

# JACQUES DERRIDA AND THE DECONSTRUCTION OF CHRISTIANITY IN SOUTHEASTERN NIGERIA

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## ABSTRACT

The people of Southeastern Nigeria are very much enterprising and industrious. Their industry is felt in every aspect of life including the religious. One of the signs is the array of churches present in the region. Recently however, there seems to be a growing tendency among the younger and some middle-aged generation to question, abandon and de-convert to alternative faith beliefs and to African traditional religions once abandoned by their forebears for Christianity. With the growing revival of festivities and shrines dedicated to traditional deities, and the public defence and preaching of traditional forms of worship with deep ties in social and cultural heritages, we have the impression that what Jacques Derrida called deconstruction is already taking place on Christianity in the Southeastern part of Nigeria. The manifest attempt in the public space to supplant the Christian God of Jesus Christ with a certain cult of *Chukwu abiama* points to the movement of dechristianization which may be one of the negative effects of deconstruction. As Derrida would insist, deconstruction is “not a negative operation.” It opens to the acceptance of the other and has the potency of leading to a rediscovery of what authentic Christianity is all about.

**Keywords:** Deconstruction, religion, Christianity, deconversion

## INTRODUCTION

The presence of churches in Nigeria and especially in the Southeast, would tend to suggest at least on the surface, the progress of faith and practice and the increasing number of converts to Christianity. This progress manifests in the cultural, spiritual and social life of the people of the Southeast, with deep roots in Igbo communities. Lately however, there is a growing tendency among the younger and some middle-aged generation, to abandon the Christian faith of their birth and to look for alternative faith systems, in some cases, to reject everything to do with the Christian God and its worship. They are beginning to challenge the traditional Christian narrative as a harbinger of good news and a way of salvation. A greater part of this tendency is the willingness to de-convert from Christianity and convert to African traditional religion. The process that brought about this movement has been gradual culminating in what we have come to identify as the deconstruction of Christianity in the Southeast Nigeria, and especially among the Igbo communities of the Southeast. It is the objective of this article to explore this deconstruction using the templates of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida while examining the factors driving it and the implications for the future of Christianity in the region. Our method here is to expose and analyse the so many signs of deconstruction that have recently become rampant in the Southeastern part of Nigeria.

## DECONSTRUCTION: GETTING A GRASP

Any follower of modern philosophy will acknowledge that Heidegger's works—*Being and Time*; and *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*—made major impact on his colleagues and followers and introduced some terms that have become permanent in philosophical dictionary of Western philosophy. One of such words is “*Destruktion*” a German word that entered the public space through “*Being and Time*” and “*Abbau*” which was introduced by “*The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*.” In their ordinary signification, the words refer to deconstruction, destruction, decomposition, dismantling, dismantling of machines or structures of thought. Heidegger's usage of “*Abbau*” was to signal his intention of clearing out, dismantling or destroying the layers of traditional metaphysical thinking that have thrown into hiddenness, or obscurity, the fundamental question of being. He accused western philosophy of the ‘*Vergessenheit*’—the forgottenness of being. Thus, ‘*Abbau*’ was a method employed by Heidegger (1982) to ‘take apart’ the centuries of metaphysical tradition in the wrong direction, to bring about a recovery of the original meaning and experience of being (p.23). This Heideggerian quest and objective struck a permanent chord with the French philosopher Jacques Derrida.

Derrida (1991) in his “Letter to a Japanese Friend,” acknowledged the influence of Heidegger's word “*Abbau*” on his choice or use of “deconstruction.” In his own words:

Among other things I wished to translate and adapt to my own ends the Heideggerian word *Destruktion* or *Abbau*. Each signified in this context an operation bearing on the structure or traditional architecture of the fundamental concepts of ontology or of Western metaphysics. (pp. 270-1)

As used and intended by Heidegger, *Destruktion* according to Derrida (1985) “is not a destruction but precisely a destructuring that dismantles the structural layers in the system, and so on” (p. 86). Derrida's attempt to translate the same word in French as “destruction” produced a meaning he never intended and so he abandoned it. The other word ‘*Abbau*’ has a similar meaning: “to take apart an edifice in order to see how it is constituted or *deconstituted*” (p.87). The word “deconstruction” came to him in a flash. In the French language, this word in both its grammatical and linguistic senses have a mechanical significance. As a noun, he (Derrida, 1991, p. 271) observes that “deconstruction” in French refers to an action of deconstructing or disarranging the construction of words in a sentence. As a verb *-déconstruire*—means to disassemble the parts of a whole...to transport it elsewhere. Though this mechanical model is a sense of deconstruction, it is not the only one and must not be limited to this or any other model of meaning. That mechanical air got ingrained in its signification because of the environment of structuralism which preceded and enabled the emergence of deconstruction. Good as it may be, Derrida's deconstruction is neither an analysis nor a critique nor even a method. It is also not an act nor an operation. Deconstruction as meant by Derrida (1991), “takes place, it is an event that does not await the deliberation, consciousness, or organization of a subject, or even of a modernity” (p. 274).

In some parts of our Southeastern Nigeria environment, it is our assumption that deconstruction is taking place, and it is taking place on Christianity as the latter has suddenly become the object of questionings by various parties; it has become the focal point of criticisms both from within and from without; its cultural, social, religious and educational contributions are being subjected to re-examination. And in a dramatic turn of events, there is a growing wave of voices calling for the rejection of Christianity and a return to traditional forms of worship or even to nothing at all. These voices have gradually started dismantling their previously held beliefs about Christianity

and moving towards alternative forms of faith and belief. It is this new process or new awareness taking place in our society especially among the Igbos, that has confirmed a commencement of the gradual process of deconstruction of Christianity and gradual openness to alternative faith systems or even total rejection and abandonment of everything that has got to do with belief and practice of religious faith. One of the tidal effects of this gradual deconstruction badly applied will be a conscious dechristianisation of the region. The other effect, as deconstruction demands, will be a re-engagement with Christianity, a rediscovery of its deeper meaning and value, and a renewal of its significance and an openness to the “other.” As Derrida (1997) observes in a roundtable conference with Caputo and others:

[A] deconstruction does not shut things down; it opens them up. It releases a thing from being riveted to itself. It does not consign a thing to its past; it gives it back its future. (p. xxxviii)

Our engagement with deconstruction is to interpret what we think is already happening in the present, though gradual it may be, and to point to the possibility of what the future of Christianity may be and may hold in our region.

Dechristianization means a gradual process of eliminating the influence of Christianity from societal, cultural and individual lives. It involves replacing the Christian God with an alternative god and creating a cult for it. In our circumstance, it has seen the rise of a certain 'chukwu abiama' today interspersed as 'chukwu okike abiama' that is gradually replacing the Holy Name of Jesus Christ, the incarnate God of the Christian worship. Those that are going through this process of de-constructing their faith and belief systems, may have been victims of some nasty experiences of deception by religious men or women, or they may have become conscious of certain historical or cultural realities that have implanted the seed of doubt in their believing mind, as a result of which they have to question what Christianity means for them. Others could be as a result of societal changes in moral values for example, the increasing acceptance of different sexual orientations traditionally considered as abnormal, but which has become accepted by the church. African traditional religions, they argue, keep sexual distinctions and roles as sacred and consider anything contrary to that as taboo. Such and many others could be the reason for their deconstruction of their faith.

## **FEATURES OF DECONSTRUCTION OF CHRISTIANITY**

### **1. Rejection of Christianity as Foreign**

This is a factor that resonates with a lot of young intellectuals and cultural advocates who are becoming more and more conscious of the importance of indigenous cultural affiliations for the development of any society. Having seen Christianity as a colonial importation and imposition, there is a growing call for the people to rise in abandonment or even a total rejection of the “foreign religion.” The multiplication of churches, the insensibility of the ministers of churches in making financial demands laden with false promises of divine reward for struggling families and adherents, the significant lack of opposition from the churches against poor governance are some of the contributing factors which as some would argue, rightly fuel the discontentment against Christianity in the area. They associate Christianity with the exploitative arm of the government which dulls the sensibilities of the people by preaching obedience to constituted authority as a divine command with heaven as reward attached to it. These critiques are getting into the public spaces and fuelling a movement or at a least a desire to reclaim cultural identities

that were disrupted and destroyed by colonial imposition of Christianity. Unfortunately, the younger generations influenced by their exposure to secularism and modernity, are buying into this.

The outward sign of the impact of this movement is the gradual rejection, in some quarters, of the Bible as a major tool of enslavement of the indigenous people. Apart from the seemingly jovial rhetoric that the book should be returned to those it was written for—the Corinthians, the Galatians, the Romans, the Ephesians etc—the argument that it was quickly translated into the local language for the continual manipulation and exploitation of the indigenous people, is getting traction among the youths. They reason that those who brought the book and quickly translated it never thought of bringing their science and technology books and still less of translating them into indigenous languages. What was their major interest in transmitting their way of faith and practice without transmitting the secret of their knowledge that has helped in their rapid scientific and technological development as a society? The decline of Christianity in the West seems to be playing into the hands of these younger generations calling for a rediscovery of traditional beliefs, practices and cultural identities. With vehemence and curses, some had in the past resorted to the public desecration of the sacred book by tearing it into pieces and daring the so-called Christian Saviour to manifest His power if he could. We know that such act would never be made of the Quoran at the risk of engendering the safety of innocent people.

However, the major proponent of the smear campaign against the Bible is Uchechukwu Obiajulu, a young man who goes by the social media name **Maazi\_Dibia** (2024). That is the name on his Facebook page where he has posted his campaign discrediting the Bible as false and inauthentic book which plagiarized ancient sources without acknowledging them. He stopped short of doubting the existence of the Jewish State of Israel whose name came from the patriarchal lineage of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. These names contained in the Hebrew Scripture told the foundations of Judaism and the emergence of the Jewish nation and the eventual birth of Christianity through a Jew named Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Maazi Dibia casts a sceptical aspersion on that patriarchal lineage and *ipso facto* built his argument that Christianity and the Bible are scams. Imagine the circle of his influence in the social media and the growing number of young Christians assimilating his teaching and abandoning the Bible and Christianity. Like the Apostle Paul told his spiritual son Timothy and the elders of Ephesus, (II Timothy 4: 14-15), Uchechukwu Obiajulu (a.k.a Maazi Dibia) has in our times, taken the position of the biblical Alexander the coppersmith, going about doing harm to the body of Christ the church and discrediting the works of the ministers of the Gospel tradition.

## **2. Trivialization of Christian Objects, and Symbols of Worship**

One of the major marks of deconstruction is the trivialization of sacred objects used for religious worships or cults. Trivialization as the name suggests, involves the process of reducing something of high spiritual or religious significance, to the level of insignificance. It is a way of bringing a religious object or ritual to disrepute by stripping it of its value and presenting it as if it is of less importance than it is. The intention behind trivialization is to caricature, downgrade the value, and bring to shame what is held in high esteem by a group or section of the society. Where it is accepted by the public, the religious object or ritual undergoes a gradual stripping of its meaning with the attendant loss of respect. Has this not been going on for far too long in Southeastern part of Nigeria?

The major perpetrators or the willing tools of this deconstruction of Christianity are screen artists, actors and comedians. They willingly overflow the social media with caricatures of Christian

religious rituals, practices and objects of cult in a manifest show of disdain. We remember, as reported in the Vanguard Newspaper (2022), what happened at the inauguration of the Anambra State Government of His Excellency, Professor Chukwuma C. Soludo in 2022 where, a suspected misunderstanding led to some form of physical squabble between the ex-governor's wife Mrs. Osodieme Obiano and the wife of the late Ikemba Nnewi Ambassador Bianca Ojukwu. It was said according to some videos in the social media and some national dailies, that a physical slap took place from one to the other. Later, the social media was awash with a caricatural recitation of the catholic Litany where actors quickly turned the traditional prayer into a joke. The simplest form read like: "Bianca di aso, mabara anyi ura!" which translated means—"Holy Bianca, pray for us!" We have also seen where the traditional catholic prayer of the Stations of the Cross was turned into a satire by a group of young comedians to remind non-performing politicians of the fate that awaits them after their poor service. These and numerous others are specific instances of intentional and deliberate trivialization of symbols, rituals or objects of religious belief and cult as if they do not really matter. Were any of these instances of trivialization been done with Islamic prayers or symbols of cult, it would have been seen as outright disrespect and desecration leading to fatal consequences for the perpetrators. We know that sacred objects, symbols and rituals often carry deep religious meanings often not conveyed by the objects or the rituals themselves. Those who use them as favourite pastime comedies should better desist unless they want to confirm that they are agents of deconstruction by the seemingly harmless avenue of comedy. The desecration has long reached even the subjects of religious cult like priests and other men of God. The random and frequent kidnapping of priests for monetary ransom, is but an indication of the project of deconstruction. Those who were regarded as the agents of the gods in former days and ipso facto regarded as sacred and untouchable because of whom they represented and serve, have today become the easiest of preys for some form of organized criminality in the Southeast. If their God does not defend them nor bring their kidnappers to justice, they reason that whom they serve is impotent and therefore, should be done away with.

### **3. Rise of Traditional Evangelism**

By traditional evangelism, we mean the direct efforts being made by practitioners of African traditional religions to spread their belief and practices to those who hold contrary faiths, in the hope of winning them over to traditional religious practices. This evangelism can take the form of direct preaching or teaching of African traditional religions in public spaces; organisation of outreach where specific forms of practices involving the invocation of intercessory prayers to ancestors and offering of religious cults to deities are done. Even transmission of these practices to children in systematic ways is also part of the evangelism. In recent times, there has been a noticeable rise in this form of African traditional evangelism, which is a conscious attempt at winning and convincing people to rediscover, reconnect with and reembrace the religious affiliations, cultural identities, spiritual heritages and practices of their ancestors. These are believed to be victims of the Christian importation and imposition upon the people of the Southeastern Nigeria. It is this that explains the resurgence in ceremonies, festivals, and practices that honour traditional deities, and give pride of place to the cult of ancestors. This evangelism has been making the rounds in our towns and villages. We have seen it take place at Awgbu, at Agulu, at Umunze, at Nkpologwu, at Achina, at Awkuzu, to mention but a few. Unknown and dilapidated shrines are getting face-lifted, with new deities installed in them. Ancient festivals dedicated to local deities are coming back in full force and becoming town carnivals. Known examples include Ada Achalla festival of Achalla town, Ikeji festival of Aro-Ndizuogu, Uchu

festival of Umuchu to mention but a few. The formerly quiet deity - *Haaba Agulu* has become a thriving spot for those who believe in its potency. The common characteristic of these evangelical outreaches we have witnessed from the practitioners of African traditional religions is the use of various religious insignia but most especially *Ofo*, *Oji*, *Nzu*, and *Omu* in the invocation of the spirits and the ancestors. They call on the various deities of their towns to protect them against modern day evils like kidnapping for ransom, and against murderers and other perpetrators of crimes. Another major mark in most of the instances cited is the systematic closure of their invocations and prayers in the name of a certain *Chukwu okike abiama*, the god we shall return to later in this work!

The biggest propagators of a new form of evangelism with emphasis on a return to African traditional religion, apart from Uchechukwu Obiajulu, are Matthias Ezeaku and his accomplices. Like Alexander the coppersmith of Paul's epistle to Timothy, these guys have been bitterly opposed to Christianity and her message. (II Timothy 4: 15) These men have weaponised the social media for the purpose of attacking and caricaturing the holy name of Jesus Christ, the religion of Christianity and Christians themselves, a group they originally belonged to until their disillusionment pushed them into rejection of their first love and a deconversion and rebirth into traditional religion. Some of them today address themselves as “born-again traditionalists.”

#### **4. Labelling Christianity a Scam**

One of the major problems of Christianity today is the seeming inability to present a uniform model and authentic interpretation of Christianity that does not give divergent and conflicting messages in the name of Goodnews. It is this divergence in the understanding and interpretation of the Goodnews, that makes it difficult, to say the least, to receive God as He has manifested Himself in Jesus Christ. With the eruption of new wave of Christianities led by the upsurge of Pentecostalism, the kernel of the Goodnews has drastically been altered. This has led to the grouping into old-fashioned Christianity and the new progressive Christianity. The old-fashioned Christianity with its traditional faith, still believes in the words of the Lord who invited his disciples to carry their crosses and follow him, that it is only through the cross that the crown of victory and glory will be won. As against the traditional faith in Jesus Christ who bore the cross, suffered, died and rose again, the new progressive Christianity champions the teaching that only faith in Jesus Christ, makes us possessors of the glory, success, health and wealth obtained for us by Jesus Christ through his death. Thus, Christians do not need to suffer because that has been done once and for all by Jesus Christ. The only thing remaining is to claim by faith, these riches. This teaching appeals and has appealed to thousands of young Christians who have followed and adhered to this new form of progressive Christianity. After the false elation by the “spirit” and the belief in the power of their “faith” to effect “miracles” and bring visible financial changes in their lives, the hour of reality has shown that many feel disappointed the promised “changes” have not materialized while the pastor blames them for not having enough faith in God. Weak and discouraged, many of these new progressive Christians tend to be turning their backs on the Christianity of their dream and looking for alternatives. Most are becoming “new converts” into native traditional religions, hence the title “born-again traditionalists” gaining traction in our land.

Let us make bold to say that the group that has been clamouring for a change or for a deconstruction of Christianity falls into two: the fallen or lapsed Christians of all denominations and the disenfranchised Pentecostal Christians. Their common feature is the loss of faith in the Christian project and the search for alternative faith ideal. Some of them have fallen into

traditional religions and are identifying as “born-again traditionalists.” Some have simply identified as “realists” meaning that they now believe that the experience of the world is a better teacher than a doctrine from a so-called man of God or from a sacred writing called the Bible.

These born-again traditionalists have been carrying a smear campaign against Christianity through the various media handles. Some youths of unstable affiliations have quickly bought into that cliché and tend to be following sheepishly the trend towards a rejection of Christianity. Are they really correct in their assertion that Christianity is a scam? I would argue that it depends on what or which type of Christianity they are referring to. Where there are variegated forms of worship under the umbrella of Christianity, it gives room for the fallacy of hasty generalization when something goes wrong. A Christianity that promises you success without work, and riches without employment cannot be anything but a proper scam. A wishy-washy type of Christianity that uses the name of Jesus as a magic formula for success, victory, health and wealth cannot but produce wishy-washy Christians who have no solid foundation in their practice of Christianity.

The Emmaus experience of the Gospel of Luke (24:13-45) can help us understand this phenomenon better. The two disciples on the way to Emmaus could be understood as the first two “fallen disciples,” who already left Jerusalem understood here as the church and were headed to Emmaus understood as traditional worship of their ancestors. Their reasons for leaving Jerusalem are likened to the exact reasons why Christians today are longing to get back to fetishism. The most worrying reason was that they felt let down by Jesus whom they considered to be a liberator that would pull them out of the rulership of their enemies and bring them to a prosperous, strong and free nation. Jesus was unfortunately killed, and those dreams were quashed and destroyed. The disciples were disappointed and lost their faith, their confidence and their trust in the Jesus project. That was why they decided to leave Jerusalem and move towards the city of Emmaus until they were arrested by Jesus along the way and made to return to Jerusalem after having been enlightened by the truths of the scripture.

Young people that await for open doors and miracle money in their bank accounts years unending; the sick and the bedridden that have been waiting for the promised miraculous healing without seeing any materialize in their flesh; those duped of their riches under the so-called “seed-covenant” with the Lord in the hope of getting multiple folds of their riches by God of riches, while in reality there is nothing in return; these aggrieved but deceived Christians have the right to think that Christianity is a scam. Most of them belong to the group of disenfranchised Pentecostal Christians. We totally and completely agree with Douthat (2012) that the major cause of the rapid disenfranchisement with a lot of young people in our climes today is “bad religion: the slow-motion collapse of traditional faith and the rise of a variety of pseudo-Christianities that stroke our egos, indulge our follies, and encourage our worst impulses (p. 3).” Apart from this group of disenfranchised Pentecostal Christians, the increase in the number of lapsed or fallen Christians is becoming a worry. In our society of today, the latter group of Christians-the lapsed or fallen Christians, have found a culminating point in Mr. Matthias Ezeaku who has shone to fame through the social media handles especially the Facebook where he has popular page by the title 'Gospel of Truth.' He proudly preaches the religion of realism and identifies himself as a realist. His major teaching is that people should be more practical and factual in their approach to situations of life and living. This teaching includes abandoning and rejecting every religious promise of help coming from any higher being in the form of so-called miracles that never happen or even true. Societal problems should be addressed to the government whose responsibility it is to solve them, and not businessmen parading as pastors, priests or prophets. Mr. Matthias Ezeaku

was himself a Christian, and an ardent follower and believer in the theatrics of the Pentecostalized-catholic priest, Fr. Ejike Camillus Mbaka. In one of his recent video posts, Mr. Matthias Ezeaku confessed to being an ardent believer in Fr. Mbaka's adoration ministry and a strong financial contributor to Fr. Mbaka's projects. He boasted of having Fr. Mbaka's First bank account number by heart as it was where he, Matthias Ezeaku, sheepishly deposited his hard earnings while believing that “Mbaka's god” would validate the promises of his prophet-servant, Fr. Mbaka. He publicly challenged the priest and others like him, to mention one authentic name and address of the beneficiaries of their purported healings. He accused the catholic priest of engaging in the business of deception and falsehood as all his purported healings in the name of Jesus, were mere arranged healings, i.e., fake and untrue healings. While we do not certify the accusations by Ezeaku, we would imagine if they were to be true, the disappointment this young man and others like him, the number is increasing on daily basis, would feel about the project of Christianity and the holy name of Jesus Christ! This is the background which explains their movement or their transition from Christianity back to African traditional religions where they claim, the truth in the name of *Chukwu okike abiama*, would set them free.

Proper Christianity is the Christianity that preaches Christ and him who is crucified. This Christ has urged his followers to carry their respective crosses of suffering and follow his footsteps. It is in the knowledge that unless there is a cross of suffering, there can never be the crown of glory and success and victory. The Gospel of Matthew 7: 21-27 describes the two groups of Christians as—tap-rooted and shallow rooted Christians. Those who hear the word and practice it as against those who only shout the name of Jesus without practicing the tenets implied by that name. The former withstand all forms of wind of deception and treachery and remain solid in faith like a house built on a solid foundation. The latter are described as having no foundation and are subjected to all forms of wind and erosion carrying them to and fro. These are the lazy generation of Christians who do nothing serious but idly pray and wait for open doors, divine blessings, miracle money; they erroneously believe the false blab and grab it gospel; they wait and claim others' favours unending and they wait endlessly for the fruits of their seed covenants. Did the apostle Paul not warn the church at Corinth “to keep away from all believers who are living a lazy life and who do not follow the instructions that we gave them?” (2 Thess. 3:7) After years of waiting and expectation and nothing told them by their false prophets comes to be realized, they become frustrated and dejected. The next thing would be to begin venting their anger and disappointment on Christianity by branding it a “scam religion.” Pentecostal Christianity and the brand of it in Catholicism have produced and continues to produce, dejected, deluded, disillusioned, and disappointed droves of young Nigerian men and women, who are turning their backs on the Christian religion and God, and embracing any and everything that would seem to offer them some anchor and realistic hope. They are the group who feel they have lost out and are today, carrying out a major campaign, to first deconstruct, and finally de-Christianise the land. They are unfortunate victims of bad religion that has taken hold of Nigeria for quite some time now.

##### **5. Institution of a New Cult of “chukwu okike abiama”**

The traditional form of evangelism we discussed above has a new object of worship that the adherents are trying to propagate. This new object of worship is called *chukwu okike abiama*. The replacement of the authentic subject of belief in *Chukwu Okike* with the hybrid and pseudo god *chukwu okike abiama*, is a proof that Chesterton was correct when he held that 'when people turn from God, they don't believe in nothing—they believe in anything.' This is a cult being promoted



to replace the name of God who became manifest in Jesus Christ, a reminder of the presence of His power and authority in the affairs of men and the world. The Christological statement in the *Acts of the Apostles* must be reemphasized again and again in the face of the growing opposition to Christianity and its founder: “there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12). As Robert Cardinal Sarah (2015) avers: “In the name of truth we must proclaim and announce Jesus Christ, the only Savior of the World, to all nations. This proclamation is in no way an obstacle to dialogue among different religions.” (p. 134)

Propagators and agents of deconstruction of Christianity, wish to replace the Christian God with the hybrid god of their imaginations. Unfortunately, ignorance is the reason for the seeming and growing acceptance of this hybrid god *chukwu okike abiama*. I call it hybrid because it is a combination of the real Supreme Being of Igbo religious thought—*Chukwu Okike*—the Creator God, and the idol of Arochukwu town known as *chukwu abiama* formerly identified as “Ibini Ukpabi” or the Long Juju of Arochukwu by the colonial masters. It is on record that Aro people, according to Metuh (1981):

sacrilegiously renamed their oracle *Chukwu* to enhance its prestige among the other Igbo groups. It had previously been known as *Ibiniokpabi*. The Aro, who originated from a mixture of Ibibio and Igbo, had a different name for God. They call him *Obassi di n'elu*. By adopting the name *Chukwu* for their oracle, they wanted to convince the Igbo – and to a large extent succeeded – that they could communicate with God in Arochukwu. (p. 160)

Having examined historical, and ethnological evidence available, Anyaegbu (2023) came to the conclusion, in an earlier written article, that:

*Chukwu abiama* is the name for the scam god of the oracle of Aro, while *Chukwu Okike* is the name of the Supreme Being, God the Creator, the Great Spirit of the universe accepted and worshipped by all the peoples of the world who accept an all-powerful and all-knowing Being, God. To even go the way of *Chukwu Okike Abiama* would suggest an effort towards hybridizing the two different and irreconcilable entities into a new form of an inexistent god. (pp. 84-5)

The trend today is to silence all those questioning the identity of this god and to impose it upon the people as the Supreme God of Igbo religious thought. One of the endgames is surely to get rid of the so-called Christian God and religion from our culture, language, education and societal heritage. The other is to gradually push us back to African traditional religions while reinstalling the culture of heathenism, fetishism and fear. However, the history of western cultures should not be quickly lost to us in our attempt to deconstruct Christianity in our land. The elimination of God within western cultures according to Sarah (2015), led to unlimited consequences – “the cynicism of atheistic communism in Eastern Europe and then its brutal replacement by unfettered materialism (p. 107).” We may not have come to atheistic Communism in our climes, but the unhindered pursuit of “unfettered materialism” is the major fall out of the attempt to eclipse and eliminate God where possible, from our cultures. The illegal and unethical means like ritual practices involving the use of human parts to gain wealth and become successful, are some of the signs of the pursuit of “unfettered materialism.” How much damage this has done and continues to do to the collective psyche of the younger generation is yet to be measured. The belief in the assistance and influence of supernatural forces in the acquisition of wealth is gradually rendering the region into a marketplace for all sorts of fake spiritualists or herbalists parading themselves as having the golden key to wealth and success.

## CONCLUSION

The events taking place with reference to Christianity in our society of the Southeastern Nigeria—among the Igbo communities—are what we have tried to identify and justify as the deconstruction of Christianity. Some of the major features of this event have been identified and discussed above. Perhaps, this could be an eye opener to most people that do not pay attention to social changes happening around them. One of the endgames of deconstruction is to replace the status quo with an alternative and in our own case, the replacement of the Christian cult and object of worship with the pre-Christian indigenous beliefs, traditions and cultural identity usurped by colonial imposition of Christianity. We have seen enough questioning of Christianity itself and its doctrines, practices, rites and rituals, to be convinced that there is a conscious process aimed at reestablishing the religious ways of our forefathers in the form of African traditional spiritualities, customs and heritages. Those at the forefront of this process, feel they are contributing to the mental and spiritual liberation of a people held down by colonial chain of Christianity. As for the two major protagonists of this movement of deconstruction, the Alexander the Coppersmiths of our time whom we have identified as Matthias Ezeaku and Uchenna Obiajulu known as Mazi\_Dibia, both formerly professed Christians, we can on the one hand, apply to them the words of Chesterton (2008):

They cannot get out of the penumbra of Christian controversy. They cannot be Christians, and they cannot leave off being Anti-Christians. Their whole atmosphere is the atmosphere of a reaction: sulks, perversity, petty criticism. They still live in the shadow of the faith and have lost the light of the faith. (pp. 10-11)

On the other hand, looking constructively at their quest, we can also intuit that their whole effort is aimed at introducing or calling for a deconstructive approach to Christianity and its practice in the Southeastern part of Nigeria. The flourishing of new forms of spiritualities having their roots in indigenous practices is evidence of the ongoing effects of deconstruction. The Christian monopoly of supernatural power is being weakened by the availability of new forms of spiritualities offering access to supernatural powers. Other aims of deconstruction could be resistance to the commercialization and exploitation of Christianity by churches and pastors who command wealth and influence in the society. Other non-Christian avenues are beginning to provide influence and leadership in the society. These have come to provide the counter coin of deconstruction which does not really stop at destruction. According to Caputo in a roundtable conference with Derrida (1997):

Deconstruction is not—we will repeat this again and again—a destruction or demolition, but a way of releasing and responding, of listening and opening up, of being responsible not only to the dominant voices of the great masters, but also to other voices that speak more gently, more discreetly, more mildly in the texts of dead white European males and in quite a few other texts too... (p. 57)

Eventually, for the survival of Christianity in our land, it will be very important to reengage with evangelisation methods, create new avenues for serious dialogue between faith and culture that would promote religious tolerance and respect for indigenous beliefs. This can only bring positive assurances leading to the mutual coexistence of Christianity alongside other spiritualities. With the evangelical model of cooperation rather than opposition, societal ills associated with religious practice like ritual killing for wealth, can be effectively defeated and sanity installed. This new reality is in fact what deconstruction tends to achieve, the “invention of the other, of something to come, something absolutely unique and idiomatic, the invention, the in-coming, of an absolute surprise” (Derrida, 1997, p.70).

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