

## TRADITION AND CONTINUITY IN AFRICAN INDEPENDENT RELIGIONS: THE CASE OF NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT

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### **Abstract**

*There are currently more new religions in non-western nations than during any previous historical period. Many new African religious movements whether they are separatist breakoff or independents are influenced by contact with diverse “unorthodox” western movements. Additionally, fragmentation and schism are internal characteristics of many of these movements. These movements exist in all African countries. In Nigeria for instance, we have the odozi obodo etc. The researchers tried to look at these independent churches especially the new religious movement. The researchers in trying to look at it evaluated the reason behind them. The result was mainly materialism, quest for power and autonomy. The method used was sociological method.*

**Keywords:** Tradition, Continuity, Independent Religious, New Religious Movements

### **Introduction**

There are currently more new religions in non-Western nations than during any previous historical period. Many new African religious movements (whether they are separatist break-offs or independent developments) are influenced by contact with diverse “unorthodox” Western movements. Additionally, fragmentation and schism are internal characteristics of many of these movements. Government persecution creates further external pressures toward schism. Internally, conditions of plural cultural contact and the failure to stabilize leadership roles and patterns of succession promote schism and fragmentation. This development is a by-product of the decline of customary religious authority and the transposition of many of the functions of religion into the secular domain.

It suggests that subjective secularization, or the manifestation of secularization as a psychological orientation, may be less prevalent in the African context than structural changes resulting in new tensions, and the relationship between religion and society.

Africa's dramatic social upheavals over the past two decades have been accompanied by the rise of a variety of new religious movements that are characterized by symbolic protest and the search for cultural continuity. These movements involve a symbolic redefinition of what is perceived to be sacred in society. This work explores the types and dynamic of new African religious movements especially in Nigeria, as sources for redefining the concepts of the sacred and the secular. It also examines the implications of these conclusion for the present and future state of research in the field redefining concept to the sacred and the secular. The implications of these conclusions for the present and future state of research in the field are equally surveyed.

### **Elucidation Of Terms**

- **Religion:** According to Durkheim (1915, 8), religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices, relative to sacred things, including beliefs and practices that unite into one single moral community all those who adhere to them.
- **Culture:** Culture simply refers to society and its way of life. However, Edward Taylor (1871, 1) defines culture as that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.
- **Secularism:** Shorter and Onyancha (1997) in Nweke (2017, 12) define secularism as a situation in which religious faith, for one reason or the other, is felt to be superfluous. It is the state in which religion loses its hold at the level of human consciousness.
- **Revitalisation:** For Oxford Dictionary, revitalisation is to put new life into something, to make something stronger or more lively.
- **Neo-traditional:** It is reformation of existing tradition. It is modernity in existing tradition.
- **Resacralization:** Resacralization can be described as counter-secularizing trends, denoting the resurgence of religion or emergence of new forms of spirituality in a variety of domains.

### **Africa's New Religions: Major Types And Sources**

Over seven thousand new religious movements exist in sub-Saharan Africa. Together they claim more than 32 million adherents (Barrett, 1982:782-791). These movements have arisen primarily in areas where there have been intensive contact with Christian missionary efforts. However, prophetic and revitalistic movements existed in Africa prior to extensive European contact. Many movements originated as early as the 1880s. The period from 1914 to 1925 marked a second peak in the emergence of new regions in Africa. A final period may be demarcated from the early 1930s to the present. It is the groups that have emerged during this most recent period which are generally referred to as the new religious movements of sub-Saharan Africa. Some of these movements actually began earlier but did not gain momentum until the 1930s. Many have persisted in largely the same term that they took over fifty years ago. Others have gone underground and resurfaced, often retaining their initial doctrinal and membership requirements.

With reference to doctrinal base, organizational structure, and geographic distribution, three major types of new religious movements in sub-Saharan Africa may be designated: (1) indigenous, or independent churches (2) separatist churches; and (3) neo-traditional movements. These groups have taken different forms in Western, Central, Southern, and Eastern Africa. They blend elements of traditional religion with influence of historical and modern churches. Many of these grades as a result of the political and social domination of colonial sense of psychological dependency that it created. Given the temporary period, other sources have stimulated the continued growth of these movements.

Historically speaking, the impetus for the growth of new African religious movements may be traced to five basic sources:

1. The disappointment of local converts with the premises and outcomes of Christianity led to the growth of prophetic, Messianic and millenarian groups.
2. The translation of the Bible into local African vernaculars stimulated a reinterpretation of scripture and a spiritual renewal in Christian groups.
3. The perceived divisions in denominational Christians and its failure to meet local needs influenced the rise of separatist churches and community based indigenous churches.
4. The importance of Western medicine in the face of personal problems, psychological disorders, epidemics, and natural disasters was a catalyst for concerns with spiritual healing in the new African religious movements.

5. The failure of mission Christianity to break down social and cultural barriers and generate a sense of community have led to the strengthening of social ties in small, sectarian groups. In general, the new African churches have tried to create a sense of community in the new urban environment and in the changing context of rural life.

Among the three groups of new religious movements designated, indigenous churches are the most rapidly growing local responses to Christianity. These churches are groups that started under the initiative of African leaders outside the immediate context of missions, or historic religions. Their membership is estimated to comprise nearly 15 percent of the Christian population of sub-Saharan Africa. Also termed independent churches, these groups have devised unique terms of social and political organization and have developed their own doctrines. Groups as diverse as the Harrist Church in the Ivory Coast, the Aladura Church in Nigeria, Kimbanguism in Zaire, and the Apostolic Movements of Zimbabwe may be classified as indigenous churches. Nevertheless, the Specific doctrines and the response to government control in each of the churches are distinctive. These groups also vary on the organization depending on the extent of their local appeal and the demographic and cultural composition of their membership. Indigenous churches may be divided into three specific subtypes: prophetic, Messianic and millenarian groups. All of these types evidenced at doctrinal innovation, efforts at spiritual renewal, and a reaction to the presence of mission churches.

### **Re- Envisioning The Sacred And The Secular**

New African religious movements provide an innovative way of re-envisioning the sacred and challenge conventional sociological theories of secularization and the decline of religiosity in contemporary society. Emile Durkheim (1915:52) stated that “all known religious beliefs, whether simple or complex,” presuppose the classification of the world into sacred and profane domains. For Durkheim, no particular entity, object or event is considered sacred. Instead, the sacred consists of the social group. Social processes are treated as the source for generating and sustaining a sense of the sacred. Durkheim’s definition of the sacred refers to ways of seeing and thinking about the world as much as it does a set of social institutions. This approach contrasts with Max Weber’s (1963:207-208) view that the sacred is embodied in specific religious institutions and must be studied in terms of their relationship to the rest of society. It is from the latter perspective that the opposition between the sacred and the secular as a source of social change, has

developed as a tool for analysing historic and contemporary religions. The much debated problems of secularization and the decline of religiosity, which became a major scholarly and popular concerns for western researchers and theologians in the 1960s and are still a source of controversy, were partially set in motion by Weber's approach.

Recent research has both debated and refined Weber's initial assumptions. In his introduction to the English translation of Weber's *The sociology of Religion*, Talcott Parsons (1963:12) argues that the rise of inter-denominationalism and liberal Protestantism in the United States seriously challenges Weber's view of how the secularization process would unfold in contemporary western societies. In his masterplan for the comparative study of religion, Weber never envisioned the processes of rapid social change and cultural contact resulting from decolonization in the third world. The notion that the people of modern Africa would have a voice in redirecting the course of religion and institutional change in Europe did not appear as an empirical possibility at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As movements of protest, many new African religious groups have become vehicles for creation, exercise, and legitimation of power by their adherents. Those who were formerly powerless have found in religion a means of altering their situation and even reversing their status in both symbolic and social terms. The adherents of these new movements have created and manipulated sacred symbols to attain secular goals. Therefore, the existence of these movements necessarily modifies conceptualizations of the relationship between the sacred and the secular.

A fundamental question lingers when assessing US and European research on African religious movements. This concerns the comparative lens through which such studies are conceived and developed. The church-denomination sect typology, which has been widely debated since Troeltsch and Weber, probably reached its peak as an analytical tool in the United States by 1970 (Eister, 1967:85-90; Demerath and Hammond, 1969; Johnson, 1971:124-137; Martin, 1978: 55-82). This typology has done much to obscure research on new religious movements in Africa and elsewhere. This distinction grew out of historical studies of European Christianity. The effects of this typology for research in Africa have been particularly misleading, because it has promoted a tendency to view new religious developments as sectarian responses rather than as autonomous developments, with different cultural and historical roots than those of more established churches and denominations. The wide range of cultural combinations and socio-political goals in African groups renders the church sect typology a relatively weak descriptive device.

Much of the research conducted on African religious movements during the 1950s and 1960s examined them as responses and challenges to colonialism (Balandier, 1955: 417- 419). In his study of African and other third world religious movements, Vittorio Lanternari (1963: 19) labelled these movements “religions of the oppressed,” which he considered to result from “the spontaneous impact of the white man’s presence on the native society.” The sacred in this case, is defined in terms of passive resistance to, and rebellion against, symbols of political and religious denomination.

Ten years after Lanternari’s book was published in English, Bryan Wilson (1973) developed a typology that compressed African religious movements into two empirical and doctrinal types: the magical and the millennial. Although, this distinction refers to both world views and specific movements, a concern with supernatural powers – magic, healing and purification- is, for Wilson, the major thrust of all religions emerging in preindustrial societies. What the sociologist considers magical in this context, of course, may be viewed by movement followers as a set of rational alternatives logically derived from tradition or from innovative doctrinal combinations. Wilson’s magic is actually a description of a wide variety of indigenous customs, beliefs, and the new conceptions of symbolic action and protest.

For Wilson, millenarian movements contain much that is magical and therefore, have little broad, lasting political or social impact. He cites the case of west African groups such as the Cherubim and Seraphim movement in Nigeria (Peel, 1968: 2-9) and some American Indian movements in support of this tendency of millenarian movements to be temporary and localized when such movements of protest do arise. In Wilson’s opinion, they are often replete with supernatural and other worldly elements as to be marginally effective as instrumental movements of protest. However, I would argue that a challenge to the existing social order is implicit in many African religious movements, regardless of the specific traditional, cultural, or magical elements that are present in this regard, the meanings and uses of new religious movements for their own group members become central issues for study. One must ask how these group members envision the sacred and the secular and what symbolic challenge they perceive themselves.

The point reinforces the methodological concern in some recent studies with defining the cosmology and belief systems in new African religions (Fernandez, 1982; MacGaffey, 1983). On the ethnographic level, this process is essential in order to assess the larger influence of semantic anthropological approach to religion, this line of research proceeded by a schematic interpretive and descriptive treatment

of the content of religious doctrines and practice. This suggestion raises key issues to both theological and sociological import. Specifically, how do members of new religious movements conceive of the sacred, of categories of religious belief and practice, and of the distribution of ecclesiastical authority within these groups?

A Western model of church and state that neatly separates the sacred and secular domains, often does not apply of the history and cultural context of new African religions. For example, Larry Shiner (1966: 218) states: “when we apply this spiritual-temporal polarity of non-western situations where such differentiations did not originally exist, we falsify the data.” Yet, if we return to Lanternari and Wilson’s theses, we are plagued by the possibility that new religious adherents have used their beliefs as meaningful coping mechanisms and survival strategies. What were previously religious of the oppressed, however, have now become religious of opportunity and channels of upward mobility (Glazier, 1983: 16), the sacred vision has been transformed into the secular opportunity.

This latter view builds upon a Weberian model of the emergence of an instrumental rationality that accompanies modernity and change. Indeed, this model has been applied to ethnographic studies of new African religions. A landmark study in this regard is Norman Long’s (1968) monograph on the religious and social responses of modernity among the Jehovah’s witnesses of Kapepa village in Zambia. The Weberian view holds that modernity is accompanied by the structuring of religious activities according to secular domain. Long found a classic version of the protestant ethic operative among the witnesses of Kapepa. Most of them were relatively young villagers with little urban experience. They equated hard work and economic success with the process of preparing themselves for the millennium and entry into the “New Kingdom” (Long 1968: 214). Relative to their fellow villagers, the witnesses made a rapid transition from hoe to plough agriculture with notable commercial success. Long (1968: 239- 240) remarks “I . . . concluded that like the correlation that Weber suggested between the protestant ethic and the ‘spirit of capitalism,’ there existed in Kapepa a close correspondence between Jehovah’s witnesses and their social and economic behaviour . . . . But social, economic, and cultural factors also play their part.”

### **The Problem Of Secularization In The African Context**

Just as the interpretation of the sacred takes a unique form in African religion, so too does the process of secularization. Peter Berger (1967: 171) argues that the

worldwide spread of the structures of the modern industrial state triggers religious change in non-western societies and is an important stimulus for the secularization process. On the other hand, Wilson (1973: 499) points to the decline of traditional authority structures and religious beliefs in the face of colonial domination and westernization. The implication of both assertions is that tendencies toward secularization are introduced to changing African societies from the outside as a by-product of the eventual movement of all societies toward industrial and post-industrial socio-economic structures (cf. Parsons, 1966: 109-114). These changes are accompanied by cultural pluralization, more frequent contact of diverse social groups, and an increase in bureaucratic forms of organisation with impersonal social relationships.

Similarly, Shiner (1966: 209-217) has noted three important characteristics of secularization that may be associated with this transition to modernity:

1. Desacralization, or a decline in the role of religion in defining the social world.
2. The process of structural differentiation by which religious and secular institutions become distinct and autonomous.
3. The transposition of religious knowledge and activities into the secular domain. This process of transposition is distinct from the decline of the social influence of religion (Wilson 1982: 149).

When these movements retain aspects of customary religion and newly introduced cultural elements, without exclusively associating themselves with either alternative. As a result of all three of the processes outlined by Shiner, individuals record their religious beliefs in a new way to meet the demands of modern society—a society that western theologians and social scientists have argued has become increasingly secular.

The combination of the sacred and secular domains in many new African religious movements creates thorny problems when analysing the process of secularization (Turner, 1974: 687-705). In these groups, the political domain has traditionally been defined and reinforced by sacred symbols and beliefs that are fundamental to the communities involved. African movements that draw upon customary religious and political symbolism have often been regarded with a mixture of alarm and suspicion by both colonial government and new regimes. When these cultural combinations are aggravated by millenarian tendencies in the new groups, the issue becomes even more complex. It is, thus, difficult to disentangle a nostalgic return to traditional notions of the sacred from new conceptions of the sacred developing from changing political and social demands. The decline of old

concepts of the sacred and resacralization, or the redefinition of the sacred, in this context, may actually constitute two complementary poles of a single phenomenon. Hence, the concept of secularization offers an incomplete framework for analysing what actually takes place when old and new symbolic categories are combined

In defining secularization in the African context, one must also consider the problem of symbolic realism (Bellah, 1970: 89-96). How do members of these groups see their own religious claims vis-à-vis the emerging secular society? Peter Berger (1966:8) suggests that recent research on religion takes for granted the predominance of a universal secularized consciousness or total acceptance of a scientific reality, without considering the possibility that for some people, the standard of cognitive validity may be the sacred, or a non-scientific reality. The quest to regain a sense of the sacred through religious, cultural and national identity is a common response to social and cultural change in African nations.

Secularization is often assumed to be a linear and uniform process (Lalivie d'Épinay, 1981: 406). Accordingly, the predictable economic and social changes accompanying industrialization are viewed as making religion marginal in contemporary society. In fact, however, many social orders that accompany it by seeking to create a sense of religious unity and group identity characteristic of pre-industrial communities. (Jules-Rosette, 1979: 219-229). In this case, the growth of modern social and economic institutions results in an effort to desacralize African societies through new religious groups and nationalistic political movements.

Liberation theology is another product of, and reaction to, the world-wide process of secularization and the spread of modern industrial structures to all corners of the globe (Brown, 1974: 269- 282). Through this approach, theologians operating within established Catholic and Protestant traditions view the bible as a revolutionary book which documents the processes of religious and political liberation and the goal of freedom. Their objective is to redefine the sacred as a set of moral principles which can be invoked in the wider society to reduce social inequalities and injustice. Although liberation theology in African and Latin America share some features with millenarian movements, it differs in its direct equation of secular goals such as social justice with religious ideals.

The example of liberation theology suggests that secular, political goals directly influence the formation and growth of new religious movements. Consequently, it is important to analyse how tendencies toward secularization have actually shaped new religious movements. One method for exploring this problem is to examine tensions in the relationships between church and state in African nations.

In many African nations such as Zaire, Zambia and Malawi, the growth of new religions takes place under close government scrutiny, and many movements (e.g. the watch tower spinoffs) are outlawed as threats to nations building. In these cases, new religions are seen as potential sources for weakening civic political commitments by virtue of their ability to mobilize masses of people in activities which are not directly supervised or controlled by the state. Political control attempts to restrict the sphere of influence of the new religious movements in a secularizing society.

A counterbalancing tendency in this secularization process is one toward ecumenical cooperation across the new religious groups. Martin west (1975:142-170) analyses the rise of ecumenism among South Africa's indigenous churches based upon two large-scale surveys of these movements. He notes efforts toward cooperation among these groups, particularly in education and financial programs but not on the level of doctrine and ritual. Similar tendencies have appeared among indigenous churches in Zambia and East Africa. Some scholars have argued that this process of cooperation ultimately results in the secularization of doctrine and leadership structures within new religious movements. In describing the Apostles of John Maranke, an African prophetic movement which I also studied, Angela Cheater (1981: 45) has argued that pragmatic concerns of economic success and secular, social and family ties have actually altered the interpretation of the sacred within the group and diminished its scope. She sees cooperation with other groups in the larger society as a major force in modifying the doctrinal and organizational structure of the religious group. This controversial argument suggests that social differentiation and change many eventually cause subjective secularization or a personal decline in religiosity.

### **Cultural Responses To Secularization**

African religious movements and movement types have adopted a variety of cultural and psychological responses to the process of secularization. These responses may be summarized in terms of at least four basic tendencies, according to which several movement types may be classified:

**1. Neotraditionalism:** Retains the myth of an ideal past and is often accompanied by an attempt to reconstruct an authoritative religious tradition. The persistence of traditional religious forms in Africa within the contemporary context is a case in point.

**2. Revitalization:** Introduces new concepts to regenerate the old. On the psychological level, this response is perceived as comprehensive and seeks an explanation of the sacred in both old and new terms. African indigenous churches and prophetic revitalization movements are examples.

**3. Syncretism:** Is the process through which former definition of the sacred are combined with innovative patterns to produce a satisfying definition of the whole and an expression of core values which is both in line with the past and adaptive to new institutions. Santeria, Latin American Pentecostalism, and many African movements exhibit this process.

**4. Millenarianism:** Creates a myth of the ideal future which attempts to construct a new definition of the sacred and a new social order in ways that yield pragmatically effective results for members of new movements, and to a lesser extent liberation theology, use this approach. Messianic movements may be included in this category.

Although, these four options do not exhaust the cultural and symbolic responses to secularization, they point to ways in which new religious movement in Africa have attempted to redefine the sacred in a secularizing society. In some instances, a direct redefinition of political and social values is involved, as in the case of millenarianism and liberation theology. In other instances, the sacred is revalidated through efforts to preserve customary notions of community and conventional expressive symbols, as evidenced in revitalistic, evangelical and spirit-type movements. In the latter case, a resacralization of dominant traditional symbols occurs, often in reaction to the decline of religious values, and institutions in the rest of society. In spite of the resacralization process, some scholars like Robin Horton (1971:107) have argued that religion in modern Africa will ultimately move in an increasingly secular direction in terms of its doctrine and organisation and will survive primarily “as a way of communion but not as a system of explanation, prediction, and control.” At present, however, a more prevalent trend in African religious movements is the attempt to create cohesive forms of community in which religious values are more coherent and exercise a larger, direct influence on social life. Dynamic religious movements throughout Africa are redefining the psychological, religious, political and social and cultural aspects of life that interweave the sacred and the secular.

### **The Future Of The New African Religion**

An important concern in the field of African religious studies centres around the extent to which new movements may be considered stable over time. It has been argued that the new religions develop through a process of schism and renewal. They break away from the influence of both missions and newly established churches to develop bonds of family and community that are particularly strong at the local level. Utopian ideals and fundamentalist interpretations of scriptures reinforce the initial break and the sense of spiritual renewal in these groups. Schism may be regarded as a sign of doctrinal ambivalence and organizational weakness. At the same time, it is the hallmark of spiritual experimentation and renewal. There is a combination of customary symbols and the new values characteristic of cultural pluralism. Many newer groups stress that their religions form interethnic and transcultural associative networks.

Although, some of the new Christian groups of Africa originate in ethnically homogeneous areas, most emphasize the potential and even the necessity for cultural sharing through overarching symbols and doctrine. This sharing does not mean that an external system is imposed on or destroys old, cultural forms. These processes of cultural combination and symbolic protest allow the members of new religious movements to acquire a reflective stance toward their immediate problems and to preserve past cultural ideas. The types of religious responses vary widely with respect to a group's attitudes towards tradition and to the degree of change which individuals consider to be possible in a particular society. The four types of movement responses mentioned above resolve social and cultural clashes through blending old and new interpretations of the sacred.

At the same time, a question of stable leadership and its institutionalization arises. The death or demise of a leader creates an important challenge to the viability of a group. Often several branches of an indigenous church or separatist movement exist in a single area because of the inability of members to resolve a crisis in leadership succession or to integrate competing doctrinal variations. Thus, schism continues to threaten the stability and survival of new religious movements after they have established autonomy from missions or historic churches. This problem has led some scholars to speculate that the new African religions are unstable and highly mutable, and that their appearance merely marks one phase of social, political or religious protest in the emergence that these groups have considerable longevity in spite of their shifting appeal. The persistence of groups like the Bwiti cult in Gabon and the Kitawala movement in Zaire and Zambia from the turn of the century to the present follows this trend.

Another important tendency contributing to the eventual stability of the new religious movement is the shift toward ecumenism. Churches such as the Kimbagnuist and the Aladura, which have endured for practically half a century, have made attempts to become international in outlook and to associate themselves with worldwide ecumenical movements. Several indigenous churches affiliated themselves with the world council between 1969 and 1981. They include: the church of the lord Aladura in Nigeria, the Kimbagist church in Zaire, the African Israel Nineveh church in Kenya, and the African church of the Holy Spirit in Kenya (cf. Perrin Jassy, 1970: 86- 77). Other indigenous churches and cults have made efforts to join together in local, national and all African cooperative association which represent them as united political and cultural groups.

Local voluntary associations formed by these churches attempt to retain the doctrinal autonomy of each group while developing joint fundraising, educational, and cultural efforts. This type of cooperation is evident in the African independent churches' association formed in 1965 in south Africa and in similar ecumenical councils and associations that have formed in Zambia and Kenya (west 1974: 121- 129). Although such association do not solve the problem of internal group conflict and leadership succession, the do appear to reinforce cooperation and political stability within the independent church movement.

### **The Cultural And Social Contribution Of Africa's New Religion**

Many of Africa's new religious movement arising from the 1920s to the present have started as religions of the oppressed and later have become movements of the protest, opportunity and mobility. Their protest has often been expressed as a challenge to the authority and liturgy of mission churches. Several of these groups, including the early watchtower movement inspired by Kamwana in Nyasaland, Kimbanguism in Zaire, and the Harrist Church in the Ivory Coast, have also led to or supported movements of political liberation and national independence. The close relationship between political and religious conceptions of freedom and human rights has contributed to this development.

The social influence of Africa's new religions, however, is not limited to the political sphere. The new images and ideal of community promoted by these groups offer alternative lifestyles to their members and to others who come into contact with the new movements. Through tightly knit communities and internal support structures, Africa's new religions establish claims to loyalty. Culturally, they promise a popular religion that is not alien to the masses. Nevertheless, some

of the contemporary groups emphasize the ultimate attainment of rewards promised in orthodox doctrines this goal is accomplished through social insulation, withdrawal, and strict personal adherence to the Bible or to the Quran. The literal interpretation of sacred writings serves to create alternative types of social relationships. In some instance, this return to fundamentalist doctrines within the African context has had the effect of triggering charismatic renewals and new forms of proselytizing within established mission churches.

The more insulated religious movements still adamantly retain a radical separation from some aspects of the contemporary societies in which they appear. Nevertheless, their attitudes towards work, toward the role of women, and toward the new forms of cultural expression, such as discourse and dress, permeate other sectors of social life that are not directly associated with their religious origins. Religious language and imagery, such as the Jamaa teachings and Apostolic or Zionist sermons and ritual, have now entered common parlance as aspects of urban popular culture (Fabian 1971: 202). The study of Africa's new religious movements, therefore, leads to a broader exploration of new cultural forms.

## **Conclusion**

Given that religion involves a high concentration of innovative and restorative symbols, it is a wellspring from which these new expressions are transmitted to a wider society. Through Africa's new religious movements, conventional cultural and symbolic forms are revived and reinterpreted. Taken from their original source, some of these religious beliefs have been applied to secular life. The ultimate viability of these new religions may, in fact, reside in the capacity of their beliefs and practices to become more fully integrated into the mainstream of modern Africa's social and cultural life. The greatest impact of these groups may, thus, take place through cultural diffusion and sharing rather than through the spread and historical evolution of any particular movement.

The processes of fragmentation and redefinition of leadership roles and goals in Africa's new religions take place under unique cultural conditions (cf. Sinda 1972: 111). Often, these processes involve redefining the sacred as part of a new search for collective identity and reinterpretation of tradition. Paradoxically, these redefinitions may challenge conceptions of the sacred in Western religious tradition. Heterodoxy, however, is not always synonymous with secularization (Berger, 1980:23-38). Through suggesting novel ways in which the sacred may be integrated into contemporary life, Africa's new religions offer an empirical

challenge to sociological theories that propose that secularization is an essential feature of the incorporation of third world communities into the industrial and post-industrial social orders.

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