

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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22. Moti, J.S. and Wegh, F.S. *An Encounter Between Tiv Religion and Christianity* (Enugu: Snaap Press, 2001), 25.
23. Ibid., 26-27.
24. Torkula, A.A. *The Cosmology of Tiv Worldview*, 24.
25. Ibid., 26.

Beliefs and Veneration of Divinities

Lydia Bosede Akande and Olatunde Oyewole Ogunbiyi

INTRODUCTION

African Religion is the indigenous religion of the African people. This religion has been a part of their lives from the beginning of time. Their religion is structured on the belief in five pillars of faith. These pillars include belief in God or the Supreme Being, belief in Divinities, belief in Ancestors, belief in Spirits, and the belief in the efficacy of magic and medicine. Out of all these perceptions, the divinities occupy an important position in the hearts of African indigenous religion devotees. These beings have been given many names by various writers such as 'gods,' 'demigods,' 'nature spirits,' divinities, and the like.¹ Among the West Africans, the divinities are given much attention to the extent that if care is not taken, a cursory observer might mistake the worship of the divinities as the totality of the religious consciousness of the people of Africa. The towering figure of the divinities above others in the structure of African Religion has led many earlier investigators to the wrong conclusion regarding African Religion. Emil Ludwig, perhaps considering the overbearing presence of the divinities, concludes that God is a philosophical concept that Africans are incapable of conceiving. Apart from this, many wrong nomenclatures have been used to describe the people and their religion due to what was seen about the divinities and their places of abode. Such obnoxious terminologies include 'idolatry' because of the emblems of worship, 'paganism' as a result of the seemingly unattractive place of worship, and 'withdrawn God,' hinting at the popularity of the divinities and little attention that is given to the Supreme Being of the African people.

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Much has been written about the divinities of Africa both by Africans and by non-Africans. The works of Parrinder are worthy of mention among the non-Africans who have devoted time to the portrayal of Africans and their religious consciousness. Two of Parrinder's works are of particular relevance. In *African Mythology*² and *African Traditional Religion*,³ the issues of the divinities were extensively discussed from the viewpoint of an insider rather than an outsider. His works showcase a turn in the scholarship of African Religion devoid of prejudice and color sentiments. Other writers soon rose to present the case of the African people from the proper perspective. These were Africans who were writing for the Africans about the Africans to the world at large. The people were stooped in Christian theology, a tool that enabled them to research African Christian Theology and, by extension African Religion. Their works are pivotal for the generation of new scholars that were soon to take over from them. They can be regarded as the patriarchs of the African Traditional Religious scholarship. Of this group, only two are mentioned herein. They are John S. Mbiti⁴ and E. Bolaji Idowu.⁵ These two are chosen for this study because of the scope of this work. The second reason why they merit a place in this work is their sphere of influence coupled with their geographical location. While Mbiti was from Kenya, Idowu was a Nigerian. While Mbiti's searchlight focused primarily on East, Central, and Southern Africa, Idowu's work covered West Africa.

Both wrote eloquently and assiduously in defense of African Religion. Their works can be viewed as polemics in the study of African Religion, especially in the area of divinities. More African scholars have arisen after these, and just a few out of the vast array of writers are mentioned. Among those are such scholars like J. Omosade Awolalu⁶ and P. A. Dopamu.⁷ Aside from their individual books, both writers have written a book together. The efforts of these scholars dig deeper from their patriarch scholars. The authors of *West African Traditional Religion*,⁸ for example, identify the divinities that are worshipped in each ethnic group of West Africa. The work of Jemiriye⁹ differentiates God from gods, highlighting the fact that the divinities are subordinate to the Supreme Being. Talking about the divinities, Etuk¹⁰ posits that below and subject to the Supreme Being are arrays of divinities that are highly regarded and worshipped by the people.

THE PLACE OF DIVINITIES IN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

Today, African Traditional Religion is gradually enjoying unprecedented attention among devotees and researchers alike. These have put the religion in a better light, making the religion appealing to those living both in and outside Africa. The religion has been transferred from time immemorial to the present time primarily through oral transmission. The religion is indigenous to the people and often referred to as traditional. It has answered their existential questions until foreign religions arrived in the region to challenge the status

structure that recognizes the Supreme Being, who occupies the highest stratum of the ladder. Closely following the Supreme Being are the Divinities, followed by the Ancestors and Spirits, respectively. The belief in magic and medicine occupies the lowest rung of the structural ladder of African traditional religious consciousness. Of all the five, the belief in divinities is given more attention than any other of the entities on the spiritual ladder of the people. It should be noted that belief in divinities varies from one locality to another; therefore, it is unclear as to whether all the ethnic groups across Africa worship one divinity or the other. Nevertheless, divinities are popular among the ethnic groups of West Africa who regard them as the objective phenomenon of their religion. In the eastern part of Africa, however, ancestors are given more recognition than the divinities, though they also venerate the divinities. The divinities, where they are given prominence, are the ones that are most worshipped. They are considered a halfway course to the Almighty. Divinities are believed to be able to provide their worshipper with whatever is demanded. They can protect the people from war and environmental challenges. They can be reached on the land, in the water, and virtually anywhere as they occupy the geographical space of the African people. Divinities are so popular that Awosanmi¹¹ considers the whole religion of the *Yorùbá* as Orisaism.

IDENTITIES AND FUNCTIONS OF THE DIVINITIES

The idea of the divinities is prevalent among the African people, especially the West Africans. To them, the divinities are the objective phenomenon, not the Supreme Being, and neither are the ancestors. In the elucidation of the Africans' divinities, many scholars and commentators have preferred to describe them by the modern-day governance of individual countries. For instance, Idowu¹² portrays them as members of the cabinet in theocratic governance of the world. These have compared them to ministers in the governance of a nation. In their opinions, the divinities are ministers in the theocratic governance of the world; this assertion is anchored on the notion that God is the Supreme Being of the whole universe. Thus, it is in the attempt at governance that he made them overseers in specific compartments of the authority of the whole world. As messengers, their power and authority were given to them by the Supreme Being, making it possible for them to render services to God and men.

The belief in divinities is entrenched throughout sub-Saharan Africa. These divinities are very popular among the Africans because they are believed to have answers to the prayers of their devotees. They are worshipped because they are believed to provide and protect the people of Africa. It is in light of this that Ray¹³ observes that the goddess, Yemoja, gains more devotees because of her benevolence to drowning swimmers, victims of accidents on the waterways, and even fishermen. Oladimeji¹⁴ also speaks of the role these divinities play in conflict resolutions in Africa and among the people. However, these divinities are believed to vary in number. The dominance of divinities or ancestors in an

particular area. Where there are many divinities like among the *Yorùbá*, the objective phenomena are the divinities.

On the other hand, the objective phenomena of the peoples of East Africa are the ancestors and local spirits. Therefore, they have a lower number of divinities than in West Africa where the number is greater. There exist a few exceptions to this assertion, however. For example, the Akan citizens of Ghana are people who venerate the ancestors but have a fairly sizeable number of divinities. Parrinder captures the essence of what is being said when he asserts:

Roughly it may be said that the peoples of Central and Southern Africa have not developed belief in nature gods, whereas many of the leading peoples of West Africa have large pantheons of gods. But some of the Sierra Leone tribes in the Far West regard the ancestors as all-important and have only vague beliefs in other spirits.¹⁵

In the whole of Africa, the *Yorùbá* ethnic group of Nigeria has the most significant number of divinities. Different Odu corpuses, according to Idowu,¹⁶ have given the number ranging between 201, 401, 600, and 1700 divinities. It is interesting to note here that their perception of the ancestors is not as prominent as the divinities. By extension, the Africans believe that the divinities are known throughout the nooks and crannies of their land. This is what Njoku¹⁷ means when he insists that the phenomenon of belief in divinities is noted everywhere in Africa.

From the preceding, it is clear that the divinities are the objective phenomena of the religious consciousness of the West Africans. The Supreme Being is venerated but hardly worshipped, so are the ancestors who are regarded as the living dead. The divinities are the most popular and actively worshipped. They are regarded as ministers within the theocratic governance of the universe. They are burdened with the responsibility of creation, some with justice, and agriculture, to mention a few. Additionally, they are considered to be intermediaries between the Supreme Being and man. They are a means to an end but not an end in themselves. God is worshipped through them, and they are recipients of sacrifices. They have a cult of priests attached to their shrines, grooves, or temples with a large number of devotees.

CATEGORIES OF THE DIVINITIES

The divinities vary in number and responsibilities from one ethnic group to another throughout Africa. The divinities are divisible into three categories¹⁸—primordial divinities, deified ancestors, and personification of natural phenomena. The primordial divinities are those that are emanations of God. They came forth in consequence of the Almighty. According to Ojo,¹⁹

The divinities are spiritual beings. They share aspects of the Supreme Being, in consequence of which they become gods with a small letter "g". This is why in

is not correct to say they are created. It will be correct to say that they emanated from the Supreme Deity or that they were engendered by Him, brought forth by Him, or came into being in consequence of Him. In other words, the divinities have attributes, qualities, or characteristics of the Supreme Being, and they are, in consequence, off-springs of God.

They were with Him from the beginning of time and were saddled with the responsibilities of the smooth running of the earth. They are the divinities that are believed to have lived in heaven with the Supreme Being. As a result of this, their origin remains shrouded in obscurity, just like the Supreme Being whose origin is also unknown. These divinities were in charge of the creation of the world, the formation of human beings, some were oracular divinities, and others were left in charge of clearing a path to the earth.

The Deified Ancestors occupy the second category of the African divinities. The occupants of this category are those divinities that were once human beings on earth but later died as heroes of their ethnic group. As a result of their extraordinary lives and performances on earth, they became deified after their death. Ordinarily, a person who has lived an exemplary life on earth becomes an ancestor upon death. Thus, a person who has lived an extraordinary life on earth becomes a divinity for that ethnic group. Some of the feats that qualify a person to become a divinity is for saving His people from marauding armies, such as in the case of Moremi of Ile-Ife, or one who had an unusual ability to achieve great things like Sango who could conjure fire to destroy his enemies. Both Moremi and Sango are prime examples from the *Yorùbá*. Usually, a divinity assumes the attributes of another divinity.²⁰

The third category of divinities is those that are the personification of natural phenomena. The divinities under this category consist of as many as there are natural phenomena on the land. These Spirits are known to inhabit rivers, streams, caves, forests, mountains, hills, and other natural phenomena available in the African geographical space. In light of this, these places where the spirits inhabit are regarded as sacred places. Such hills and rocks like Oke-Ibadan and Olumo Rocks become the home of the divinities. Usually, the spirits occupying these sacred sites are called by the names of those mountains, rivers, or hills. Annual festivals are also held in honor of these divinities by their adherents.

Awolalu and Dopamu,²¹ in their elucidation of the divinities among the West Africans, have attempted a rough categorization of the divinities into different departments. These include:

Arch Divinity. Orisa-nla or Obatala (*Yorùbá*); Ala, Ana, or Ani (Igbo); Olokun (Edo); Egbesu (Ijaw); Obumo (Ibibio); Gunnu (Nupe); Mawu-Lisa (Ewe-Fon); Tano (Akan and Ga); Dugbo (Kono).

Oracle Divinity. Orunmila or Ifa (*Yorùbá*); Fa (Ewe-Fon); Agwu (Igbo); Ibinikpabi (Igbo).

Earth Divinity. Sanponna (*Yorùbá*); Sagbata (Ewe-Fon); Ojukwu (Igbo);

Divinity of Iron: Ogun (Yorùbá); Gu (Ewe-Fon); Ta Yao (Ashanti).

Thunder Divinity: Sango (Yorùbá); Hevioso (Ewe-Fon); Gua (Akan); Sokogba (Nupe); Amadioha (Igbo); Ogiuwu (Edo).

Divine Messenger: (Trickster): Esu (Yorùbá); Legba (Ewe-Fon); Agwu (Igbo).

Water Divinity: Osun, Oya, Olokun (Yorùbá); Bosomtwe (Akan); Binabu (Ijaw).

It is worth mentioning that even when the regions or tribes of people speak the same language, divinities vary in numbers from one ethnic group to the other or from one community to the other. For example, a different number of their Pantheon is given by *Ifa* corpus among the Yorùbá, where such numbers as 201, 401, 600, and even 1700 were given for their population. However, the number is lower in other ethnic groups across Africa. The reasons for the increase in number may not be unconnected to issues related to migration, development, and cultural contacts forcing a fusion of divinities to form new divinities or nomenclatures similar to the foreign culture that has come to settle within another community. Among the Yorùbá and the Ewe, the oracular divinity is *Ifa* and *Fa*, respectively. The combination of divinities in a particular area is known as the Pantheon of that particular place. The Pantheon has an arch divinity as their head. He is the most important of the Pantheon and is usually confused with the Supreme Being. For example, *Orisa-nla* is the head of the Yorùbá Pantheon. He rules with the scepter received from Olodumare himself. It must, however, be maintained that the Supreme Being is far above all the divinities.

WORSHIP OF THE DIVINITIES

Since it has been noted that the divinities are the objective phenomena of the West Africans, it is clear that the divinities are offered worship far above any other spiritual agency in the theology of the people. A look at the liturgical elements indicates the level of veneration the people have for their gods. During worship, the devotees often begin with a libation. Libation is the act of pouring some liquid onto the floor, or onto the emblems of those divinities that are being worshipped. Oftentimes, water, palm wine, spirits, beer, and liquor are liquid items used. Each divinity has its own drink preference, and this is poured on the ground or the paraphernalia of worship. Significantly, the liquid is believed to "soften" the ground and usher the worshippers to the presence of the divinities. Going simultaneously with libation is the invocation of the divinities. This is done by calling upon the divinity that is being worshipped. He or she is called by his or her cognomens, attributes, and praise songs. This is succeeded with an invitation to the worshippers to partake in the ceremony. Next comes the offering. The offerings differ from one divinity to the other throughout Africa, such as food items like rice, kolanut, yam, or fruits. After the offering, petitions follow next, while songs are accompanied by musical instruments. Songs often come in the form of praises, petitions.

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history of the divinity. These songs lead to dancing and merriment. One of the final liturgical acts is the offering of sacrifices. This is a crucial element of the ceremony. Usually, sacrifices that are offered differ from one divinity to the other. Sacrificial items include rams, cows, snails, dogs, and other animals. Often, the entrails of the animals are what are offered as a sacrifice to the divinity. Sacrifices are sometimes for thanksgiving, and it is done when devotees wish to thank the divinities. Votive offerings are made in consequence of an answered prayer that was followed by a vow. Expiation and substitutionary sacrifices are two of a kind that are close to one another. While expiation is to seek forgiveness, substitutionary sacrifices are given as substitutes for the people. There are also preventive sacrifices and foundational sacrifices. Preventive sacrifices are to prevent evils from entering the community, while foundation sacrifices are done when a new town or a new house is to be built.

OBJECTS OF WORSHIP, SACRED ABODES, AND RELIGIOUS PERSONALITIES

The objects of worship and their habitations of the African divinities have contributed to the religion being misconstrued and misrepresented by earlier writers and commentators. These investigators have concluded that the African people worship a withdrawn god. They have referred to African Religion as idolatry, heathenism, and several other obnoxious nomenclatures. However, a cursory observation of the people's actions, devoid of prejudicial sentiments, would have revealed the truth to these researchers. It is clear that the people are not idol worshippers; instead, they believe that the images they venerate possess the spirits of their known divinities. These divinities can stay or decide to leave their abodes anytime they feel like, and the images become empty. Each divinity has symbols or emblems that are sacred to him or her. These are merely visual representations of the divinities. These emblems and symbols, which are considered sacred to the people of Africa, are kept away from the public. The symbols are sometimes made of wooden materials carved for the purpose of representation. The emblems are kept in various places of worship. The divinities inhabit sacred places that dot the African landscape. They can either be in temples, shrines, or grooves. The divinities are offered worship in these sacred places as they can be communicated to there.

RELATIONSHIP OF THE DIVINITIES TO THE SUPREME BEING

The divinities are known to be capable of answering the petitions of the devotees. They can give children to those who desire to have children. It is in recognition of this that names are given to children attesting to the fact that the divinities have answered their prayers. Hence, such names like Ogunbiyi, Ogodayo, Esurayi, or Ifabiyi among the *Yorùbá* are given to children due to answered prayers. When the divinities answer the prayers of the devotees, they are given names that attest to the fact that the divinities have answered their prayers.

war, sacrifices are often given to them. However, the divinities are not an end in themselves; rather, they are a means to an end. The implication here is that they have someone who is superior to them in the person of Olodumare. While it is true that they are the objective phenomenon of the people, the Africans do not doubt their position before the Almighty. This can be demonstrated in their sociological patterns. All across the continent of Africa, the King is the supreme ruler and is at the apex of the pyramid. Closely following the King are the Chiefs, the village heads before the common people. It is this pattern that plays itself out in the course of their theological consciousness. The people of Africa view the Supreme Being as the head of the theocratic pyramidal structure, and the divinities as those delegated with myriads of functions. Thus, their authorities are derived from the Supreme Being. In view of this, the divinities are considered to be representatives of God on earth. They are between God and men. Using the *Yorùbá*, as an example, the devotees see them as they see the Chiefs who are expected to take their needs to the King and bring the King's responses to them. That is the reason why the Kings do not usually appear in public. However, when they do, they usually wear a crown that partially covers their faces.

To prove that the divinities are not an end in themselves, the Africans have myths attesting to the divinities' lower position. First, recall that the Supreme Being sent them to the earth to fulfill specific assignments. *Orisa-nla* was sent into the world to create the earth according to the *Yorùbá*, for example. Besides, the story is told by the *Yorùbá* of Nigeria, whereas 1700 divinities demanded that the Supreme Being should abdicate the throne of governance of the universe for them for a trial period of 16 years. God suggested they run it for only 16 days. By the eighth day, things got so bad that they had to petition Olodumare to take back the running of the universe.²² According to Idowu,²³ the story ended with the divinities celebrating and praising the Supreme Being. Another is the Edo myth that Awolalu and Dopamu succinctly relate in their book, *West African Traditional Religion*,²⁴ as summarized next.

The myth concerns the Edo ethnic group of Nigeria. It speaks about the beauty contest between Olokun and Osanobwa. On the day of the contest, Osanobwa, the Supreme Being of the Edo people, sent his messenger to invite Olokun, who is a river divinity, to the venue. Once getting out to receive the messenger, Olokun discovered that the messenger was dressed exactly as he/she was. This feat was done several times, and she found that the messenger was always dressed as she was. The messenger of Osanobwa was the Chameleon. Osanobwa accepted defeat because much as she tried, she could not beat the messenger of God. Regarding the relationship between the Supreme Being and the Divinities, Ekeke and Ekeopara²⁵ has succinctly come up with five reasons to prove the assertion that the divinities are subordinate to the Supreme Being. These include: they are created beings; they are derivations from the Deity; they are given functions to perform in the world; they were functionaries in the theocratic governance of the world; and they are intermediaries between human beings and God.

CONCLUSION

African religious consciousness, the divinities exist to add meaning to the life of devotees and the society at large. While the Supreme Being is regarded as the creator who occupies the highest echelon of the pyramidal structure of the people's religion, the divinities are the most venerated by the Africans. They occupy a place between the Supreme Being and human beings in their quest for answers to life's questions. The words of Ushe²⁶ are appropriate here:

The Supreme Being is venerated and not worshipped. The Africans have no temple and an image attributed to Him because He is beyond human comprehension. He is unique, showing that there is none like Him. The Supreme Being in African religious belief has so many divinities or deputies who work with Him in the unitary theocratic governance of the universe. They are functionaries and ministers whose duties are to carry out the full instructions of the Supreme Being. They do not have absolute power; their existence is derived from the Supreme Being. They are created as so and are subordinate to God in all matters.

The importance and popularity of these divinities have gone beyond the shores of Africa. They are also worshipped in America and even in Latin America.

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Beliefs and Veneration of Ancestors

Benson Ohihon Igboin

INTRODUCTION

In discussing African concept of the ancestors, we are not concerned about the generally incorrect position such as 'ancestor worship' but rather we are poised to critically examine the traditional fundamentals of assuming ancestor-hood in order to determine whether they are still consistent with contemporary realities in Africa. In any case, ancestors have been defined as the dead whose memory will be kept among the living. They are those who must have satisfied certain moral and social conditions set by the community before their death. These conditions will be critically examined later in the light of the contemporary realities in Africa. Even though Western scholarship seems to diminish the value and importance of ancestors, the reality is that in most parts of rural Africa the belief is still strong. In fact, continuous research has demonstrated that the praxis is truer than the theoretical framework consigning it to the past.¹

Ancestors are believed to play significant roles in the community they have left behind. The debate over the relevance of the ancestors in contemporary Africa has been a controversial one. One school of thought argues that the ancestors are still relevant in societal administration in rural settlements, which have not been completely 'infested' by modernity's machine of devaluation of values, though at different levels in individual communities.² The other posits that ancestors have no relevance again, and they should rest in peace, if possible. The latter hinges its arguments on the realities of contemporary social, political, economic, and technological challenges which the ancestors did not

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African Traditional Religion and Humanities' Scholarship: The Contributions of Edward Geoffrey Parrinder and Kofi Asare Opoku

Olatunde Oyewole Ogunbiyi and Lydia Bosede Akande

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary academic discussions on African Traditional Religion, there is an emphasis on considering the works of "patriarch" scholars and their attendant influences on the field. These scholars have blazed the trail for future scholars that will either tow or abandon the path they had opened for posterity. It is important to examine the works of these scholars for several reasons, a few of which are highlighted in this study. Many of the scholars themselves are dying out, and their exits are a cause for concern. The legacies they leave behind should be made available for upcoming researchers to act as springboards for future studies. Besides, they were the ones who actually started a serious academic examination of African Traditional Religion. This is a religion that has hitherto been subjected to a series of misinterpretations and consequent misrepresentations. There were apologies of African Traditional Religion in the face of virulent persecutions from Western scholars when prejudice was the order of the day for anything that was not Western. A few of these patriarch scholars of African Traditional Religion were Europeans, while others were Africans.

Among these are the likes of Geoffrey Parrinder, John S. Mbiti, E. Bolaji Idowu, Joseph Omosade Awolalu, Kofi Opoku Asare, and P. Adelumola.

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European, yet he wrote an unbiased account of his fieldwork in Africa. The other scholar who merits a space in this exercise is Kofi Asare Opoku, who can be described as a second-generation scholar. He was an African and a contributor to the academic studies of African Traditional Religion across universities both in Nigeria and overseas. It is worthy of mention that all the scholars earlier mentioned, including the two to be studied, have made tremendous contributions and sacrifices in the field of academics.

The work is further divided into four major areas and examines African Traditional Religion in its pristine form. This will provide a basis for the earlier scholars' perception of the religion. The third section is devoted to the study of the personality of Parrinder and his academic legacies as it relates only to African Traditional Religion because, as a versatile scholar, he touched every aspect of "World Religions." A similar emphasis is carried out on Opoku in the fourth section of this chapter, while the fifth section is an assessment of their works. The approaches that are used are multi-disciplinary, which include the historical and theological approaches. The historical approach affords the researchers the ability to trace the history of African Traditional Religious scholarship and the profiles of the scholars under review, while the theological approach examines their works in line with the religious consciousness of the Africans.

AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION IN ITS PRISTINE FORM

Religion has been one of the most difficult concepts to define. Attempting to capture this fact, Nana Osei Bonsu puts it this way: "Religion, like any other philosophical concept does not have a single universally accepted definition. This is because religion deals with immaterial objects that cannot be empirically verified. It has been defined differently by people of diverse interests, academic and cultural backgrounds."¹

In most cases, people focus on their expressions or manifestations rather than its essence, which should be a significant area of concern.² There exist diverse definitions, as many as there are disciplines. Each of these disciplines attempts to define religion from the spectacles of their own discipline. As of today, there is no acceptable definition of "religion." In an attempt to define the word, Rahner³ examines the etymological connotation of the word as he traced the root of the word "religion" to the Latin word *religio* with its different verb forms—*relegere*, *religari*, and *reeligere*.

This etymological construct will serve as the premise for the overview of the African Traditional Religion: African Traditional Religion is hitherto referred to as ATR and is the aboriginal religion of the Africans. It is the indigenous beliefs and practices of the African people that have existed before the advent of foreigners on the African land space. ATR is the religion that has been

by the African people, some of who even claimed to be Muslims or Christians. The religion is considered "traditional" since it is indigenous to the Africans and the transmission mode from the generations unknown to the present day. In the words of Awolalu, "This is not a 'fossil' religion, a thing of the past or a dead religion. It is a religion that is practiced by living men and women."⁴ Interestingly, the religion, like other religions of the world, has undergone several changes in lieu of the technological advancements and globalizing agencies, which makes the term to be one that only speaks of the religion in terms of age and difference from foreign religions that came afterward to Africa.

There have been a lot of debates that later scholars have come to engage themselves in regarding ATR. Some have preferred to see the religion in the singular; others have chosen to see it in the plural. Bolaji Idowu, Awolalu, and Dopamu see the religion in the singular, while Parrinder and Mbiti prefer to view the religion as plural. Hence, some view it as African Traditional Religion, while others view it as African Traditional Religions. Those who see it in the singular postulate a homogenous perception of the peoples' faith, not denying the diversity in languages and ethnicity but focusing on the structural similarities inherent in their faith. Still, others prefer to view it from the linguistic differences of the Africans, the size of the continent, and the apparent dichotomy in number, theologies, and emphasis and conclude that the religion should be seen in the plural. The chapter's authors are of the opinion that the religion of the people is actually one. This is anchored on the similarities in the structure of African Religion, which by far outweigh the dissimilarities, especially in the structure of the religion.

When compared to other world religions, ATR has no scriptures like the Qu'ran or the Bible. It is a religion that is based on oral transmissions, which has existed for centuries, though it must also be emphasized that the religion has its own corpora, some of which are still reduced into writing. In addition to this, the religion differs from others because it does not possess temples like the foreign religion that came after. As far as the Africans are concerned, God can be worshiped anywhere, and he is not localized to a particular place. It must be added here that the religion has sacred places known as grooves, shrines, and oftentimes houses where God is worshiped. The founder of the religion is shrouded in mystery. He is not known, though it must be emphasized that the religion is not the religion of a man but a collective. In light of this, the religion has no revivalists, reformers, or evangelists to propagate it. Nevertheless, ATR devotees have been known to be loyal to their religion.

The Africans construct their cosmos from three-dimensional, distinct but inseparable worlds; these are the human order with their social concepts, the non-human world that is physical and natural, plus the spiritual world where the unseen forces inhabit. These three are mutually interrelated, constituting a unity and depending on one another. Around this worldview hangs their perception of the beings they revere as a people. This consists of recognizing

Spain. This chapter examines two out of these erudite scholars. They are Edward Geoffrey Parrinder and Kofi Asare Opoku. The reasons for the writers' choice of these enigmatic figures lie in the fact that Edward Parrinder was a European, yet he wrote an unbiased account of his fieldwork in Africa. The other scholar who merits a space in this exercise is Kofi Asare Opoku, who can be described as a second-generation scholar. He was an African and a contributor to the academic studies of African Traditional Religion across universities both in Nigeria and overseas. It is worthy of mention that all the scholars earlier mentioned, including the two to be studied, have made tremendous contributions and sacrifices in the field of academics.

The work is further divided into four major areas and examines African Traditional Religion in its pristine form. This will provide a basis for the earlier scholars' perception of the religion. The third section is devoted to the study of the personality of Parrinder and his academic legacies as it relates only to African Traditional Religion because, as a versatile scholar, he touched every aspect of "World Religions." A similar emphasis is carried out on Opoku in the fourth section of this chapter, while the fifth section is an assessment of their works. The approaches that are used are multi-disciplinary, which include the historical and theological approaches. The historical approach affords the researchers the ability to trace the history of African Traditional Religious scholarship and the profiles of the scholars under review, while the theological approach examines their works in line with the religious consciousness of the Africans.

AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION IN ITS PRISTINE FORM

Religion has been one of the most difficult concepts to define. Attempting to capture this fact, Nana Osei Bonsu puts it this way: "Religion, like any other philosophical concept does not have a single universally accepted definition. This is because religion deals with immaterial objects that cannot be empirically verified. It has been defined differently by people of diverse interests, academic and cultural backgrounds."¹

In most cases, people focus on their expressions or manifestations rather than its essence, which should be a significant area of concern.² There exist diverse definitions, as many as there are disciplines. Each of these disciplines attempts to define religion from the spectacles of their own discipline. As of today, there is no acceptable definition of "religion." In an attempt to define the word, Rahner³ examines the etymological connotation of the word as he traced the root of the word "religion" to the Latin word *religio* with its different verb forms—*relegere*, *religari*, and *reeligere*.

This etymological construct will serve as the premise for the overview of the African Traditional Religion. African Traditional Religion is hitherto referred to as ATR and is the aboriginal religion of the Africans. It is the indigenous beliefs and practices of the African people that have existed before the advent of foreigners on the African land space. ATR is the religion that has been

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transmitted from one generation to the other through oral transmission. This is the faith that has been practiced from time immemorial to the present time by the African people, some of who even claimed to be Muslims or Christians. The religion is considered "traditional" since it is indigenous to the Africans and the transmission mode from the generations unknown to the present day. In the words of Awolalu, "This is not a 'fossil' religion, a thing of the past or a dead religion. It is a religion that is practiced by living men and women."⁴ Interestingly, the religion, like other religions of the world, has undergone several changes in lieu of the technological advancements and globalizing agencies, which makes the term to be one that only speaks of the religion in terms of age and difference from foreign religions that came afterward to Africa.

There have been a lot of debates that later scholars have come to engage themselves in regarding ATR. Some have preferred to see the religion in the singular; others have chosen to see it in the plural. Bolaji Idowu, Awolalu, and Dopamu see the religion in the singular, while Parrinder and Mbiti prefer to view the religion as plural. Hence, some view it as African Traditional Religion, while others view it as African Traditional Religions. Those who see it in the singular postulate a homogenous perception of the peoples' faith, not denying the diversity in languages and ethnicity but focusing on the structural similarities inherent in their faith. Still, others prefer to view it from the linguistic differences of the Africans, the size of the continent, and the apparent dichotomy in number, theologies, and emphasis and conclude that the religion should be seen in the plural. The chapter's authors are of the opinion that the religion of the people is actually one. This is anchored on the similarities in the structure of African Religion, which by far outweigh the dissimilarities, especially in the structure of the religion.

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