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African and Christian spiritualities – Ancestry and worship

ABSTRACT

African and Christian spiritualities have, over the years, posed a challenge to themselves and Africans. In some instances, they have disagreed with the doctrines and theologies of churches such as Christian churches, which often become too over-prescriptive by dictating how things should be done, and African indigenous churches, which have a rich history within the African context. At the centre of this challenge is the understanding of, and the approach to ancestry that is embedded in African spirituality and worship. This, in turn, is embedded in Christianity. To understand why such challenges and conflicts exist, one must understand the parallel existence of the two spiritualities. This article uses ancestry and worship to investigate these challenges and conflicts of African and Christian spiritualities. In order to understand such challenges and conflicts, relevant literature on African and Christian spiritualities is consulted, with the aim of examining different authors and different comments and standpoints of various churches on the subject. This article concludes, by making recommendations that will seek to synchronise African and Christian spiritualities for harmonious co-existence.[1]

1. INTRODUCTION

The Christian church, which falls under the umbrella of the Christian religion, has the biggest following in Africa, which is estimated at 31 per cent of the population or 2.382 billion followers in Africa. As such, the Christian religion is believed to be the

1 This article is based on Dipali's doctoral dissertation (2023).

biggest religion on the African continent and in the world (Vaughan 2024). It has faced challenges such as epidemic diseases, including HIV/AIDS, Covid-19, civil and world wars, ongoing religious tensions, and political interferences, especially in Africa. Part of the ongoing struggles and challenges within the Christian church concerns spirituality and ancestral veneration.

The Christian church is founded on its polity, doctrines, and processes, all of which are supported by its constitution. This foundation defines what the Christian church is and guides its mission to spread the Good News, while effectively managing its administration. However, it is important to acknowledge that many followers in this context are Africans who have cultural roots in ancestor worship. This raises the possibility that these followers may practise what could be viewed as "two beliefs": one during the day and another at night. This article aims to explore the adherence to both belief systems, whether as a matter of principle or personal conviction.

1.1 The nature of conflict and a possible resolution

This article addresses a situation that corresponds to the phrase "one coin with two different sides: 'head and tail' or 'two bulls in one kraal'". This relates to the degree to which the topic has produced a contested space. On the one hand, there is the church, fixed upon the notion of one God, as expressed in the Gospel of Matthew 22:37: "You shall love your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your mind." On the other, there is the belief in ancestors. The orthodox Christian position is that there is one God to be prayed to, worshipped, glorified, and be venerated. In the Christian church, this may be one of the morals set to its followers. On the other hand, the reality of ancestry lies in understanding and believing in ancestors. Rule (2002) posits that, in South Africa, the vast majority of people are religious and claim to be belonging to the Christian faith. A survey in 2000 found that, among other churches, the Christian Zionist church and the Methodist church were dominating in terms of followers. Bae (2023) adds that the majority of these Black church followers understand ancestors not as those who are dead and forgotten, but as members of the community and they, therefore, have the responsibility to venerate them. This is how conflict over the issue of ancestry arises and why it must be addressed. There seems to be uncertainty on the ancestors' existence and their role in the communities. This is exacerbated by some notions of the Christian undermining the existence of ancestors.

2. METHODOLOGY

This article investigates other related methodological approaches and applies insights obtained from other articles to investigate the assumed challenges of African and Christian spiritualities. For example, grounded theory may be applied as the primary methodology in this article and other methodologies may form part of the interdisciplinary approach. Ramalho *et al.* (2015) describe grounded theory as the methodology where existing literature is not used primarily as a theoretical background but rather as data to be used to provide analytical strategies that will help the researcher contextualise the research within existing knowledge.

3. TOWARDS A PRACTICAL THEOLOGY THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Anderson (2001:12) compares practical theology to a divine partner joining us, walking with us, stimulating our reflections, and inspiring us to recognise the world we live in. In other words, we should be aware of the world and everything that takes place in it and make sense of what is happening. On the other hand, Swinton and Mowat (2006:3) mention that

> practical theology is a web and a mixture of relationships where different disciplines are in a relationship with each other.

This article explores the perspectives of a community that worships in various denominations. It investigates their preferences and the reasons behind their belief that "double-dipping", as it is sometimes referred to, is a valid expression of their inward faith.

Furthermore, Park (2010) asserts that practical theology is important because it carries significant elements, namely

- Transformational. Practical theology can engage, wrestle, and converse with the conflict between ancestry and the Christian church, with the aim of transforming society.
- Contextual and situational. Ancestry is a contextual realistic subject. Situations change from time to time, and it is the task of practical theology to be on par with content, context, and situation.
- Interrogative. One of the tasks of practical theology is to delve deeply into and interrogate things in order to reach well-thought out outcomes and opinions. Hence, this article explores, from a theological point of view, African spirituality and Christian spirituality, in order to identify the conflict between ancestral veneration and the Christian church.

- Interdisciplinary practical theology. This is like a three-legged pot in which all types of ingredients or recipes produce good-smelling food. In other words, practical theology attracts other academic disciplines and blends them into one product. Social science, anthropology, and ancestry can be natural examples of the disciplines used in the three-legged pot.

Achieving the above requires a process that reflects three stages, namely reflective, hermeneutical, and correlational dialogue, that are essential in practical theology, according to Park (2010). This approach enhances understanding and meaning within the discussed context of this article.

- Reflective. The process of practical theology dictates that the problem under review must be revisited reflectively, so that the researcher maintains focus.
- Hermeneutical. There must be evidence of a theory and methodology of biblical texts in the processes of practical theology.
- Correlational dialogue. The process also helps integrate data and different views. A correlating dialogue between different literatures with different opinions must be established.

All the above intends to bring new meanings and horizons to specific contexts that are of special significance.

4. HOW DOES THIS ARTICLE FIT INTO THE FIELD OF PRACTICAL THEOLOGY?

There should be a relationship between theory and praxis and the two must work together interchangeably. According to Anderson (2001:14), theory alone is useless without praxis and vice versa. In other words, the practical everyday lives of people are reflected upon theologically and they must make sense as to why and how life presents itself within communities. This article explores the conflict of ancestral veneration and Christian church. African and Christian spiritualities are investigated to address the conflict.

In as much as the article is centred on ancestry, worship, and the Christian church, as well as African and Christian spiritualties, there is a strong possibility that this article may influence the study of other spiritualties and other similar religious conflicts. In other words, the outcome of this article may also benefit the community at large, as it is consistent with the aims of practical theology. Dingemans (1996:84) supports the understanding of the task of practical theology and further asserts that practical theology is not the opposite of theoretical theology. Instead, it stands for a theoretical approach to practice. It is best defined when it is involved with the church and society regarding contextual issues.

5. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Long before missionaries and Christianity arrived in Africa, Africans' way of living included the realisation that there is a supreme being. Nwanchor *et al.* (2025:23-24) argue that missionaries arrived and changed the mindset and beliefs of Africans in how they worship, venerate their ancestors, and recognise the supreme being who was with them.

- Missionaries failed to distinguish between Western culture and Christianity in that they did not understand the reality of religion as experienced through the local cultures of communities.
- The fallacy of superior civilisation, whereby missionaries developed an attitude towards Africans and promoted their Western ways that made them lose touch with the local culture of the people.
- The missionaries failed to indigenise Christianity by, for example, building churches opposed to African customs such as "*Indumba*" (traditional house of traditional doctors) and developed western architectural buildings that did not resonate with the people. They also forced Africans to learn English hymns only. Both language and building played and still play a pertinent role in the lives of Africans.

Knighton (1999:120-127) adds that missionaries declared it unrighteous for Africans to attempt to express God in the African way to the point where African names were dismissed and English names were introduced Christian names for Africans. The Christian names given to African people diluted the African spirituality. This was the start of the conflict, because Christian names made African ancestry less valued, undermined, and disrespected.

With the mushrooming of Christianity brought by missionaries, Africans were then forced and introduced to Christian ministry. Kolb (1993:276) asserts that the term "ministry" is derived from the Latin word *ministerium* which means "service". Therefore, Christian ministry became the service designated to bring God's Word to his people. Christian ministry characterised by Christian spirituality was observed and practised in the Christian church. The Christian church, driven by Christian spirituality, developed morals, the way to view things, and prescriptions as to how to behave, which rejected the existence and the functionality of African spirituality, especially the element of ancestral veneration.

The missionaries converted Africans to Christianity and, in the process, obliterated the existence of African spirituality. This raises the question as to whether Christianity is African or is Africanism Christian? These questions emanated from the historical struggle of Africans to retain their religious self-identify amid the imposition of Western Christianity.

Maluleke (1997:6) posits that it is difficult to respond to these questions because of the shared experiences of slavery and colonialism in Africa by all Africans, Christian and non-Christian alike. This has made it too precarious to believe in expressions such as African Christianity, African philosophy, African literature. Furthermore, due to this shared painful experience, Black people still struggle with the word "African" when it is used to characterise, identify, and define them, because the term was imposed on indigenous people. This conflict has a rich history that started centuries ago, and that continues to show its ugly head in our current times.

6. THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

The Christian church believes in the Holy Trinity. God is the central figure and none is greater than God. Historically, the two main branches of Christianity are the Roman Catholic church and the Protestant churches, which have, over the years, faced many challenges from other religions such as Islam (Armour Sr 2003).

One such challenge that the Christian church had to wrestle with and continues to face is the topic of ancestors, with its key features such as ancestry and ancestral calling. Lim (2015:109) mentions that ancestral veneration presents a conflict to the Christian church with its moral and cultural implications. The Christian church must understand, have a clear view, and an approach towards ancestral veneration. In other words, how does the church deal with the prejudiced non-Christians or other Christians towards the belief in ancestral veneration?

6.1 The conflicting contribution of colonialism to the Christian church

Mtuze (2003:10) asserts that one of the negative implications to the Christian church with its views on ancestry was the influx of missionaries with their Western colonial tactics. This became evident in how the mainstream church, in particular, transformed itself over the years to be fully Western and at the same time how Africans lost touch with their authentic relationship with their origins, including ancestors. Kgatla (1997:633) mentions that Western missionaries did not understand the culture and practices of Africans, thus creating confusion within the church. In other words, the current conflict within the Christian church and ultimately between African and Christian spiritualities is the result of negative colonial interference.

Currently, the struggle for ancestry still exists. De-Visser (2011) cites that the Zion Christian church, for example, does not believe in ancestors or

entertain the subject of ancestors. The Methodist church of Southern Africa is currently discussing and engaging with the topic of "*Ukuthwasa*" (initiation process of being a traditional doctor), which means the initial process of being a "*Sangoma*" (traditional doctor) (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2019).

6.2 Perceptions as a source of conflict within the Christian church

The Christian church is also faced with perceptions concerning ancestry. Werner (2007:55) states that personality variables such as interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, communication skills, self-control, and integrity largely determine how well a person applies these to him-/herself in a situation. Such variables define how a person or something is received. In this instance, such perceptions are germane to the issue of ancestral veneration.

On the other hand, Brown (2010:4) states that a perception may be a prejudice, a judgment or an opinion formed beforehand or without due examination. These may include an unjustified, usually negative attitude towards others because of their backgrounds. Different perceptions are unavoidable in a customary Sunday Christian church service, with different people coming from different situations. Unfortunately, such perceptions result in pulling the church from its stand of preaching the gospel and treating all equally into a judgmental system of labelling those who believe in ancestors.

Therefore, the Christian church, as an integral part of society, is bound to struggle with ideological, theological, and doctrinal perceptions. For example, mainline churches such as the Methodist Church and/or the Roman Catholic Church would not agree with the usage of "*umqombothi*" (traditional African beer drunk during festivals and appeasing ancestors) as a symbol of the elements of Eucharist because they use red wine and bread/wafers. On the other hand, an African indigenous church such as the Ethiopian church of Southern Africa finds it acceptable to use "*umqombothi*" for Eucharist. In other words, perceptions are part of society.

7. ANCESTRAL VENERATION

It is believed that, long before Christianity arrived in Africa, the practice of ancestors existed, and people had a relationship with them. The arrival of missionaries with their misplaced theologies changed and upset that relationship. Breugel (2001) avers that those who practise ancestral veneration quote history in defence of their actions "*si ife tidayamba zimenizi, ndi makolo, tosno ife sitingaleke xa makolo athu*" (translated as "we cannot abandon what they (ancestors) started"). In other words, the Christian church cannot escape

the existence of ancestors and should deal with the fact that its members in South Africa are predominantly Africans.

Bae (2023) highlights one of the realistic conflicts, and asks the question: Is ancestry a cult or worship? Bae (2023) answers this question, by stating that ancestral veneration is not a cult because there is no evidence of apotheosis (the elevation of someone to divine status) of the ancestors.

Anderson (2001:37) contributes to this question of a cult or worship, by cautioning Christians not to be ambitious concerning the complex and dynamic topic of ancestry. According to Anderson, before making conclusions about the cult of ancestors, Christians need to locate the origins of ancestors and then formulate an informed opinion.

7.1 Conflicting biblical references on ancestry

The literal reading and interpretations of the Bible can bring conflict and confusion to its readers. Both the Old and the New Testaments contain Scriptures that may be conflicting. The Christian church and the Bible co-exist, and the Bible has, for centuries, been used as the basis for the Christian church. Therefore, the Bible should be used effectively so that it enhances the understanding of the Christian church concerning African and Christian spiritualties. Both the Old and the New Testaments include stories with chapters and verses that contradict and, at times, oppose each other regarding the understanding of ancestors, ancestral calling, and ancestral veneration. Below are some of these scriptures.

Matthew 17:1-9 tells a story of the experience of three disciples observing Jesus in conversation with Moses and Elijah who were his ancestors. The remarks of the disciple may be interpreted as them venerating the ancestors: “Let us stay here on the mountain”. In this instance, one can highlight the relationship between the ancestors and the living in that the three disciples got to know Moses and Elijah and the excitement led to a conclusion by one of the disciples.

1 Samuel 28:9-15: Saul said to his people: “Find me a woman who is a medium, so I may go and inquire of her …”. But the woman said to him: “Surely you know what Saul has done, he has cut off the mediums from the land …”. Then the woman asked: “Who shall I bring up for you?”. “Bring up Samuel”, he said. When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out at the top of her voice and said to Saul: “Why have you deceived me?” This story highlights the danger or perceptions about ancestry which lead to wrong conclusions about ancestors, ancestral calling, and veneration. A certain king announced a conclusion about mediums that were able to communicate with ancestors. He was later proven wrong about his decisions.

The above two scriptures are literal readings of the Bible confirming the existence of ancestors and the acts of traditional healers or mediums. They are literal readings of the Bible rejecting the acts of the mediums or traditional healers. Bae and Van Der Merve (2008:1302) argue that the story in 1 Samuel 28:9-15 can be interpreted differently regarding the belief in necromancy. They further suggest that it may be that God is able to speak to people using those with the gift to communicate with ancestors.

Bae and Van Der Merve (2008:1309-1310) further illustrate the latter point by referring to the historical context of the story where God will communicate with King Saul in dreams. After losing Prophet Samuel, God leads King Saul to a woman with the gift of communicating with the dead (Samuel). Spronk (2010:1) supports Bae and Van Der Merve, adding that ancestry and the ability to communicate with the dead is not mentioned in the Old Testament, but it has played a prominent role in shaping the religion of ancient Isreal. In other words, necromancy may not appear openly in the Bible, but it has been in existence in the Bible.

Leviticus 19:31: "Do not turn on to mediums or seek out spiritists for you will be defiled, says the Lord your God." This means that people should not turn to traditional healers who are called and possess the spirit of ancestors. This book shows the danger of literal reading of the Bible. Sometimes, people read the Bible literally without looking into the historical background, the plot, the audiences, the culture, and so forth. They want to interpret Scripture as it is in the current times.

Isaiah 8:19-20: "When someone tells you to consult mediums, who whisper and mutter, you do not inquire of their God. Why consult the dead on behalf of the living? Consult God's instruction and the testimony of warning. If anyone does not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn." This clearly tells the story of the prophet who rebukes the consultation of mediums. A story that is contrary to the one in Samuel 1:28.

It can be concluded that ancestral veneration, worship, necromancy, traditional doctors, and mediums found in the Bible are subject to different interpretations and conclusions. However, it must be noted that different interpretations and conclusions may lead to confusion.

8. MORAL AND CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS

The Christian church believes in Jesus Christ. The New Testament taught us that he came to the world incarnated and set out to the Jews and to all Christians the morals and culture of living a Christ-like life. These include, among others, Christian worship, *imago Dei*, moral evil, and Christian practices.

8.1 Christian worship

In the Christian church, Christian worship is a major cultural practice that plays a role in dealing with cultural implications. At the centre of this worship is the Holy Spirit which all Christians worship directly. The Holy Spirit leads them to immerse in spirituality (Linman 2010:3). Simultaneously mixing ancestry and Christian worshipping is conflicting because the one praises, venerates, and recognises God, and the other venerates God. In Christian worship services, ancestral veneration is mostly forbidden. A person who suddenly venerates ancestors in the middle of a Christian service is viewed as taboo.

According to White (2000:1-5), Christian worship is an outward and visible form of appreciating God in worshipping. He uses the German word "*Gottesdienst*" which means "God's service and our service to God", thus rendering service to God. Plantinga Jr and Rozeboom (2003:3-4) support service rendered to God and mention that worship is occurring at all times in heaven. When Christians worship, they are joining that which is already happening. In other words, the purpose is to continue with something that does not end and that we did not start, and we will never end. Plantinga Jr and Rozeboom (2003:3-4) continue:

> we worship in the spirit, and as we do so, we are taking our part amongst angels, archangels and all the company of heaven … heaven is not a long way away.

Part of what is causing conflict above all that has been said is to identify elements of Christian worship. Cobb (1950:410) identifies three elements from the Bible, namely singing, prayer, and giving.

8.1.1 Singing

Singing happens everywhere and it can take form at any time. Singing also takes most of the time in the church service or any Christian event. As part of Christian worshipping, it is given its space and time. Ancestral veneration will never intercept singing. I have observed that ancestral visitation and veneration do take place during the singing. That is a conflict.

8.1.2 Prayer

"Pray without ceasing" (1 Th. 5:17). Paul reminds and instructs about the value of praying as an act of worshipping. The question of whether ancestors are prayed or worshipped becomes relevant in this instance. The Christian church believes that Christians only pray to God. However, some sections of the Christian church blame others for praying to ancestors. This is a misconception.

8.1.3 Giving

Giving goes to God as a way of thanking him for life, love, guidance, and so forth. In this instance, there is also conflict with ancestral veneration, because ancestors are venerated by the slaughtering of animals. The question is: To whom should Christians give preference – ancestors or God?

8.1.4 *Imago Dei*

Geller (2012:18) asserts that ancestry provides two arguments that contribute to the conflict between ancestral veneration and the Christian church with its moral and cultural views. Concerning ancestral veneration, Geller argues that not everyone gets to be an ancestor. Moreover, there are different categories of the dead. The poor are categorised under "special dead" and others fall under "ancestors". Christians may misunderstand this argument in that it categorises people according to status. The Christian believes in the doctrine of *Imago Dei*, meaning being created in the image and likeness of God.

8.1.5 Moral evil

Molobi (2005) avers that to venerate ancestors is to have a spiritual responsibility and a sense of unity that includes respect for parents, fighting for justice, coping with illness, misfortunes and witchcraft, as well as appeasing the ancestors. In my opinion, Molobi (2005) mentions this to correct some critics of ancestral veneration. According to Breugel (2001:260), people are sometimes convinced into believing in things with which they do not resonate or agree; in other words, "moral evil". Ancestors are used as monsters to threaten others if they are not appeased. In other words, moral evil can be understood as the wrong way of presenting ancestors to the Christian church and perhaps the African community in general.

9. CHRISTIAN PRACTICES

Pauw (1960:146-147) distinguishes between African and Christian practices to defend Christianity that is accused of labelling African practices and rituals as pagan activities. Moreover, Pauw mentions that practices and rituals of this nature are non-magical because Christianity is not magical; it depends solely on God.

9.1 Prayer of healing

Pauw (1960:146-147) mentions that people pray with the expectation and the realisation that God may grant healing or not, if he so wishes. In other words, God decides on how to respond to the prayer requests.

9.2 Prayer for the bereaved

Upon the death of a person, arrangements are made for pastoral visits up to the day of the funeral where the church uses different resources such as Bibles, hymnal and prayer books to conduct the funeral. Burial rites, prayers, and symbolic ashes are also performed during the funeral.

10. DICHOTOMIES BETWEEN AFRICAN SPIRITUALITY AND CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

The conflict of ancestry in the Christian church not only poses a problem for the practical church that has to deal with ancestry every Sunday or at every church event, but it should also be investigated from a theological perspective. One cannot separate the church from "spirituality". Similarly, the Christian church in Africa cannot be separated from the reality of its membership, in other words, Africans with their African origin, cultural, and traditional identities. One of those identities is to venerate ancestors. This understanding then instigates the role of African spirituality and Christian spirituality. Differences and conflict in the Christian church directly affect these two spiritualties.

10.1 African spirituality

Masango (2006:1) describes African spirituality as the spirituality that shapes a person in such a way they grow into the concept of Ubuntu (Humanness)".

> African Spirituality is embedded in the living traditions and cultures of African people in a way that it relates to other spiritualties in the world without being measured through or by them. African Spirituality provides a guide for the search of emerging African traditions in the article of African religions in the myths, rituals, and human agents who undergo ritual apprenticeship like priests, diviners, herbalists, kings, chiefs and artists (Harvey & Adogame 2012:109).

African spirituality can be viewed as the mother of all spiritualities found in Africa. In African spirituality, Africans find expression in celebrating through songs, dances, rituals, and symbols that show the energising spirit animating the community to move in response to God (Du Toit 1998:47). In other words, African spirituality is the Africans' way of life, a tool for them to identify themselves and how they manage life as it exists for them.

Louw (2014) asserts that African spirituality makes Africans believe that everything relates to everything else, making it difficult to discard ancestral veneration from the functioning and existence of the Christian church. Furthermore, Louw (2014) mentions that spirituality influences a person to live in a truly fulfilling way. In Africa, spirituality is concerned with life. This

means that African spirituality does not choose a person, group or situation; by default, it fits in every situation in Africa, including in the Christian church. Therefore, there is no need for conflict between ancestral veneration and Christian church, because African spirituality enables them to collaborate.

10.2 Christian spirituality

Christian spirituality can be defined as the

> disposition or internal condition of people when in such a state as prepares them to recognize and fully appreciate spiritual realities, and such true spirituality is ultimately the result of the in-working of the Holy Spirit (Tan 2001:7).

It shapes and empowers the maturity of the "spiritual person" who is alive to be responsive in the world of God. Tan (2011:362-363) mentions that, at the heart of Christianity, lies Christian spirituality which is the central story about Jesus Christ: his birth, death, and resurrection. Furthermore, Christian spirituality is not about simply hearing the stories, but also about believing them to be true. This information is important as it agrees with what the Christian church stands for, in other words, centred on the person of Jesus Christ. Therefore, room for any other spirituality other than Christian spirituality poses a problem within the church.

Besides examining Christian spirituality as a doctrine or experience or from the biblical point of view, Smith (2007:7-8) avers that Christian spirituality should be viewed from the intellectual point of view, where knowledge and experience combine for a better understanding of God. In other words, Smith suggests that Christian spirituality should be used to understand God's awareness and transcendence. Louw (2014:29) views a different dimension of Christian spirituality and asserts that, within Christian spirituality, the vast majority of approaches to the issue of culture (ancestral veneration) tended to be more than "Christianisation" of so-called heathen culture. There is an element of disrespect for African spirituality and conflict can be identified in this approach.

African spirituality focuses on African identity, which cannot be separated from the relationship with ancestors. Christian spirituality focuses on the awareness of God and transcendence. One can observe the cracks and gaps between the two which will cascade to the Christian church. Nurnberger (2007:83) observes some of these cracks and gaps and highlights that African tradition, with its rituals and practices, does fit into the realm of Christian spirituality as long as nothing contradicts Christianity. By this, Nurnberger may be introducing a relationship between African spirituality and Christian spirituality which can be named African Christianity.

According to Mokhoati (2021), African Christianity is the synthesis of Christianity and African traditional religion. However, the African cultural heritage is intimately intertwined with the religious heritage, and 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. The entire process makes African Christianity a melting pot in which different religious traditions are easily conformed. The reason for this is that African cultural heritage is inextricably linked to African religious heritage, which includes ancestors and spirits. It is the result of a fusion of Christianity and African traditional religion. In some ways, it can be viewed as the result of syncretism, in which Christian ethical-spiritual ideas are combined with those of African traditional religion (Mokhoati 2021). Furthermore, from an outsider's perspective, it could be argued that the intersection of Christianity and African traditional religion appears to dilute the purity of either Christianity or African traditional religion, as both religious traditions appear to lose their uniqueness when juxtaposed. Because of this type of syncretism, it is easy to conclude that the junction of Christianity and African traditional religion means the distortion of both systems, as there is no clear understanding of how both systems came to be or collaborate.

Some examples of the visible differences between African spirituality and Christian spirituality include:

- The practice of "*Sangoma*" (traditional doctor) to drink blood of an animal as a ritual (African spirituality). Christian spirituality may view this as cultic.
- The sacrifice of burning animals on man-made altars is a practice found in the Old Testament (African spirituality). It may be argued that Jesus replaced this practice in the New Testament (Christian spirituality).

10.3 The value of African spirituality amidst Christian church systems

Mokhoati (2017) asserts that Christians believing in African spirituality view their African or traditional behaviours no less valuable when compared to Christian belief systems or components. They claim that their indigenous rights and behaviours were accommodating to Christian belief systems and components. As a result, the use of Christian elements such as holy water, candle lighting, and prayer offerings is thought to be compatible with traditional ways of healing or diagnosis, particularly among Christian leaders and traditional healers. For example, the choice of a member consulting a traditional healer to include Christian elements such as prayer when consulting was solely that member's choice, but it was not instructive to do so. The ancestors are supposed to have disclosed these client-centred demands,

and the usage of Christian components is likewise determined and approved under the guidance or discretion of the ancestors. The ancestors are supposed to be free to do this since they speak with the participants whenever they choose to impart a message. Ancestors communicate whenever they wish to share anything.

11. AFRICAN SPIRITUALTY OR CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY?

There is no denial of the co-existence of the African spirituality and the Christian spirituality with their own unique features which at times contradict each other. A question can be asked: Which one is greater than the other one? Nürnberger (2008) responds to this question, stating that the biblical faith was intentional in not accepting any intolerances and it was clear that the greatest authority is that from God and God alone. This was an effort to compete, disrespect, and undermine and/or being undermined by other spiritualties. Therefore, it is not a question of which spirituality is greater and which is less. It is a question of understanding that God is supreme and that both African spirituality and Christian spirituality bow down to God. Furthermore, ancestral veneration and Christian church are not bigger than God. Therefore, if there is conflict, it does not make God less than what God is.

Nürnberger (2008) concludes this conflict of ancestral veneration and Christian church, by highlighting that ancestors understand that, while they expect to be venerated, they lived in the world and contributed positively to the Christian church. It would, therefore, be selfish of them to be recognised all over and above everybody else at all times, and being venerated or recognised above God who happens to be their maker.

12. RECOMMENDATIONS

In addressing the conflict of ancestry and the dichotomies between the African and Christian spiritualties, Mokhoati (2018:3-4) helps by introducing and re-inventing the understanding of Africa to a closer-to-home relationship. Mokhoati introduces Jesus as the “brother ancestor” and, in doing so, seeks to make African people view Jesus not as a Jew, but as one of the African ancestors, and addresses ancestral rituals and the significance thereof. Perhaps, more conversations need to be held and articles written, in order to integrate African and Christian spiritualties, so that they are on par with each other.

Molobi (2005) takes a biblical view and calls God the parent ancestor. These views will be partnered with Galatians 3:28 “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus”. Therefore, the Bible should be read contextually and interpreted in such a way that it does not undermine the African heritage. Beyers and Mphahlele (2009) view Jesus as the African ancestor and mention that some of his functions on earth equate those of an African ancestor. They mention that, like African ancestors are mediators, Jesus also mediates between human beings and God. The African belief is that ancestors are spiritually connected with the living. Like the ancestors who have supernatural powers, Jesus has more natural powers because he is God. There are similarities between Jesus and African ancestors that qualify Jesus to be called brother ancestor or parent ancestor. Of course, ancestors should not be placed in the same league with Jesus because ancestors understand that Jesus is supreme.

In integrating African and Christian spiritualties, Bediako (1993:1) encourages no competition between Christianity and the African world view. Christians and/or Africans oversee these two spiritualties. Therefore, it should be easy for them to find common ground that will help future generations deal easily with the cracks and conflict that may arise.

13. CONCLUSION

This article aimed to reflect on the conflict between ancestry and the Christian church with its moral and cultural implications. It identified differences between African spirituality and Christian spirituality. This was prompted by an ongoing personal observation between the mainstream Christian spirituality-inclined church and the African spirituality-inclined indigenous church.

Despite the identified conflict between ancestral veneration and the Christian church and despite the identified differences between African spirituality and Christian spirituality, there is a sense of hope because a relationship between the two was suggested on condition that the two can work together, as long as one does not disturb the other.

Lastly, Genesis 1:26 should prevail: “Let us make a person in our image”. All people should remember the *imago Dei*. In the face of God, all humanity is the same. Despite differences in theological, doctrinal, cultural, and moral implications, God created all his creation with love.

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