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ANCESTRY, GOODNESS, AND THE RELATIONSHIP WITH
CHRISTIANITY AS ECODOMICAL ASPECTS OF
DECOLONIZATION IN INDIGENOUS AFRICAN RELIGIONS

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Abstract: This paper is an attempt to identify common factors which constitute the foundation of decolonization in indigenous African religions. Since such aspects need to be essentially constructive in order to effectively and positively replace Colonial ideas, this particular search for common ground concerning decolonization in indigenous African religions is going to be pursued through the concept of ecomomy, seen as constructive process. When applied to decolonization with this postulated positivity, ecomomy coagulates three distinct aspects of indigenous African religions into a common reality. These three aspects are ancestry, goodness, and the relationship with Christianity; they can function therefore as common denominator for various attempts to provide indigenous African religions with specific methodology in dealing with decolonization. This article is going to investigate four such methodologies which can confer positivity as well as an ecomomic, constructive character to decolonization efforts throughout the spectrum of indigenous African religions as they are reflected in the writings of John Mbiti, Isiaka P. Lalèyê, Jakob K. Olupona, and Israel Kamudzandu, all intellectuals of different geographical origin, religious backgrounds, university training, and personal convictions. With Mbiti promoting the superiority of Christianity, Lalèyê accepting it as irrelevant, Olupona preferring to deal without it, and Kamudzandu seeing it as essential, decolonizing efforts in indigenous African religions have at least four different methodologies which all aim at providing African communities with positive and ecomomic, essentially constructive ways to move forward beyond Colonial intellectual paradigms by making sure that peace and goodness are secured for everybody, African or not.

Key Words: ancestors, goodness, Christianity, decolonization, ecomomy, religion, John Mbiti, Isiaka P. Lalèyê, Jakob K. Olupona, Israel Kamudzandu, Africa.

1. Introduction: Terminologies and Methodologies

Decolonization is a complicated term and an even more complicated reality. Contemporary studies in the field are numerous and extremely difficult to pigeonhole, especially because of the highly complex range of meanings attached to the concept of decolonization. A rather poor but nonetheless decent attempt to sum up the totality of such decolonizing efforts would be to recognize the necessity of indigenous African religions to leave behind the Colonial era while, at the same time, admit that the actual way to achieve this goal should remain an issue open to discussion. This discussion, however, appears to be condemned to remaining constructive if decolonization efforts are going to have any chance of success whatsoever, and it is this constructive aspect of decolonization which points to the concept of ecodomy.

Taken on its own, the notion of ecodomy refers to ‘any constructive process’, an idea which I took from Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz who, in 1995, wrote an exceptional book entitled *God’s Spirit. Transforming a World in Crisis* (Müller-Fahrenholz 1995, 109). While equating ecodomy with constructive processes seems to be quite simple, when applied to indigenous African religions the term appears to evade a clear definition especially when decolonization is introduced in the debates about how this move beyond the Colonial era should be achieved. It is clear that decolonization must happen and it is equally clear that it must be a constructive effort; it is not so clear, however, how moving beyond Colonial mentalities can be not only truly decolonizing but also fundamentally constructive in a way which provides African communities with a safe environment for all their members. As Kwasi Wiredu points out, Colonial philosophies are indeed ‘an imposition’ (Wiredu 2006, 291), but leaving this burden behind is a little more complicated than it may appear. This is why Wiredu goes on saying that in order for decolonization to succeed in leaving behind Colonial thinking, it must create—indeed, it must construct and build—a new way of thinking or, as he explains, it must produce ‘definite modes of conceptualization’ (Wiredu 2006, 294) or concrete concepts which can support the theory.

This paper is an attempt to demonstrate that there are at least two such concepts, namely ancestry and goodness, which—together with a constructive treatment of Christianity—can work as building blocks for an ecodominical process of decolonization. As such, the most difficult aspect of decolonization is keeping a proper balance between leaving behind certain philosophies and moving on towards new patterns of thought, between giving up certain ideas and embrace, even create new notions. Doing this in indigenous African religions is anything but easy. Nevertheless, as Ezra Chitando, Afe Adogame, and Bolaji Bateye wrote a few years back, indigenous African religions must not only deal with ‘the absence of

African voices' but also go through a decisive 'intellectual decolonization' through actively assuming a 'distinctive identity'—evidently African—in an attempt to 'speak back' at European and American ways of thinking (Chitando et al 2012, 3-7).

'Speaking back', however, is extremely difficult because, as Aloysius M. Lugira demonstrates, the harsh reality of Sub-Saharan universities, the very cradle of decolonization, may wish to remain connected to international scholarly networks (Lugira 2009, 106), and this presupposes intense interaction with Western philosophies, including Christianity. This paper will show that, in the end, it does not really matter if Christianity is accepted or rejected—or anything in between for that matter; what really counts is that indigenous African religions should find a common denominator which not only helps them build a specifically African epistemology, but also allows them to deal with Christianity in an ecodominical, constructive way. In other words, one must find a way, a distinct methodology in order to deal with Christianity in the field of indigenous African religions, and this paper will eventually seek to prove that there are more ways or methodologies to put together the need for decolonization and the reality of Christianity as a religion throughout the African continent.

Thus, it will be shown that the common denominator for all African religions is the idea of ancestry which should be focused on the reality of goodness. When ancestry and goodness work together, dealing with Christianity in a constructive manner will follow quite naturally regardless of whether the Christian religion is accepted, rejected, or even ignored. In order to demonstrate this thesis, four philosophers and religious scholars were selected: first, John S. Mbiti, a trained Christian theologian with Anglican Protestant credentials for whom Christianity should prevail over indigenous African religions because ancestors are not relevant religiously but only socially for as long as they are remembered in a good way; second, Isiaka P. Lalèyè, an anthropological philosopher preoccupied with religion who believes that Christianity should be tolerated while indigenous African religions should be promoted in order for ancestors to benefit from a good death; third, Jakob K. Olupona, a distinguished religious scholar who focuses entirely on indigenous African religions and the necessity that ancestors should be remembered through good traditional rituals while Christianity should be excluded from the discussion because it is neither important, nor relevant to indigenous African religions; and fourth, Israel Kamudzandu, a professional Protestant theologian specializing in New Testament studies who connects ancestry and goodness through the concept of mediation, in the sense that indigenous African religions should find a good, positive way to work with other religions, including Christianity. These four authors, therefore, provide the field of indigenous African religions with four distinct

methodologies which allow the process of decolonization to treat Christianity in an ecodominical, constructive manner.

I should highlight here that none of the authors mentioned in this paper use the notion of 'ecodomy'. It is my belief, however, that 'ecodomy' can be a suitable concept for describing this array of attempts to provide the field of indigenous African religions with a foundational idea which is both constructive and innovative. As far as I am concerned, I do not side with any of the authors; Africa is a huge continent with numerous contexts defined by local specificity and it is unlikely that one proposal should work everywhere. I am convinced though that Kamudzandu's approach—or anything similar for that matter—which promotes decolonization by accommodating valuable Colonial concepts, is perhaps the best way forward.

2. John S. Mbiti's Ecodomic Decolonization and the Superiority of Christianity

Mbiti is Christian theologian and even if he is an African from Eastern Kenya, his Anglican Protestant credentials coupled with his upbringing dominated by British influences had a crucial impact on his views regarding the process of decolonization and how this should be performed in connection with indigenous African religions. For Mbiti, the Christian religion, and especially Protestantism of Anglican confession, reigns supreme above all other world religions. This is why, when discussing the complex issue of ancestors, which refers exclusively to dead persons—a fundamental aspect of indigenous African religions—Mbiti insists that they have nothing to do with worship. In other words, as far as Mbiti is concerned, ancestors do not have any particular religious role in indigenous African religions, so their main function is social cohesion. Ancestors are very important for Mbiti, but only socially and not religiously (Mbiti 1996, 289).

Mbiti's theory about the social importance of ancestors in indigenous African religions is severely criticized by Anthony Ephirim-Donkor who is convinced that ancestors must not only be worshipped; they are indeed worshipped in all indigenous African religions (Ephirim-Donkor 2013, 189). If this is the case, what is the nature of the ancestors' social importance in Mbiti? First, Mbiti points out that ancestors must be remembered and, more importantly, they must be remembered in a good, positive way. Mbiti is aware that in indigenous African religions, ancestors have a huge importance because they are believed to be 'men's contemporaries' which means that they can actually live like 'spirits', in which sense one can even say that they exist as 'living dead' in the very midst of every African community (Mbiti 1996, 289).

It is quite clear that for the 'African mind' belief in ancestors is not only a key component of their most basic philosophies of life but also a

reality which triggers certain feelings in the living. For instance, since Mbiti insists that ancestors must be remembered in a good way, it means that they can also be remembered in a bad way, in which case ancestors inspire fear among the living. In this respect, Donatus O. Chukwu believes that ancestors not only continue to exist “in another realm of life” but they also continue to be spiritually part of their families despite their physical death (Chukwu 2011, 183). Thus, ‘dealing’ with ancestors appears to be a religious fact which Mbiti tries to conceal by insisting that they only serve social purposes. In doing so, however, Mbiti goes as far as saying that ancestors can be considered ancestors only when they are no longer remembered; for as long as they are remembered though they are not ancestors, they are only ‘living dead’ or ‘spirits’. This is why Mbiti is convinced that using the word ‘ancestors’ or ‘ancestral spirits’ to refer to the dead is useless, so he believes that the very notion of ‘ancestor’ should be avoided or perhaps even cancelled (Mbiti 1999, 83-84) given that they serve only social purposes and should be remembered as such.

Mbiti is supported in his conviction that ancestors serve only social purposes and not religious functions by Leonard E. Barrett who makes the same point: in indigenous African religions, the necessity to socially stay in touch with the departed exceeds the need to religiously offer them sacrifices (Barrett 1974, 25). This explains why in remembering ancestors, the notion of goodness is almost a necessity, an aspect which cannot and indeed must not be avoided no matter the cost—sacrifices and remembrance are positively interconnected in indigenous African religions. Why would anyone remember any departed member of his family in a negative way? This would be socially futile, so remembering the dead in a good way—as Mbiti suggests—is not only something which makes sense socially but also method whereby African societies can be strengthened and, at the same time, indigenous African religions can be shown as, if not futile, at least as inadequate.

The only religion which matters for Mbiti is Christianity, but Africans should feel free to keep their belief in ancestors for as long as they do not think of them in religious terms but only remember them socially in a positive way. Thus, in Mbiti, the main role of ancestors is to develop family connections not only before but also after death. Mbiti is supported in this endeavor by Edwin A. Udoeye, who also believes that a social reading of the importance of ancestors in indigenous African religions should be done by underlining the role of ancestors to keep families together and strong regardless of the reality of death (Udoeye 2011, 102). For Mbiti, therefore, decolonization presupposes the deconstruction of the religious role of ancestors in indigenous African religions while stressing their exclusive social importance in ecodomically strengthening families for as long as they are remembered in a good way within the context of the only religion which truly matters, namely Christianity.

3. Issiaka P. Lalèyê's Ecodomic Decolonization and the Irrelevance of Christianity

Unlike Mbiti, who sees Christianity as the only religion which matters while indigenous African religions with their focus on ancestors are reduced to nothing more than social manifestations, Lalèyê sees decolonization as a process which must move beyond the social aspect of ancestrality. Although an African with Roman-Catholic affiliations and French upbringing in Benin and Senegal, Lalèyê—an anthropological philosopher by training—does not insist on the necessity to single out Christianity as the pinnacle of religious life; for him, Christianity is indifferent. This is because ‘the African mind’ has a reality of its own and indigenous African religions tend to be constitutive to Africanness, although—according to William M. Johnston—indigenous African religions can be sometimes mixed with Christianity (Johnston 1998, 71). Ancestors, therefore, are important not only from a social perspective, but also from a distinctly religious point of view. There is, however, an important aspect which must be taken into account here: ancestors are defined ethically, in the sense that only those who had lived a good life and consequently enjoyed a good death can be considered genuine ancestors (Lalèyê 1996, 658).

This perspective is supported by Charles O. Jegede who insists that only the reality of ‘good death’ can be taken into account when a deceased person becomes an ancestor (Jegede 2010, 352). Existence beyond death is very much a true reality both for the good and the evil, but it is only the good who went through life and entered death in goodness can be said to have truly become ancestors. According to Lalèyê, ancestralization or the quality of becoming as well as being an ancestor is a religious blessing, and only the good enjoy its benefits while the bad share only in curse and punishment. This means that not all the deceased can and should be automatically included in the reality of ancestral existence beyond/in death (Lalèyê 1996, 657). Interestingly enough, it is not the task of human beings to decide whether or not a certain deceased person becomes an ancestor. Very much in line with Lalèyê, Robert Baum believes that it is only the supreme being who actually takes the final decision regarding who is blessed with ancestrality and who is cursed with punishment (Baum 2005, 83-84).

There are other views which differ from Lalèyê's perspective in the sense that ancestrality is an inherent quality of the death, so both the good and the evil can be said to have become ancestors when they passed away. For instance, Dominica Dipio indicates that in some cases ancestors must be pacified and calmed (Dipio 2014, 54). Such appeasement happens exclusively through religious rituals, as Lalèyê points out, but it is not so much the ritual which is important—what really counts in this case is the goodness of the person who died and can bestow blessings upon the living

or, by implication, the evil of another person who died and can impart curses on those left behind in physical life. In Lalèyê, the ultimate importance of ancestors does not reside in their capacity to bless or curse the living but rather in the fact that the living can be taught and supported in various ways by the deceased. In other words, the stress does not fall so much on the dead ancestors who bless or curse, but rather on the living who learn valuable lessons whenever they interact with ancestors (Lalèyê 1996, 658) in order to have their lives enriched not only socially but also religiously.

In putting together the social and religious aspects of human existence, Lalèyê promotes a view of ancestors which, in my view, embellishes the deconstructive process of decolonization with the ecodomic aspect of underscoring the positive side of indigenous African religions whereby ancestors bless the living. True decolonization must embrace such positivity; this is why, in Lalèyê, Christianity is irrelevant. While neither criticized, nor hailed as supreme religion, Christianity is allowed to coexist with indigenous African religions. From the perspective of the actual cult and of the fact that death is a common reality for both Christianity and indigenous African religions, the position of the former is irrelevant in connection with the latter. What is important beyond the fact that both Christianity and indigenous African religions are indeed religions has to do with the reality of death. Both Christianity and indigenous African religions must deal with death as well as the people who died. In indigenous African religions though dead is the gateway towards a realm of existence which allows the living to talk to the dead because, as David T. Ngong emphasizes, death is a continuation of life in African cultures (Ngong 2013, 113).

Similarly, Michael Baffoe and Lewis Asimeng-Boahene agree with Lalèyê in saying that, through religious rituals, the living can speak with the dead (Baffoe and Asimeng-Boahene 2012, 493), especially those who led good lives, went through good deaths, and are going to become genuine ancestors through religious rituals (Lalèyê 1996, 658-659). For Lalèyê, therefore, decolonization is a process of ecodomic construction, in the sense that bridges must be build between the social and religious aspects of human life with the specific purpose of allowing the living not only to communicate with their dead ancestors through religious rituals, but also to be taught and blessed throughout their lives.

4. Jakob K. Olupona's Ecodomic Decolonization and the Rejection of Christianity

It should be said from the very start that Olupona is not against Christianity *per se*. A native of Nigeria and accustomed to Protestant Christianity, Olupona is the African religious scholar *par excellence* because unlike Mbiti and Lalèyê, he believes that indigenous African religions

should be studied apart from Christianity (Olupona 2014, xxii). Thus, if there is a supreme being—and some African religions do believe in such entity—ancestors are even more important. On the one hand, as Olupona explains, ancestors are placed alongside African deities but on the other hand, they emerge as having more significance than these (Olupona 2014, 20). Olupona's interpretation is confirmed by Khonsura A. Wilson who believes that ancestors 'are more important in the affairs of humans than God' (Wilson 2012, 174) but also by Jawanza E. Clark who states that ancestors transcend human beings (Clark 2012, 75); in other words, ancestors move above the realm of humans into—what else?—the realm of God or gods or the supreme being whatever name this is known by.

Although Olupona's understanding of indigenous African religions is very different from that of Mbiti and Lalèyê, he does come very close to their interpretation regarding the ethical idea of goodness. However, unlike Mbiti and Lalèyê who focus on the goodness of ancestors who may be reached by certain rituals, Olupona is much more concerned with the evil of ancestors who may be appeased by good rituals. Thus, in Olupona, goodness is not used in connection with the ancestors, but rather with the rituals whereby they can be contacted. If in Mbiti ancestors had only social relevance while in Lalèyê they were important both socially and religiously, in Olupona ancestors are important exclusively from a religious point of view. Their being placed alongside African deities as well as other spiritual forces (Olupona 2014, 20) indicates that, according to Olupona, in indigenous African religions religion encompasses every aspect of human life to the point that one's social life is literally captured by religion. Olupona's conviction is backed by Maulana Karenga who also believes that for Africans everything has 'religious relevance' (Karenga 2000, 273).

Ancestors are everywhere, Olupona seems to infer, and their spiritual existence beyond or even in death makes them at least equal to African deities. If so, they can evidently influence the world of humans, which also means that they should be venerated as such. Being part of the 'African pantheon of gods', as Monica A. Coleman puts it (Coleman 2011, 224), requires the kind of veneration which, on the part of humans, seeks welfare from ancestors while on the part of ancestors, bestows blessing. This is why Julius Bailey writes that ancestors are believed to be capable of providing the members of their own families with benefits, especially with harmony (Bailey 2008, 104).

Nevertheless, unlike Bailey, Olupona focuses on the problematic aspect of the ancestor's existence beyond death, namely their capacity to grant not only blessings, but also curses. 'Misfortune, illness, and even death' are just words which sum up the evils which can fall upon the living as a result of the spiritual activity of ancestors (Olupona 2013, 52). Hence, Olupona's preoccupation with the necessity of good rituals. Rituals must be good and effective if ancestors are to bestow blessings instead of curses.

However, there is a huge problem here because, resembling Mbiti, Olupona indicates that the recently deceased are not ancestors, they are merely 'living dead'. Only those who are no longer remembered by anybody, and especially by the very members of their former families, are genuine ancestors. This only sheds further light on why remembrance rituals must be as good as it gets in order for ancestors, those not remembered, to be properly remembered (Olupona 2014, 28-29).

Since such convictions have nothing in common with Christianity, this plays no role whatsoever in Olupona. Africans bury their dead with personal belongings, Olupona writes, precisely because they believe not only in the deceased relatives' existence after death (Olupona 2014, 29) but also in the fact that their dead will surely influence their lives. This is why Simeon T. Iber underlines the African belief that ancestors influence the lives of the living (Iber 2011, 20) to the point that the living make sure that the dead, as revealed by Khondlo Mtshali, have all the necessary means to continue their existence beyond death (Mtshali 2009, 133). For Olupona, decolonization involves the rejection of Christianity for good reasons, mainly because there is virtually no connection between Christianity and indigenous African religions; this is why, in Olupona, the ecodomic process of strengthening African communities must be done by investigating indigenous African religions on their own. Christianity is rejected because it cannot help in this respect; the kind of 'mind' which harbors Christian beliefs is very different from the 'African mind'. Consequently, in order for African communities to have a prosperous life they must be left on their own, subject to their own religious convictions, to their own indigenous African religions and their belief in ancestors who can be dealt with through good and effective rituals.

5. Israel Kamudzandu's Ecodomic Decolonization and the Inclusion of Christianity

Kamudzandu proposes a methodology for decolonization which provides the concept of ecodomy with its most encompassing possibilities. If in Mbiti Christianity reigns supreme compared to indigenous African religions, in Lalèyê it is indifferent but nevertheless accepted, and in Olupona it should preferably stay away, in Kamudzandu Christianity is a must. Born in Zimbabwe but working in the United States of America as Protestant pastor and professor of Methodist confession, Kamudzandu is, like Mbiti, a Christian theologian, so there must be a place for Christianity in his thought despite his African credentials. Hence, his approach of decolonization is the most constructive of those proposed by Mbiti, Lalèyê, and Olupona because it manages not only to include Christianity in his decolonization perspective but it also makes it work ecodomically together with indigenous African religions. In short, Kamudzandu focuses on what he calls 'cross-cultural hermeneutics' as basis for his constructive

decolonization by providing the notion of ecodomy with the possibility of putting together indigenous African religions and the Christian religion in a close working relationship (Kamudzandu 2010, 23-24).

Kamudzandu's method is quite simple and it attempts to define decolonization based on contemporary realities and how the situation of indigenous African religions really is in practice, not on how decolonization may look in theory. Thus, he provides the example of the Shona people for whom it is literally impossible to avoid Christianity as they practice their own indigenous African religions. In other words, it is rather evident that in today's world Christianity is a reality which cannot be avoided and also a religion that has affected, influenced, and enriched indigenous African religions for the past few centuries. This idea was on the academic market long before Kamudzandu came up with his theory because as early as the turn of the twenty-first century Samuel O. Imbo wrote about the impossibility of avoiding 'Western interactions with African religions' (Imbo 2002, 92). In Kamudzandu, this specifically means that in order for the whole deconstruction process to work positively and ecodomically, the very notion of ancestry must be considered through the lens of cross-cultural and cross-religious hermeneutic. In concrete terms, ancestors must be seen as mediators; in the particular case of the Shona people, ancestors must never be worshipped as gods, but they must nonetheless be venerated as mediators between God and the living (Kamudzandu 2010, 24), which is essentially a clear and perpetual manifestation of goodness for the benefit of the living.

Furthermore, as Maulana Karenga argues, in indigenous African religions ancestors are immortal (Karenga 2000, 273), so they must be included in any equation which deals with the existence of the living, and since those living in Africa are not only indigenous Africans but also Christians of all sorts, ancestors should be seen as mediators between people and communities or as manifestation of goodness between human beings irrespective of their origin and race. While ancestors must never be mistaken for the Supreme Being or God (Idamarhare 2010, 53), ancestors can nevertheless function as bridge builders between religions, cultures, and societies—most poignantly between indigenous African religions and Christianity (Kamudzandu 2010, 180) as practical indicators of goodness applied among people pertaining to different religious backgrounds and convictions. In other words, for Kamudzandu there is nothing which cannot be bridged and there is nothing which cannot be reconciled, so even realities as different as Christianity and indigenous African religions can find a way to stay and work together.

Thus, for Kamudzandu, decolonization must always be a process which concentrates on building rather than on destroying, on connecting rather than disconnecting, and it is in this respect that he acquires the most literal 'constructive' meaning for the notion of ecodomy because, according to his theory, ancestors are not only mediators between the

living and God, but also spiritual realities capable of building bridges between Christianity and indigenous African religions. Kamudzandu not only militates for the inclusion of Christianity in the world of indigenous African religions; he in fact argues in favor of the interconnectivity between Christianity and indigenous African religions by liaising the two through the very plastic picture of 'bridge building'. The two types of religions must work together not only by having Christianity accept the notion of ancestors from indigenous African religions; on the contrary—and also as a balancing factor highlighted by Elia Shabani Mligo—indigenous African religions could and should borrow from Christianity the image of Jesus Christ as the very embodiment of mediation (Shabani Mligo 2011, 364) and human goodness. This particular imagery of Jesus Christ *the* mediator is the best solution for the empowering of decolonization as ecodominical process with positive and constructive values because, as Kamudzandu points out, the final purpose of both Christianity and indigenous African religions is providing a context for the living to enjoy blessing (Kamudzandu 2010, 178-179) as practical manifestation of goodness.

6. Conclusion: Hope despite Disagreement

Dealing with decolonization in contemporary academy is not easy and, be it as it may, the implementation of decolonization policies in real life, with decisions which can theoretically as well as practically, affect millions of people and entire societies, will eventually prove—if it is not already the case—to be at least as difficult as their theoretical counterparts. At the same time, precisely because every practical application has a previous theoretical side to it, academic discussions about the content and nature of decolonization are far from being obsolete, irrelevant or even useless. This paper attempted to briefly identify four issues which may constitute integrative aspects of the concept of decolonization which, although inherently a deconstructive attempt, could and hopefully would turn into positive as well as intentionally constructive endeavors not only in theory, but also in practice. This is why, the idea of decolonization is discussed in conjunction with the notion of ecodomy, seen as a constructive process, which is set against more or less recent attempts to convey meaning to the problem of decolonization. Thus, while acknowledging the need of the 'African mind'—a rather loose term referring to the extremely complex web of indigenous African religions, philosophies, cultures, and systems of thought—to rid itself of Western concepts in order to achieve (a certain degree of) independence for its own spiritual values, it has been argued that there is also a need to acknowledge the fact that, in contemporary times, the heritage of the Colonial era cannot and need to be eradicated completely. There are many aspects which can be singled out in this

respect, ranging from patterns of thinking to the extant infrastructure more or less ‘imposed’ on Africans by colonists. Nevertheless, one which was singled out in this paper was the Christian religion.

Similarly, the paper is also an effort to see how Christianity as a religion can be dealt with in connection with indigenous African religions, so in this respect attempts were made to identify other theoretical concepts which may aid in this respect. Hence, the focus on ancestry and goodness as common factors which define African efforts to achieve decolonization, especially the decolonization of indigenous African religions. In the end, ancestry, goodness, and the relationship with Christianity were seen as ecodominical or constructive/positive aspects which define the nature of the decolonization of indigenous African religions. Four types of decolonizing efforts were identified as being promoted by John S. Mbiti, a Anglican Protestant theologian who believed that ancestry and goodness can work only if Christianity is kept as the only religion that matters; Issiaka P. Lalèyê, a philosopher who was convinced that Christianity should be tolerated because it is irrelevant to indigenous African religions which can work goodness through the notion of ancestry; Jakob K. Olupona, whose preference for indigenous African religions is clear in favor of the rejection of Christianity on grounds that the two kinds of religion hold nothing in common; and Israel Kamudzandu, a Methodist Protestant theologian for whom ancestors are capable of working goodness through the inclusion of Christianity among indigenous African religions by bridging the two types of religions and their corresponding communities.

To conclude, it is most encouraging to see that despite such radical diversity and difference, the hope for as well as the possibility of positive, ecodominical solutions for the African continent do exist in theory and they can also be implemented in practice. Mbiti, Lalèyê, Olupona, and Kamudzandu may not concur when it comes to how decolonization is supposed to be carried out but they do agree that the notion of ancestors can have positive results in this process, especially regarding the relationship between Christianity and indigenous African religions. Their hypotheses are different, their demonstrations are different, and their solutions are different; their intentions, however, to build a safe environment for the whole of Africa are identical despite their different approaches, methodologies, and even convictions. Quite clearly, there is hope for the academy as professional theologians like Mbiti and Kamudzandu, anthropological philosophers like Lalèyê, and religious scholars like Olupona come together in an effort to provide concrete solutions for ecodominical approaches to decolonization which allow this deconstructive process to move on positively and constructively. Even more importantly, there is hope for society in general because—despite their academic disagreements—they all propose explanations which are essentially dominated by the idea of ancestors not only as theoretical

means but also as practical purposes in providing African communities with visible demonstrations of human goodness regarding the complex relationship between Christianity and indigenous African religions.

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