Hodgson (1974) writers

> The period saw the emergence of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and Pythagoras in Greece; Confucius and Lao-tze in China; Upanishad and Buddha in India: Zoroastrianism and Jewish prophets in Palestine. A good many of the so-called "world religions" arose during the period particularly Judaism, Hinduism, Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism and Zoroastrianism existed. Christianity sprang from Judaism and Islam inherited Zoroastrianism, Christianity Judaism (Marshall 1974: 111-128).

Christianity traces and derives its name to Christ. Hence, Christianity maintains that "Christ is the way, the truth and the life" and that no one could go to God except through Him. To Christ's name every knee must bow and every tongue confess. It claims that there is no other way by which man can be saved; and that "outside the Christian church, there can be no salvation" (Ozigbo 1989:67).

Arguably, the affirmation of uniqueness and exclusiveness of Christianity over every other world religion is the bedrock of the myriad contentions between Christianity and ATR. This is founded on the grounds that Christianity in its advent in Africa especially, Nigeria described ATR as "Paganism" and adherent of ATR as "unbelievers". Christianity also referred to all the instruments of worship of ATR such as carved woods, trees, molded objects *et cetera* as 'fetish' or 'idol'. Christianity advocates for the worship of God through Christ. ATR on the other hand commune with God -Chukwu through many deities and small gods. Just as Christ is the only channel acceptable to the Christian faith as the "true way" to worship God, adherents of ATR believe that God could be reached through different media. Therefore, the major contention between Christianity and ATR lies in the disparity in the "true medium" of worship. Christianity preaches that man's sins are forgiven him when he confesses to Christ and repents from such sins. Similarly, ATR believe that through "prayers" and sacrifices to the deities, one's sins are atoned.

Agbodike explains that prayers and sacrifices are offered by the people to the ancestors as well as to the gods and through them to God Almighty, so that the latter should ensure the stability of the society. Through prayers and sacrifices, African people appease the ancestors and the gods for offences they have committed and by so doing reconciled to them and obtain their blessings in return, (Agbodike 1999: 111-112).

Of course, these belief systems are embedded in African culture and religion. However, upon its introduction and arrival in Africa, especially, during the colonial era, Christianity disparaged adherents to ATR "pagans". Aspects of ATR worship such as oracular consultation, divination, pouring of libations and sacrifices were perceived as 'devilish" and "ungodly" and were rejected by Christianity. Hence, a break-away from such practices by adherents of ATR is seen as "repentance". By embracing the ways of Christianity, an individual's salvation is said to be guaranteed. The forceful imposition of Christianity by colonial rulers and missionaries heightened the contentions between African and European cultures exemplified in the two religions respectively. Iwe argued that "religion needs culture for its illumination and culture needs religion for its purification" (Iwe, 61).

Christianity, its nature and method of stiff competition for converts and claim of superiority under colonial rule, tried to force Nigerians, especially, in Igboland to totally abandon their traditional religion, beliefs and way of life. Many scholars are of the opinion that with the coming of Christianity, Traditional religion was dismantled and the Igbo quickly and uncritically accepted Christianity without reservation. (Anyanwu 2005:32). Ayandele (1979) also had stated that "the walls of Igbo pegandom collapsed Jericho-wise on the shouting of the gospel and that 1900 and 1902, the Bible rolled through Igboland like a juggernaut crushing the gods to atoms" (Ayandele 1979:169). The questions that one could ask are; were Igbo gods truly crushed as some scholars would have people believe? Did oracular consultations, divination, use of

'magical' powers, offering of sacrifices to the gods and deities and ancestor reverence stop in Africa with the ban on them by colonial rulers? What has been the relationship between ATR and Christianity in this age of globalization?

Indeed, the answers are not far fetched. The colonial rulers introduced measures to suppress ATR. These measures however, rather than suppress ATR, created contentious situations between the two religions and cultures. Over time, both religions have continued to be at loggerhead following the rise in materialism, poverty and quest for faster ways of solving human challenges by both Christians and ATR adherents in recent times. Stark realities tend to suggest that African Traditional Religion has remained dominant among Africans. In fact, the same people who embraced Christianity also practiced ATR, especially, in situations of emergency and during the implementation of such cultural practices as, child naming ceremony, initiation rites and burials. Both Christians and adherents to ATR still consult diviners, use magical powers and offer sacrifices and pour libations to deities and revere ancestors.

A look into the present situation around Nigeria and indeed Igboland suggests that the world of the African and his culture now feature prominently in churches. The real economics of religion- the search for greener pastures and increasing materialistic tendencies appear to unite both religions. This again suggests that both religions have a common goal- the worship of God and maintenance of mutual relationship between man and his creator. Hence, there appeared to have been a missing link and areas of possible dialogue that would have helped to ensure avoidable contentious between the two religions. These areas were heightened by the excesses of colonial rulers and the unrestricted desire of the earliest missionaries in Africa to prove and impose the superiority of Christianity over ATR. If these grey areas were considered when Christianity was introduced into Nigeria and Igboland, the perceived myriad contentions would have been graciously and carefully avoided. It would have provided for greater inter-religious dialogue between the two religions than is witnessed in this age of globalization.

Areas of Avoidable Contentions and Obstacles to Inter-religious Reconciliations
Within these contentions, four areas of dialogue and agreements are discussed. They were overshadowed by the perceived overbearing and exploitative economic motives and desire to impose Christian superiority over ATR by the missionary/colonizing European forces. These contentions obviously denied the two religions from sharing religious convictions for the purpose of mutual understanding that would have fostered peaceful coexistence amongst world community of various religious faiths. (Ademo 1989:82-88)

First amongst these contentions is the absence or due attention to "the dialogue of histories". The missionaries were obsessed with their desire to conquer, penetrate and dominate Igboland. Consequently, there was no room for any form of analysis of relations between the contending religious strange bed-fellows. This would have helped to define the stance and respect they would have had for one another. Besides, the positions they occupy vis-à-vis the political, social and economic spheres, the questions of justice, injustice, power, domination wealth and poverty would have been ironed out (Ademo 2011).

The second contention is the absence of "the dialogue of theologies" (Gort 2008: 758). This would have removed religious nescience and misunderstanding and in turn, foster respect and

tolerance among adherents and participants. This dialogue of theologies would have helped participants in both religions to gain a sense of the deepest meaning and intention of one another's religious tenets and thus, a way of breaking through communalist apprehensions of religion (Gort 2008: 760).

The third area of contention is absence of "the dialogue of spiritualities". There was the absence of a means of talking heart to heart about the deepest fears and highest hopes desiring to be understood. This would have helped effect a respectable exchange of truth-claims, core beliefs and convictions and existential religious feelings (Gort 2008: 760). The opportunity to share spiritualities was lost under colonial rule and has remained in practice in this age of globalization. If this dialogue of spiritualities had happened between ATR and Christianity, there would have been reconciliation of some sort.

The fourth and last contention considered in this discourse is the absence of "the dialogue of life" (Gort 2008:760). Gort argues that apart from the theological and spiritual differences and concerns, there are concerns of life. Such concerns of life have to do with injustice, poverty, hunger and others. If these contentions received attention or were dialogued by the two religions at the point of contact, the relationship between them would have been cordial. The 'jaw jaw' rather than 'war war' relations would have prevailed. To say the least, relations would have been devoid of the myriad contentions burn out of avoidable struggle for domination and superiority that chase Christian faithfuls and adherents of ATR in the 21st century Nigeria.

From the foregoing, it is safe to say that these grey areas produced some critical obstacles to inter-religious dialogue and reconciliation. It created continuous hostility in the part of Christianity against ATR. This stems out of the prejudices inherited by Christians of the 21st century from the colonial theology and feeling of superiority against a 'primitive' religion and culture. There exist levels of ignorance of the exact nature of ATR because Christian missionaries failed to undertake any study of what they perceived as a primitive religion. In addition, there is continuous aggression towards ATR by the imported religions. The competition for members by foreign religion e.g., Christianity targeted against ATR creates unending aggression and violence.

Most Christians consider dialogue of any sort with ATR as syncretism. As Ariarajah posits that the issue of enculturation and Africanisation of Christianity is perceived as corruption of Christianity which is Christocentric (Ariarajah1976:5). On the part of the impact of poverty and oppression, there is socio-economic injustice, which creates the need for economic democracy and understanding between religions. Fanaticism which is a characteristic feature of Christianity against ATR and African culture creates a big challenge between adherents of both religions. This negative influence of fundamentalism that characterizes relations between Christianity against ATR in Nigeria in the 21st century is a product inherited malaise from colonial imposition.

Suggestions/Conclusion
From our discourse so far, it is evident that most religions in the world have a commodious goal-the worship of the Supreme Being -God. What seem to be at the threshold of the myriad contentions is the manner some Christians at the earliest time of introduction conducted their

activities. They regarded ATR and its adherents as primitive religion coupled with the ban and disrespect they placed on aspects of African culture and way of life. The claim of superiority created a psychology of contempt against ATR. Hence, new converts to Christianity regarded ATR and its adherents as 'unbelievers'. It is this unwelcoming attitude and intolerant posture of Christianity that greased the wheel of myriad contentions between ATR and Christianity beyond the colonial era.

Therefore, with improved knowledge in this age of globalization of the understanding of areas of common relations among religions, there is need for increased inter-religious dialogue. Christian faithfuls should desist from the practice of intolerance and superiority claim over ATR. It is germane to note that in most cases, both adherents to ATR and Christians are equal and the same. There should be greater attention to popular wisdom that makes both people of the different religions live together in the same community. Despite the myriad contentions, people of different religions eat together, sleep together, celebrate and mourn together. They board the same buses, live in the same compounds/houses, attend the same schools and belong to the same associations and even buy from the same markets. This understanding should form the basis for greater cooperation and peaceful co-existence.

Christians should re-examine the theology of absolutism and embrace rational relations that tend to focus on ultimate reality without absolutizing its particular expressions. There should be greater attitude of humility and repentance instead of the show of arrogance by some Christians against ATR adherents. Greater study of African Religious tradition and culture should be encouraged as they constitute the foundation of a possible and meaningful reconciliation. This would also enhance religious and cultural democracy in this age of globalization. If Christians would eschew these morbid contentions emanating from colonially induced egoism, superiority complexes and unfounded competition derived from struggle for dominance and influence, religion would indeed be a factor for human unity and progress. It is not out of place if Christians in the age of globalization apologize for the wrongs of colonial missionaries which Pope John II started in 1986. During the Assisi inter-religious prayer meeting for peace, the Pope personally asked for forgiveness for the past mistakes of the church from traditional religious leaders (Mercado 2004, 2005: 102). This example should form the nexus for greater and positive religious dialogue towards having better understanding and improved relations between ATR and Christianity. Through this medium, effective management of the barrage of religious contentions would be achieved.

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