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# **Pre-colonial West African Christianity in the Senegal River Valley**

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## **Abstract**

Historical scholarship has often documented that Christianity was not present in West Africa until Europeans introduced it to West Africans around the fifteenth century. Yet history speaks differently. Many centuries before Europeans arrived on the West African coast to build economic alliances and to colonise West Africa, West Africans were introduced to Christianity from other Africans via trade and migration. This paper focuses on the presence of Christianity in the Senegal River Valley in late antiquity and the Middle Ages. It also shows the contemporary consequences of the often-said statement that Christianity was brought to West Africa solely through Europeans and presents the implications of sharing the truth of pre-colonial Christianity existing in the West African Senegal River Valley region with hopes that this rich history will advance Christianity among unbelieving African diasporic populations.

## **Introduction**

As a result of millions of displaced Africans trafficked to the United States of America during the transatlantic slave trade, a number of things were stolen from them by European colonisers. Their land, history, languages, and culture—their entire African identity—was ripped away. Ramifications of this enslavement include many twenty-first century African descendants of the enslaved yearning to be connected to their ancestral culture and religion. In a 2023 Pew Research survey 61% of black Americans shared that they feel a strong connection to their roots as opposed to only 36% of white Americans (Cohn et. al. 2021). Additionally, according to another Pew Research survey,

43% of Black adults used a method to determine their African ancestry (Cox & Tamir 2022). Knowledge of one's ancestral history is important for many African Americans.

Yet regarding religion, Christianity is sometimes disregarded among unbelieving Black Americans because they associate Christianity with white supremacy and enslavement since European colonisers enslaved millions of Africans in the name of their perverted form of Christianity. In his book *Is Christianity the White Man's Religion? How the Bible Is Good News for People of Color*, Antipas Harris (2020:19) shares that African American unbelievers argue that Christianity is the white man's religion because the 'church is quickly becoming more of a symbol of conflict, oppression, and hypocrisy'. These Eurocentric ungodly symbols have stood for centuries. However, what some unbelieving Black Americans fail to realise, as a result of incomplete or untrue historical scholarship, is that some of their West African ancestors may have been Christians before Europeans came to colonise West Africa and that they worshipped the Lord according to their African culture. I am not arguing that Christianity was widespread in pre-colonial West Africa, but rather that it did indeed exist in rural areas with nomads settling there, possibly only in small pockets<sup>1</sup>. There were African Christians in West Africa before European colonisation. Since Christianity was present in West Africa prior to European colonisation, this should be taught as a missiological bridge for God to redeem the lost amongst unbelieving African American populations.

The non-Christian population is growing in the United States. In 2008 19.5% of African Americans were the religious nones or religiously unaffiliated, but that number has risen to but that has risen to 34.9% in 2020 (Burge 2022). Black Americans that are religiously unaffiliated has risen 'more dramatically than whites, Hispanics or Asians' (Burge 2022). Luna Malbroux is an African American millennial blogger and former Christian. She shares why she has left the Christian faith: 'Steadily, it seems like when we move away from the Christian church, we move towards less organized spiritual practices based on

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<sup>1</sup> The entirety of my doctoral research on the presence of Christianity in pre-colonial West Africa is not complete. As of April 2026, I have only found small pockets of Christianity in this region. My hope and prayer is to uncover more of this evidence to debunk the lie that Christianity was introduced to Africans residing in pre-colonial West Africa by Europeans.

African spirituality. There have been no knocks on the door, no pamphlets, no billboards, no late-night hotlines, no viral video campaigns. And yet, unnamed spiritual movement reimagining African tradition and nature-centered spirituality has been growing among young black Americans' (Harris 2020).

Steadily, it seems like when we move away from the Christian church, we move towards less organised spiritual practices based on African spirituality. There have been no knocks on the door, no pamphlets, no billboards, no late-night hotlines, no viral video campaigns. Yet, an unnamed spiritual movement that reimagines African tradition and nature-centred spirituality has been growing among young black Americans (Harris 2020:22). The church has evangelistic work to do here; therefore, this article will first show the contemporary consequences of the often-said statement that Christianity was brought to West Africa solely through Europeans. It will then highlight the presence of Christianity in the Senegal River Valley before European colonisation. And lastly, it will present the implications of sharing the truth of pre-colonial Christianity in the West African region of the Senegal River Valley.

## **The Misinformation of West African Christianity Being Established by Europeans**

There is a dominant false Eurocentric narrative that Christianity did not arrive in West Africa until the fifteenth century when it was brought by Europeans. This narrative has been told by historical scholars such as Elizabeth Isichei. In *A History of Christianity in Africa: From antiquity to present*, Isichei (1995:141-142, 172-201) highlights that Christianity only penetrated West Africa in the fifteenth century in Kongo. Before the fifteenth century she primarily highlights the presence of Islam in West Africa without digging into evidence of indigenous Christianity or other Africans bringing the gospel to West Africa.

In his essay 'Historical perspectives on West African Christianity' in the *Routledge Companion to Christianity in Africa*, Robert Baum (2015:79) asserts that West Africa had no contact with Christianity until the fifteenth century when the Portuguese arrived. Baum shares that from the fifteenth to nineteenth century Christian communities existed from Saint-Louis in Senegal to the Gold Coast, Dahomey, Nigeria, and Cape Verde due to the mission of Europeans. For example, the Diola in southern Senegal were met by the

Portuguese who tried to convert them to Christianity in the sixteenth century. The provincial Chief was one of the first Diola to convert to Christianity. Baum (2015:85) says that most conversions to Christianity occurred in West Africa after Europe colonised the region. Baum (2015:80) goes on to emphasise that after European missions, West Africans had the task of trying to adopt Christianity within their existing West African culture, however he does not share any exploration or adoption of Christianity before the Portuguese colonised these West African regions.

Additional historians and theologians who advance the narrative that Christianity was introduced to West Africa by European colonisers are Bengt Sundkler and Christopher Steed. In *A History of the Church in Africa*, Sundkler and Steed (2000:45) write about African Christian converts throughout the continent and their development through African kings and courts for the predominate church denominations of Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant. They (2000:45) commence their West Africa section by writing that when Portugal had heard that Islamic Arabs were taking hold of West African trade and spreading their religion, the European powers stood up to 'not preach the gospel but to induce foreign peoples to accept Christianity as found and formed in the West'.

Sundkler and Steed (2000:45) share that the Gambia was first introduced to Christianity via their king who begged to be baptised in 1458. In the fifteenth century, Portuguese settlers married into the Gambian community and built churches there. The Portuguese also built forts and chapels on the Gold Coast of Ghana at that time. Sundkler and Steed appear to have not investigated non-European pre-colonial accounts of Christianity in this African region. Additionally, as European colonisers arrived in West Africa, many were not looking for evidence of Christianity in this West African region since their supremacist ways sought to conquer and enslave West Africans.

## **A Pre-colonial Agenda of European Missions to the Senegal River Valley**

Historically we find that the Portuguese were the first large European group to arrive in the Senegal River Valley region around the 1440s, yet they did not to come to solely share the good news of Jesus Christ but rather to engage in

trade and colonisation. Prince Henry of Portugal and the Pope heard about the gold flourishing in West Africa and sent missionaries to establish political and economic monopolies, and then eventually to colonise these West African regions. In *Prelude to Empire: Portugal Overseas before Henry the Navigator*, Bailey Diffie (1960:89) wrote that during this time, 'Portugal now launched on the imperial road from which there was no point of voluntary return... the hope for profit, the conquest of souls, the cutting off of Castile were identified with Portugal's national spirit'.

Concerning Senegal, the Portuguese established trading posts in towns such as Goree, Saint-Louis, and Rufisque around 1444 and encouraged slave trade. Later the Dutch took over Senegalese trade, then, in the seventeenth century, the imperial power of the French assumed control over trade, Senegal, and the region from the Dutch (Turner 2014:1075). Regarding Malian European colonisation, the Portuguese navigator Diogo Gomez reached Mali in 1457 with the hopes of converting the king. One vassal king, Nomimansa, converted to the Christian faith and the Portuguese *conquista* was launched (Shaw & Gitau 2020:68). Lastly, in Mauritania, the Portuguese landed on the coast of Mauritania in 1441 in hopes of conquering the region. Later on, the French seized colonial power after much fight. The French had no Christian witness in mind when they made Mauritania their colonial territory. Evangelism was never a primary effort by these European colonisers. If it was, their actions would speak for it. This, of course, has identity and salvific consequences for unbelieving African Americans, historically and today.

## **Consequences of the Narrative of West African Christianity Being Established by Europeans**

Identity and salvific consequences emerge as a result of the false narrative that Europeans established West African Christianity. These consequences arise especially as it relates to racial oppression and the many other injustices African Americans experience.

*Personal Identity.* The transatlantic slave trade has numerous residual effects on African Americans historically and today. One of the main effects are African Americans' questions about their ethnic and cultural identity: Who are we? Where did we come from? Sentiments of Christianity being the white man's

religion can propel some unbelieving Black people to put their hope in false identities such as their African ancestry.

For the purposes of my research, I will highlight Dr. Beverly Daniel Tatum's (1993) relational research on the immersion/emersion stage of Black identity development invented by Dr. William E. Cross (1972) where this stage defines a Black individual's desire to surround themselves around visible symbols of their racial identity while actively rejecting symbols of whiteness. When individuals arrive at the immersion stage, they actively seek opportunities to explore their own roots and the culture from which they believe they originated. For the scope of my research this stage is key as it highlights why some unbelieving African Americans have demonised Christianity due to the sin of white oppression. Dr. Tatum (1993) finds that once a person enters the immersion stage healing can take place as the individual is connected to others from their racial or ethnic group. This serves as a corrective relational experience. The shared experiences of one's racial group are a source of empowerment and contribute to the racial identity for which one is longing in this stage. Dr. Tatum's research assists my scope of work in that it confirms that African Americans connecting and identifying with their racial or ethnic groups allows individuals to feel heard, understood, and accepted. This is a missiological bridge for the Black church.

*Salvific consequences.* An unbeliever's soul is on the line as it relates to the persistent narrative that Christianity was introduced to West Africa via Europeans. Yet there are some liberative entry points for the church for this misinformation. In 'Is Liberation the Starting Point for an African-American Theology of Evangelism?' F. Douglas Powe, Jr. (2009) argues that when it comes to the Black community and the history of enslavement and oppression in the United States of America, for some Black unbelievers a liberative scope should be considered as a starting point for evangelism. Ways in which Powe encourages his readers to embrace liberation as a starting point for African American evangelism include reaching back to retrieve negro spirituals to sing and teach today, as well as taping into Black worship services and Black preaching that 'testified to Jesus' liberating presence in the struggle for freedom' (Powe 2009:3) Powe argues for holistic evangelism, rather than a dualistic evangelism that neglects the spiritual but focuses on the physical or vice versa.

I would like to expand Dr. Powe's liberation entry point and help to quench immense thirst in some African Americans to know and understand their West African heritage and what was lost through American chattel slavery. Concentrated Black worship experiences that highlight the struggle of Black Americans in the United States under the umbrella of white oppression is not what Black people want to be reminded of. I have witnessed in my local church outreach and missions ministry that what some unbelieving Black people thirst for can only be fully quenched placing their faith Jesus Christ and being fully known and appreciated according to their ethnic identity.

Today Senegal is a majority Muslim nation. One would think that when some medieval West African kings converting to Islam, the common citizen would have followed their leadership, but that was not the case. In fact, Islam only made small strides during the medieval period among people groups such as the Wolof of the Senegambia region when they were exposed to Islam in the eleventh century. It was not until the nineteenth century that this people group largely adopted Islam as an anti-European movement in response to colonisation. Senegal did not want to have anything do with any European religion (and I believe many aren't aware that Christianity existed in their region in the medieval period without European introduction, but we will dive more into that later).

This, amongst many other examples, can have salvific consequences for unbelieving African Americans whose ancestors were enslaved in the transatlantic slave trade. The church's salvific hope allows believers to eagerly await the Lord Jesus Christ to deliver the church from the sin, bondage, and corruption in this world. Hope is a persistent expectation of an unseen reality, and the content of the church's hope is the return of Christ in all of his glory with a complete deliverance from believers sinful natures in this present world. Believers should value this eschatological hope because currently we live in a world where false sources of hope are being widely proclaimed. Believers are called to counter these false sources of hope with the gospel.

Some of the false sources of hope some unbelieving African Americans put their faith in is ancestral veneration or worship as they believe their ancestors are the link between the living and the universal being that exists outside of the realm of human understanding (Sibani & Edosa 2020:176). When some call

on their deceased ancestors for divine involvement, they believe that their departed ancestors have the power to intervene in their current affairs, provide authoritative direction, and, in some cases, bestow on them blessings or curses. They call on their ancestors to appease them, or because they need insight, and they are assured that their ancestors know how to help them deal with the questions and conflicts they are facing. In some instances, if the unbelieving perform the prescribed rituals, formulas, and festivals with music to honour and provoke their ancestors to join them, they can greatly influence their lives.

Yet God's Word speaks differently. First, the Bible condemns divination or mediums (Ezekiel 13:9, Acts 16:16-18), which is how some of those who worship their deceased ancestors treat them. Second, Scripture tells us that when a human being dies then they are completely broken off from earthly existence (Luke 16:19-30). Thus, no living human being can talk to the dead. Third, Jesus Christ is the only one that conquered death through his sacrificial death and resurrection for all of humanity. Jesus is still alive, and he is intervening in lives today. Lastly, because our Triune God is the creator and controls all of the universe, he is the only true guide for humanity. The world values and prioritises things that do not please God, such as idolising themselves or their culture, loving money, and simply adoring sin. For Christians, seeing unbelieving African Americans embrace their false sense of hope should propel the believing to declare to them that they should hope in someone who is solid and eternal. The centre of our solid hope is the one that lives in us—Jesus Christ (Col 1:27). The solution to this false narrative and injustice is to share pre-colonial West African Christianity with unbelieving African Americans and to prayerfully ask the Lord to save.

## **Evidence of Pre-colonial Christianity in the Senegal River Valley**

The Senegal River valley exists in the West Africa Sahel region. In late antiquity and the medieval period, it was a prime area for settlement and development by Africans from other regions of the continent. Today it flows through countries such as Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, and Senegal, but in antiquity and the medieval period it was the home of the Kingdom of Ghana, Mali, and other major West African empires.

The method by which I determined that pre-colonial Christianity existed in the Senegal River Valley was by validating the commencement of European colonisation within the transatlantic slave trade and then working back to study the origins of West African kingdoms and people groups, as well as studying trade and migration from other parts of the African continent to this West African region. The Portuguese looked to secure slaves and goods from northern Senegal in the 1440s. Thus, my research will work back from fifteenth century to identify Christians in this West African region. As it stands today, due to the lack of published, written West African history in West African languages, most of the evidence to conclude that Christianity existed before European colonisation includes written Arabic accounts, oral accounts, and ethnological and archeological finds. It is important to also highlight that Islam did not assume full control over the entire West African region after its invasions in North and West Africa in late antiquity and the medieval period. Rather, Islam was largely confined to trading centres in pre-colonial West Africa and did not affect the majority of rural populations.

The Senegal River was a major river route that created links for those in West Africa to trade goods with North Africa in what we call trans-Saharan trade. The scope of my research covers the Senegal River valley from third to fourteenth century, which include the ancient historical kingdom of Ghana, established around the third century BCE<sup>2</sup>, and the Mali kingdom, established around thirteenth century. The main locations of these ancient and medieval kingdoms are modern day Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, the Gambia, and Guinea. The dominant ethnic people group during the kingdom of Ghana's reign were the Soninke.

Around the third century, though some would argue in first or second century, the camel became the animal that could be packed with goods and travel long distances for days or weeks without water. Hence trans-Saharan trade between North Africa and West Africa was in full gear during the Christian era in North Africa. Gold was exported from West Africa to North Africa to be used for items such as gold coinage issued in Carthage in the fourth century. A desire for gold

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<sup>2</sup> The ancient kingdom of Ghana should not be confused with the present-day country of Ghana. The ancient kingdom of Ghana existed on the Senegal and Niger Rivers and included present-day Mauritania and Mali regions. Additionally, the name Ghana was generally applied to the ruler or king, but the country itself is called Awkar.

led Carthage and other Byzantine African cities to establish trade relations with Djenne-Djenno (modern day Mali), and Aoudahgost (modern day Mauritania) (Achi 2023:204).

Trade between North Africa and West Africa was flourishing before the Arab conquest in the seventh century. Before the Arab conquest, most North African populations were Christian. Christianity was firmly rooted in North Africa and East Africa before, during, and, for many centuries, after the Arab invasion. According to Egyptian Christian historical texts, even in the tenth century Alexandria's patriarch was the head of Christians in Kairouan (Tunisia), Tripoli (Libya), Egypt, Ethiopia, and Nubia. Christianity spread across North Africa, reaching all the way to Morocco, in the first six hundred years of the Common Era. Other examples of the spread of North African Christianity include Coptic book production in the ninth century, primarily used for Egyptian monasteries, beginning to grow even after the Islamic conquest in Egypt.

The Arab invasion in Egypt forced some Christian Copts to migrate west. Those who did preserved their religion, culture, and language. Around 650 new expulsions were made by troops of the Calif Omar Ibn Al-Aziz. According to old Ghanaian tradition, Egyptians migrating to Ghana. The migration is confirmed by the languages in the ancient Ghanaian region, such as the language of the Wolof on the Senegal River, which contain many Egyptian words (El Fasi 1988:472). The eleventh century Arabic writer Al-Zuhri (2000:98) documents the profession of Christianity in Ghana when he shares that 'caravans from the land of the farthest Sus and Maghrib [northwestern Africa] go there' and that in former years they 'professed Christianity until the year of 469/1076'. Arab scholar Al-Bakri wrote in 1137 that the inhabitants of Ghana were Christians in 1076/1077' (Captivating History 2020:473). Al-Zhuri, an Arab chronicler, also writes that slaves are imported into Ghana and in the towns of Tadimakka and NSLA, and that the people in these towns were Christians (Levtzion & Hopkins 1981:98). Moreover, we find that during the early medieval period Zavilah was a major port along the North African coast where slaves were forced to migrate to the Sahel. As Africans migrated, they brought their religion and culture with them.

In *Early Christianity in Africa: North Africa, The Sahara, The Sudan, Central and East Africa: A Contribution to Ethnohistory*, Ludwig Brandl (1975:495) writes

that many Christians wandered in the Sahara, the Sudan, and Central Africa in small groups with their herds. Since they struggled for existence, they were not ecclesiastically organised. Communication with Rome and Byzantium were interrupted by the Arabs. History tends to favour the number of West African courtships that converted to Islam, however some of these courtships converted to Islam just to establish good trading relationships with the Arabs for economic and political gain. Yet the common citizens of these West African kingdoms did not feel obligated to convert to Islam like the royal courts.

From third to ninth century, Senegal and the Gambia valley were especially home to many scattered or migrated African communities. This migration occurred for reasons such as desiccation and economic and religious pressure to move from one's homeland. Since the Senegal River valley was fertile, saturated with water, a safe haven for nomads that faced regional attacks—the Senegal River Valley attracted many North Africans. As the nomads migrated to this West African region, they brought their knowledge, culture, and religion with them.

In *Saharan Myth and Saga*, H.T. Norris (1972:152-153) shares a translated account of an Adrar writer that provides us with details of Christians in Mauritania in the beginning of fifth century. The Adrar writer tells the story of when Abu Bakr (a caliph or Muslim leader) came to the Adrar region in Mauritania, he found two groups: the ones that settled in towns or villages, and the nomads or herders. The Adrar writer states that: 'As for the settled folk, they were Christians'. Not only did the Christians occupy the bulk of the land, the Adrar writer goes on to say that 'each of the two groups was ruled by Christians who possessed the bulk of the land and property, owing to their number and wealth and authority' (in Norris 1972:153). Abu Bakr fought the Christians and wanted them to submit to him, but they refused. In the end the Abu Bakr made peace with the Christians. In order to remain in their land, they could pay a poll-tax and still practice their religion, or they could leave their country in peace. The Christians were out-powered, so they left the country. Not only does this Adrar text confirm that Christians were present in West Africa before European colonisation, it also confirms Christian leadership and perseverance in their faith; these Christians refused to convert to Islam.

Additionally, as Christians migrated to West Africa they intermarried with the indigenous peoples of the West African region, creating new people groups such as the Tukolor (or the people of Takrur or Tekrur), Fulani, Wolof, and Serer peoples. With these intermarriages the customs of the indigenous West Africans tended to be more influential than the customs of those who had immigrated. Thus, we have many ethnically heterogeneous societies. Yet the North Africans were also very influential. Archeology finds the Wolof on the Senegal River having the cross as an ethnological symbol and the Bambara (another West African ethnic group) having it on their dugout-canoes (Brandl 1975:480).

The Lembtuna in the Sahara desert brought Christian thoughts to the Wolof as we see in a number of words in that language that can be traced back to words in Tamashec (the language of the Sanhaya-Ama), such as the expression *fahaske dya* derived from the Tamashec *afasko* (or *tafisko*) meaning 'spring', once derived from the Latin *pasqua* meaning 'Easter'. And *bakar* meaning 'fault' which is taken from the Latin *peccatum*, meaning 'sin'. In the religion of the Bambara, there is the expression 'angel' which, in the same way, may be traced back to Christian influence due to the Sanhaya-Amazigh in about 850 (Brandl 1975:480). Language speaks to the beliefs and expression of the culture.

In the middle of the Senegal Valley, the trading empire of Takrur was well established. Takrur resided in the Senegambia regions (modern-day Poder or Saint-Louis region) and was one of the first West African regions to profit from their exportation of gold. Takrur also touches the south of modern-day Mauritania. The Takrur empire was formed at the beginning of the Common Era. By the ninth century, the Takrur empire was a major trading centre. One could find gold and slaves being traded for wool, copper, and beads from North Africa. Takrur was founded by the ancestors of the Tukolor people. One can find the North African Fulani people group residing in Takrur during the Common Era (El Fasi 1988:127).

The kingdom of Ghana fizzled around the eleventh century. The next powerful kingdom that dominated its territory was the Mali kingdom, established in the thirteenth century. Mali was one of the richest and greatest African kingdoms in history. Because of this, it gained and monopolised the caravan trade in gold.

The Mali kingdom started in 1235 when Sundiata proclaiming himself as king (leader of the Mande people group). The Mali empire included the Atlantic coasts of Senegal and the Gambia as well as the Sahelian zone of the Niger Bend and even extended as the trading centres of Walata in the western desert and Tadmekka in the south-central Sahara.<sup>3</sup>

Around the fourteenth century, Mansa Musa, one of the kingdom's most powerful kings, adopted Islam. But there were in fact Christians that existed in this Mali empire that maintained the gold, hence Christianity existed in West Africa. When Ibn al-Dawadarim, an Arabic explorer from Egypt, asked how about details of where the gold grows in Mansa Musa's kingdom, the king replied, 'It is not in that part of our land which belongs to the Muslims, but in the land which belongs to the Christians of Takrur' (Levtzion & Hopkins 1981:250). Mansa Musa did not force those within his empire to convert to Islam. When asked why the Muslims did not take the land from the Christians, Mansa Musa shared with Ibn al-Dawadarim that they have tried, but when they do the gold does not produce, yet when the gold stays with the Christians, gold is produced (Levtzion & Hopkins 1981:250). Ibn al-Dawadarim's account corroborates with the account of Al-Umari, an Arab historian, who in the fourteenth century documented that Mansa Musa did not make non-Muslim (Christian) areas pay the *jizya* or Muslim tribute tax, because these neighbouring countries were employed to extract gold from the mines, and gold increased when they managed it (Captivating History 2020:110). Both of these Arabic traveler accounts speak not only to Christianity in Takrur, but also of the favour of the Lord over the Christians' labour.

Additional evidence of Christians in Mauritania and Mali surfaced from archeological and ethnological finds. Some anthropologists and archaeologists excavated a variety of ornamental crosses in the artwork of the Tuareg, a tribal people of the Sahara, some of whom still live in the countries of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger (Phiri et al. 2016:206.). Some scholars hold that the crosses discovered are a resounding corroboration of an early Christian presence in West Africa (Phiri et al. 2016:206.). The Tuareg tribe migrated from North Africa to West Africa in the seventh century to avoid submitting to Arab conquerors

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<sup>3</sup> This includes the modern-day African states of the Gambia, Senegal, Guinea, Mali, and portions of Burkina Faso, Mauritania, and Niger

and to not convert to Islam. The Tuareg were nomads that descended from the Christian Garamantes from the Libya region (Norris 1972:230).

Another African group that migrated to West Africa were the Donatists. Christianity was popular in North Africa since second century. Due to their controversial doctrinal beliefs and opposition to the Catholic church, the Donatists gradually founded a kind of Amazigh National Church. Around 375 the Donatists suffered severe persecution and were defeated around 405. Some Donatist refugees went to Mauritania in West Africa where history has found ethnological symbols of the cross with the Tuareg.

A final observation about how Christianity is not ‘the white man’s religion’ is that there would be no European Christian missions to West Africa without the Christian theology birthed out of North Africa which heavily influencing Europe in the second and third century. Many in the Western world have ignored early African church history and the fact that Africa had established Christian nations and developed Christian theology long before Europeans did. Yet in spite of this dismissiveness of early African theology, Christian theology clearly moved from Africa to Europe. This move came in oral and written forms through many North African theologians and church fathers such as Tertullian, Athanasius, Cyril, and Augustine. A plethora of the so-called Western theological concepts started in Africa. Both the Greek and Latin Bibles were products of African. Africans started studying and getting consensus in community with ecumenical councils (Oden 2007:45-49).

Liturgical, exegetical, doctrinal, and social teachings all stemmed from North Africans to Europeans. For example, Tertullian from Carthage writes on prayer, patience, baptism, repentance, fasting, idolatry, the resurrection of the dead, and much more from 200-213, all of which have influenced Europeans and the West. Cassiodorus, who was a monk and statesmen, founded a monastery in Italy that included a scriptorium which included many texts from fourth century African intellectuals which became known to Europeans at that time (Oden 2007:190). In fact, while Rome was persecuting Christians for their faith in the 250s-305, Christianity notably grew in North Africa and Egypt in the 270s-300s. Christianity was not fully accepted in Rome until Constantine came to power in 311. Europe’s early medieval formation was rooted in African penitential tradition. Pope Gregory the Great adopted Augustinian theology for

the West from 590-604 (Oden 2007:191). John of Damascus could not have written his orthodox systematic theology in 743 without inclusion of many Egyptian and African sources (Oden 2007:191). Shall I go on? The point I am trying to make is that there are many instances where Christian theology and thought was transferred from Africa to Europe, inter alia, academia, exegesis, dogmatics, ecumenism, teaching on justification, monastic communities, apologetics, philosophy, and dialectics.

The reason the theology of Athanasius, Cyprian, Augustine, Tertullian, and many more African theologians was accepted by Europeans is that these African theologians taught in a way or language that was accepted by Rome. African Christianity also spread in Europe through refugees being exiled in Spain, Gaul, Sardinia, Sicily, Italy, and Britain during the Vandal and Arab invasions around the seventh to ninth centuries (Oden 2007:73). It is clear that early African Christianity highly influenced European and Western theology and thought. Although some forms of Western Christianity may be tainted by white supremacy, Christianity is not solely 'the white man's religion'. The roots of pure, untainted orthodox Christian theology lie in Africa. It was African Christian intellectualism and the African church that developed the European Christianity which still stands today.

## Summary

In summary, pre-colonial West African Christianity in the Senegal River valley did indeed exist before the trans-Atlantic slave trade administered by European colonisation. Direct evidenced presents that trade and migration from North Africa appear to be the fulcrum of the spread of Christianity to this West African region. Through trans-Saharan trade, North Africans intermarried and intermixed Christianity with the culture of West Africans. That European Christianity would not exist without the theology birthed in North Africa further confirms that Christianity is not 'the white man's religion'. These findings have personal identity and salvific consequences as they communicate to unbelieving African Americans that some West African people groups were Christian before European colonisation. For diasporic Africans and African Americans to convert to the Christian faith is not necessarily an abandonment of their African identity and culture. Rather, they can convert to the Christian faith while still embracing their African ancestry and traditions.

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