

AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY: INTERSECTIONS BETWEEN CULTURE AND IDENTITY AMONG AMAXHOSA

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Abstract

There seems to be a paradox at the heart of African Christianity – that is, the synthesis between Christianity and African Traditional Religion (ATR). It is vibrant and growing but at the same time shallow and superficial. It is characterised by the struggle for authenticity, uniqueness and identity. On the one hand, it is a form of resistance against early missionary activities and their presentation of Christianity in a western apparel; and on the other, a search for self-actualisation in a convoluted interplay between the African religious heritage, traditional culture and identity. With this interplay in mind, it seemed necessary to investigate how African Christians identified themselves and expressed their religiosity in relation to their culture. This speaks directly to the understanding of self-concept or identity while questioning the place of culture in religious persuasions. Using a qualitative research approach in the form of one-on-one interviews, the study discovered that the practitioners of African Christianity do not sense any polarity or dichotomy that impacts them negatively in the knowledge of self or identity through the juxtapositioning of Christianity and African Traditional Religion.

Keywords: African Christianity; African Traditional Religion; Christianity; Culture; Identity

Introduction

This paper is part of a larger research project that looks into African Christianity by focusing primarily on the interaction between religion, culture and identity. It is a sequel to the article, “Religious Intersections in African Christianity: The Conversion Dilemma among Indigenous Converts”, which was published in 2020 by *Scriptura* Journal. It emerged out of the developed awareness that there are intersectionalities between Christianity and African Traditional Religion (ATR). The project was therefore undertaken in order to explore and discover the nature of these intersectionalities. This is against this backdrop that the juxtapositioning of Christianity and African Traditional Religion does not seem to sit well and has tended to create some discomfort for both conservative Christians (Jarvis 2009), and rigorist African religionists (Mndende 2009).

On the one hand, Jarvis (2009:43) seems to think that the only reasonable way in which indigenous Africans can be fully assimilated into Christianity is by the renunciation of their cultural heritage and religious beliefs. The reason being that these cultural and religious beliefs conflicts with the revelation of God as found in the Bible.

Mndende (2009:8), on the other hand, argues that these two religious traditions – that is, Christianity and African Traditional Religion – are a paradox and therefore should not be juxtaposed. This discussion, however, seems to be dominated by outsiders or non-experiencers and lack the perceptions of experiencers – that is, the voices of the people who experience and practice this realism on a daily basis.

This research project was therefore undertaken in order to explore this grey area by probing into the emic perspectives of people who juxtapose Christianity and African Traditional Religion. It sought to understand how the experiencers of this reality describe it; whether this realism implies dichotomy – a paradoxical encirclement of two opposing religious traditions or worldviews – and whether there are any negative undertones that are embedded within this realism, which are experienced by practitioners of African Christianity on personal identity.

African Christianity

African Christianity is the synthesis between Christianity and African Traditional Religion (Mokhoathi 2020:1–2). Since the African cultural heritage is intimately intertwined with the religious heritage, it may be difficult to identify which elements of the African cultural and religious heritage can be incorporated into, or tolerated by the Christian system. This makes African Christianity a melting-pot in which different religious traditions are easily assimilated. This is because African cultural heritage is embedded within African religious heritage, and with it comes the inclusion of ancestors and spirits. It is a product of the synthesis of Christianity and African Traditional Religion. In a certain sense, it may be perceived as the product of syncretism, from which the ethico-spiritual principles of Christianity are practised in conjunction with those of African Traditional Religion (Mokhoathi 2017:3).

Accordingly, taking an outsider's view into account, it may be argued that the intersection of Christianity and African Traditional Religion appears to dilute the purity of Christianity or that of the African Traditional Religion – as both religious traditions seem to lose their uniqueness when juxtaposed (Mokhoathi 2017:4). Due to this form of syncretism, one may easily conclude that the intersection of Christianity and African Traditional Religion implies the distortion of both systems, since there is currently no definite clarity on how both systems come or work together. This is why this intersection cannot simply be written-off or dismissed as distortion. The voice of the experiencers needs to be heard before any conclusions may be drawn.

Methodology

Using a qualitative research approach informed by phenomenology as a theoretical construct, the study explored the lived experiences of participants who juxtaposed Christianity and African Traditional Religion. Ten participants from Alice, a town in the Eastern Cape, were considered. In order to maintain anonymity, I used coding in place of the actual names of the participants. The participants were therefore classified in the following manner: The first male participant was classified as Participant 1 Male – P1M, and the second female participant was classified as Participant 2 Female – P2F. The study focused on participants who were both Christian and African religionists. A snowball technique was used to identify the participants. Ten participants were considered for the study – 5 males and 5 females.

The age groups of the participants ranged from 30–40 years; from 41–50 years; and from 51 years and older. Four participants ranged between the ages of 30–40 years, two ranged between the ages of 41–50, and four were 51 years and older. In terms of their educational levels, three participants had already completed their Matric or Diplomas, another three had already completed their degrees or Honours, and the last four had already completed their Masters or Doctorate at the time of this research. The participants came from different religious denominations (Ethiopian Episcopal Church, Zion Pentecostal Church, Methodist Church of Southern Africa, and Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa) and had embraced the African traditional heritage.

Discussions and results

The purpose of this empirical study was to investigate the realism of participants who juxtaposed Christianity and African Traditional Religion and how this synthesis impacts on their self-knowledge or identity as African Christians. The data provided by the participants was discussed and interpreted following the 7 phenomenological steps¹. In order to address this point of enquiry, I asked the participants to respond to the following questions: (1) how is Christianity juxtaposed with ATR? (2) Do African traditional practices yield any value when juxtaposed with the Christian belief system? (3) What are the effects of juxtaposing Christianity and ATR to personal identity? These three questions therefore served as themes for the analytic process of the data which was provided by the participants.

How Christianity is juxtaposed with ATR

There were different sentiments regarding the juxtapositioning of Christianity and ATR among the participants. Some of the participants traced the coming together of these two religions to both the universal belief in one God and their socio-cultural upbringings, which acknowledged both traditions. The participants noted that both Christianity and ATR are underpinned by a strong monotheistic belief in God, and this is central in both religious traditions whether one is a Christian or African religionist. This universal understanding of God is said to be the same in all religions, even though God reveals Himself in various ways. In this perception, the participants noted that one cannot comprehensively prove whether the Christian God is distinctly unique from other gods or is the same as the African religionists' God.

They maintained that God is incomprehensible and that what is known of Him has been revealed through nature, scriptures or other forms, and is learnt from external and personal experiences rather than through scientific enquiries and comparative analysis. In this regard, it was argued that there are no conclusive analogies between gods (or the comparative analysis of deities) in order to convey which god precedes the other or who differs from others, and in what fashion, so that they may be acclaimed as autonomously higher than other gods. Participant 2F alluded that “what is generally known of God are His characteristics or attributes, such as God is eternal, God is love, God is immutable,

¹ These phenomenological steps are discussed in another publication titled, “*Episteme and the Study of the African Religious Heritage: Towards the use of relative epistemologies*, (pp. 34-38)”.

or God is merciful. These play a prominent role in the perception of God in various religious traditions”.

The attributes of God therefore seem to be aligned to the revelations of God or with how worshippers experience, understand and relate with Him. In some impressions, such as in the ATR, worshippers often perceive of their God as having retired from the undertakings of this physical world (*deus otiosus*), as being transcendent (*deus absconditus*), and as distant (*deus remoteus*) (Crafford 2015:8). For the reason that He is not intimately involved in day-to-day activities, it is argued that God left the affairs of this world to major divinities and the ancestors (Crafford 2015:8). Major divinities are said to reside in the sky, closer to the Creator or Supreme Being, while the ancestors are thought to live underneath the earth in a spiritual form (Olupona 2011:56). As they exist in a spiritual form, the ancestors are said to “act as friends at court to intervene between man and the Supreme Being and to get prayers and petitions answered more quickly and effectively” (Opoku 1978:37). Due to this role, it is argued that “ancestral spirits loom very large because these spirits do not only dominate the spirit world but operate pervasively in the human world to the extent that, in some communities, they monopolize cultic devotion” (Olupona 2011:57).

Ancestral beliefs therefore serve as a form of socio-religious control in which the behaviour of individuals is structured. They act as an authoritative foundation for moral sanctions and sustain the values by which society is organised. The participants, however, also noted that in Christianity, God is understood to be immanent (intimately involved in the material world), as passible (expressive of emotions) and has become much closer to humanity by taking human nature (through incarnation). Participant 6M alluded to this when he noted that “God is omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent. He connects with us through the Holy Spirit and through Christ”. Even though the participants appear to share the same sentiments on the universality of God, they significantly differ on the understanding of His role in day-to-day activities. Some believed that God is distant as He has left the day-to-day activities to the care of ancestors; while others believed that God is always present and sympathises with believers in all situations.

Those who argued that God is always present also noted that “we need the active involvement of our ancestors to intercede on our behalf because we are sinners and God is always angered by our sins because He is everywhere and sees all that we do” (Participant 4F). The philosophical stance assumed by participants that Christianity links with the African Traditional Religion due to the common belief in the universal God was further reinforced by Participant 10F. She asserted that “[t]here is a link between Christianity and African religion. I am a Christian and *Sangoma* (traditional healer). Therefore, I embrace both faiths. I do not see any contradiction, and my life is balanced.” Hirst (2005), an anthropologist who has conducted extensive research on *isiXhosa* systems of divination, seems to corroborate this presupposition. He noted that to most traditional healers, Christianity and traditional religion are considered to be related systems of thought and practice. He conveyed his observations in the following manner:

Most healers are nominal, if not practising, Christians. From the healers’ perspective, Christianity and traditional religion are considered to be related systems of thought and practice. The terms of one system are translatable into the

terms of the other and the ensuing transpositions used in a mutually reinforcing way (Hirst 2005:4).

This implies that the experiencers of African Christianity – those who synthesise Christianity and African Religion, do not inevitably perceive any contradictions between the two religions, nor do they regard themselves as embracing two different religious traditions. Rather, they perceive of themselves as holding-on to a unified worldview, which is composed of two religious traditions. This unified worldview brings consonance and order into their lives rather than disrupt it. Because it incorporates two religious traditions, this worldview is not linear but multi-faceted. It is simply not characterised by “a mind-body dualism consonant with Western biomedicine and consumer culture” (Hirst 2005:4). Instead, it is “a complex dialectical process in which old and new [religious forms] are integrated, synthesized and increasingly supplement each other” (Hirst 2005:4).

Thus, the ATR, as an old (traditional) religious form, is systematically integrated with Christianity, the new (assimilative) religious form, and both religions increasingly continue to supplement each other as practitioners consistently try to adjust to the socio-religious realities of life. In this manner, the experiencers of African Christianity speak of a unified worldview, not a dichotomous worldview, based on duality as embodied in Western philosophy. Because of this intersection, some participants noted that they were raised-up within families that embraced both traditions, where their parents were both Christians while African religionists. In this scenery, the participants were expected to uphold both traditions. For instance, Participant 5M asserted that:

“I was raised by parents who embraced both religions. My father was an African religionist and my mother was a Christian. On Sunday, we would go to church but even then, my father insisted that we must always wear our fetish (amulets) to stay under the protection of the ancestors. I did not see any contradiction in this.”

This means that during the upbringing of some participants, the embrace of two religious traditions was not a significant problem. They were surrounded by people who merged the two religious traditions. Juxtaposing Christianity and ATR was therefore a normal part of their experiences. According to McGuire (2002:51), this is known as the “shaping and maintaining of worldviews”. She (2002) noted that there are various processes which may alter or reinforce an individual’s worldview, and these include (a) the social forces that shape and maintain the individual’s worldview, (b) conversion, in which the individual changes their existing worldview, and (c) commitment to a group of fellow believers. Of most significance to this study was the process of conversion, as it related to the radical change of worldviews to the individuals who converted. In this case, conversion meant the “transformation of one’s self concurrent with a transformation of one’s basic meaning system” (McGuire 2002:73).

This implies that individual and contextual factors may prompt people to convert in that they make them aware of the magnitude to which their prior systems of meaning appear insufficient to explain or give meaning to current experiences and events (McGuire 2002:73). In this process, the meaning system may be said to be in crisis and therefore in need of some adjustments. This is known as ‘*anomie*’. The term ‘*anomie*’,

according to McGuire (2002:80), was first used by Durkheim to typify a situation where a meaning system was utterly disrupted, and the individual or community found it difficult or even impossible to maintain their moral order without question. This is because the term ‘*anomie*’ literally means to be “without order” (McGuire 2002:35). Therefore, in order to bring order back into their meaning system, individuals or communities often resorted to syncretism.

McGuire (2002:35) alluded to this by stating that “[p]robably the most common new basis of meaning is syncretism – the intertwining of new meanings with the older meaning system”. This appears to have been the case for African traditional communities, who were overwhelmed by the influence of Christianity during the missionary epoch. When their old system of meaning was thrown into crisis, they adjusted by incorporating the newly-found Christian beliefs into the older system to maintain order and thus began to practice syncretism. There is no surprise, therefore, in this backdrop, as to why Christianity was juxtaposed with African Traditional Religion. African Christians were trying to avoid ‘*anomie*’ by maintaining their moral order and thereby opened doors to syncretism. The participants therefore appeared to have been exposed to this realism and had adopted it as a normal way of life.

The value of traditional practices amidst Christian systems

The participants seemed to think that their traditional practices became no less valuable when juxtaposed with Christian belief systems or components. They said that their traditional customs and practices were accommodative of Christian belief systems and components. As a result, the use of Christian components like holy water, candle lighting, and the offering of prayers is said to be compatible with traditional methods of healing or diagnoses, particularly for those participants who were Christian leaders and traditional healers. The foresight to using Christian components, however, was said to depend entirely on the needs of the clients. These client-centred needs are said to be revealed by the ancestors, and the use of Christian components also determined by and permitted under the guidance or discretion of the ancestors. Elaborating on this point, Participant 1F said that:

Traditional healing is dependent on the guidance and discretion of the ancestors. So, they tell us of the things they do not want. As for me, I have been using Christian components for many years, and the ancestors continue to heal and reveal things through those components.

Supporting this assertion, Participant 3M stated that “[t]o me, it makes no difference whether one uses Christian or non-Christian components, it depends on the discretion of the ancestors and the purpose of using such components”. This implies that the use or non-use of Christian components largely depends on the guidance and discretion of the ancestors. They determine which components are to be used and for what purposes. The ancestors are said to be at liberty to do this because they communicate at any given time with the participants when they wish to convey a message. They are not limited or restricted by anything. Therefore, they can communicate at any time and whenever they wish to communicate. This can happen even when one is still at church. Participant 7F explained this in the following way: “The ancestors communicate at any time they want

to convey something. This happens whether one is at church, in public places or alone in private. They are not restricted by anything, including Christian symbols”.

This however, does not mean that the ancestors dominate one’s character and their lives by overriding their will beyond limits until they feel helpless or without control. Undoubtedly, the ancestors are perceived as very powerful and may possess great control over traditional healers. But the participants noted that even under such circumstances, the ancestors may still be pleaded with or repressed until one finds a suitable place to reciprocate the communication. Participant 8M, for instance, noted that the ancestors may be suppressed or asked to remain calm, particularly when the occasion is not suitable for traditional healers to listen to and obey their directives. This is even more true in the case of traditional healers, who are guided by ancestors that are religious. These ancestors are said to be more equitable and may be listened to even when one is within the church context. Their manifestation is understood to be gentle and non-intrusive, whereas non-religious ancestors may be both intrusive and restrictive – restricting one’s freedom of movement in such a way that they do not go to certain places, or attend certain functions.

Because religious ancestors are mostly equitable and non-intrusive, they permit the use of Christian symbols or Christian components such as prayer, candle lighting, the burning of incense, or the reading of the Bible within the traditional healing practice. Participant 9M assumed that these ancestors accept Christian symbols and Christian components because they were once Christians themselves while living in the physical world:

There are religious ancestors (*izihlewe zecawa*), who allow Christian components to be used. Probably because, they themselves, were Christians at once, or because they are not against things like prayer or any other Christian symbols (P9M).

This seemed to be the case for Participant 2F. As a faith healer, she said that she united her ancestors with the church (*ukudibanisa izihlewe necawa*). This allowed her to unleash her spiritual gift as a faith healer (*umthandazeli*). This gift of *ukuthandazela* (faith healing) requires that she rely heavily upon the active involvement of the ancestors, who reveal the ailments of her clients. And as a faith healer, part of her diagnosis requires that she use the Bible, prayer sessions, and holy water. These are sometimes used in conjunction with other traditional approaches to treatment. This may entail the supplementation of prayers with *muti/amayeza*² or the cleansing of an individual by holy water, which is accompanied by protective charms. These accounts seem to suggest that there are religious ancestors, or at least, ancestors that approve of Christian belief systems and Christian components. They permit the use of Christian symbols, in some cases, within the context of healing or diagnosis. These Christian components are said to supplement traditional remedies rather than nullify them.

This happens even in cases where traditional clanic rituals are performed. Participant 3M, for instance, noted that they usually begin their ritual ceremonies with prayers and by singing church hymns. He said that these prayers and hymns invoke the unity of the family, including the lineage of their ancestors, and therefore, must be made before going

² Traditional medicines or natural healing plants.

to appease the ancestors at the kraal. He asserted that “[...] when we are going to appease (*ukungxengxeza*) the ancestors, we leave *inkundla* (the space between the house and the kraal) with a prayer and song. Our family hymn is “*unabantu bakho thixo ngamaxesha onke* [you are with your people God, at all times]”. This seems to suggest that Christian belief systems do not contradict traditional practices, as African Christians appear to easily combine these two religious traditions in such a way that they supplement each other. This seemed to be the same case with the understanding of Christ and ancestors.

The participants seemed to think that Christ and ancestors do not oppose each other because they have different functions. On the one hand, they said that Jesus Christ is a savior and redeemer, from whom the ancestors do not hold a claim. On the other hand, they said that the ancestors are benefactors of clan groups or ethnic communities, and do not claim to save or mediate on behalf of the rest of humanity. Participant 1F expressed this sentiment in the following way: “Well, I cannot compare the role that Jesus plays with that of the ancestors. Jesus mediates on behalf of the world but the ancestors look after their clans. They speak to God on behalf of the living, so that God may look with favour on them”.

Thus, the participants seemed to argue that Jesus’ role is universal and entails the facilitation of reconciliation between God and the rest of humanity, whereas the ancestors look after the welfare of their clans or communities. That is probably why Opoku (1978:37) contends that the ancestors “act as friends at court to intervene between man and the Supreme Being and to get prayers and petitions answered more quickly and effectively”. This implies that the ancestors do not substitute Christ but provide additional support in supplicating on behalf of the living in their clan to God in order for Him to respond with favour towards their pleas. Hence, the role of Christ was said not to be comparable with that of the ancestors. Eventually, this line of thought seemed to discredit the notion that Christianity and ATR are a paradox (Mndende 2009:8), as well as the argument that one has to abandon their African traditional belief systems to be a ‘*bona fide*’ Christian (Jarvis 2009:44). Hirst’s (2005:4) observation on this matter seems to be accurate – that for nominal Christians, both Christianity and ATR are thought to be related systems of thought and practice.

Effects of blending Christianity and ATR to identity

The last research question looked into the crisis which may emerge out of the juxtapositioning of Christianity and African Traditional Religion. It sought to establish whether the people who juxtapose Christianity and ATR do have or do not have any identity crisis, or can be said to assume dual identities. This is important because scholars such as Oosthuizen (2011:279) observed that “[t]aking on Christianity has often led to a crisis of identity”, and this is true for Christians who belong to the so-called Mainline or Reformed churches. In this debate, Oosthuizen (2011:279) argues that “[i]n the Mainline churches the crisis of identity lies in the fact that many of their members wish to receive the benefits of traditional religion, such as their spontaneity in liturgy and their healing procedures” but do not get these.

Rather, it is the African Independent/Initiated Churches (AICs) that have incorporated these components into their liturgy and are not afraid to publicly acknowledge that fact. Even in this study, the participants who belonged to Mainline churches, such as the United Presbyterian Church or the Methodist Church of Southern

African, seemed to suffer from incidents of criticism or discrimination. Therefore, they characterised their churches as rigid and non-accommodative. They said that they are often misunderstood, misjudged or accused of witchcraft by members of their churches. Participant 4P, for instance, stated that “[s]ome people refer to us as *intaka-mpuku* (bats). They say we are neither birds nor mice, but we fall on both sides.” These appear to be the same remarks, which Mndende (2009:8) made in the perception of people who juxtapose Christianity and African Religion. She regarded them as people who are “neither fish nor flesh”. In other words, the people who juxtapose Christianity and ATR are often negatively labelled or referred to by derogatory names, such as bats – in this case implying that one is neither a bird nor a mouse, or as neither fish nor flesh.

Since they are thought to be “sitting on the fence” (Mndende 2009:8), these people are unjustifiably judged and criticised. In some instances, they feel rejected by their own respective churches. Participant 10F, for instance, noted that she regularly feels rejected at her church unless she is visiting the Zionist church. This is because “[i]n Zionist churches, one is permitted to use candles, and to also pray for water. But at my church, some people see me as a witch when I do that. So, we face discrimination” (P10F). Participant 7 also corroborated this sentiment. She said that “[i]n many cases, I have been accused of being a witch. But the people who make such accusations would end up coming to me, in need of my services” (P7F). This means that the people who juxtapose Christianity and ATR are often judged without any prior consideration as to what their perceptions are in relation to identity and self-awareness.

Nonetheless, these perceptions seem neither to question the identity of participants nor have any lasting negative effects on their personalities. Instead, they interpreted these forms of criticism as just the socio-religious perceptions and remarks of other people on their lived experiences as African Christians who are Christian and traditional healers. The central issue was that they neither questioned their identity nor doubted the importance of the services that they provided to their respective communities as traditional healers. Instead, they argued that the juxtapositioning of Christianity and ATR does not in any way distort or misconstrue their identity. Rather, “[i]t helps one to center themselves, as they are aware of both worlds – being Christian and African” (P9M). Participant 1F also stated that the coming together of these two faiths does not distort her identity, but rather consolidates it, as the two religious traditions supplement each other in the reinforcement of a unified worldview. She argued that there are things that Christianity does not explain, but the African Traditional Religion does. For example, she said “things like witchcraft, *oohili*³, or *ukuthwetyulwa*⁴ are undermined in Christianity, but we take them seriously in African Religion”.

This narrative therefore speaks to the consolidation of identity rather than an identity crisis. The participants appeared to consolidate rather than alter their identities by embracing these two religious traditions – juxtaposing Christianity and African

³ There is no direct translation of this term into English. But *uhili/tikoloshe* (singular) may be described as dwarf-like creatures that are used by witches to peruse evil ends or to cause harm against other people, including their enemies (Mokhoathi 2020:8).

⁴ There is also no direct translation of this term into English, but *ukuthwetyulwa* may be interpreted as the taking away of someone through witchcraft to an alien place (forest, river, desert, or mountain) while one is assumed to be dead by the members of his/her family (Mokhoathi 2020:8).

Traditional Religion. Identity refers “to each person’s biographical arrangement of meanings and interpretations that form a somewhat coherent sense of ‘who am I?’” (McGuire 2002:52). This is the general understanding of identity in this study. Because identity is consolidated through various intersections, McGuire (2002:52) noted that “a woman might describe herself as a mother, a wife, a Catholic, a Polish-American, a member of the town volunteer ambulance squad, in the church choir, and vice president of the PTA.” These various roles are deemed to represent not merely her formal memberships, but more importantly, the social locations of her identity; and religion, pervades all such social roles in relatively undifferentiated societal levels.

This implies that a single person may have various roles, such as the women portrayed in the above citation, but without losing his or her identity or having to be regarded as someone assuming dual or multiple identities. Instead, all these various roles collectively work to consolidate a unified sense of being, from which the social locations of his or her identity are retrieved. This is the same with religion. One, for instance, may be a Jew by birth, a Christian by conversion, and a Protestant by orientation, yet have a single and consolidated identity. The various components – being a Jew, a Christian and Protestant – may be seen as consolidating a single rather than altering one’s sense of identity, seeing that they are all separate locations of identity. This implies that the experiencers of African Christianity speak of the consolidation of identity rather than dichotomisation in the juxtapositioning of Christianity and African Traditional Religion.

Conclusion

The voices of the experiencers of African Christianity – those who are Christian and African religionists at the same time, seem to contradict that of non-experiencers in the form of conservative Christians and rigorist African religionists. Even though both conservative Christians and rigorist African religionists agree that the two religious systems – Christianity and African Traditional Religion, do not mix and should be kept apart, their position has been questioned by the experiencers of this realism, who strongly argue that the two religious traditions are related systems of thought and practice. This gives us an indication that there are at least three interpretations into this phenomena – the juxtapositioning of Christianity and African Traditional Religion. The first is that of conservative Christians, who argue that African Christians must do away with their cultural and religious customs in order to be fully incorporated into Christianity because their cultural and traditional customs conflict with the revealed word of God. The second is that of rigorist African religionists, who maintain that the coming together of Christianity and African Traditional Religion is a contradiction; therefore, the African Traditional Religion must not be juxtaposed with Christianity. The last perspective on the matter is that of nominal Christians who argue that Christianity and African Traditional Religion are related systems of thought and practice, and therefore can be juxtaposed together. In light of these various perceptions, the latter was the one that was discovered by this study.

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