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**Africa and the Challenges of Religious
Foundationalism: Thinking on Wole Soyinka's
Option**

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Abstract

The super-imposition of extraneous religious logic has caused serious problems in Africa. Though religion is a strong force to be reckoned with in national development, it has proved to be

problematic in a nation like Nigeria. Dangerous fanaticisms, sectarian violence, violation of human rights are some of the problems that emanate from a wrong episteme of religion. Beyond this, there is a foundationalist epistemology where adherents of various denominations push up the epistemic capacity of their religion as the ultimate standard of religious rationality. This has polarized humanity to such an extent that religious inclinations form a basis for the definition and recognition of the being of others. If John shares the same faith with James, then James is considered a brother and a human, but if they share a different faith, the question of humanity and rationality automatically sets in. This paper critically explores the concept of religion, foundationalism and generates a philosophical discourse that can enhance a mindset of tolerance. It explores the view of Wole Soyinka in his essay, *The Credo of Being and Nothingness* and asserts that the humanistic value in the African Traditional Religion could be a template for other religions and a feature to be propagated.

Keywords

Religion, Foundationalism, Religious Foundationalism

Introduction

Religion occupies an important place in human society. As a result of its role in society, the human being has been described not only as a rational being, but also as a religious being. An individual to a large extent, is by nature religious and there is always that urge in people to unite with the supernatural aspect of their existence. This urge is symbolized by the proliferation of various religious organizations and practices. Faith and beliefs are central to religions. Unfortunately, these belief systems have turned out to be the major ills of religious practices as different religions now engage in a battle for supremacy and authenticity over others. The outcome has been an attempt to impose the doctrines of one over the other thereby breeding hatred, most especially among their adherents and faithful. It is therefore not surprising that religion, considered as an important aspect of human existence, has also been the force that is responsible for the division that exists among people.

Some exclusive religions like Islam, Judaism and Christianity consistently wish to be seen as the only foundation for absolute truth about the knowledge of the supernatural. In Africa today, the problem has moved from the question of supernatural truth to the issue of state religion. The outcome of this is the constant religious crises arising from religious intolerance, sectarian violence and imposition of religious faith and beliefs. The challenges of religious foundationalism in Africa are enormous and the effects could be seen in almost every facet of our existence. Since most of these religions in Africa are products of colonialism, what future lies for the unity of Africa? Must we allow religion to destroy us or is there any need for the Africanization of foreign religions? This shall be the focus of this paper in the light of Soyinka's *The Credo of Being and Nothingness*.

Clarification of Concepts

Three major concepts seek clarification in lights of which they are being used in this paper, these are religion, foundationalism and religious foundationalism.

Meaning of Religion

From its etymology, religion is derived from the Latin word 'religare' which means "to bind back" or "to rebind". This implies that etymologically speaking, religion entails a process of reconnecting by worship a missing or broken intimacy between God and worshippers. The alternative less known and used etymological origin of religion is the Latin word 'relegere' denoting "to re-read."¹ Away from its etymological understanding, there have been various attempts to define the phenomenon of religion. These attempts have come from various perspectives, ranging from the psychological, sociological and anthropological to the philosophical and theological² and, most recently, they have come from a biological perspective.³ However, since this is beyond the scope of this paper, we shall not bother to investigate these plethora of definitions. But we should see religion as an attitude

¹Joseph, C. L. Shipwreck of faith "The religious vision and ideas of Wole soyinka Toronto: journal of Theology 2015

²Ohadike, D. Muslim-Christian conflict and political instability in Nigeria. University press. 1993

³Owutu 2013 p. 3

because it involves devotion and provision of orientation to life, both for individuals and communities. This orientation is based on self-realization and social harmony and also a personal experience that redounds positively to the public good when properly handled.⁴

Contextually, therefore, we shall adopt the meaning of religion as offered by Akinola who conceives of it as being “associated with the role of preaching the moral principles and rules that are expected to govern societies and the lives of its members.”⁵ Akinola’s definition of religion stems from the sociological theory of religion where religion is conceived of as a creation of the society for the control of its members. This definition further shows why religion is such a powerful force in the society. And because it is believed to possess a powerful force in the society, this definition also explains the continuous struggle for supremacy among different religions.

Foundationalism

Foundationalism as a school of thought has a strong root in epistemology and metaphysics.⁶ Though its root traces back to the ancient period of western philosophy when the Ionians sought to understand the basic material of the earth, it was Rene Descartes’ rationalism that gave impetus to it.

Descartes believed that there are certain truths which can only be known through their intrinsic nature. Similarly, Hegel talks about the absolute as the foundation of reality and knowledge generally. In the Hegelian view, knowledge becomes the self-manifestation of the absolute spirit. Though there have been variations in the foundational thought system that now accommodates empiricism, foundationalism is basically a rationalistic ideology.

Foundationalism is a theory of justification that claims that a belief is justified if it is derived from some basic beliefs called foundations. The theory of foundation is held by some theorists of epistemic justification that all our beliefs are made up of two kinds: those beliefs that are self-justifying and non-basic beliefs that need

⁴Soyinka, W. *Climate of fear: the quest for dignity in a dehumanized world*. Random house. 2004 P.10

⁵Soyinka, W. *Climate of fear: the quest for dignity in a dehumanized world*. Random house. 2004 P.10

⁶Ibid 120

to be justified by their inferential relationship to the basic beliefs. Proceeding further, foundationalists classify beliefs into those that are infallible and self-evident and those that are inferential. Foundationalism as a theory of justification posits that some beliefs are incorrigible and infallible and as such does not need to be justified; such beliefs are said to be self-evident or derived by intuition.⁷

Of utmost importance to us in this work on foundationalism as a theory of epistemic justification is the idea of intuition. Intuition is a state of awareness based on revelation. Like epistemic intuition, religion is often seen as a revealed experience. Employed in religion, therefore, it is believed by some religions that their intuitive experience is clearer and as such should serve as the basis through which other beliefs could be based, justified and evaluated.

Religious Foundationalism

Religion is characterized by the passion that it can arouse.⁸At the heart of every exclusive religion is the view that presupposes superiority to the other. Three major religions that can be described as exclusive are Christianity, Islam and Judaism. Because of their self-perceived nature of superiority, these religions tend to be the major forces that shape the progress of the society in history more than other known religions of the world. As a result of their influences in the society, the need to see one religion as a yardstick for the acceptance or denial of other religious doctrines and beliefs becomes the rallying point for their superiority.

The term “religious foundationalism” therefore is the view which bears out that the doctrinal base of a given religion constitutes an epistemic focus for evaluating other religions. The idea of religious foundationalism has been described by Bergson as giving rise to a closed society. It will, according to him, only produce a static society and its attendant ills. Bergson describes such religions as being humiliating to humankind. He regretted that “The spectacle of what religions have been in the past, of what certain religions still are today, is indeed humiliating for human intelligence.”⁹ In more simple words, a religious foundationalist

⁷Soyinka, W. *Climate of fear: the quest for dignity in a dehumanized world*. Random house. 2004 P.10

⁸Joseph, C. L. Shipwreck of faith “The religious vision and ideas of Wole soyinka Toronto: journal of Theology 2015

⁹Harris,2012 p.110

sees his or her religion as the ontological foundation which every religious person must embrace. It is the belief that for the doctrines of other religions to be accepted, such belief systems must comply with certain intrinsic paradigms.

Every religion is an attempt to understand the divine reality. No single religion has the final answer. Every religion, even the so called pseudo religions themselves, contains the moment of people's attempt to comprehensively give a satisfactory response and even answer to agitating minds matters concerning the ultimate reality.¹⁰ Meanwhile, whenever religion is particularized or absolutely rationalized, the very reality of religion as the absolute dynamism of the singular, immediate experience becomes elusive. In such cases, religion is concretized wholly in singular purposeful ventures and phenomenon. This is the moment it is also estranged from its foundation which is the disposition towards the coordination of the necessary of reality, the balancing of differentiation in determination; "Every religion, no matter how inadequately it seeks to express the experience underlying it, serves as a missing link."¹¹ Thus, identifying a religion as the core of every religious experience is wrong because religion is diversely conceived and interpreted.

Religious foundationalism, therefore, bears out that the doctrinal base of a given religion constitutes an epistemic focus for examining other religions. It presupposes that there is an intrinsic parameter which other belief systems must comply with. In line with this, a religious foundationalist sees his/her religion as the ontological foundation which every religious person must embrace.

The Challenges of Religious Foundationalism in Africa

Africa is a continent noted for different religious denominations. While some of these religions are imported, others are indigenous. But irrespective of its origin, an African shows a higher level of commitment to his/her chosen religion. However, there is an epistemic problem when adherents of one religion tend to see the idea of God and how to best worship him from the standpoint of their faith. Whenever an attempt is made by one religion to establish the consciousness that one religion is better than the other, the problem of religious foundationalism is created. Religious

¹⁰Soyinka, W. *Climate of fear: the quest for dignity in a dehumanized world*. Random house. 2004 P.10

¹¹Ibid 123

foundationalism in Africa comes with its problems. Akinbuwa Kolade expresses this problem in the following words:

Religion in Africa is highly vulnerable to misinterpretation and faulty dogmas. There is an excessive concentration on externalities and a one-sided perspective which falls outside a given paradigm. A problem then ensues that if a system is not in consonance with my belief systems, then it is irrational.¹²

The point above leads to the phenomenon of religious intolerance and insensitivity. The origin of religious crisis in Africa can be traced to the problem of acculturation. Echoing this sentiment, Bidney observes that one of the most widespread forms of axiological crisis is illustrated through the process of acculturation.¹³ Going further, he notes that for many native peoples brought involuntarily into contact with Western civilization, acculturation is, all too often, deculturation, since the old discarded cultural forms are not superseded by new forms. Bidney also maintains that such cultural crises may be regarded as the product of cultural inertia and of the withering away of given native institutions when brought into contact with alien forms of culture which they can neither resist nor assimilate.

The basic contradiction of foundationalist religion in Africa is that it remains totally blind to African communal system of life. No matter the level of polarization of African values by foreign extract, there will always be a gap between what is truly African and foreign values. As a member of the global society, Africa cannot be excluded from the trend of globalization. However, as globalization is associated with infiltration of global trends, there is need for the Africanization of these trends in order to meet the basic challenges of Africa and her system of thought. Africa is a communitarian society where brotherliness, tolerance, compromise and conscience are highly upheld. However, these values have been absconded following the individualism of foreign cultures. This individualism is also visible in the religious circle too. In Africa, the dominant religions now are Christianity and Islam. The individualism of these religions has created enemies between

¹²Soyinka, W. *Climate of fear: the quest for dignity in a dehumanized world*. Random house. 2004 P.10

¹³Ibid 124

people who are supposed to live in harmony like brothers and sisters. It has also destroyed bonds among people who do not share the same religious faith. Relationships are now mostly defined on the basis of religion. Sadly, religion in Africa has ethnic concentrates; and the higher as the worshippers, the more it becomes intolerant to other religious worshippers. It is this logic that now makes Africans to shed each other's blood without recourse to the biological bond that existed among them and have also heightened ethnicity in most African societies Nigeria included.

Accordingly, the idea of religious freedom is widely upheld as one of the fundamental rights of humans. This poses a serious problem as to the right possessed by a person or group of persons who hide under the canopy of religious beliefs to propagate terrorism out of religious convictions. It is on this note that Mary Glendon holds that religious freedom is at risk even in countries that officially protect religious freedom.¹⁴ Hertzke is indifferent too to the idea of religious freedom. He describes it as a paradox, maintaining it is:

A profound paradox of our age, that, just when evidence of the value of religious freedom is mounting, the international consensus behind it is weakening, attacked by theocratic movements, violated by aggressive secular policies, and undermined by growing elite hostility or ignorance.¹⁵

What Hertzke implies here is that the value of religion cannot be underestimated. However, just when people have become exposed to its value and the freedom to be associated with such values, the idea different people tend to have of it is now causing problems as to what should really constitute the object of religion. The reason for this result is not far-fetched; it is simply the belief systems that are promoted by these religious movements. In other words, these theocratic movements violate secular policies and in place of these policies implant in the mind of the people their belief. Often times, these are masterminded by the elite for self-aggrandizement. The outcome, then, is religious hostility caused by religious ignorance.

¹⁴Soyinka, W. *Of Africa*. Yale University Press. 2012 Pp 41-42

¹⁵Townes 20

As noted by Nwozor, the Boko Haram insurgency has been at the epicentre of Nigeria's security crisis since it showed its terrorist activities in 2009.¹⁶ He stated further that while we still struggle as to pinpoint the leadership composition of the Boko Haram sect, we cannot claim ignorance of their ideology and terrorist activities since 2009. Bagaji et al identify the relationship between Boko Haram and Maitatsine sects in terms of shared anarchic philosophy and objectives.¹⁷ The Boko Haram sect is professedly anti-west and considers terrorist strategy as a veritable jihadist tool to conquer the "infidels."¹⁸ The infidels in this context are those who are outside the template of orthodox Islam or those who condone or are sympathetic to western education and civilization.¹⁹ Thus, the literal meaning of Boko Haram is "western education is sin". The arbitrary targets of Boko Haram's sustained terrorist attacks appear to create analytical problems with regard to who it categorises as an infidel. There has not been any boundary in the targets of its attacks: it appears to attack everybody but with preponderance on Christian institutions. Essentially, the targets of the attacks masterminded by the Boko Haram have not followed any particular pattern to lead to a plausible conclusion about their driving motives and ultimate goals.

The immediate deducible interpretation of their motives is that it intends to undermine the sovereignty of the Nigerian state through the creation of general insecurity by turning the country into a territory of anarchy. Their strategy could be likened to religious anarchism as it manifests the nature of, and also exemplifies the mainstream, terrorist tradition of the organisational planning and armed resistance.²⁰

The peculiarity and invincibility of the Boko Haram sect lie in its daredevil attacks, loose organisational structure, facelessness and surreptitious operational modalities.²¹ The terrorist organization, before now, had no particular demand from the government other than the abrogation of western education. Over the years, however, it has become

¹⁶Soyinka, W. *Art, dialogue, and outrage: essays on literature and culture*. Pantheon Books. 1988 P. 238

¹⁷Mbiti, John. *African religions and philosophy*. Heinemann. 1990 P. 1

¹⁸Idowu, E. Bolaji. *Olódùmarè: God in Yoruba belief*. Longman, Nigeria. 1982 P. 5

¹⁹Joseph, C. L. Shipwreck of faith "The religious vision and ideas of Wole soyinka Toronto: Journal of Theology 2015

²⁰Senghor, Leopold Sedar. "Negritude: A humanism in the twentieth century." In Tejumola Olaniyan and Ato Quayson (eds). *African Literature: an anthology of criticism and theory*. Blackwell Publishing. (2007) 195-202

²¹Soyinka 2014 p. 158

glaring that the sect has trappings of religious fanaticism. This position is also observed by Onuoha in his evaluation of the ideological position of the terrorist group thus:

Its ideological mission is quite clear, namely to overthrow the Nigerian state and impose strict Islamic Sharia law in the country. Members of the sect are motivated by the conviction that the Nigerian state is filled with social vices and corruption, thus 'the best thing for a devout Muslim to do was to "migrate" from the morally bankrupt society to a secluded place and establish an ideal Islamic society devoid of political corruption and moral deprivation.²²

The philosophy of religious bigotry which motorizes the Boko Haram insurgency is undoubtedly a foundationalist ideology which is inimical to the growth of a multi-religious society like Nigeria. There are basic interpretations that designate the Boko Haram violence as religious war which has its major focus on ethnic cleansing. However, one of the major factors that characterize religion and ethnicity in Nigerian polity is the domination of the major religions (Christianity and Islam) along discernible geographical lines. Following the incessant targeting of Christian worship centres by Boko Haram bombers, the then president of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Ayo Oritsejafor, described the attacks on Christians as a "systematic ethnic and religious cleansing" and threatened that "we have the legitimate right to defend ourselves. We're also saying today that we will do whatever it takes."²³ Because the slaughtering of Christians took place in the Northern part of the country that is predominantly Islamized, the Hausa/Fulani became hated especially by those in the Southern part with Christianity as the dominant religion. In this way, religious foundationalism has provided a ground for ethnic hatred in Nigeria.

Wole Soyinka and the Credo of Being and Nothingness

In 1991, Wole Soyinka delivered the inaugural lecture in the Archbishop Olufosoye Lecture Series at the University of Ibadan

²²Ibid pp.147-148, 150-151

²³Soyinka(2014) p. 158

entitled "The Credo of Being and Nothingness." In this seminal public address, Soyinka reflects theoretically and philosophically on the question of religion in both private and public spheres. He also discusses his personal attitude toward various religious worldviews and traditions. In the lecture, Soyinka informs his audience that "the sphere of religion constitutes the ultimate challenge of the twenty-first century."²⁴ Again, Soyinka maintains that this credo is given credence to by the assumption: "I believe, therefore, I am. You disbelieve, therefore, you are not. Therefore, you count for nothing. You are sub-human. You are outside the pale of humanity, outside the concept of community."²⁵ Soyinka contended that this credo is dangerous. It has generated denial of human rights, denial of human life, religious fanaticism and violent outburst. He therefore posited the central task of his lecture thus:

My task today is to bring the two religions warring tribes of this nation to an understanding that they represent only a part of the many global strains of spiritual adhesion that constantly threaten to bring this world of ours to that presumably blissful condition of nothingness.²⁶

Soyinka conceives religion as the sphere of violence. For him, violence is the underlying concept that describes all religious activities and transactions in the modern world. Second to violence is the notion of intolerance and fear, which are produced deliberately by all religious fanatics, zealots, or extremists. Accordingly, he coined the term "religious imperialism" to describe the method by which religious zealots and radicals win converts to their faith. Speaking on the activities of these religious fanatics and extremists, Joseph concludes that "these elements constitute the negative effects of religion in both political realm and civil society."²⁷

Religious tensions between evangelical churches and Islamic groups are not uncommon in Nigeria. For instance, in Ilorin, Kwara State, fourteen churches were burnt to the ground by suspected

²⁴Netland, H. *Encountering religious pluralism: the challenge to christian faith and mission*. InterVarsity press.(2001) P. 221

²⁵Soyinka(2004) p. 131

²⁶Soyinka 1991 p. 17

²⁷Joseph, C. L. Shipwreck of faith "The religious vision and ideas of Wole soyinka Toronto: journal of Theology (2015)

Islamic fundamentalists in 1999. Besides, news of the introduction of Sharia law on January 2000 in Zamfara State led to wide spread violence in February/March, 2000 in which property were destroyed and more than one thousand people were killed.²⁸ From Maitatsine uprising of the 1980's to the Boko Haram of today, it has been violence associated with religious beliefs that is almost bringing government to her knees, while peace and security remain a difficult task to achieve.

The event that prompted Soyinka's reaction that the sphere of religion constitutes the ultimate challenge of the twenty-first century occurred at the University of Ibadan in May, 1986. There was a demonstration by Muslim students during which they burnt the figure of the risen Christ in the Chapel of Resurrection at the university. Over the years, there have been similar or worse cases of such religious uprisings. In September, 2001, as many as one thousand people were massacred in a sectarian violence that rocked Jos. On January 7, 2011, eight Muslim youths were waylaid and killed in the village of Barkin Ladi. The following day, scores of Muslims youth armed with bow and arrow, matches, disused tyres, petrol and gun laid siege to Igbo traders trading in Dilmi market and Bauchi Road killed 48 Igbo traders. In the evening of the same day, over 14 Muslims were killed in Jos and other surrounding areas in reprisal attack.²⁹

These attacks and counter attacks still continue as witnessed in the spasmodic rambles generated by the Boko Haram sect. Wole Soyinka exposes all these as elements of pathological ignorance. In a sarcastic manner, he advised the militants to even wipe out the (+) sign in mathematics since it bears a semblance of the Christian cross when he says "And the other side should have responded by abandoning the use of the bracket (+), it is suggestive of the symbol of the cross."³⁰ He embarks on this sarcasm to bear out the irrationality of religious fanaticism. He associates religious violence with religious absolutism and dogmatism. Like many other humanists and critics of religion, he rightly understands religious absolutism and intolerance as a threat to cultural advancement, democratic peace, and human freedom and flourishing. Soyinka discerns that religious fanaticism in general

²⁸Ohadike, D. Muslim-Christian conflict and political instability in Nigeria. University press. 1993

²⁹Owutu(2013) p. 3

³⁰Soyinka, W. *Art, dialogue, and outrage: essays on literature and culture*. Pantheon Books.(1988) P. 238

presents a challenge to the security of human society and indeed its survival, and in the case of radical Islam in particular, it stirs global fear and extreme reactions cross-culturally.³¹In his book, *Climate of Fear*, presented first as a series of lectures for the prestigious Reith Lectures at Oxford University, Soyinka alarms his English audience that “We have to speak to religion!”³² We ought to address the issue of religious indoctrination and the peril of religious radicalism and fanaticism. He continues, “We are obliged to recognize, indeed, to emphasize, the place of injustice, localized or global, as ready manure for the deadly shoots of fanaticism. However, the engines of global violence today are oiled from the deep wells of fanaticism, even though they may be cranked by the calculating hands of politicians or the power-hungry.”³³

Soyinka deploys the subject pronoun “we” to designate collective responsibility and mutual accountability in matters of religious peace and interfaith dialogue. In his assessment, every member of society is somewhat liable to contribute to a non-threatening social order and an environment suitable to the absence of religious terror and violence. He cautions that without the collaborative effort of every individual, unrestrained religious expression and precarious religious dogmas will continue to be a global crisis that haunts us.

In other words, religion is something that needs to be controlled, and human evil premised on one’s religious feeling and conviction heightens the human condition.³⁴

Soyinka links religious extremism with the pursuit of power and domination. Similarly, Sam Harris observes that religious extremists “see political and military action to be intrinsic to the practice of their faith.”³⁵ Religious fanatics and power-hunger politicians enjoy an inseparable alliance; more recently, “the poised blade of fanaticism has become more proficient and inventive over its agency of execution.”³⁶Lamentably, Soyinka declares, “the space of [religious] fanaticism aggressively expands into other nations of traditional tolerance and balance...The monologue, alas, continues

³¹Soyinka, W. *Climate of fear: the quest for dignity in a dehumanized world*. Random house. (2004) P.10

³²Ibid 120

³³Ibid

³⁴Joseph, C. L. Shipwreck of faith “The religious vision and ideas of Wole soyinka Toronto: journal of Theology (2015)

³⁵Harris, (2012) p.110

³⁶Soyinka, W. *Art, dialogue, and outrage: essays on literature and culture*. Pantheon Books. (1988) P. 238

to dominate the murderous swath blazed by succeeding religions – Christianity and Islam most notoriously. Deviationism – or heresy – is one shortcut to death.”³⁷

Furthermore, Soyinka resituates the ambivalent discourse of race to the zone of religion as the conundrum of the twenty-first century culture. Religion is now perceived as a global phenomenon of shock and human calamity. In fact, Soyinka noted that every religion now develops sects, and even cults, which then proceed to act contrary to the fundamental precepts and articles of faith within that religion. These sects and cults then attempt to impose their beliefs as the superior faith. Taking this into consideration, Soyinka maintains that religious foundationalism is a serious struggle in the twenty-first century as was the issue of race in the nineteenth century. With dazzling rhetoric and linguistic force, he declares:

The nineteenth-century black American scholar W.E.B. Du Bois once declared that the issue of the twentieth century would be that of race. It is becoming clear that while the century, the last, did indeed inherit – and still remains plagued almost continuously by – that social issue, race was replaced toward the end by religion and it is something that has yet to be addressed with the same global concern as race once was. The issue of the twenty-first century is clearly that of religion, whose cynical manipulations contribute in no small measure to our current of fear.³⁸

Soyinka goes on to clarify his thesis that religion, not race is the predicament of the twenty-first century. He does that by first defining the integral components of religion and then by explaining the threatening implications of the program of religious fanaticism to cultures, peoples, and civilizations. What is at stake here is the dreadful and singular claim of religion: the call to absolute submission. However, he notes that religion, when it is imported by coercion or transmitted involuntarily, sustains “terror against terror, and the submission of the world to a regimen of fear.”³⁹

³⁷Ibid 123

³⁸Soyinka, W. *Art, dialogue, and outrage: essays on literature and culture*. Pantheon Books. (1988) P. 238

³⁹Ibid 28

He contemplates further on how Western religious and cultural imperialism had created violent societies and communities in Africa, as well led to social rift and disharmony among the African people. He sees both Christianity and Islam as agents of colonial conquest and violence in the Continent. He expresses thus:

Cultural and spiritual violation has left indelible imprints on the collective psyche and sense of identity of the peoples, a process that was ensured through savage repressions of cohering traditions by successive waves of colonizing hordes. Their presence was both physical and abstract. Their mission was not merely to implant their own peoples on any lands whose climates were congenial—East and Southern Africa—but to establish outposts for surrogate controls where the environment proved physically inclement...The cultural and spiritual savaging of the continent, let us hasten to insist, was not by the Christian-European axis alone.

The Arab-Islamic dimension preceded it, and was every bit as devastating, a fact that a rather distorted sense of continental solidarity leads some scholars to edit, at the expense of Truth and Reality.⁴⁰

Both Christianity and Islam produced networks of power relations, hegemonic processes of dominance and oppression, and engineered the framework religious resentment among the African people. The religious hegemony allowed both religious traditions “to secure the consent of subordinates to abide by their rule. The notion of consent is key, because hegemony is created through coercion that is gained by using the church, family, media, political parties, schools, unions, and other voluntary associations—the civil society and all its organizations.”⁴¹In a complementary statement, Soyinka intensifies his thesis that “A new inhuman act, some new

⁴⁰Soyinka, W. . *Of Africa*. Yale University Press. (2012) Pp 41-42

⁴¹Townes 20

destructive conflict is certain to have [sic] surface somewhere, one that is traceable to one or other of the so-called major religions."⁴²

Soyinka and the lesson from African Traditional Religion

It is a proven fact that religion permeates every aspect of the African life; in fact, an African is a very religious and spiritual being. According to an African religion scholar, John Mbiti, "Africans are notoriously religious, and each people have its own religious system with a set of beliefs and practices. Religion permeates into all the departments of life so fully that it is not easy or possible always to isolate it."⁴³ Similarly, Idowu, E. B.'s writing about the religious world of the Yoruba people, notes

The real keynote of the life of the Yoruba is neither their noble ancestry nor in the past deeds of their heroes. The keynote of their life is their religion. In all things, they are religious. Religion forms the foundation and the all-governing principle of life for them...The religion of the Yoruba permeates their lives so much that it expresses itself in multifarious ways.⁴⁴

Consequently, it is possible to infer that religion serves as the social and humanistic source for the African moral vision and worldview, and the African humanistic values.⁴⁵

In his interpretation of African traditional religion—including the nature and attributes of African deities and the complexity of the *Ifa* in determining the divine will, Wole Soyinka presents African spirituality as a humanism in the same line of thought like Leopold Sedar Senghor, who, in his theorization of Negritude as "the sum total of the values of the civilization of the African World" (or "the sum of the cultural values of the black world") construes Negritude as a humanism of the twentieth

⁴²Soyinka, W. . *Art, dialogue, and outrage: essays on literature and culture*. Pantheon Books. (1988) P. 238

⁴³Mbiti, John. . *African religions and philosophy*. Heinemann. P. 1 (1990)

⁴⁴Idowu, E. Bolaji. . *Olódùmarè: God in Yoruba belief*. Longman, Nigeria. (1982)P. 5

⁴⁵Joseph, C. L. . Shipwreck of faith "The religious vision and ideas of Wole soyinka
Toronto: journal of Theology 2015

century.⁴⁶ However, while Soyinka explains the concept through African spirituality and the concept of God in African religion, Senghor focuses on African concept of ontology and reality.

Soyinka is of the view that in African religion,

The real cohesive factor of religion is the living God and that without this one factor; all things would fall to pieces. Life belongs to God. It is he who summons it into being, strengthens and preserves it.⁴⁷

In African religions, God is the Sovereign Lord who gives and sustains all life. Yet, because of his comprehensive otherness, he has freely chosen to manifest himself and reveal his will directly through the *Orisa*, who function as facilitators or mediators between God and humanity. With clarity and precision, Soyinka succinctly explains the ontological transcendence and relational immanence of the African deities thus:

In the process of their visitation, the gods assume form, shape, and character—and responsibilities. They acquire supervisory roles over phenomena, in some cases becoming thoroughly identified with them...the deities themselves appear to experience a need, periodically at least, to be united with the mortal essence, no matter the excuse—altruistic, self-sacrificial, in pursuit of moral redemption, or simply as an adventure in divine tourism...The gods are products of a primordial unity, as narrated in the myth of *Atunda*—literally rendered as “the one who recreates.”⁴⁸

All gods, according to the Yoruba, are manifestations of universal phenomena of which humanity is also a part. *Ifa* is replete

⁴⁶Senghor, Leopold Sedar. . “Negritude: A humanism in the twentieth century.” In Tejumola Olaniyan and Ato Quayson (eds). *African Literature: an anthology of criticism and theory*. Blackwell Publishing.195-202, (2007)

⁴⁷Soyinka, W. . *Art, dialogue, and outrage: essays on literature and culture*. Pantheon Books.(1988) P. 238

⁴⁸Soyinka, W. *Art, dialogue, and outrage: essays on literature and culture*. Pantheon Books. (1988)P. 238

with *odu* – those verses that form a compendium of morality tales, historic vignettes, and curative prescriptions – verses that narrate at the same time the experiences of both mortals and immortals for whom *Ifa* divined, counseled, and who either chose to obey or ignore *Ifa*. The skeptics are neither personalized nor hounded by any supernatural forces. The narratives are indicative that they simply go their way. The gods remain totally indifferent toward who does or does not follow them or acknowledge their place in mortal decisions. The priest of *Ifa* never presumes to take up cudgels on behalf of the slighted deity. No excommunication is pronounced; a killing fatwa is unheard of. The language of apostasy is anathema in the land of the *Orisa*. There is neither paradise nor hell. There is no purgatory. You can neither seduce nor intimidate a true *Orisa* faithful with projections of a punitive or rewarding afterlife...⁴⁹

However, this does not imply that African traditional religion does not permit punishment, especially for evil acts, but unlike the foundational religions, it does not function on the maxim of “I believe therefore I am and you do not believe, therefore you are not.” Yoruba traditional ethos is communitarian. This is equally seen in the synergistic rapport between devotees of different divinities. Festivals are organized peacefully without supremacist philosophy which in many instances create a framework between Christian and Muslims. We could, therefore, agree with Netland that the “secular African deities” affirm various religious systems and traditions and consider them “as equally legitimate religious alternatives, with preferences among them largely being functions of individual characteristics and, social and cultural factors.”⁵⁰ Again, Soyinka establishes the *Orisa* within its rightful place as a monotheistic religious tradition.

Soyinka accepts the maxim that “exclusive truth claims create an *us-them* mentality: to preserve *our* identity and religious purity, *they* must be removed”. He questions religious terrorism and imperialism as an adequate method to force people to the “one true God.”⁵¹ Soyinka finds great promises in the tolerant and adaptive nature of African religions and the “secular gods” of the

⁴⁹Ibid 131

⁵⁰Netland, H.. *Encountering religious pluralism: the challenge to christian faith and mission*. InterVarsity press. (2001)P. 221

⁵¹Soyinka, W. . *Art, dialogue, and outrage: essays on literature and culture*. Pantheon Books. 1988 P. 238

Yoruba people, which he proposes could potentially contribute to human peace and cooperation.

From Soyinka's standpoint, what we must pursue, therefore, is not a competitive, bruising arena for the claims of ideology or religion but an open marketplace of both ideas and faiths. It is within this context, without any ambiguity, that the *Orisa* and their body of divine precepts, *Ifa*, prove of great humanistic value in the realm of religion. As a quest for spiritual enquiry, *Ifa* exemplifies this field of accommodation for all seekers, no matter what the structure of belief. This ancient religion, according to him, should be co-opted as a guide into our exploration of a noninterfering order of faith and spirituality and proposes that warfare between religions need not be.

Conclusion

Beyond foundationalism is the apt phrase to engender tolerant religious mindset. Africa has suffered tremendously from the negative implications of this pattern that see one religion as the answer to all baffling questions about life.

It is sufficient to call the world's attention to the fact that religions do exist on this continent that can boast of never having launched a war, yet those beliefs have proved themselves the bedrock of endurance and survival.⁵²

In line with this, there is a need for Africans to Africanize foreign religion in such a way that will suit their cultural life. The present credo of 'I believe and you disbelieve' has gone a long way to foment violence and endanger the strong ethos of African humanism.

⁵²Soyinka, W. . *Art, dialogue, and outrage: essays on literature and culture*. Pantheon Books. 1988 P. 238