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(9) CHRISTIANITY AND TRADITIONAL AFRICAN RELIGIONS

Tabona Shoko

Introduction

It is widely held that western writers took the leading part in writing about African religion, more so than indigenous writers. This is so because western writers had adequate resources such as funds to produce journals and pamphlets as well as Bibles. The advent of Christian missionaries in Africa saw the African Traditional Religions (ATRs) being largely portrayed negatively. In their writings they deliberately used derogatory terms such as 'primitive', *juju*, 'paganism', 'superstition', 'barbaric' and other terms which denote negative connotations about African Traditional Religions. Since most of these writers were missionaries and colonial administrators and agents, they wanted to convert people to their own religion and took the jurisdiction rights of the Africans. Their aim was to downplay African Traditional Religions and have many converts to Christianity. As a result, up till now, many Africans dissociate themselves from their traditional values under the guise of Christianity as if the two religions were radical opposites. However, it seems there is a meeting point between the two religions and that they are not totally opposed to one another, in fact they appear to complement one another. It is from this background that this essay seeks to explore the scholarly writings on Christianity and African Traditional Religions in Africa. The writings of scholars such as J.S. Mbiti, J.K. Olupona, D.E. Thomas, B.J. Phiri, L. Mages, R.J. Gehman and M.F.C. Bourdillon will be explored. These scholars have noted the relationship between Christianity and African Traditional Religion in Africa in different levels and terms.

Relationship between Christianity and African Traditional Religion

The interaction between Christianity and African Traditional Religion has been a subject of serious discussion amongst scholars. In fact, since setting foot upon African soil, missionaries and academics have attempted to understand and interpret African Traditional Religions. Western missiologists, religious historians and political scientists have produced numerous academic studies about the encounter between Christianity and African Traditional Religion.[1] There has been a lot of negative portrayal of African Traditional Religion. A great number of the foreign investigators used misleading terms in describing the people's beliefs of Africans. Amongst such terms are primitive, savage, fetishism, *juju,* heathenism, paganism, animism, witchcraft, idolatry, and polytheism. According to Joseph Omosade Awolalu it is obvious that these words are inappropriate in describing African religion.[2]

Positions of Relationship

A sizeable number of studies have been conducted on the relationship between African Traditional Religion and Christianity or the Bible and Biblical hermeneutics by scholars such as Musa Dube,[3] John

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[1] Inus Daneel, *Quest for Belonging: Introduction to a Study of African Independent Churches*. Gweru: Mambo Press (1987), 30.
[2] Joseph Omosade Awolalu, "African Traditional Religion," in *Studies in Comparative Religion* 9, no.1 (1975), 35.
[3] Musa Dube, A.M. Mbuvi and Dora Mbuvayesango, *Postcolonial Perspectives In African Biblical Interpretations.* Atlanta: Soulen and Soulen (2012).

Mbiti,[4] Gerald West[5] and Lovemore Togarasei.[6] Most Biblical scholars explain the relationship between African Traditional Religion and the Bible in two ways that are closely related yet distinct. The two models are the 'dialectic' and the 'dialogic' models.[7] The dialectic accounts for the discontinuity between the Bible and African Traditional Religion while the dialogic model accounts for continuity for it facilitates dialogue between the Bible and African Traditional Religions.

There are three positions that have been established by scholars to try to explain the relationship between Christianity and African Traditional Religion. As Charles Nyamiti states, the positions are, first, the 'exclusivist' approach which argues that salvation is found only in or through the explicit knowledge and confession of Christ. The second category is 'inclusivist' which argues that salvation or truth is also found in Christ but may be mediated through the non-Christian religions or philosophies apart from any explicit knowledge of Him. The last is the 'pluralist' approach that sees Christ as simply one means of salvation and truth amongst many others. The relationship between Christianity and African Traditional Religions cannot be explained under one position; this is the reason why scholars have formulated the three key terms to explain it.[8]

Christianity and African Traditional Religion as Allies

The two religions, Christianity and African Traditional Religion, have been depicted as having some similarities, and that as allies they share some common traits, despite initial hostilities. According to John Mbiti, Christianity, the religion which puts its faith in Jesus Christ, came to Africa shortly after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.[9] Since then, it has spread to other parts of Africa and remained firm. Although Christianity spread so rapidly in Africa in the latter half of the twentieth century, it faced many challenges. But in the minds of the people, the religion is still associated with Europe and America for it is from there that the majority of white Christian missionaries came. At one time, overseas missionaries and their African converts condemned African Traditional Religions in the worst terms possible. But Mbiti argues that African Traditional Religions and Christianity have become allies, unofficially, one has prepared the ground for the accommodation of the other. The Christian idea of the church has parallels with African traditional life in which kinship and the extended family play a central role. African Christians seem to accommodate Christianity readily into their traditional world view. This is taking place particularly around the notion of God. They give up certain ideas, beliefs and practices in dealing with humans, as proclaimed in Christianity. There are also moral and ethical codes which Africans find similar to their traditional morals. For Mbiti, the church is the Christian family in which all are related to one another through faith and baptism in Jesus Christ. The church also includes those who died and those who are still alive.[10] This is similar to the African view of the family of both the living and the departed. In reading some aspects of the Bible, African Christianity finds many aspects that resonate with ancient Jewish life. This makes it easy to feel that the Bible belongs to them and that they belong to the Bible.[11] In this sense, African Christians then view Jesus as addressing himself to them and within their own context.

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[4] John Samuel Mbiti, *Introduction to African Traditional Religion.* Nairobi: East African Educational Publications (1994).
[5] Gerald West, *Biblical hermeneutics of liberation: Modes of Reading the Bible in the South African Context,* Mary Knoll, NY and Pietermaritzburg: Obis Books and Cluster Publications (1995).
[6] Lovemore Togarasei, *The Bible in Context: Essay Collection,* Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press (2009).
[7] Oyekan Owomoyela, *Culture and Customs of Zimbabwe,* West Port: Greenwood Publishing Group (2002).
[8] Charles Nyamiti, "The Doctrine of God," In *A Reader in African Christian Theology*, ed John Parratt (London: SPCK, 1987) 58-68.
[9] Mbiti, *Introduction to African Traditional Religion,* 180.
[10] Mbiti, *Introduction to African Traditional Religion,* 190.
[11] Mbiti, *Introduction to African Traditional Religion,* 189.

Jesus' mission to the sick, the poor, the hungry and the oppressed becomes relevant in their hearts.[12] People feel he is concerned about them in their constant needs.

In pursuit of the amicable relationship between Christianity and African Traditional Religion, Richard Gehman refers to Mbiti who argues that African Traditional Religion should be considered a preparation for the gospel. In his argument traditional religion is fulfilled in Christianity.[13] Expounding the relationship between the two religions Gehman argues that the relationship is not merely one of perfections and imperfections nor is it merely one of promise and fulfilment. In so many ways Christianity is compatible with African Traditional Religion. In other words biblical revelation completes that which is vaguely perceived, it corrects that which was partly understood though with distortion. For Gehman the theological emphasis of African Traditional Religion and Christianity differs in that African traditional Religion focuses on humanity while biblical revelation focuses on God. African traditional Religion, he observed, is anthropocentric.[14] This means that African Traditional Religion tries to make the divine powers an instrument of humanity's personal welfare. By performing rites, humanity's aim is to compel them into God's service. According to Tokunboh Adeyemo the African people do not seek God for their own sake; they seek God in worship for what they can get out of God.[15] J.S. Mbiti says that it is a means to exploit rather than veneration. However biblical revelation is theocentric, focusing on God. God is not only the origin of humanity but God is the ultimate goal and purpose of humanity's life. The chief end of humanity is to glorify God and to enjoy God for ever. This contrast between being anthropocentric and being theocentric is not a minor difference. It strikes at the very heart of African Traditional Religion and the Christian faith.[16] This means that the central concerns of Christianity and African Traditional Religion are poles apart.

Jesse Mugambi is one prominent theologian who has made a contribution on the relationship between Christianity and African Traditional Religion. He argues that Christianity and African traditional beliefs have some similarities in which kinship and extended family plays a central role. The church thrives in the Christian family in which all are related to one another through faith and baptism in Jesus Christ. The church also indicates those who have died and those who still live in this world are similar to the African view of the family of both the living and the departed.[17] Under this notion one can add the issue of sainthood in Christianity with that of ancestorhood in African Traditional Religion. Both saints and African ancestors are the departed ones but in different religious systems.

A renowned African Christian scholar, Kwame Bediako, is of the view that God as proclaimed by the missionaries was already worshipped in African Traditional Religions. This is to say that even before the advent of Christianity in Africa, the Africans were already aware of and were worshipping the God which the missionaries thought they were introducing to Africa.[18] African theologians such as J.S. Mbiti and E.B. Idowu argue that there are many points of contact between Christianity and African Traditional Religion, including the concept of God, morality, communalism and other aspects. They criticise the foreignness of Christianity insisting that African Traditional Religions are a vital source of theology in Africa. These theologians are guided by theology of continuity, maintaining that Christianity fulfils the religious longing found in African Traditional Religions.

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[12] Mbiti, *Introduction to African Traditional Religion,* 189.
[13] Richard Gehman, *African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspectives.* Kampala: East African Publication Publishers (1989), 249.
[14] Gehman, *African Traditional Religion,* 253.
[15] Tokunbo Adeyemo, cited in Gehman, *African Traditional Religion*, 255.
[16] Mbiti cited in Gehman *African Traditional Religion,* 260.
[17] Jesse Mugambi, *African Theology: An Introduction.* Nairobi: East Africa Publishers (1989), 15.
[18] Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity: the Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa.* Cumbria: Regnum Books (1992), 125.

Ebolaji Idowu also stands in solidarity with those who stress continuity between Christianity and African Traditional Religion. He teaches that all worship is valid before God, that the impulse to worship comes from God and thus resulting practices of worship is Yahweh's.[19] Idowu's premise is that there is only one God who reveals himself in different ways to all creeds. All religions are therefore the result of God's loving activity among all the people of the religions. While the encounter between Christianity and African Traditional Religion has been characterised by the skewed power relationships in favour of the former, it remains possible for the religions to enter fruitful dialogue. But critics of this stance have argued that there is no common ground between the two religions. They argue that while it is possible for Christianity to be engaged in conversation with other religions of the book, African Traditional Religions do not have any sacred tests that could be consulted for clarification in the context of lofty theological debates. They would regard African Traditional Religions as a passing phase and as victims of social change.

On the relationship between Christianity and African Traditional Religion, Bizeck J. Phiri argues that the acceptance of European mission Christianity amongst the local people was justified by the various benefits of formal or European mission education. Educated Africans acquired wide knowledge of the world, were able read about western and Jewish cultures and could now compare, write, explain and be proud of their own cultures, customs and traditions.[20] The expansion of the intellectual horizon of the Africans, eased by Christianity, enhanced a new African self-understanding and self-appreciation beyond the immediate traditional circle of kinship and lineage. Also the availability of the Bible translations and other literature on local culture at a time when Africans were under foreign European domination had the inevitable consequence of arousing deep loyalties towards the indigenous cause. In other words the needs of nationalism were properly established.[21] However, there are some conflicts.

Areas of Conflict

Studies on the relationship between African Traditional Religion and Christianity have also shown that there are areas of conflict between the two religions.

John Mbiti argues that there are also conflicts between the Christian life and the life of those who follow only African Traditional Religions. Some of the areas where conflicts arise concern traditional African rituals especially those of offerings in connection with the departed, African initiation rites, marriage customs, the place of sorcery, evil magic and witchcraft in African life, and methods of dealing with disease, misfortune and suffering.[22]

The main differences between Christianity and African Traditional Religion exist in the domain of their respective claims and in their organisation. Christianity has a founder, sacred book, creeds and dogmas. African Traditional Religions are expressed through cultic rites and religious practices. Oral traditions and repetitive rituals convey beliefs in traditional religions. Mbiti holds that some of the world religions like Christianity and Islam have founders who started them which is not the case when it comes to African Traditional Religions. The traditional religions have no identifiable founder. It is believed the religions evolved slowly through many centuries, as people responded to the situations of their life and reflected upon their experiences. Above all they differ on how a human being enters a blessed eternity in the presence of a holy and just God.

Okot p'Bitek takes a critical position to those scholars who have been viewed as friendly in furthering the study of African Traditional Religions. For example, p'Bitek views such scholars as Evans Pritchard,

[19] Ebolaji Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition*. London: SCM Press (1973), 20.
[20] Bizeck Phiri, "Crises of Life in African Religion and Christianity," *Journal of Humanities* 3, no.1 (2001): 17-21.
[21] Phiri, "Crises of Life," 17-21.
[22] Mbiti, *Introduction to African Traditional Religion,* 195.

John Mbiti and other Christian missionaries and clergy as enemies of African Traditional Religions. For him, they were not truly concerned with furthering the faith or making converts to African religion; rather, they were Christian apologists who sought to show that the noble savage was capable of religious thought and that Jesus Christ was the fulfilment of their biblical allegiance.[23] p'Bitek's argument alleges that even the children of Africa are misguided by failing to view African Traditional Religions as a faith in its own right. Instead of respecting their own sacred religion and culture they denied any sacred qualities worthy of worship that exist within their culture. They are furthering the hegemonic Christian continuity which propagates the theory that Christianity is the fulfilment of all faiths. He then criticised Mbiti for what he calls 'Hellenising and Christianising the Christian deity'.[24] However, p'Bitek has since been criticised too for making a literal bombast against other scholars, and practising racism in reverse.

Another scholar, Newel Booth, pointed out that 'many western students of African historians of religions, anthropologists among others, exploit Africa for their own academic or ideological purposes'.[25] In a similar vein, Robin Horton is highly critical and suggested that the Judeo-Christian spectacles being used by several African Christian-trained scholars is 'more a bane than a boon in the study of African religion'.[26] Moreover, p'Bitek was quite categorical in his assertion that African scholars of the traditional religions are intellectual smugglers who dress up in African deities' borrowed garbs using them as mercenaries in foreign battles, none of which was in the interests of African people.[27]

One historian of religion, Jacob Olupona, also made a significant contribution on the relationship between Christianity and African Traditional Religion. According to Olupona any meeting of two different realities incurs the risk of conflict. His observation was that when Christianity came into contact and interacted with African Traditional Religion, it caused a pattern of disruption and division. As a result of its biased approach, it divided the community into two camps, with one containing the converts who looked down upon the old traditional religion and culture, and the other, loyalist adherents of African Traditional Religions. The net result therefore was a struggle between Christianity and African Traditional Religion. Due to this encounter, traditional culture was bruised and badly shaken and many Africans were Christianised to such an extent that they lampooned traditional religion and culture.[28]

Another scholar, Emmanuel Babalola, also made a contribution on the relationship between Christianity and African Traditional Religion. For him Christianity has been responsible for the erosion of African Traditional Religion. He affirms that proponents of Christianity have negatively labelled African Traditional Religion a 'non-reality'.[29] It has also been observed that many African Christians look upon African Traditional Religion with disdain. At certain historical moments, the proponents of Christian expansion into Africa operated deliberately to destroy African Traditional Religion and cultural forms that had guided the African people before the incursion of Christianity. The African evangelists worked tirelessly to propel negative myths and propaganda about African people, particularly their supposedly inherent inability to conceptualise the Deity.[30]

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[23] Laurent Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Tradition of Abundant Life.* Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers (1997), 5.
[24] Okot p'Bitek, *African Religions in Western Scholarship*. Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau (1971), 5.
[25] Newel Booth, *African Religion: A Symposium*. New York: Nok Publishers (1977), 12.
[26] Robin Horton, "Judaeo-Christian Spectacles: Boon or Bane to the Study of African Religions? *Cahiers d'etudes Africaines*, 24, no 96 (1984) 391-436.
[27] P'Bitek, African Religions, 5.
[28] Jacob Olupona, *African Traditional Religion in Contemporary Society*. New York: Paragon House (1989), 114,-128).
[29] Emmanuel Babalola, "The Impact of African Traditional Religion and Culture Upon the Aladura Churches," in *Asian Journal of Theology* 6, no 1 (1992):130-140.
[30] Babalola, "Impact of African Traditional Religion," 130-140.

Douglas E. Thomas also wrote on Christianity and African Traditional Religion. He argues that Christianity has barely touched the core of the life of most African peoples. In places such as northern Uganda at the turn of the century, 99% of families relied on their indigenous religious faith in moments of crisis. Although many African people are forced to embrace Christianity in moments of existential crisis, they immediately revert to the faith of their forebears. Okot p'Bitek states, 'The Africans' embrace of Christian religio-culture was nothing more than accepting another god into their already existing pantheon.'[31]

In the same mode of identifying the contrasting features between Christianity and African Traditional Religion, Richard Gehman also argues that African Traditional Religion beliefs in humanity and sin contrast with Christianity. For him, Scripture is clear in showing that humanity's basic problem is transgression of the law of God and rebellion against God (1 John 3:4) whereas evil in African Traditional Religion is basically that which conflicts with the interests of the community and the traditions of the past. Sin in Scripture is always related to God. Sin is sin because it is contrary to the will of God and contrary to God's very nature.[32] For Gehman, African Traditional Religion does not teach that sin is rebellion against God or the transgression of God's law. Instead, the traditional way of life is the best life which has been given by the ancestral spirits, the divinities and by God-self. There is no understanding of a spiritual new birth, a need to grow and progress in the knowledge of God. Since the *status quo* is the best life, man's primary concern is material prosperity.[33]

Richard Gehman also states that African Traditional understanding of salvation contrasts with the gospel. In biblical terms, salvation is the deliverance or release from sin and all it affects, unto a new life which is eternal in nature and duration. Salvation in biblical terms is past, present and future. In African Traditional Religion, emphasis is upon a good life here and now. The good life is abundant in vital force.[34] In African Traditional Religion good health means a large and growing family with many possessions and disruption of the *status quo* reflects displeasure of the ancestors. But life can be restored in its fullness upon requisite ritual activity. In a way the determinants of right and wrong are the dictates of society and its traditions. In a related observation made by a Zimbabwean anthropologist, Michael Bourdillon, mission churches amongst the Shona people tend to emphasise the individual rather than the family or neighbourhood groups. Christian rituals tend to break down rural communities and the social and communal aspects of traditional religion are impaired.[35]

Bizeck Phiri also expressed an element of ambivalence in the relationship between Christianity and African Traditional Religion. In his conception, Christianity introduced new modern identities to traditional African societies. Through Christianity, Africans acquired such new identities as full members of Christian churches or denominations, fully ordained priests, ministers, or bishops, teachers, catechists, elders or deacons, while many others became trained carpenters, builders as well as junior clerical workers in colonial government offices. They received a new sense of themselves as African people as well as some of the tools with which to become independent states.[36] However this is not to say that Christianity has been without what may be considered as negative effects on the local cultural identities. During the early stages of the late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century enterprise, Christianity condemned many traditional social and religious beliefs and practices as evil or pagan, and sought to replace them with

[31] Okot p'Bitek cited in Douglas E. Thomas, *African Traditional Religion in the Modern Word*. London: MacFarland and Company (2005), 49.
[32] Gehman, *African Traditional Religion*, 254.
[33] Gehman, *African Traditional Religion*, 254.
[34] Gehman, *African Traditional Religion*, 254.
[35] Michael Bourdillon, *The Shona Peoples: An Ethnography of the Contemporary Shona, with Special Reference to their Religion*, Gweru: Mambo Press (1976), 285.
[36] Phiri, "Crises of Life," 17-21.

Christian-cum-European beliefs and practices. As a result, local converts to mission Christianity were frequently alienated from their own societies as they could no longer easily identify themselves with the values and meaning of their traditional societies, but neither could they identify themselves fully with the new Christian-cum-western way of life to which they had been introduced.[37]

Laurent Magesa has also contributed on the relationship between Christianity and African Traditional Religion. He states that despite the strong influence of Christianity in many areas of African life, the basic attitudes and religious philosophy of many Africans have been similar to that expressed many years ago by a Central African, Kwena Man, to David Livingstone: 'To be plain with you… we should like you much better if you traded with us and then went away without forever boring us with preaching the word of God of yours.'[38] In this light, Mbiti observed that traditional concepts still form the essential background of many African people. And one of the common complaints of Christian leaders concerns the 'duality' of African Christians' way of life, implying that African Christians do not always adhere to religious and ritual demands that are formulated and expressed by leaders of their churches. Many times they seek comfort in their own religious systems even though these may not correspond exactly to what is inculcated and expected by Christian leaders. Such African conceptions of God, the world and morality continue to penetrate Christianity in Africa. Gabriel Setiolane argues that, because of the cultural form in which it is clothed, the Christianity of the missionaries cannot be assimilated nor help African people to face up to difficult situations. Many African professors, ministers of government and members of Parliament have been known to revert in secret to the diviner or medium in order to know what lies ahead, while at the same time vigorously protesting in public that diviners are relics of by-gone primitive times and that they possess no mystical powers.[39]

Furthermore, John Parratt states that the sharp division between western missionary Christianity and pagan African culture tended to lead to a dilemma in the experience of many African Christians. Whilst some African converts were able to break completely with their traditional heritage, more frequently the adoption of the new faith produced Christians with a 'foot in two worlds', who found it difficult to reconcile their sense of belonging to their African heritage with a western form of Christianity.[40] It is argued that there are areas of African culture which throw light on aspects of the Christian faith and which may be helpful compared with them. For instance, the concept of divine life force among Africans may be seen as corresponding to the activity of the Holy Spirit in the world. Even the role of the ancestors in African Traditional Religions may throw some light on the doctrine of the communion of saints.

All the above scholars tend to agree that the relationship between Christianity and African Traditional Religion has been a mixture of 'love and hate'. But since religion is dynamic, some changes occurred that have bred the phenomenon of African Independent Churches.

African Independent Churches

The study of African Independent (or Indigenous) Churches is best understood in the religious studies depicted in the history and development of Christianity in Africa.[41] Scholars in several disciplines such as Social Science, History, Theology and Religious Studies especially in the fields of Christian History and Missiology, have produced a multiplicity of studies that explain the origins, growth and development of this new religious experience in Africa from within their respective ideologies. Adogame provides a concise survey of certain outstanding scholars who have contributed in this field such as Horton (1962,

[37] Phiri, "Crises of Life," 17-21.
[38] Magesa, *African Religion,* 5.
[39] Gabriel Setiolane in Magesa, *African Religion*, 8.
[40] John Parrat, *A Reader in African Theology*. London: SPCK (1987), 8.
[41] See Tabona Shoko, *Karanga Indigenous Religion in Zimbabwe*. Farnham, UK: Ashgate (2007), 164-5.

1967), Wellborn and Orgot (1966), Peel (1968) and Barrette (1968). These explain the phenomenon of African independence as signs of social and cultural change. Linton (1972) and Barber (1972) present the new churches as exemplifications of stress and adjustive phenomena. But for Blander (1953), Anderson (1958), Koebben (1960), Sundkler (1961), independent churches are sparked by political and socio-economic protest especially in the wake of colonialism and apartheid in South Africa.[42] Whilst Oosthuizen identifies the same trend in South Africa and Amanze (1988) in Botswana, M. Daneel pointed out both social, cultural, economic and political factors and above all religious grounds as causative for the sprouting of the Shona Zion churches, and as signs of theological protest caused by different doctrinal interpretations in the mainline Christian churches in Zimbabwe. It is within these broad causal explanatory models that we are able to locate the genesis and proliferation of the African Independent Churches.[43]

Some theologians have observed that worship in mission churches tended to be dull for most Africans, and this is the reason why some African Christians have broken off from mission churches and formed their own churches where they are able to incorporate more freely some traditional African customs and practices into their Christian life. According to Mbiti, this affects the form of prayers, music, hymns, songs and festivals and attitudes to dreams and visions as well as the organisation which is modified according to the ways that seem to fit the followers best. Much of the traditional worldview is retained in many of the indigenous churches. But in the course of history, Christianity and African Traditional Religions have undergone a paradigm shift that has seen a new phenomenon in the form of interreligious dialogue.

Interreligious Dialogue

Some scholars such as Ezra Chitando observed that at the formal level, Christianity has witnessed profound shifts in its attitude towards other communities of faith. Within the Catholic Church, the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) ushered in a more positive era. The church officially acknowledged the reality of religious pluralism in the 'Declaration on the relation of the church to Non-Christian religions'.[44] African theologians have been forceful and eloquent in their plea for dialogue between Christianity and African Traditional Religion. Catholic and Protestant African theologians have maintained that until Christianity takes on an African flavour by coming to terms or dialogue with African Traditional Religions and cultural realities, it will remain a foreign religion.[45] In the same vein for E. Chitando there are many points of meeting between Christianity and African Traditional Religions, including the concept of God, morality, communalism and other aspects. They criticise the foreignness of Christianity, insisting that African Traditional Religions are a valid source of theology in Africa.[46] Other theologians argue that African Traditional Religions are a valid path to salvation and they should be treated with respect.

Chitando states that it is important to note that African communities have forced Christianity to recognise the presence and vitality of African Traditional Religions. At gatherings, steps are taken to ensure that all religious sensibilities are not wilfully trampled upon. In communities where Christians observe a certain diet, different cooking pots are used to ensure that the Christians do not feel out of place at such gatherings. In some instances Christians also participate in ceremonies to honour ancestors. When it is their turn to drink beer from the calabash that would be circulating, they ask traditionalists to stand in for

[42] Afe Adogame, *Celestial Church of Christ: The Politics of Cultural Identity in a West African Prophetic Charismatic Movement*, Frankfurt Am Main: Peter Lang (1999), 2.
[43] Shoko, *Karanga Indigenous Religion,* 164-5.
[44] Frans Verstraelen, *Christianity in a New Key: New Voices and Vistas through Intercontinental Communication*. Gweru: Mambo Press, 1996: 27.
[45] Parratt, Reader in African Christian Theology, 11.
[46] Ezra Chitando, "Rewrapping the Christian Faith Indigenously: A Preliminary Study of African Theology in Zimbabwe," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa,* 2002: 3-21.

them. This tolerance is also seen in the acknowledgement of ritual specialists such as the Varemba (or Vamwenye). Members of the community allow these specialists to slaughter beasts for communal ceremonies as they observe stringent dietary regulations.[47]

Jonathan Tserayi posits that Africans have brought Christianity and African traditionalists into a dialogue by borrowing heavily from both the religions. They have sought to maximise benefits available within the two religions, without subscribing to the demonization that fundamentalist Christians seek to promote. They have brought the two religions into an ongoing dialogue, as they grapple with what it means to be 'truly African and Christian'.[48] Millions of Africans allow African Traditional Religions to whisper to them words of wisdom and encouragement. African Christians wish to embrace both religious systems because they regard African Traditional Religions as meeting real needs by procuring salvation for social ills, for the evil spirits, and for witchcraft which they experience as 'real', while Christianity is looked upon for providing salvation in the hereafter. In so doing, the African Christian feels that he or she has bought a double insurance for both salvation in time of trouble and misfortune, and salvation in heaven, by putting one foot in African Traditional Religions and the other foot in the Christian religion.[49]

Furthermore, Tserayi also states that, when confronted with problems, many African Christians tend not to exactly demonise Christianity but to shift their focus to traditional practices. When these Christians turn to the African Traditional Religion, they refer to it as 'doing the real thing'.[50] Michael Bourdillon in his book, *The Shona Peoples* (1976), carries a picture of Mr Lazarus Zonde Gwanzura, a widely respected *n'anga* (traditional healer) from Mufakose suburb in Harare. According to him, there is no discrepancy between Christianity and his way of healing. He himself is a Christian…[51] The two accounts are represented in the diviner's words that it is the diviner's conviction that Christianity and African Traditional Religion can be perfectly synchronised. If anything, according to him, these two religions complement one another; they do not, for him, conflict with one other. Their followers are the ones who have conflicts about them.

Finally, the diviner sees the unity in diversity when she or he looks at the two religions under discussion. This is of course reminiscent of Pannikar's rainbow model whose summary is the profound reality that one colour seems to exclude the other colours, when actually the others are within that colour. Given this, one can argue that there is good effect at meeting points of Christianity and African Traditional Religions.[52]

Conclusion

By way of conclusion, one can state that Christianity and African Traditional Religions have many touching points where they meet as friends. But there are also other areas where they conflict. Although Christianity has submitted itself as superior to African Traditional Religions, African theologians now portray an accurate picture that puts both religions on a par.

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[47] Chitando, "Rewrapping the Christian Faith", 10.
[48] Jonathan Tserayi, "A Meeting Point for *Christianity and African Traditional* Religions," *Chiedza* (2000), 46.
[49] Tserayi, "A Meeting Point for Christianity", 46.
[50] Tserayi, "A Meeting Point for Christianity", 46.
[51] Tserayi, "A Meeting Point for Christianity", 46.
[52] Panikkar, *The Interreligious Dialogue*. New York: Paulist Press, 1978, 19-20.

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