

**A REVIEW OF "HALF CHRISTIAN HALF PAGAN: THE DILEMMA OF THE  
NIGERIAN CHRISTIAN"**

Ikechukwu Anthony KANU  
Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies  
Tansian University, Umunya  
Anambra State  
[ikee\\_maio@yahoo.com](mailto:ikee_maio@yahoo.com)

**Half Christian half pagan: The dilemma of the Nigerian Christian** is the product of a profound thought by an African Christian thinker on a burning issue in African Christian Theology, precisely, the problem of syncretism in Christian practice. The organization of the book is quite excellent. Each chapter begins with a good compass that tells the reader the itinerary. At the end of each chapter, the reader looks back across a well constructed schema which reflects the quality of the author's mind. The notes, bibliography coverage and index are quite impressive. He navigates his way through the maze of syncretism with maximum ingenuity.

The first chapter of the book, as one would expect exposes the theological content of syncretism. The author understands syncretism as the merging of elements from cultures or religions. This would encompass any theologically untenable amalgam. Since syncretism is a concrete practice among Christians, the author leads his readers through a couple of syncretistic practices. These include, the contractual and materialistic relationship between God and most Africans, the abuse of sacred objects, divinations and oath taking, and the activities of the New Religious Movements that has provided a fertile ground for syncretism. The author blamed all these on the influence of the traditional background from which the Nigerian Christian embraced Christianity and called on Christians to mark the dividing line between traditional beliefs and authentic Christian practices.

In his characteristic genius of assembling a wealth of ideas and configuring them into something new, the author discusses the implications of syncretism for the Nigerian Christian practice. This he categorized into the theological implications, the psychological bent and the pastoral difficulties. Given the situation at hand, the author in his doggedness does not fold his hand and watch, he goes ahead to

propose a tripartite way out of the mess. These are: inclusive inculturation, in-depth catechesis and enlightenment of faith.

This notwithstanding, the use of the word 'Pagan' in the caption of the book is derogatory and obnoxious. It is inappropriate and inadequate to describe a people's traditional practices as pagan. Moreover, modern studies in religion show that it is totally out of date to speak of African traditional practices as pagan. The term is derived from the Latin word *Paganus*. It means originally a village dweller or a countryman, a person who lives far away from a civilized community. It is a mark of sociological distinction between the polished, civilized, enlightened and the sophisticated, as opposed to the crude, rustic, unpolished, uncivilized, unenlightened and unsophisticated. In fact, the word pagan is a purely sociological term and was never meant to be a word for religious connotation. It was employed by Western investigators with their high sense of superiority to speak of African cultural values. If we struggle to convince the white man that our culture and religion are not pagan, one wonders if we should also do the same with a fellow black man. The word pagan at the caption of the book makes a bad advert of the work, at least, before people who understand what the term stands for. However, the book has joined a spate of writings on the theme of syncretism, and my criticism cannot take this away from it.

Osita Asogwa has incensed the scholarly world with a work that is destined to be the corner stone for studies in the area of religion. It is a work of great erudition and ingenuity. The book ranges over a multitude of issues upon which a short review can hardly be just, and the fertility of Osita Asogwa mind brings a welcome freshness to the subject.