

**Traditional Religion and its Impact on the Practices of Apostolic and Zionist Churches in
Zimbabwe.**

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Abstract

Traditional religion is core to Zimbabwean people and, its impact has been felt by many Christian churches in Zimbabwe. Churches that are affected most are Apostolic and Zionist churches. These churches have promoted syncretism because they have mixed practices from African Traditional Religion (ATR) and Christianity in their worship and practices. While there have been attempts, especially by mainline churches, to extinguish traditional religion in the country, the efforts paid less because traditional practices are in the DNA of Zimbabwean people. This paper uncovers the practices found in Apostolic and Zionist churches that are strongly believed to have been borrowed from ATR. Most African Initiated Churches (AICs) have some elements of ATR within them. This work attempts to trace the history of ATR in Zimbabwe and expose those practices in AICs that are believed to have been copied from ATR.

List of Abbreviations

- AICs: African Independent Churches
- ATR: African Traditional Religion

Glossary

The vernacular words are defined in this section to help the reader understand their meaning, as they are used in this work.

Imimoya yomdeni: the Ndebele word for family spirits

Inkosi Yezulu: the Lord of Heavens

Izangoma: spirit mediums

Izanunsi: diviners

Iwosana: rain initiators

Mhondoro: Lion spirits

Midzimu: the Shona word for ancestral spirits

Musikavhanu: the other name for God, which means “Creator of all peoples.”

Mwari: Shona High God.

Ukutshaya Amathambo: another form of divination by casting of bones.

UMdali: the Creator

UNKulunkulu: the Ndebele name for God which means “the Great Great One.”

Concepts

Religion, African Initiated Churches, Zimbabwe, African traditional Religion, Christianity, African people, Africa, Religion in Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, Apostolic and Zionist Churches.

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A. Problem to be solved

Traditional Religion and Christianity are believed to be two worlds apart and that they do not share anything in common. However, it has not been so in Zimbabwe. Christians always fall back to African Traditional Religion (ATR). The Apostolic and Zionist Churches always find themselves adopting practices from ATR and bringing them to Christianity. There is a need to understand which practices have been borrowed from ATR and are now practiced in Apostolic and Zionist Churches.

B. Objectives of the Research

The objectives of this study are twofold. First, the study seeks to understand the history of traditional religion and Christianity in Zimbabwe and how ATR has survived to today. Second, the study aims at bringing to light those practices from ATR that have been adopted by the Apostolic and Zionist Churches in Zimbabwe. This study attempts to understand the practices that the Apostolic and Zionist churches have borrowed from ATR.

C. Organization of the Project

This work will use a qualitative research approach to meet its objectives. People from Apostolic and Zionist Churches are going to be interviewed. The extensive work of other scholars and researchers will be used to build up this work. Also, the researcher will invest time to interview the pastors and members of the Apostolic and Zionist churches. The researcher will also visit some of these churches to get first-hand information. The following is a proposed outline for this research:

- 1: Introduction
- 2: Background of Religion in Zimbabwe
- 3: ATR Practices found in Apostolic and Zionist Churches in Zimbabwe
- 4: Conclusion.

INTRODUCTION

The coming of Christianity to Africa fueled what we can term “the temporal death of African Traditional Religion (ATR) in Africa and in Zimbabwe to be specific. Africa, a once purely traditional society, began to shun its practices and adopted the Christian way of life. Temporal death here suggests that ATR had a time of being silenced (during the colonial era), but it has now been revived either in a transformed form or in its original form.

While ATR is believed to be in the process of dying in Zimbabwe, its practices have reemerged among many indigenous churches in Zimbabwe, with Apostolic and Zionist Churches encompassed. Traditional religion is no longer found in traditional shrines like it used to be in the past, nor is it being administered by traditional healers or spirit mediums, but it is now housed within the walls of some Christian churches and is now being overseen by the so-called men of God, pastors, bishops, and prophets. This will be revealed much in this research as this work seeks to bring to light all those practices in the Apostolic and Zionist Churches that are suspected to have been borrowed from ATR.

Oosthuizen (1969, p. 6) writes in regards to the rebirth of ATR and the state of Christianity in Africa, “The old gods are not yet dead. The old forms, including ancestor worship, have received greater significance since the rise of nationalism, so that festivals associated with the original pre-Christian religion have drawn thousands. The ancestor cult receives a new emphasis even from Christian leaders.” This shows how ATR has failed to be stamped out in Africa and how it has been reborn in a new form. The most interesting part is that ATR is now being emphasized by Christian leaders who are supposed to be the defenders of Christian faith at all costs. Church leaders like Isaiah Shembe (the founder of the Nazareth Church) from South Africa and Prophet Thabiso Ngwenya (founder of Faith in Christ International) from Zimbabwe are some Christian leaders who have accepted some ATR practices back into their churches.

Apostolic and Zionist Churches in Zimbabwe

When we talk of the churches that have been affected by ATR to a greater extent in Zimbabwe, we talk about Apostolic and Zionist churches. When the word “apostolic” is mentioned, one envisions the New Testament church of the book of Acts of the Apostles. An apostle, from the New Testament perspective, was a person who walked with Jesus and learned from Him. The early church was called the apostolic church for the reason of the presence of apostles within it nothing much. However, while the Apostolic Churches in Zimbabwe have no direct link to the apostles, those who subscribe to these churches believe that these churches emulate the apostolic church of the first century even though there are many differences between the two.. Also, when we talk of Zionists, another will think of those churches who advocate for the restoration of Jerusalem as the center of Christianity, but again this is not so in the Zimbabwean context. The Apostolic and Zionist churches in Zimbabwe are commonly referred to as “white garment churches” because of the type of robes that they wear. However, for the purpose of this work, such identification will not be used because nowadays we have most of the members of these churches donned in red, green, purple, and blue garments. African Zionist churches have very little connection to Western religions such as Christianity (Madise, 2005, p. 3). Shange argues that religious movements like Shembe and African Zionist Churches look beyond oppression to find what they perceive to be valuable ideas within Western cultural and religious fields (2013, pp. 33-34). These churches have seen a major break from Western theologies and have promoted the amalgamation of Christianity and traditional religion.

BACKGROUND OF RELIGION IN ZIMBABWE

The land that we call Zimbabwe today has been a religious land from the onset since its occupation by the Shona and the Ndebele people. First, the area was a purely traditional society. However, as time went on, Christianity began to set its foot through the activities of Western missionaries and the colonization of Africa. This led to a total change in both cultural practices and religious beliefs in the land. There is a time in history that ATR was strongly suppressed in Zimbabwe both by the Christian

missionaries and the colonial masters. This work separates the history of religion in Zimbabwe into three phases: the pre-colonial phase, the colonial phase, and the post-colonial phase. However, before venturing much into the history of religion in Zimbabwe, it is imperative to start by defining religion.

Religion Defined

Religion has been defined differently by many scholars depending on what ideas they want to convey to the world. For the purpose of this work, religion is viewed as covering all aspects of human life. It is seen as culture because it directs how people conduct their day-to-day activities. Harrison defines religion as a cultural system of commonly shared beliefs and rituals that provide a sense of ultimate meaning and purpose by creating an idea of reality that is sacred and supernatural (Harrison, 2006, p. 133). This definition accepts that religion is a way of life since it is a cultural system but also maintains that this cultural system goes a step further in trying to find the meaning of the sacred. Martineau, on the other hand, defines religion as a belief in an ever living God or a super being (1890, p. 304). This definition fails to consider religious groups such as Buddhism that do not believe in God at all. Buddhism believes that there is no God, but an individual can reach perfection on his own. If we restrict the definition of religion to a belief in an ever living God, we would not have done justice to these other religious groups. On the other hand, Frazer (1890, p. 354) defines religion as a merciful conciliation of powers superior to humans. Frazer views the purpose of religion as only mercy and forgiveness. This limits the function of religion, which goes beyond this scope. Religion is concerned with all aspects of human life and cannot be confined to mercy and forgiveness.

Many theorists believe that religion is a social construct. It forms the basis of how society lives. The likes of Girard (1988), Hobbes (1889: 53), and Durkheim (1965: 9) consider that religion, state, laws, and culture are social constructs there to warrant that society is less chaotic and operates efficiently. For Hobbes, religion would make part of the social contract that the human race goes into when ending the state of nature (1889, p. 53). The state of nature here is believed to be the time of violence and chaos (ibid, p. 53). Durkheim (1965, p. 9), on the other hand, views religion as a system of symbols by means of

which society becomes cognizant and aware of itself. Religion and culture are therefore believed to have brought order into the world as they promote consciousness in humanity. Praeg (2000, p. 1) argues that religion is just one of many structures in society that help bring about order. Like culture and other fields of society, religion gives individuals a sense of belonging; it is also a very important part of people's identity (Pickering 1984, pp. 193-194).

African Religion and Culture

Some scholars believe that African religion and culture have been despised and looked down upon and that there is a need to promote African culture. This kind of belief could be the one driving the Apostolic and Zionist churches to accommodate some practices from ATR within the church. Comby (1984, p. 166) argues that in the promulgation of Christianity, African culture was not considered. He states that, "It seems as if the concern for civilization was meant to force Africans to accept the western culture, norms, values and life style." It is in this regard that Brain (2005, p. 166) believes that this negative attitude in the propagation of Christianity gave rise to the African Independent Churches in the 20th Century. The rise of AICs gave the new dawn to African traditions and cultures. Within the AICs, there was born Apostolic and Zionist Churches that have accepted some ATR practices in the church.

Turaki (1999, pp. 17-19) is of the view that Christianity needs to be indigenized and that there is a need to remove all elements in Christianity that are Western and replace them with those that are African. This philosophy is also found in many indigenous Christian churches in Zimbabwe. However, removing elements in Christianity that are Western is removing Christianity at all. Accepting other Christian beliefs and rejecting others is not reasonable, since the Bible does not give us room to do that. For Tutu (1978), there is a need to redeem the hidden treasures contained in the African religion, and these hidden treasures can become a pillar of the new faith. The Zimbabwean people had their beliefs before the coming of Christianity, Tutu believes that there is a need to unlock those beliefs and bring them to Christianity so that Christianity may not be seen as alien to African people. This will help us understand the Apostolic

and Zionist churches who have gone an extra mile in trying to accommodate the hidden treasures of African culture.

The Pre-Colonial Phase

Before colonization, Zimbabwe was a purely traditional society, probably with Shona practices in the Eastern parts of the country and the Ndebele practices in the west. The Ndebele and Shona traditional religious practices were not very different. The concept of God existed between the two traditions a way before the coming of Christianity. There was also an emphasis on ancestral worship, and rituals formed an integral part of worship in these societies. The Shona and Ndebele religious beliefs are now so fused that one cannot readily see a remarkable difference between the two (Ncube, 1988, p. 20).

The Shona Traditional Religious Beliefs

The Shona people are believed to have entered what we call Zimbabwe today around the eleventh century. Probably, the most common belief among the Shona people is the *Mwari* cult. The term *Mwari* is used in relation to a deity or God. Ncube (p. 17) argues that in Shona cosmology, *Mwari* was understood to be beyond and above the human ancestral hierarchies. He further states that during a national crisis such as drought or war, *Mwari* could be approached through the senior lineage ancestors (*mhondoro*). According to traditional belief, *Mwari* was concerned with the fertility of crops and women. But then his role expanded to cover tribal and national politics when the Rozwi needed to consolidate their political control over the widely scathed vassals (Daneel, 1971). There are other names for *Mwari*; he is also known as “*Musikavhanu*” (creator of all peoples) and “*Dzivaguru*” (the great pool). For many Shona-speaking Zimbabweans, patrilineal ancestors (*midzimu*) play a central role in everyday life, overseeing the course of social and moral relations within the patriline and beyond (Engelke, 2007, p. 38). Rituals were also important in Shona traditional worship practices.

The Ndebele Traditional Religious Beliefs

The Ndebele people also believed in the existence of God, but more emphasis was also put on ancestor worship. God is known as *uNkulunkulu* (the Great Great One), *uMdali* (the Creator), and *Inkosi Yezulu* (the King of Heavens). For the Ndebele people, God cannot be approached directly. People pray through the ancestors who will in turn speak to God on behalf of humanity. Ancestors, as defined by Adogbo (2010), were human beings who had lived extraordinary and mysterious lives on earth after their death; they were canonized or deified as gods. Spirit mediums (*izangoma*), diviners (*izanunsi*), and rain initiators (*iwosana*) played a significant role in the life of the Ndebele society. They could convey the message of the ancestors to the people. The Ndebele people had their system of worship centered on ancestral spirits, the king being the chief priest in that system of belief (Ncube, p. 18). The king was directly involved in the religious life of the society.

The Colonial Era

Christianity could not penetrate Zimbabwe fully before colonization because the local people suspected this religion and did not trust it. The efforts of Robert Moffat before colonization failed to bear fruits because King Mzilikazi frustrated the work of the missionary in the region. King Mzilikazi believed that the teaching of the missionaries was not congruent with the cultural, religious, and military life of the Ndebele people. Even though King Mzilikazi gave Moffat a piece of land at “Inyati,” the local people decided to let the “teachers,” as the missionaries were called, live in the land but they did not accept the missionaries’ way of life (Gann, 1969, p. 44). When the colonizers finally took over Zimbabwe in 1890 with the help of the missionaries, the local religion began to be discredited, and Christianity was promoted by the new rulers. Pauw (1963, p. 34) writes, “Indigenized versions of Christianity and ATR were strongly rejected; those who partook in these practices were often accused of being devil worshipers. White missionaries wanted Africans to reject their traditional beliefs; they often portrayed them as being fundamentally at odds with Christianity.” Those who converted to Christianity were always encouraged to reject their ancestors, cultural beliefs, and rituals and adopt the Christian way of life. It is in this regard

that MuCulloch (183, p. 122) argues, “The racist colonialists had no interest in the indigenous cultures, their main concern was to establish complete control over a given territory.” This control included killing local culture and religion. In view of this, Biko (2004) states that many African cultures have been battered beyond recognition.

However, the colonial regime began to face resistance from the local people as a result of unfair treatment of the blacks by the colonial government. The rise of African nationalism also had a bearing on religion. Many African religious leaders began to feel that African culture and tradition need to be revived. Even with all the efforts from the local leaders to resuscitate African culture, some scholars still believed that there was still great intolerance towards African ideas, even by Africans themselves. This could have been a result of the mentality that was inculcated into the minds of Africans by the missionaries that black ideas are not good at all. Biko believes that one way to correct these wrongs is through Black Consciousness.

Post-Colonial Phase

When Zimbabwe became independent in 1980, there was a shift in doing things with respect to religion. Religious freedoms were granted to many groups that were once silenced during the colonial era. ATR began to be recognized once again. The formation of the association called the Zimbabwe National Traditional Healers Association (ZINATHA) and its inclusion in government legislation was a great achievement on the part of those who subscribed to ATR because this meant that traditional healers could now operate officially as long as they are registered. The formation of African independent churches began to grow in independent Zimbabwe, and many traditional practices began to be integrated into the church, especially by the Apostolic and Zionist churches.

African Independent Churches

In an effort to find themselves, the Africans progressed a step further in trying to restore their dignity and beliefs. They began to form African Independent Churches (AICs) that were completely different from Western churches. Most of these churches are Pentecostal or Apostolic in nature. These

churches have been struggling to get recognition by people from mainline churches, as most of them are considered pagan churches. According to West (1975, p. 1), “They have been judged as not being Christian at all; instead, they are seen as being bridges back to paganism. The educated see them as uneducated, and the sophisticated see them as primitive.” Even post-colonial governments have failed to fully recognize these churches as equivalent to others. This upset has been felt much by the Apostolic and Zionist churches in Zimbabwe. Most of the leaders in these churches are not licensed ministers maybe due to the fact that they do not hold proper qualifications that are required for one to be considered a religious minister. Even though these churches are currently drawing thousands of followers, they are still being despised. On government occasions such as national heroes’ burial, independence celebrations, and other state functions, these churches have never been invited to officiate. This may prove how these churches have been sidelined and looked down upon.

ATR PRACTICES FOUND IN APOSTOLIC AND ZIONIST CHURCHES

Many practices found in Apostolic and Zionist churches are believed to have been borrowed from ATR. Those churches with elements of ATR within their practices are quick to quote the Old Testament as the basis of their teachings. This might be because the sacrificial system of the Old Testament is somehow close to ATR when it comes to rituals. Some of these churches do not use the Bible at all. They believe that God is revealing everything even today. However, one should not conclude that all apostolic and Zionist churches have the same practices.

Common Practices

Belief in Ancestral Spirits and Fear of the Spirits

Ancestral spirits play an integral part in the lives of African people. Both the Ndebele and Shona people believe in ancestral spirits. It is believed that most African cultures worship God through ancestors. The community cannot approach God directly, but they have to go through ancestors. Ancestral

worship can be understood as the worship of the dead (Burge, 1967). As a general rule, the ancestors are a spiritual hierarchy residing in the spirit world, having access to spiritual beings and forces, and thought to be separated from but not beyond the reach of the living (Ncube, 1988, p. 31). It is believed that ancestral spirits protect the family and also provide good health and wealth, but at the same time, these spirits can be harmful if disobeyed.

The traditional worldview in African culture is spiritual, where spirituality controls every aspect of life. Ancestors in traditional religion are a community of divine intermediaries standing before God. Their function is to act as patrons, intercessors, benefactors, guardians, protectors, and punishers at the same time. According to Donko (2010), ancestor worship revolves around dead elders posthumously. Although spiritual in existence, the ancestors are manifested physically in the person of their earthly representative. In the region of Matabeleland, the spirit of an elderly person who died may choose for itself the person to whom it wants to manifest.

Some Apostolic churches in Zimbabwe also uphold the belief in ancestors. There is a belief that there are good as well as bad ancestors. Good ancestors are believed to be the protectors of the people, while bad ancestors torment them. Faith in Christ International, a church led by Prophet Thabiso Ngwenya is one example of the churches that believe in the existence and power of ancestral spirits. The church teaches that people need to pray through good ancestors for protection and to cast out the bad ones. The following is part of the prayer that is recited by church members when they pray to ancestors:

“My good ancestors, protect me in my life... You bad ancestors, I say out of my life.”

One participant, a member of this church who was interviewed concerning ancestral worship had this to say:

“It will be unwise to believe that ancestors do not exist. At our church, we are taught that there are good ancestors that protect us, and there are bad ancestors that are there to harm people. These bad ancestors need to be silenced or else they destroy families.” (L. Ngwenya, personal communication, February 20, 2020).

The belief in ancestors is core to the teachings of Prophet Ngwenya and his church. Members of this church do not see any problem in worshipping what they call good ancestors.

While other Apostolic and Zionist churches see it not right to worship ancestors, they still believe that these spirits exist. Ancestral spirits are considered to be demons, and they are only there to harm people. Those who go to these churches live in fear of these spirits and things like bad luck or other misfortunes in life are often associated with *imimoya yomdeni* (family spirits). Religious rituals are usually carried out in these churches to cast out these spirits. Fear of spirits is common in apostolic churches, just as it is common in ATR.

Polygamy and Inheriting Wives

Almost all societies in the world value marriage. Marriage is found in all societies, but understanding of it is different. Getting married to two or more wives is a custom found all over Africa, although in some societies it is less than in others (Mbiti, 1969, p. 186). This practice is common in traditional societies, and a man is considered great by the number of wives and children that he has. It is in this regard that Mbiti says it is instilled in the minds of African people that a big family earns its head great respect in the eyes of the community (Ibid, p. 186). There is also a belief that polygamy helps prevent or reduce prostitution, especially on the part of the husband (ibid, p. 187). In ATR, a man can also inherit his deceased brother's wife. This practice is common among many African cultures.

The practice of having many wives has found its way into the practices of Apostolic and Zionist churches in Zimbabwe. Bishop T. Zibuya of the Holy Zion Church is a proponent of this practice. He has three wives and over twenty children. The researcher had the opportunity to interview him, and he says:

“We find nothing wrong in marrying many wives. Remember we are Blacks, and this is part of us. Even in the Bible, we have many people who were married to many wives but God used them for his purposes” (T. Zibuya, personal communication, March 22, 2020).

There are many churches in Zimbabwe that believe in polygamy. These include churches like Johane Marange and Johane Masowe. A participant who is a member of Johane Marange was also interviewed, and he had this to say concerning polygamy:

“What I can say is that we are blacks not whites. Marrying many wives is not a problem to us. Let those who continue to attack us do so. That will not change us” (M. Mushonga, personal communication, April 1, 2020).

Some of these churches promote inheriting wives from deceased relatives. The living relative is charged with taking care of the deceased relative’s family, including the wife. This includes fulfilling all their welfare needs. This shows the great interrelation that exists between these churches and ATR.

Divination

In ATR, people are always eager to know what the future holds and to discover what the spirit world holds concerning their lives. In this regard, they end up consulting diviners or spirit mediums. Divination is the act of obtaining secret knowledge, especially that which relates to the future, by means within the reach almost exclusively of special classes of men (IBSE, 1915). In Ndebele culture, the most common act of divination is *ukutshaya amathambo* (casting of bones). The diviner gets the information by interpreting the position of bones that will be scattered on the ground. Mbiti states that there are other methods of divination in different parts of Africa, using divination stones, gourds, numbers, palm reading, forming or seeing images in pots of water, interpreting sounds, and using seances by means of which the diviner (or another medium) gets in touch with the spirit world (Mbiti, p. 233).

Today, we have many churches in Zimbabwe that still use these tricks to get information from the spirit world. Prophet Miracle Paul of Chitungwiza in Zimbabwe uses similar methods to obtain information from the spirit world. He has what he calls the ‘Abraham’s Tent,’ where people enter and they can see everything concerning their lives, including those people who are bewitching them. Sometimes people are made to look at the towel, and they see visions about hidden things relating to their lives. In some churches, the spirit will be made to speak through another person and that way the

information will be obtained. However, the Bible is against such practices. In Deuteronomy 18:10, it is written, “Let no one be found among you who sacrifices their son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft” (NIV). One of the prophets who chose to be anonymous had this to say:

“We do not use evil spirits in getting such kind of information. These methods that we use are similar to those found in traditional religion I agree. But we receive these methods from God through revelations like visions and dreams.” (Identity Concealed, personal communication, March 10, 2020).

The challenge to this is that these practices are not consistent with the teachings of the Bible and one is left wondering where the source of this power comes from. If these practices are from God of the Bible as some claim, there should be a relationship between these practices and what the Bible teaches.

Use of Shrines, Clay Pots, Tobacco Stuff, and Finger Millet Grains

In traditional religion, there are no specified places of worship. Worship can be done in shrines, caves, or in open spaces. However, shrines are very important in ATR. They are considered to be sacred, and great respect is shown when entering them. Failure to show respect might anger the spirits. What is commonly found in these shrines are clay pots, tobacco stuffs, finger millet grains, and other medicines that are used to cure people. Medicines are mixed in clay pots, and tobacco is sprinkled down to invoke the spirits. The most common practice done when someone is entering a shrine is removing shoes. This is believed to be a sign of showing respect, and no further explanation is given to this act.

Shrines are also common to Apostolic and Zionist churches in Zimbabwe. The practices in these shrines are almost similar to those that are done in ATR. Clay pots, tobacco, finger millet grains, and other things are used in these shrines when curing people. However, it should be clear that not all apostolic churches have these shrines. Those churches with these practices are noticeably traditional in nature. The removal of shoes when entering a shrine is also common in apostolic churches. A participant who preferred to be called Mary was interviewed, and she said:

“Removal of shoes is common amongst many apostolic churches. However, I do not think that this is related to traditional religion. We are taught that this is taken from Exodus 3:5 where Moses was instructed to take off his sandals” (Mary, personal communication, April 9, 2020).

However, some believe that most prophets in Apostolic Churches get their power from the marine spirits; thus, the removal of shoes and the folding of trousers to the knee level is symbolic to crossing the river or a stream of water. When one crosses the river, he removes shoes and folds his trousers to the knee level.

Traditional Songs, Beating of Drums, and Dancing

If there is a thing that Africans enjoy the most, it is music and dance. Music is at the heart of worship in Africa. Mbiti (1969, p. 87) writes, “God is often worshiped through songs, and African peoples are very fond of singing. Many gatherings and ceremonies are accompanied by singing, which not only helps to pass on religious knowledge from one person or group to another, but helps create and strengthen corporate feeling and solidarity.” This music is usually accompanied by well-synchronized rhythmic drums and dance. Some of the spirits are invoked through singing, drumming, and dancing. Music, singing, and dancing reach deep into the innermost parts of African peoples, and many things came to the surface under musical inspiration, which otherwise may not be readily revealed (ibid, p. 87).

In AICs, these practices are also common. Music becomes the center of worship as well. Without music, worshipers do not feel a spiritual connection with God. The Shembe Church in South Africa still uses the traditional Zulu tunes in worship. This makes the local people quickly connect with the practices of this church. Some Zionist churches beat drums to accompany the music. The beating of the drums is also believed to have been borrowed from ATR. Singing and drumming are followed by dancing. Many churches like Zion Christian Church (ZCC) of Bishop Mutendi consider dancing a very important part of worship. However, some churches have justified themselves that in the Old Testament God wanted to be worshiped through instrumental music and dance (c.f Psalm 150:1-5).

Dreams

In ATR, dreams are taken seriously and are believed to be from ancestors. Oosthuizen (1968, p. 3) writes, “Dreaming is important in Zulu and most African culture because it is through dreams that communication with ancestors is possible.” Dreaming has also been taken seriously by Apostolic and Zionist churches in Zimbabwe. However, most of these churches believe that dreams come from God. Opt Moyo, who is a member of the Twelve Apostolic Church of Christ, had this to say:

“I do not have a full explanation concerning dreams, but there is a belief that when a person dreams it comes from the Holy Spirit. In my church, we believe in dreams” (O. Moyo, personal communication, April 5, 2020).

Usually, there are people who are deemed to have a gift of interpreting dreams. Unexplained dreams will act as a stimulant to go and consult a diviner or a prophet in AICs or a witch doctor in ATR. The belief that dreams always have meaning to one’s life is common in both ATR and Apostolic churches.

Witchcraft and Sorcery

Problems in life are often associated with witchcraft in ATR. For example, the death of a person is rarely believed to be natural, but is believed to be the result of witchcraft. Witchcraft is a term used more popularly and broadly, to describe all sorts of evil employment of mystical power, generally in a secret fashion (Mbiti, p. 263). Apostolic churches believe in the presence of witches in society. In these churches, there are people who are capable of dealing with witches and wizards. This belief is one of the common beliefs shared between ATR and Apostolic Churches. Austin Moyo, also a member of the Twelve Apostolic Church of Christ, says:

“We believe that witches are there. This is so because some of the things that happen are dangerous and hard to explain. We end up believing that witchcraft exists. Some of the things that happen include incurable sicknesses. A person can be too sick, but medicine from hospitals and traditional

healers can be of no use until the person is healed at our church. This shows that the power of the Holy Spirit is there” (A. Moyo, personal communication, April 8, 2020).

CONCLUSION

When Christianity came to Africa, it found people who had their own religion and a way of life already. It did not come into a vacuum society, but an already indoctrinated one. During the days of Christianity supremacy in Zimbabwe, Christian missionaries failed to realize one thing that was helpful, training local people to be leaders of the local church. The African people were only made to be followers, not leaders in the church. The effects of this are now seen with the kind of Christian leaders that we have in Zimbabwe. Many indigenous churches and their leadership are now sliding back to ATR slowly maybe due to a lack of understanding of the Bible.

When missionaries came to Africa, they received biblical and ministry training, but they showed no interest in training local leaders. While local people saw that the church was good, they did not possess sufficient knowledge of the Bible and ministry. When these people formed their independent churches, they led the people in ignorance and were quick to adopt ATR practices because they understood ATR better than Christianity. If the situation is to be improved in Africa as a whole, there is a need for more training of church leaders in theology and biblical studies. Training and studying are very much needed, which is why Paul wrote to Timothy, “Study to show thyself approved” (2 Tim. 2:15).

It is clear that ATR has been revived in Zimbabwe under African Indigenous Churches. The practices of these churches point towards religious syncretism where two religions are practiced at the same time. The coexistence of ATR and Christianity within apostolic churches is difficult to explain. It is, however, true that ATR is alive within Apostolic and Zionist Churches. There is a need for transformation in these churches if they are to be called Christian churches.

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