

## **Globalization and The Future Hope for Christianity: How Africa Can Shape World Christianity**

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### **Abstract:**

Religion has not been insulated from the widespread forces of globalization. While these forces have facilitated the transmission of religion from one region to another, they have also reshaped the face of religion in various parts of the world. Focusing on the Christian faith in Africa—particularly Nigeria—this paper argues that globalization has functioned as an effective means of transporting Western religious ideals into the Global South. Consequently, globalization is viewed with suspicion as a tool of westernization, a concern reinforced by the marginalization of African Christian music and culture within the Global North. Yet, with Christianity's imminent demographic shift to the Global South, it is imperative for the region to reclaim ownership of its faith and resist Western distortions. To this end, the paper reviews Western influence on contemporary Christianity, analyzes the deceptive aspects of globalization, and suggests ways in which African Christianity can actively engage globalizing forces, leveraging them to transmit African Christian norms and values back to the Global North.

### **Contribution:**

This article contributes by demonstrating that globalization, rather than being neutral, functions as a continuation of colonialism that shapes African theological identity. Furthermore, it emphasizes the necessity of dewesternization so that Africa can reclaim its theological autonomy and actively participate as a central voice in shaping a polycentric global Christianity.

**Keywords:** globalization; future hope; Africa; world Christianity

## **INTRODUCTION**

Much research has been conducted to assess how much the West knows and cares about Africa. Although many of these studies are informal and not strictly academic, they clearly reveal how often the true Africa is neglected or misunderstood. One might expect that the information explosion of the 21st century—fueled by the collapse of space and time in the so-called “global village”—

would foster greater awareness and mutual understanding. Yet this technological closeness seems to benefit only the Global North's access to the Global South, not the other way around. A simple YouTube search with the query "Is Africa a country or a continent?" illustrates the persistence of such misconceptions.

It is therefore unsurprising, though disappointing, when "enlightened" individuals in the West equate Nigeria with a state or refer to Africa as if it were a single country. Some even compliment my English proficiency, seemingly unaware that English is Nigeria's official language and part of my early education. Others are baffled when I cannot identify a Nigerian they happen to know, despite Nigeria's population of more than 200 million people.<sup>1</sup> These naïve assumptions underscore the depth of ignorance about Africa. It was precisely such claims that prompted Mawocha<sup>2</sup> to release the educational video *Africa is NOT a Country*. Though they may appear trivial, these misconceptions raise serious questions about the legitimacy of globalization. Instead of fostering equality and understanding, globalization often reinforces distorted views of Africa. This dynamic generates suspicion and skepticism toward globalization's supposed universality.

As Bauman notes, "Globalization divides as much as it unites."<sup>3</sup> This suggests that global interconnectedness exposes rather than eliminates hierarchies. Misconceptions about Nigeria or Africa are not merely anecdotal but reflect structural inequalities. These inequalities are embedded in the very processes that claim to unite the world. Consequently, Africa remains marginalized in the global imagination.

Scholars such as Walls<sup>4</sup> and Jenkins<sup>5</sup> have shown that Christianity's center of gravity is shifting to the Global South. However, theological authority remains concentrated in the Global North. This paradox indicates that African Christianity is numerically dominant yet doctrinally dependent. Netland<sup>6</sup> emphasizes the need for

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<sup>1</sup> World Population Review. *Nigeria Population 2019*. September 8, 2019.  
<http://worldpopulationreview.com/state-rankings/nigerian-population-by-state>.

<sup>2</sup> Iwani Mawocha. "Africa is Not A Country". *Youtube*, January 12, 2015.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZmhqpS3oMpw>.

<sup>3</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization: The human consequences* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2023), 2.

<sup>4</sup> Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith* (New York, NY: Orbis Books, 2002).

<sup>5</sup> Philip Jenkins. *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> Harold A. Netland. "Introduction: globalization and theology today". In Craig Ott & Harold A.

non-Western scholars to be full partners in theological debates. Without such participation, global theology risks being unbalanced and incomplete.

The Global South (among other non-Western countries or continents) is faced with two challenges. The first being that of preserving Christian theology, and the second, that of sharing their theological thoughts with the rest of the world. For a very long time, Africa has been like *Wakanda* (in the movie *Black Panther*, 2018),<sup>7</sup> hidden from the rest of the world. The striking difference between these two is that while *Wakanda* chose to keep herself from the rest of the world, Africa has been made hidden, but Africa cannot remain invisible forever. Just as the movie concludes with *Wakanda* choosing to move out from hiding in order to help the world by sharing *Wakanda's* wealth and advanced technology with the rest of the world, America inclusive, the shift of world Christianity to the Global South must also awaken Africans to the need and responsibility of sharing her rich theological heritage and reflections with the rest of the world. To achieve this however, it is imperative for Africa to seek out viable, helpful, and sustainable ways of interacting with the forces of globalization.

The other challenge presented to the Global South is that of maintaining her cultural heritage amidst contemporary cultural deconstructions and simulations. Although the center of Christianity is finding its way to the Global South, the Western culture and its superiority complex is still being exported by the forces of globalization. The effective marketing strategy of the West, which sells them out as the world model has led to a simulation of Western and African cultures. While colonization and colonial mentality has also helped in this cause, the key role of globalization cannot be overemphasized. We therefore remain suspicious of globalization as a tool for westernization. This point is reinforced by the bankruptcy of African Christian music and culture within the Global North. Christianity's imminent shift to the Global South has made it crucial for the Global South to own her culture and religion, refuting Western distortions therein. Focusing on Nigeria as a lens for viewing the wider conversation in the African context, this paper probes the deception of globalization, reviews Western influences on Christianity as

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Netland (ed.), *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 30.

<sup>7</sup> Ryan Coogler. (Director). *Black Panther* [Motion Picture] (Burbank, CA: Marvel Studios, 2018).

known today, and suggests possible ways that African Christian thought can actively engage with 'globalizing' forces, leveraging upon such to export African Christian norms and values to the Global North. To begin however, an inquiry into the foundations established by colonization, which has made Africa prone to Westernization, disguised as globalization, is necessary.

Previous research has often examined globalization mainly in political and economic terms. Less attention has been given to its influence on African religious identity. This neglect leaves a gap in understanding the cultural and theological dimensions of globalization. The intersection of Western Christianity and African theology has not been sufficiently explored. Addressing this gap is the central aim of this article.

This paper argues that Africa, particularly Nigeria, must reclaim its theological autonomy. The process requires deliberate *dewesternization* of inherited theological frameworks. By doing so, Africa will not only resist Western distortions but also affirm its own heritage. Such a move positions Africa as an active contributor to the shaping of World Christianity. In this way, Africa transforms from a passive recipient into a constructive global agent.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This study employs a qualitative theological approach, particularly through critical literature analysis. Netland emphasizes that theology in the context of globalization requires an awareness of "an increasingly complex interrelatedness on multiple levels across traditional boundaries".<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, Tite Tiénou highlights that all theology is contextual, meaning that theology always emerges from particular experiences, cultures, and situations. Therefore, a qualitative approach is essential for interpreting the meaning of faith within real-life contexts.<sup>9</sup> The author analyzes theological arguments and historical narratives drawn from both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include colonial and missionary records, African Christian traditions, and theological reflections from within the African context. Secondary literature is used to frame the discourse on globalization,

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<sup>8</sup> Harold A. Netland. "Introduction: globalization and theology today": 16.

<sup>9</sup> Tite Tiénou. "Biblical foundations for African theology". *Missiology: An International Review* 10, no. 4 (1982): 436. <https://doi.org/10.1177/009182968201000405>.

theology, and African identity, incorporating voices from globalization theorists such as Bauman, Steger, and Netland. By synthesizing these materials, the research situates African Christianity within the larger debate on globalization and its cultural implications.

The method is interpretive and critical, aiming to uncover how globalization perpetuates colonial legacies and influences African Christian identity. The analysis is structured thematically, beginning with the historical continuity from colonialism to globalization, then moving to the theological implications of Western dominance, and finally suggesting strategies for African dewesternization and theological renewal. This reflective approach allows the author not only to critique globalization as a disguised form of imperialism but also to propose constructive pathways for African Christianity to shape global theological discourse. The emphasis on contextual theology highlights the importance of reclaiming African agency in articulating a theology that is both locally rooted and globally engaged.

## **RESULTS**

### **From Colonialism to Globalization**

Colonialism and globalization, though distinct in historical period and method, are closely linked in their consequences for Africa. Both systems reshaped African societies by undermining indigenous political structures, reorienting economic systems, and displacing cultural and religious practices. Each was driven by a power imbalance in which Western nations imposed their models on African societies. Colonialism relied on overt political control, while globalization often operates through more subtle mechanisms of cultural and economic dominance. For this reason, globalization can be interpreted as a contemporary extension—or even a disguised continuation—of colonialism.

In 1985, Williamson presented a romanticized account of colonization in his discussion of Willbur Fisk and African Colonization. According to Williamson, Fisk believed that “colonization was the best available means for eradicating slavery from the nation...Fisk understood colonization to be a voluntary process by which black persons, both free and slave, would be taken from America to Africa, where

they would be afforded the opportunity to establish their own colony or colonies”.<sup>10</sup> In this view, colonization was designed to grant both agency and political and economic autonomy to enslaved and formerly enslaved people. Such explanations frame colonization in positive terms, masking its exploitative nature and portraying colonizers as agents of love, justice, and liberation. This makes it difficult to recognize the profound and destructive changes colonialism imposed on Africa.

Against such interpretations, Falola and Heaton rightly reject romanticized views of colonization and present an account more consistent with historical reality. With reference to Nigeria, they explain that colonial rule was “charged with the task of governing the territories of Nigeria, expanding the commerce of the country, and promoting ‘progress’ and ‘civilization’ for peoples they considered inferior and backward”.<sup>11</sup> In other words, the guiding ideologies of colonization were neither humanitarian efforts to free slaves nor attempts to provide them with autonomy. Rather, they were strategies for taking control of Nigeria’s territories, exploiting its commerce, and advancing a superiority complex that cast Africa as an inferior continent lacking in both “progress” and “civilization.” This undeniable reality compelled Williamson despite his generally positive view of Fisk’s involvement in colonization, to acknowledge that “Fisk and others understood the colonization enterprise to involve a missionary thrust. Such an understanding was distinctly grounded in a sense of the superiority of Christianity and American culture to all other religions and cultures”.<sup>12</sup>

The Nigerian context illustrates these dynamics vividly. Politically, colonial authorities removed resistant traditional rulers and replaced them with compliant figures under a system of indirect rule. Although presented as a hybrid of indigenous and colonial governance, this system effectively undermined indigenous authority and eroded communal accountability.<sup>13</sup> Economically, the British imposed a cash-

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<sup>10</sup> Douglas J. Williamson. “Willbur Fisk and African Colonization: a “painful portion” of American Methodist history”. *Methodist History* 23, no. 1 (1985): 81–83; Christopher H. Evans. “American Methodism: A Compact History, Revised and Updated”. *Wesley and Methodist Studies* 17, no. 1 (2025): 93–95. <https://doi.org/10.5325/weslmethstud.17.1.0093>.

<sup>11</sup> Toyin Falola and Matthew M. Heaton. *A History of Nigeria* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 110. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511819711>.

<sup>12</sup> Douglas J. Williamson. “Willbur Fisk and African Colonization: a “painful portion” of American Methodist history”: 83; Christopher H. Evans. “American Methodism: A Compact History, Revised and Updated”: 93-95.

<sup>13</sup> Toyin Falola and Matthew M. Heaton. *A History of Nigeria*, 110.

based system tied to the pound sterling and compelled Nigerians into wage labor. This restructuring redirected agricultural production away from local needs toward external markets, ensuring profitability for Britain and Europe at the expense of Nigerian self-sufficiency. Such measures illustrate that colonialism was less about development and more about the consolidation of imperial economic power.

Religion was equally transformed under colonial influence. Missionaries and colonial administrators often sought to suppress indigenous religious expressions in favor of Westernized Christianity. This produced the misconception that Christianity itself was introduced to Africa by Europeans. As Boaheng argues, this narrative dismisses the legitimacy of African Traditional Religions,<sup>14</sup> while Adjei highlights its roots in Western cultural arrogance. The result was the widespread perception of Christianity as a “White man’s religion,” which fostered theological dependency and reinforced the authority of Western institutions to define Christian orthodoxy in Africa.<sup>15</sup>

Globalization builds upon these colonial foundations, often perpetuating similar dynamics in subtler forms. Economically, it sustains Africa’s role as a consumer rather than a producer, reinforcing dependency on foreign goods. Politically and culturally, it promotes Western values as universal models, marginalizing African perspectives. Theologically, it continues to privilege Western frameworks, limiting the development of authentically African expressions of Christianity. In this sense, globalization represents not a break from colonialism but its transformation into new modalities of control and influence.

On an economic level, Falola and Heaton lament that:

The British also instituted a cash economy based on the UK currency and forced Nigerians into wage labor, transforming in a few short years the processes of agricultural production and capital accumulation that had developed among Nigerian communities over centuries. This was done primarily as a means to redirect economic activity towards external markets and thereby make the colonial endeavor self-sustaining for the colonial government and profitable for British and European business.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Paul Boaheng. “God and the traditional African experience: shattering the stereotypes”. *Thinking About Religion* 10 (2012): 1-10. [http://organizations.uncfsu.edu/ncrsa/journal/v10/boaheng\\_god.htm](http://organizations.uncfsu.edu/ncrsa/journal/v10/boaheng_god.htm).

<sup>15</sup> Ako Adjei. “Imperialism and spiritual freedom: An African view”. *American Journal of Sociology* 50, no. 3 (1944): 189-198. <https://doi.org/10.1177/009182968000800303>; Pauleson Ashibeshibe Utsu. “Religious imperialism and African religion: In search of religious tolerance”. *African Social Science and Humanities Journal* 2, no. 4 (2021): 233-240. <https://doi.org/10.57040/asshj.v2i4.84>.

<sup>16</sup> Toyin Falola and Matthew M. Heaton. *A History of Nigeria*, 111.

That is to say, the British colonial masters forcefully changed the Nigerian economic system that was in place, replacing it with a system that is not essentially profitable to the Nigerian economy nor the Nigerian State, but rather profitable for both the British and European economy. Such economic strategizing is proof of the economic motivation for colonization. Many decades after the forceful establishment of such trading system, globalization with its World Trade phenomenon is exploiting Nigeria's economy, making Nigeria a dumping ground for producers. In other words, Nigeria has failed to have a mark in the global economy as producers, rather, Nigeria has made its mark as a country obsessed with importation, due to the faulty understanding—inaugurated by the colonizers and reaffirmed by globalism—of Western supremacy which affirms that foreign goods are always best.

The religious economy was also not spared from colonial influences. The colonialist sought to displace the indigenous expressions of religion in favor of their Westernized expressions religion. This has led to the promulgation of the faulty impression that Western missionaries introduced Christianity to Africa, thus, introducing God to Africa. Weather this claim is due to the western misconception of the African Traditional Religions<sup>17</sup> or due to the Western "mental disposition" of superiority of culture and religion,<sup>18</sup> such a claim has led to the pandemic conclusion that Christianity is a White man's religion. This in turn instilled daunting consequences that cannot sufficiently be explored here. In any case, colonial Christianity ingrafted an ideology of western theological superiority on the African continent, giving Westerners the right and liberty to define the 'ought' and 'ought not' of Christianity, even Christianity on African soil.

Globalization as a construct on its part seem to be building on the foundations laid by colonization. As such, eating from the pots of Africa, even though such meal and feasting is detrimental to Africa. That is to say, globalization has imbibed the superiority model of colonization which to this day has continued to impact Africa's politics, economy, culture, and religion in unprecedented ways. Focusing on the religious economy, we shall seek to explicate some of these impacts,

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<sup>17</sup> Paul Boaheng. "God and the traditional African experience: shattering the stereotypes": 1-10.

<sup>18</sup> Ako Adjei. "Imperialism and spiritual freedom: An African view": 189-198; Pauleson Ashibeshibe Utsu. "Religious imperialism and African religion: In search of religious tolerance": 233-240.

but before then, we shift to an appraisal of the concept of globalization.

### **Globalization: A Quest for Conceptualization**

The concept of globalization has proved itself to be a very controversial one which can and should be contested. Several scholars have grappled with the concept, seeking to complicate and/or clarify the subject matter. Steger<sup>19</sup> describes the vast controversy using the Buddhist parable of the blind scholars and their encounter with an elephant. The understanding of each blind scholar was only limited to the region/section of the elephant that was within their grasp.

Thus, each blind scholar produced an extensive and accurate depiction of the elephant based on their experience. Because this elephant (globalization) is too huge to be dissected in such little space, we direct the reader to the works of Lechner and Boli, Steger, and Bauman.<sup>20</sup> An attempt is however made here to present an understanding of the concept, especially as it relates to the current conversation.

Netland observed that at the heart of globalization is the “awareness of an increasingly complex interrelatedness on multiple levels across traditional boundaries”.<sup>21</sup> Such complex interconnectedness is made possible by the continuous shrinkage of time and collapse of space. Singer alludes to this shrinkage of space and interconnectedness of boundaries by exemplifying the possibility of a country A’s events being affected by a country B’s events. That is to say, Nigeria can be directly affected in real time by an event happening in USA.<sup>22</sup> To this effect, Steger attempts to sum up his understanding of globalization by describing the concept as “the expansion and intensification of social relations and consciousness across world-time and world-space”,<sup>23</sup> and Netland reminds us globalization possesses a multidimensional nature which cuts across the lines of politics, economics, science,

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<sup>19</sup> Manfred B. Steger. *Globalization: A very short introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>20</sup> Frank J. Lechner & John Boli (Ed.). *The Globalization Reader*. 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell Publishing, 2015); Manfred B. Steger. *Globalization: A very short introduction*; and Zygmunt Bauman. *Globalization: The human consequences* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1893).

<sup>21</sup> Harold A. Netland. “Introduction: globalization and theology today”, 18.

<sup>22</sup> Peter Singer, *One World: The ethics of globalization* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2022), 2.

<sup>23</sup> Manfred B. Steger. *Globalization: A very short introduction*, 5.

technology, culture, and religion.<sup>24</sup> With these interconnectedness and multidimensionality, the question that begs to be asked is, who controls globalization, or who benefits from globalization?

To respond to the question above, the idiom “he who pays the piper calls the tune” rings true about globalization and has daunting implications. In view of this, whoever controls globalization stands the benefit of defining its movement. While it does not clearly state who or what governs globalization, Bauman seems to be of the opinion that globalization creates a “top and bottom divide.”<sup>25</sup> Netland on the other hand seem to respond to the question more directly in the assertion that the earlier stages of globalization were spare-headed and controlled by “European and American organizations and businesses”.<sup>26</sup> Although Netland<sup>27</sup> limits his claims to the earlier history of globalization, Singer<sup>28</sup> seem to be more aware of the contemporary influences on globalization. To this regard, Singer could have been acknowledging some Western imperialism reflected in globalization when he referenced President George Bush’s firm claim in 1992 to use his power and influence for the benefit of Americans. Although Waters asserts that “globalizing forces are impersonal and beyond the control and intentions of any individual or group of individuals”,<sup>29</sup> Waters still maintains that, “Many aspects of globalization are indeed intentional and reflexive”.<sup>30</sup> In effect, globalization is influenced by some deliberate actions of certain institution that have the power and autonomy. Considering the current implications of globalization on Africa, and in view of Africa’s oppression by “stronger” countries as reflected in slavery and colonization, we are inclined to acknowledge with Petras and Valtmeyer that globalization is a system of imperialism.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Harold A. Netland. “Introduction: globalization and theology today”, 19.

<sup>25</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization: The human consequences*, 3.

<sup>26</sup> Harold A. Netland. “Introduction: globalization and theology today”, 20.

<sup>27</sup> Harold A. Netland. “Introduction: globalization and theology today”, 22.

<sup>28</sup> Peter Singer, *One World: The ethics of globalization*, 2.

<sup>29</sup> Malcolm Waters, *Globalization*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (New York, NY: Routledge, 2001), 3.

<sup>30</sup> Malcolm Waters, *Globalization*, 2.

<sup>31</sup> James Petras & Henry Veltmeyer. *Globalization Unmasked: Imperialism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century* (New York, NY: Zed Books, 2001).

## DISCUSSION

### The Impacts of Western Christianity on Africa

In 2003, Lamin Sanneh pointed out the distinction between “World Christianity” and “Global Christianity” as such:

“World Christianity is the movement of Christianity as it takes form and shape in societies that previously were not Christian, societies that had no bureaucratic tradition with which to domesticate the gospel. In these societies, Christianity was received and expressed through the cultures, customs, and traditions of the peoples affected... “Global Christianity” on the other hand, is the faithful replication of Christian forms and patterns developed in Europe.<sup>32</sup>

His distinction highlights the first among other impacts of Western Christianity within Africa. It is observed that “Global Christianity” is more prevalent in Africa, especially among mainline denominations. A theologian friend of mine from Africa (Nigeria), whom I shall leave unnamed symbolizes this in unmistakable terms when on September 2019, he articulated to me concerning himself that, “My African theology is Western.” Such Westernized Christianity has led to an unfortunate reliance on Westerners for orthodoxy and orthopraxy by the African church.

Consequently, this dependence has led to a blind acceptance of several Western and Eurocentric practices that are not necessarily biblical nor Christian. Some of such glaring practices are: the Christmas tree, which has been unquestionably accepted as a Christian practice regardless of its pagan origins;<sup>33</sup> Santa Clause, who has been unashamedly assimilated into the Christmas traditions regardless of Santa’s conflated mythological and pagan history;<sup>34</sup> and the dating of Easter, the practice surrounding Easter eggs, and in some cases Easter bunnies, which have naively been upheld by the African Church, who have remained adamant or ignorant of its pagan roots.<sup>35</sup> Regrettably, a good proportion of African Christians

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<sup>32</sup> Lamin Sanneh. *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 22.

<sup>33</sup> Tibi Puiu. “The origins and history of the Christmas tree: from paganism to modern ubiquity”. *ZME Science*, December 11, 2023. <https://www.zmescience.com/science/history-science/origin-christmas-tree-pagan..>

<sup>34</sup> Zoe Mintz. “Santa Claus’ Pagan Origins: 5 Influences Behind Father Christmas”. *International Business Times*, June 12, 2024. <https://www.ibtimes.com/santa-claus-pagan-origins-5-influences-behind-father-christmas-1736863>.

<sup>35</sup> Heather McDougall. “The pagan roots of Easter”. *The Guardian*, April 3, 2010. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2010/apr/03/easter-pagan-symbolism>.

today will rather dismiss the church than discard these pagan practices disguised in Christian colors. To this regard, Sanneh was right in stating that “Global Christianity,” represented by the concept of Western/Westernized Christianity, “is, in fact, religious establishment and the cultural captivity of faith”.<sup>36</sup>

Secondly, Western Christianity has impacted the core of African theology by imprinting in her a distorted image of Christ, which is based on imperialism and the superiority of the white race. This image we will refer to as “White Jesus.” Jun, Jolivet, Ash, & Collins are firm in stating that White Jesus is “a socially constructed apparatus—a mythology that animates the architecture of salvation—that operates stealthily as a veneer for patriarchal White supremacist, capitalist, and imperialist sociopolitical, cultural, and economic agendas. White Jesus was constructed by combining empire, colorism, racism, education, and religion”.<sup>37</sup> The ‘stealth’ of this ideology as Jun et al pointed out cannot be overemphasized.<sup>38</sup> Such stealth has left a White Jesus unnoticed and unchallenged in the African church. It is noteworthy at this point to affirm Jun et al in clarifying that “White Jesus” is different from the Jesus of the Gospels<sup>39</sup>. To place the Jesus of the Gospels within human history, it is clear that Jesus took on human form as a Jewish man. To this regard, the historical Jesus does not pass for White.<sup>40</sup> On an affective domain, this ideology of Whiteness has pervaded our mentality as Africans.

Symbolizing this, is another theologian friend of mine from Africa (Tanzania),

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<sup>36</sup> Lamin Sanneh. *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West*, 22.

<sup>37</sup> Alexander Jun, Tabatha L. Jones Jolivet, Allison N. Ash, & Christopher S. Collins. *White Jesus: The Architecture of Racism in Religion and Education*. (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2018), xx.

<sup>38</sup> Alexander Jun, Tabatha L. Jones Jolivet, Allison N. Ash, & Christopher S. Collins. *White Jesus: The Architecture of Racism in Religion and Education*, xxi.

<sup>39</sup> Alexander Jun, Tabatha L. Jones Jolivet, Allison N. Ash, & Christopher S. Collins. *White Jesus: The Architecture of Racism in Religion and Education*; Christina Iluzada. “White Jesus: The Architecture of Racism in Religion and Education.” *International Journal of Christianity & Education* 25, no. 3 (2021): 365-367. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20569971211020665>.

<sup>40</sup> Although there currently appears to be somewhat of a controversy as to whether Jews pass for white, even though they are dark/black skinned, history records that the Jews belonged to the marginalized group, thus, not passing for whiteness, which is considered as a symbol of privilege and supremacy (Karen Lehrman Bloch. “We’re Jews, we’re not White, we define ourselves”. *Jewish Journal*, March 27, 2019. [https://jewishjournal.com/cover\\_story/295918/were-jews-were-not-white-we-define-ourselves](https://jewishjournal.com/cover_story/295918/were-jews-were-not-white-we-define-ourselves); Smith, Tema. “Are Jews White? American history says it’s complicated”. *Forward: Jewish, Independent, Nonprofit*, January 9, 2019. <https://forward.com/opinion/417274/are-jews-white-american-history-says-its-complicated>; Lori Harrison-Kahan. “Passing for White, passing for Jewish: Mixed race identity in Danzy Senna and Rebecca Walker”. *MELUS* 30, no. 1 (2005): 19-48. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30029610>). A quick and well-known example that signifies Jewish marginalized status is the Holocaust.

whom I will also leave unnamed. She firmly professed to me that her Jesus will always have blue eyes and long blond hair. Of course, the reason for her dogmatic claim is not farfetched. The current contemporary iconography of the church is filled with whitewashed images of White Jesus, White Apostles, and White Saints, hence, the mental disposition of Africans has been conditioned to think of Jesus only as a White man. It may bemuse you to know that in May 2019, I uploaded a photo of a Black Jesus to my Facebook and WhatsApp story, and the most pushback I got were from Africans. This glaringly reveals the depth and intensity of colonial Christianity.

The third and final implication under consideration here is the threat of liberalism. The word threat is adopted here because I do not believe that the church in Africa has moved to the left wing yet, although there seem to be a move away from the right wing. This move threatens what Africa has learnt to acknowledge and respect as Christian theology, albeit adulterated by Western schemes. Regardless of one's perception of liberalism, whether judging it to be good or bad, the point remains that liberalism is shaking the walls of faith, belief, and religious practices in Africa. As we have noted earlier, it is also obtainable here that Africa's dependence on Western theology and Africa's colonial mentality continues to make this threat more imminent. Leveraging on this bias, the said "popular culture"—although alien to the African culture—infests the African socio-religious arena with foreign concepts and ideas, such as atheism. In Nigeria for instance, there is a growing number of youths who are claiming to be atheist or free thinkers or areligious. A clarion call is therefore made for Africa to retrace her Christian identity and desensitize herself from all Western idealization and the devaluation of Africa.

### **Retracing the African Christian Identity**

If Africa is to shape World Christianity, there exist an urgency for Africa to "dewesternize" herself. Suffice it to say that without such "dewesternization", Africa's faithful and fruitful contributions might lack (the desired) impact. Tiénoú believes that such "dewesternization" must also be engaged by the West, who have refused to accept the changing center of Christianity to the Global South, but have

continued to situate themselves as the center for theology.<sup>41</sup> Undoubtedly, the West has a long way to go in decentralizing themselves from both Christianity and Christian theology, and for Africa's voice to be heard, the West has to listen. However, there is also something to be said about Africa as well. Africa needs to "dewesternize" herself in the sense that she does not need accept a White Imperialist Jesus that supports the superiority agenda and savior complex of the West.

Africa needs to "dewesternize" herself by choosing not to make the West the main source for Africa's theology. It is well known—although unfortunately not accepted by some—that all theology is contextual theology. In the words of Tiénou, "...there is no such thing as presuppositionless theology".<sup>42</sup> That is to say, when Africans adopt a Western theology, Africa stands the risk of positioning themselves to adopt the cultural dispositions therein. Also, there exist the risk of applying a Western or Westernized solution to a distinctive African situation. Hence, Africa needs to consume a theology that respects her context. Of course, that is not to say that Western theology should be completely discarded from the African religious atmosphere, for I believe that we all have something to learn from each other. In fact, if there has never existed a need for both the Global North and the Global South to listen to each other, now is the time for such theological conversations. With the compression of time and space, the world continues to become intricately connected, presenting us with opportunities for such intricate and intimate theological conversations. However, for such conversations to genuinely happen respectfully, Africa needs to "dewesternize" herself and feed on her own theology. We cannot continue with the colonial mentality that makes us fashion our theologies to become as Western as possible and our churches as Westernized as can be. We cannot continue to sing "I am dreaming of a White Christmas", nor sing about how fun "it is to ride in a one- horse open sleigh" because they do not make sense within our context. In fact, we cannot continue to encourage indigenous artist and theologians that write with a colonial mentality. A case in point is Nathaniel Bassey, a Nigerian singer songwriter who wrote a song using the four seasons of "Summer,

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<sup>41</sup> Tite Tiénou, "Christian theology in an era of World Christianity". In Craig Ott & Harold A. Netland (Ed.), *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 40-45.

<sup>42</sup> Tite Tiénou. "Biblical foundations for African theology": 435.

Winter, Autumn, Spring” while Nigeria only has two seasons.<sup>43</sup> In fact, his arrangement of the four seasons says a lot. We must “dewesternize” ourselves as Africans and write songs and theologies that is authentic to Africa.

Having “dewesternized” ourselves as African’s, there exist the need to retrace the Christian identity back to Africa. Africans cannot continue to believe that Christianity is a White man’s religion. The roots of Christianity in Africa are deep and historic, and can be traced back to the gospels. The gospel of Luke, for instance, records that the cross bearer of Jesus Christ on his way to crucifixion was an African. Acts of the Apostles also informs us that there were Africans present on the day of Pentecost. We also discover in Acts that Phillip meets with an official from Ethiopia who was converted at the end of the conversation. To this effect, we can conclude that Christianity was planted in Africa right from its earliest conception, centuries before the West came into play. This Christianity that dwelt in Africa did not exist as a dormant religion but an active one. This is evidenced by the immense contributions Africans made to the development of Christianity into what it is today. For instance, Africa produce several Church Fathers who shaped the nature and character of Christian thought.

One among such Church Fathers, perhaps the most notable, is St. Augustine, whose works to this day is being meticulously studied in both Universities and Seminaries. It is therefore plausible for Africa to claim Christianity as an indigenous African religion. This claim however, does not give Africa grounds to claim monopoly over Christianity because the Christian faith cannot, and should not, be hijacked, controlled, and/or colonized by any people grouping. As Tiénou shows, Christianity has a “Polycentric” character that enables it find a home within different cultures and contexts. The call therefore is for Africans to acknowledge the settling and localization of Christianity in Africa, even before colonialism, thus dismissing the enigmatic and erroneous claim of Christianity as a western religion.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Nathaniel Bassey. *Wonderful Wonder*. [CD]. (Lagos: Nathaniel Bassey Music, 2016).

<sup>44</sup> Tite Tiénou, “Christian theology in an era of World Christianity”, 37-51.

## **Prospects for Africa in Shaping Global Christianity**

When Africa successfully dispels her colonial mentality, by “dewesternizing” herself and retracing her Christian roots and origins back to the earliest inceptions of Christianity, then Africa will be ready to ‘stand tall’ and speak with confidence to the global estate. Leveraging upon the intricacies of the globalizing world and exploiting the tools of globalization, Africa stands a chance to once more, shape the face of World Christianity. Though Tiénou <sup>45</sup> rightly questions if the West will ever allow Africa an equal voice in theology and scholarship, we are however convinced of the prospects Africa possesses in shaping World Christianity. An attempt to conceptualize such prospects is therefore to discussed.

### ***The Coin is Two-Sided***

The one-sided narrative of Africa propagated all around the world needs to be deconstructed and reconstructed. I admit that this first suggestion is not necessarily theological nor distinctively Christian, in fact, the sectors capable of reconstructing this one-sided narrative may not be considered Christian. Nevertheless, it is imperative for these unfairly promulgated African narratives to be deconstructed and reconstructed at all cost, especially since such narratives impact every facet of Africa in undeniably detrimental way. If such narratives are not deconstructed, Christian theology in African perspective might continually be taken for granted.

The one-sided narrative working against Africa is that of the characterization of Africa as a poor, corrupt, and uneducated continent. If you turn on the TV, the news concerning Africa that mostly hits the global scene are mostly negative. You hear of things such as the Ebola virus, the infestation of HIV/AIDS, ethno-religious violence, Boko-Haram, and the list continues. Our leaders have been characterized as corrupt. Africa to this day is seen as city needing Western civilization and “foreign aid.” African kids are still shown on TV walking barefooted and some are shown in a skeletal condition due to hunger. Thus, fund raisers are established to raise funds and “save” these children, in effect, “save” Africa. Surprisingly, I attended a Hillsong concert in 2019 and time was dedicated to raise financial support in order to help buy school supplies for African kids. While this is well intentioned, we should not

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<sup>45</sup> “Christian theology in an era of World Christianity”, 37-51.

loose sight of the big picture here.

Such one-sided characterization of Africa has not only painted Africa as backward, but also retarded. It therefore comes as a shame but no surprise that the world still questions if anything good can come out of Africa.

In 2009, Chimamanda Adichie reminds the world of *the Danger of a Single Story* and urged all to desist from single narratives. The world must also desist from entertaining the single narrative it has construed about Africa. To achieve this however, Africa must stop disbursing single narratives about herself. Africa must open up the true Africa to the world. Africa must learn to promote a positive self-image. It is crucial to remember that good news is also deserving of public hearing.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, the entertainment industries, governmental agencies, news outlets, churches, Africans in diaspora, and every institution of African descent need to take seriously the responsibility of unraveling the true delicately interwoven multifaceted story of Africa to the rest of the world. Since negativity cannot produce positive impact, Africa's voice in theology will not be taken seriously unless Africa is positively seen for what Africa truly is.

### ***The effective town-crier***

Due to the vitality of effective communication to the progress of any cause, the African socio-cultural system instituted the system of a town-crier, who serves as an effective and dependable medium/channel of transferring information to the general public. In the same vein, the global village has also come with its instituted town-criers, represented by concepts such as the internet (among many others). If Africa, as stake holders in this global village desire to disburse information to the wider populace of the village, Africa must seek to utilize the town-criers of the global village. In 2019, Clement reports that in 2017, "there was an estimated 3.9 billion internet users worldwide. This accounts for more than half of the global population."<sup>47</sup> Consequently, if Christianity in Africa effectively interacts with the internet alone, it stands a chance of reaching out to more than half of the globe.

Currently, Africa seem to have listened to, more than she has engaged with

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<sup>46</sup> "The danger of a single story". *TED: Ideas change everything*, September 13, 2019.  
[https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda\\_adichie\\_the\\_danger\\_of\\_a\\_single\\_story?language=en#t-308731](https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?language=en#t-308731).

<sup>47</sup> J. Clement. "Internet usage worldwide – Statistics & facts." *Statista*, April 11, 2025.  
<https://www.statista.com/topics/1145/internet-usage-worldwide>.

these town-criers. Her interactions with the internet, seem to be weightier on consumption than on production. As an example, I have sought to incorporate African scholarship into my research work. But being located in the States, I have had limited access to African publications I had desired to use. These works by African scholars were neither listed on Amazon nor any other paid retailer that could possibly do me the favor of shipping the material to my address.

Similarly, I have sought to listen to specific African gospel songs at certain points in time, but have been robbed of such gratification simply because, the music was neither available on YouTube nor on Amazon Music. Such lack of global/international presence do not serve Africa nor World Christianity well.

Dwelling on Music some more, it might interest you to know that while the African church is proliferated with Western music, the reverse is not the case. Having been a part of three churches in Minnesota, USA, that seek to be “diverse” and “welcoming”, and having visited with at least 4 other churches, it is sad to mention that none of those churches had any form of African music—or any non-Western music for that matter—in their liturgy. I also recently probed a group of four Chaplains I served with about some big names within the Nigerian music industry, but they surprisingly knew none. This goes to show that Africa has not effectively made her presence known on the global scene. I therefore pose this challenge to Christianity in Africa: I wonder if the story would have been any different if the internet was populated by the creative works of Africans. What if African theologians and publishers will aim to have all their published works listed on Amazon and other online retailers? Can Africans infest the internet to the point where every search query on any platform will list works by Africans among the results?

### ***Theologizing for the Global context***

African theology has often been shaped by immediate contextual concerns such as colonialism, cultural identity, and social justice. While it is essential for African theologians to remain attentive to their local realities, the scope of African theology cannot be limited to domestic issues alone. The increasing interconnectedness of the world compels African scholarship to speak to challenges beyond its own borders. If Africa seeks to shape World Christianity, its theological

reflections must engage both local and global dimensions. Contextual theology, therefore, should serve not only African communities but also contribute meaningfully to the global theological discourse.

The claim that all theology is contextual, as Tiénou argues, does not diminish the possibility of theology with wider relevance. Instead, it highlights the importance of acknowledging one's presuppositions while offering insights that can resonate across cultural boundaries.<sup>48</sup> African theologians are thus called to develop theological responses that arise from African experiences yet remain accessible to other contexts. Such engagement requires humility: theology from Africa should not be positioned as "infallible" or normative for others. Rather, it should be understood as a vital contribution to the polycentric character of Christianity, which thrives through dialogue among diverse cultures.

At the same time, the danger of insularity must be avoided. If African scholarship focuses exclusively on uniquely African issues, it risks being sidelined in global debates. Globalization has created shared challenges—such as migration, climate change, economic inequality, and secularization—that demand theological responses from multiple perspectives. By addressing such issues, African theology demonstrates its relevance not only within its immediate setting but also in shaping responses to universal human concerns. This move underscores the potential of Africa not as a passive recipient but as an active participant in global theological conversations.

The practical challenge lies in balancing contextual depth with global engagement. African theologians must continue to critique colonial legacies and affirm indigenous traditions, while simultaneously offering constructive theological resources to the wider world. This dual responsibility reflects both the uniqueness of African experiences and the interconnectedness of the global community. By speaking into global issues while grounded in its own context, African theology exemplifies a model of contextual relevance combined with universal significance. Such a model can enrich theological discourse worldwide and reposition Africa as a central contributor to World Christianity.

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<sup>48</sup> Tite Tiénou. "Biblical foundations for African theology": 435-448.

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper has examined the relationship between globalization and African Christianity, with particular attention to the Nigerian context. By tracing the historical continuity from colonialism to globalization, it has demonstrated how Western ideologies continue to shape African politics, economics, culture, and religion. Particular attention has been given to the religious sphere, where Western theological frameworks and practices have frequently overshadowed indigenous expressions of faith. These patterns reveal globalization not as a neutral process but as a continuation of colonial structures that privilege Western dominance. At the same time, the study underscores the urgent need for Africa to reclaim theological autonomy through deliberate dewesternization. By rediscovering its deep historical roots in Christianity and affirming its own cultural resources, Africa can overcome inherited colonial mentalities. This requires rejecting distorted images of Christianity, such as the “White Jesus,” while affirming the authenticity of African theological voices. It also involves recognizing that Christianity has been present in Africa since its earliest centuries, making it not a foreign import but an indigenous faith.

The future of World Christianity will increasingly depend on contributions from the Global South. For Africa, this means developing theology that is both rooted in its own context and responsive to global realities. African theologians must continue to critique colonial legacies while also addressing shared challenges such as secularization, inequality, and interreligious coexistence. In doing so, African theology will not only enrich its local communities but also shape broader theological conversations. Africa now stands at a decisive moment in the history of Christianity. If it succeeds in reclaiming its identity and actively engaging with the forces of globalization, it can move from the margins to the center of global theological discourse. Such a transformation would not only decolonize African Christianity but also contribute to a more polycentric and inclusive vision of World Christianity.

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