





The Influence of African Traditional Beliefs and Practices on Neo-Prophetic Christianity: An Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The rapid expansion of the neo-prophetic strand of Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in Africa has resulted in much public and academic scrutiny against the backdrop of perceived appropriation of elements of indigenous African faith. Even though African countries have retained secularism in place of a state religion, many African states, notably Ghana, have remained steadfastly committed to their traditional religions, sometimes even working in tandem with monotheistic Abrahamic religions like Islam and Christianity. Unquestionably, indigenous African religious beliefs have had a significant impact on African mental matrixes, which in turn has affected the practice of Christianity. Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate how Ghanaian Christianity was impacted by traditional African beliefs and customs. In particular, a study of neo-prophetic churches at Manso Dome-Beposo within the Ashanti Region of Ghana was employed. The data for the study was gathered using interview guidelines and qualitative approaches. The data collected was thematically analyzed in line with the reviewed literature. The study found that most prophetic explorations involve the use of rituals, artefacts, and stylistic forms, which are similar to *Abisa* in the Akan spiritual cosmology. The study found out again that, there are several elements suggestive of African traditional religious influence on Christianity. For instance, it was observed that the notion of the existence of evil spirits in Akan cosmology has strongly influenced contemporary prophetism in Ghana. The study concluded that although the idea that Christianity has been affected by African traditional religion may not have empirical validity, there are plenty of visible indicators to back up this assertion. It has been recommended that with the evidence of possible syncretism, a clear distinction should be made between the culture and the religious activities of the people since at times the church wrongfully accuses members even when they are performing culturing duties. This will help the church authorities to inculturate Christian liturgy.

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INTRODUCTION

Like other philosophical ideas, religion is complex and cannot be adequately captured in a single, widely recognized description. This is so because religion deals with immaterial concepts that cannot be empirically verified. Diverse people with diverse hobbies, cultural origins, and academic backgrounds have described it in different ways. African culture is clearly influenced by their religious life, which is ingrained in their religious legacy. Parrinder asserts that religion is the foundation of African culture and an essential aspect of African

existence. This is because religion is so deeply embedded and pervasive in African culture that it affects almost every element of day-to-day existence.¹

According to Mbiti, religious beliefs and rituals are central to every aspect of African society, to the extent that drummers, painters, farmers, hunters, rulers, subjects, and historians are all influenced by their faith. It ensures societal stability, maintains authority and unity, and advances politics and legislation. Religion has a significant influence on people of many backgrounds, especially Africans, to the point where it affects their social lives, political systems, cultures, and economic endeavours.² This is why Leonard argues that,

The religion of these first Africans is their way of life, their faith. It offers the basis for determining their morality and establishing the application of their laws. Because of the overall pattern of their shared life, they are unable to leave it. Like Hindus, they abide by religious prohibitions regarding eating, drinking, and singing.³

The beliefs and practices of the people of Africa, especially the Akans, are strongly influenced by traditional religion. With no written records, their philosophy is best understood through the study of oral tradition, myths, proverbs, liturgy, and witty sayings. However, it is thought that when European settlers introduced the gospel to Africa, they ignored the traditional faith and imposed their culture and religion on the Africans. It is worth noting once more that upon their conversion to Christianity, Africans exhibited a susceptibility to the old religious beliefs and rituals of their African culture.⁴ Thus, many African Christians developed double standards because of their incapacity to completely distance themselves from the principles of the indigenous faith of their ancestors. Put differently, individuals demonstrated dual devotion to their religious pursuits, offering their utmost devotion to God during prosperous times and resorting to their ancestral faith during hard times.⁵ Some have claimed that these methods are necessary for the gospel to be disseminated even though they may go against core Christian beliefs. For instance, Nche *et al* asserted that:

The inculturation of the Christian faith in Africa is indeed imperative. The Christian faith should be made indigenous and developed from within the cultures of the people. Faith should be made a way of life for Africans in which their experiences are appealed to and aspirations met. The faith should be African.⁶

Nevertheless, the misconception of African beliefs and their disbelief is an initial problem that the first missionaries created and it became possible because the missionaries were ignorant of the African worldview. This to some extent has created some form of tension between the basic traditional identity of the Africans and their newfound faith. This problem is heightened when the African makes an effort to contextualize his/her faith within the African religio-cultural cosmology.

It is against this backdrop concerning African religion that this work seeks to consider and investigate what happens with the double standard of religious activities after Africans have been converted to Christianity. It will explore the influence that the Akan traditional practices and beliefs have on the African Christian having in mind the sayings of Parrinder describing religion as being all-pervading and soul-absorbing and influencing the life of the African. This research will be done against the backdrop that Africans themselves are religious in all their activities and these religious activities have the potential to influence their newly accepted religion which is Christianity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Many academics have defined religion, giving it different meanings based on the goal and the researcher's field of expertise. One could contend that the general ontology of the particular point of view influences the theory or definition of religion chosen. For instance, a sociologist would define religion through a sociological lens, but a psychologist would define religion from a distinct psychological perspective. The same would apply to definitions derived from culture or any other discipline. It is imperative hence to state that, our personal experiences and historical antecedents could also influence the definition of religion. It will be apt to state again that whereas a Westerner might provide a definition influenced by European ideas, an African would formulate the response in line with African philosophy. Most religious meanings are derived from the person researching on occasion. Religion therefore is a social phenomenon that is a matter of belief and practice that has a

¹ G. E. Parrinder, *African Traditional Religion*, 3rd ed. (London: Sheldon Press, 1974).

² J. S. Mbiti, *The Prayers of African Religion* (Marynoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1975).

³ A. C. Leonard, *The Lower Niger and Its People* (London: Frank Cass, 1966), 429.

⁴ Kofi Asare Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion* (Accra: FEP International Private Limited, 1978).

⁵ Asare Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*.

⁶ George C Nche, Lawrence N Okwuosa, and Theresa C Nwaoga, "Revisiting the Concept of Inculturation in a Modern Africa: A Reflection on Salient Issues," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 72, no. 1 (2016), 16.

substantial impact on almost everyone. The understanding that there are some things a human cannot do for himself, as well as questions about life and the world around him that he cannot answer, is the source of religion. People are curious about their origins and intended destination. However, people also think that there must be a higher authority figure out there who is capable of helping them with whatever they are unable to accomplish on their own and providing answers to some issues they are unable to.

Nevertheless, amidst this complex nature and the lack of a universally accepted definition of what constitutes religion, some researchers have provided some working definitions. For example, Maile is of the view that religion became a way of man's life in an attempt to answer basic questions about life.⁷ It is also defined by Ferguson and Wright as the act of properly honouring, respecting, and making reference to the divine. They contend that religion is an activity rather than a doctrine.⁸ It is a human endeavour to become closer to God. Barth offers an alternative viewpoint on human endeavours to approach God, emphasizing that God is sovereign and that human endeavours cannot lead to any knowledge of God at all.⁹ Barth sees religion as, purely human's effort to find God. He says that all religions including Christianity are by definition unbelief, or a man's futile quest to find God using his resources.¹⁰ Ferguson and Wright describe religion as a practice and it includes a way of living, but it is related to the divine.¹¹

According to Parrinder,

Religion lies at the root of African culture and it is essential to African life. The reason for this lies in the fact that religion is so all-pervading and soul-absorbing in Africa that there is scarcely a sphere of life activity which is not influenced by it. It gives inspiration to artists and craftsmen, to farmers and hunters, to rulers and subjects, to historians and drummers. It motivates politics and legislation, upholds authority and comradeship, and ensures social stability in times of war and peace.¹²

Mbiti in supporting Parrinder's position argues that religion is formal in every aspect of human existence. It has influenced many individuals of different backgrounds, especially Africans, to the point where it has impacted their social lives, political systems, cultures, and economic endeavours.¹³ Religion as defined by Ferguson, Mbiti and other scholars portrays human effort to reach God. This has become one of the major reasons why there is a countless number of different religions. Barth in his assessment forgot that religion is not only the desire of man in search of God but also the willingness of the Supreme Being to give man the chance to approach him. This however is more of a Christian conception of religion than generic of all religions. It is worth noting that the desire of man to seek God makes God the ultimate being available when being searched, and this constitutes religion. Some Africans have also opted to follow the African Traditional Religion, which they do by living their lives according to its teachings. Mbiti asserts that it is difficult for a person to be disengaged from their religion because doing so means severing ties to their ancestry, foundation, sense of security, family, and the entire community that affirms their existence.¹⁴

In relation to how people have come to relate to the concept of religion, Thorpe opined,

The classification of religion based on developmental stages is known as the typology of religion, which emerged from Western research. The 17th and 18th centuries saw the discovery of new continents and cultures, which led to a conundrum regarding interreligious relationships. Western ideas about this gave rise to the classification of "primal" or "traditional" religions. This category was created to put religions together that have structural similarities. This classification was predicated on the acknowledgement that religions have evolved in an evolutionary manner. It is possible to uncover the first religion in its original form by researching the religious customs of modern tribal communities.¹⁵

In his book "The Humanity of Black African Religions," Sundermeier asserts that some religions developed more than others. Pejoratively, the primordial faiths were called tribe religions, traditional primeval religions, or even primal religions.¹⁶ African religion is sometimes described as primal or primitive, and this is

⁷ M. L. Maile, *Comparison and Trust between African Religion, Customs and Ceremonies and Spiritual Writings* (Bloemfontein: NG Sending Pers, 1995), 11.

⁸ S. B. Ferguson and D. F. Wright, *New Dictionary of Theology* (Leicester England: Intervarsity Press, 1988), 575.

⁹ K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics, Doctrine of Reconciliation Part One*, vol. 4 (Edinburg : T & T Clark, 1956), 45.

¹⁰ Barth, *Church Dogmatics, Doctrine of Reconciliation Part One*.

¹¹ Ferguson and Wright, *New Dictionary of Theology*.

¹² Geoffrey Parrinder, *African Traditional Religion*. (London: Sheldon Press, 1962).

¹³ John S Mbiti, "African Religions and Philosophy," (Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1969).

¹⁴ Mbiti, "African Religions and Philosophy," 29.

¹⁵ Shirley Ann Thorpe, *Primal Religions Worldwide: An Introductory, Descriptive Review; a Project of the Institute for Theological Research, Unisa*, vol. 17 (University of South Africa, 1992), 5.

¹⁶ T. Sundermeier, *Nur Gemeinsam Können Wir Leben: Das Menschenbild Schwarzafrikanischer Religionen [Only Together Can We Live: The Humanity of Black African Religions]*, (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn , 1990).

arguable due to Sundermeier's theory which was based on the European perception of Africa as a developing continent. However, it cannot be concurred that Africans' religious progress is a direct result of their underdeveloped character, as African religion transcends the comprehension of missionaries.¹⁷

Van den Heever asserts that religion is the human way of representing reality and so according to him, it's quite logical that there will be a multitude of interpretations of what reality looks like.¹⁸ As has already been emphasized, the various definitions given by scholars on religion have either agreed or disagreed with each other. Thus this thesis will acquaint itself with a working definition to help congregate with a common understanding and focus. Given this, the present work adopted Beyers' view of religion as a working definition.

According to him,

Religion is an effort by humans to search for meaning, to understand reality and to place themselves in a relationship with reality. Religion is not only an intellectual, cognitive experience, as at times it happens in Western culture. Religion encapsulates the whole human being. Humans stand in a holistic relationship with reality.¹⁹

The justification for adopting or clinging to the definition of Beyers amidst all the other definitions is two-fold. The first is the understanding that he gives concerning the search for meaning and reality by man as a religious entity. It is well noted that both African traditional religion and Christianity are religious bodies and their fundamental role is directed to the Supreme Being who is believed to have meaning to all realities. Again, Beyers emphasized that religion encapsulates the whole being of humans making it holistic. This holistic ideology as offered by Beyers is also found in the belief system of the African traditional religious people. According to them, religion is the entire life of an individual, religion is also, their waking up.

Concept of Inculturation

The term "inculturation" is used in this work to assist African traditional people and Christians in understanding one another better since it offers a useful framework for analyzing the interactions between the African land and the Christian Church. It makes it possible for the church and the culture to communicate. The process by which the faith embodied in one culture meets and becomes embodied in another is known as inculturation, according to Paulinus Odozor.²⁰

According to Walligo,

Inculturation means the honest and serious attempt to make Christ and his Gospel of salvation ever more understood by peoples of every culture, locality and time. It is the reformulation of Christian life and doctrine into the very thought patterns of each person... It is the continuous endeavour to make Christianity truly feel at home in the cultures of each people.²¹

When defining inculturation, Arrupe does it in the context of Christ's incarnation. He asserts that inculturation is the embodiment of the Christian message and way of life in a specific cultural setting so that this experience is expressed not only through culturally appropriate elements but also as a principle that unites, animates, and guides the cultures, changing and reconstructing them to create a new creation.²²

It is evident that the church is both influenced by and a product of the culture it was introduced to. The church is deeply entwined with the culture, and the culture responds to it by forming a continuing relationship. Local customs and practices incorporate Christian teachings and messages, and Christian teachings and practices are impacted by the local culture. Shorter asserts that the term "inculturation" suggests a reciprocal bond between the evangelizer and the evangelized. Since culture is continually changing, inculturation refers to both the initial encounter of the Christian faith with a non-Christian culture as well as an ongoing conversation.²³ It could be asserted from the claims made by Shorter that the Christian religion to some extent exists in a cultural form and mainly thrives when it is well integrated with the religio-cultural perspective of the people

¹⁷ Sundermeier, *Nur Gemeinsam Können Wir Leben: Das Menschenbild Schwarzafrikanischer Religionen [Only Together Can We Live: The Humanity of Black African Religions]*.

¹⁸ Gerhard A. van den Heever, "Early Christianity," in *Biblical Studies* (Oxford University Press, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.1093/obo/9780195393361-0207>.

¹⁹ Jaco Beyers, "What Is Religion? An African Understanding," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 66, no. 1 (2010), 341.

²⁰ Paulinus Ikechukwu Odozor, "An African Moral Theology of Inculturation: Methodological Considerations," *Theological Studies* 69, no. 3 (2008): 583–609, 585.

²¹ J. Walligo, "Making a Church That Is Truly African," in *Inculturation: Its Meaning and Urgency*, ed. John Walligo (Nairobi: Pauline Publication, 1986), 11.

²² P. Arrupe et al., "Working Paper on Jesuit Missions and Inculturation," 1978, 6.

²³ A. Shorter, "Inculturation of African Traditional Religious Values in Christianity – How Far?," 2002, 12.

African Traditional Religion

Africans have never been without their faith, beliefs, and practices as many African scholars have reechoed the high religiosity of Africans. Mbiti makes an emphatic assessment that, ATR is a religion that needs no conversion towards membership. That is because it is the very foundation on which the African identity is built. Before Christianity was brought to the African continent, Africans had their set beliefs and practices, which were part of their spiritual ontology. This spiritual worldview informed every aspect of their lives and their religious practices were non-negotiable. Their religion also shaped their civilization, prescribing social mores for each ethnic group to follow in the home and the society.

As previously stated, ATR is a lived religion, to study it one must study the religious journey of the African from birth to death.²⁴ Magesa adds that since it involves the whole of life, whatever one thinks, says, or does is religious or, at least, can have religious implications.²⁵ A study of ATR and the African worldview cannot be limited to research alone but must also constitute empirical evidence of African life. It is through the empirical evidence, which is passed on from one generation to the other that gives birth to African conversion. There is no conversion experience in ATR as in some other religions. You have to be born into it. Mbiti states, Consequently, it is impossible to convert from one traditional religion to another; instead, one must be born into a community in order to adopt its religious practices. It is impossible for an outsider to enter or fully understand another society's religion. The few Europeans I know who make such amazing claims who declare they have been converted to African religions have no idea what they are talking about. Becoming a libationist or following a few rituals like the African does not equate to becoming a convert to a traditional religion.²⁶

In contrast to Mbiti's statements of posting and conversion by sole birth. It seems that only indigenous people may identify as traditionalists. It is also acknowledged that conversion occurs when two individuals become acquainted through marriage or cohabitation. People who have stayed with others are influenced by their ongoing relationships. Mbiti claims that Africans are renowned for their extreme religiosity, to the point where it is difficult or impossible to completely separate religion from African culture.²⁷ Mndende agrees with Mbiti when he acknowledges that,

Religion is part of the fibre of society; it is deeply ingrained in social life, and it is impossible to isolate and study it as a distinct phenomenon; therefore when members of a family clan gather together in a sacrificial ritual for the ancestors, that is, a religious activity in honour to an ancestor or ancestors.²⁸

Even whilst it may be seen as a way to honour or commemorate the ancestors, the gathering is religious in nature due to all that goes on there. An emphasis is placed on the ancestors during the animal slaughter, water or beer pouring, and dancing. It is easy to argue that the African can be studied as a test case for what religion portrays when defining and appreciating religion. According to Thorpe, religion is an essential component of life itself, and African Traditional Religious people view it as the basis of all life. According to Mbiti, religion enters every aspect of life to such an extent that it is difficult or impossible to completely isolate it.²⁹ It is because of this that this article subscribes to the dictum by Mbiti that the African is a notoriously religious. Leonard's assertion of the Africans and their existence explains it all when he writes,

The religion of these natives (Africans) is their existence and their existence is their religion. It supplies the principle on which their law is dispensed and morality adjudicated. The entire organization of their common life is so interwoven with it that they cannot get away from it. Like the Hindus they eat religiously, drink religiously and sing religiously.³⁰

African Culture and Christianity

From the very onset of discourse on the interrelationship between African culture and Christianity, is the undeniable fact that the native people who converted to Christianity will never forget their African origins and culture. This has strongly been expressed in the call for contextualized Christianity that reflects the praxis of the African. That is because the culture of the people is in tandem with their values, norms, beliefs and practices.

²⁴ Mbiti, "African Religions and Philosophy," 5.

²⁵ Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Orbis Books, 2014).

²⁶ Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 5

²⁷ Mbiti, *African Religions and philosophy*, 1

²⁸ N. Mndende, "Spiritual Reality in South Africa," in *Secular Spirituality as a Contextual Critique of Religion*, ed. C. du Toit and C. Mayson (Pretoria: UNISA, 2006), 153–73, 161.

²⁹ Mbiti, "African Religions and Philosophy," 1.

³⁰ Leonard, *The Lower Niger and Its People*, 429.

In summary, it can be argued that the faith or belief expressed by the people is in direct alignment with their cultural values. As indicated by Akama, culture is a complex system made up of the arts, knowledge, society, and beliefs.³¹ Kluchohn and Kelly defined culture as all of the historically produced explicit and impactful, rational and irrational plans for life that have existed at any point in time and have the capacity to influence men's conduct.³² Otite and Oginwo define culture as the intricate sum of human knowledge, morality, beliefs, arts, customs, and technologies that are passed down and shared from one generation to the next.³³ According to Sibani, culture is the thing that encompasses everything and is akin to the way of life of the people, passed down from generation to generation and age to age.³⁴ In agreement with Sibani's stance, it is easy to see why African Christians are susceptible to returning to their transmitted religious activities.

The important role that culture plays in Christian evangelization and missions has also been discussed by other academics who conceive that people's thought patterns are shaped by the culture they grew up in and that a person's worldview has a major role in determining how open or closed they are to new ideas. Accordingly, Omenyo has observed that one of the shortcomings of missionary work in Africa has long been acknowledged to be historical Christianity's inability to engage in a fruitful discourse with traditional African culture and religion. He claims that the result of this theological shortfall is that most African Christians find it difficult to reconcile their worldview with the brand of Christianity that Western Christian missionaries in Africa espouse.³⁵ According to Omenyo's claims, the manner the Christian faith was taught to African Christians at the time they were converted likely prevented them from understanding it completely. However, his opinions do not offer any suggestions for how to solve the issue of the theological deficit and enhance communication between the Christian religion and traditional African cultures. Hence, another element that this work examines is inculturation, specifically how some indigenous cultural practices and beliefs seem to be subsumed in Christianity. As asserted by Adamo,

The current state of Christianity and the concerning rise in ATR membership make communication between African Indigenous Religion (AIR) and Christianity imperative. Because so many African Christians continue to support ATR, particularly during emergencies, the missionary brand of Christianity that Africans have accepted can be described as hypocritical.³⁶

This indicates that while ATR is still prevalent and strong, especially during difficult times, Christian leaders need to be very aware of this if they hope to raise authentic, pure African Christians. Many people who have professed to be Christians still support conventional priests today. Furthermore, the summary of Bascom and Herskovits remains accurate,

African religions continued to exhibit vitality everywhere, despite the ferocity of Christian missionary endeavours and the millennia of Muslim proselytizing that have characterized the diverse sections of Africa. This can be observed in the homage paid to ancestors, the worship of African deities, and the use of sorcery, divination, and other ceremonies.....³⁷

Subsequently, Larbi, argues that the early missionary endeavour in Africa was severely damaged by the denial of the spirit force (witches, sorcerers, fetishes, magic, charms, and the native deities). They ultimately produced two-world Christians with dual loyalties during that process. He concludes that this kind of situation usually occurs when Christian converts still have a phobia of witches and ghosts and think that the power of their fetish can help them in difficult times.³⁸ By making these claims, Larbi hopes to highlight the fact that, provided connections are built with traditional African civilizations, the gospel may have the necessary cultural influence. This research concedes Larbi's claim in part, but not in its entirety, as one cannot practice ancestor worship and be a Christian. At this point, the research supports the blending of some traditional African beliefs and customs (such as marriage ceremonies, funeral rites, birth and naming ceremonies, and sickness and healing) with Christianity so that African Christians could worship their God without feeling guilty.

According to Bediako,

³¹ E. S. Akama, *Introduction to Religious Cultural Studies* (Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt Press, 2021), 91.

³² C. Klockhohn and W. Kelly, *The Concept of Culture* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1988), 44.

³³ A. Otite and P. Oginwo, *Problems of Culture in Africa* (Ibadan: Opex, 2016), 86.

³⁴ C. M. Sibani, *Fundamentals of Religion and Culture in African Society*. (Enugu: Frankpana, 2014), 107.

³⁵ Cephas Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism: A Study of the Development of Charismatic Renewal in the Mainline Churches in Ghana* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2002), 1.

³⁶ David T Adamo, "Christianity and the African Traditional Religion (s): The Postcolonial Round of Engagement," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 32, no. 1 (2011): 1–10.

³⁷ W. R. Bascom and M. J. Herskovits, *Continuity and Change in African Cultures* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 3.

³⁸ Emmanuel Kingsley Larbi, *Pentecostalism: The Eddies of Ghanaian Christianity*, vol. 1 (CPCS, 2001), 29.

When the gospel is preached, the resultant community does not dissociate itself from the old practices rather it becomes the fulfilment of the aspirations of the old customs. He concludes that the Christian gospel is not opposed to African religious ideas, but rather is the crowning glory of African religiosity.³⁹

Given that culture is often posited as an antithesis to Christianity, this has important implications for the idea that traditional African culture serves as a doorway to genuine Christianity. Therefore, there needs to be a synthesis of culture with Christianity, where harmonic elements are maintained for continuity and misinformed and harmful elements of culture are shunned. This is especially so because a person who follows Christ according to Andrew Walls does not become an outsider in their society; rather, it marks the beginning of the community's conversion. Walls' statement is premised on his belief that the African Christian does not lead a solitary life. He has to live his life within the community.⁴⁰

METHODOLOGY

The study made use of qualitative methods which enabled the researchers to subjectively analyze the findings. Again, this method was used because of the nature of the work as it will be most appropriate to use a qualitative method of gathering information since matters about perceptions, beliefs, ideas and opinions are difficult to measure quantitatively. The data was collected with an unstructured interview guide and open-ended questions, which enabled in-depth investigation. The researchers interviewed priests and members from both the traditional religious community and the church. Their responses served as the primary source of information. Published and unpublished books such as journals, magazines, and brochures also served as secondary sources of information. The choice of Manso Dome-Beposo was due to the viable practice of ATR existing in tandem with Neo-prophetic churches. Respondents from the traditional faith were selected from two shrines; one being the high priest for the community, Okonfo Kobri and the other being a family shrine priestess named Okonfo Biribinsia, a highly respected priestess. Three (3) neo-prophetic churches were selected for the study.

The sample from the population selection of respondents was chosen using the purposive sampling technique. The term "purposeful sampling" describes a selection approach wherein the researcher uses judgment to determine which individuals will offer the best perspective on the topic of interest, and then purposefully invites those particular perspectives into the study. This is used when subjects are specifically needed based on their knowledge of the issues under study. This technique was chosen since the study required more knowledgeable persons who can provide the right information for the study because of their experiences and for the fact that they are directly involved in helping to analyse the extent to which traditional religion has influenced Christianity. Interviews and observations were employed as primary sources of data collection. Moreover, other secondary sources like publications, bulletins, newspapers and such documents were used to crosscheck or confirm some of the responses given by the informants.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The main aim of this paper was to examine the extent African traditional religion has influenced neo-prophetic Christianity. This was done by examining some key elements, which patrons of neo-prophetic churches demonstrate. The study focused on some specific elements such as prayer, morality, and prophetic ministration among others. The paper argues that whilst one cannot in certainty determine that these elements/ activities carried out by some Christians were directly borrowed from the African traditional religion and thus amount to syncretism, the nature and form of these elements make it plausible to be called such. That is because most of the activities especially within the contemporary neo-prophetic churches seem to mimic that of the African traditional religion. It can be admitted that there are no accepted indicators, that one can use to measure the extent of the influence of ATR on Christianity. Nevertheless, available studies seem to suggest there is some syncretic element within contemporary Christianity.

Influence of ATR on Prophetism

The study found out, that ATR has influenced the concept and the nature of propheetism in the Ghanaian churches. That is because the study found out that most prophetic explorations involve the use of rituals artefacts and stylistic forms which are similar to "Abisa" in the Akan spiritual cosmology. For example, Africans may feel unworthy of directly addressing the Almighty God, according to Mbiti. Consequently, people will come to God through an intermediary such as divinities or an oracle. Therefore, it is typical to come across diviners

³⁹ Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and Modern Africa* (London: Harper Collins, 1992), 310.

⁴⁰ Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History* (New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 51.

who act as the representatives of the gods that the people pray to. This is predicated on the idea that God, other deities, and the ancestors are largely unapproachable and only interact with people through a select group of selected servants. On this account, one of the respondents who is a fetish priest remarked that:

I find it funny when people give all sorts of names to our faith, beliefs and practices. It is important to say that, there is nothing wrong with people sharing their heritage and identity. However, because of the many misconceptions about ATR, many people are confused and you cannot tell whether they are Christians or not. Look at what many churches are doing now, most of the things I can confidently say it was borrowed from ATR. I may be wrong though, but you cannot deny it either. Practically, the nature and form of prophetic if not the same is very similar to how 'abisa' is done in Akan divination.

The claim of the respondent supposes that there is an expectation for Christians and their ministers to be distinct from ATR adherents and also for prophetic ministration to be distinct from the nature and form of divination. However, the respondent seems confident to some degree that how prophetic ministry is conducted is foreshadowed in the stylistic form of divination where the diviner, serves as an intermediary consulting the spirit realm on behalf of the living. This form of interdependence between the spiritual world and the physical world largely depends on intermediaries such as women and men diviners who have learnt the art of divination and are primarily needed for divination and to deliver oracular messages. Similarly, patrons of neo-prophetic movement, also depend heavily on their prophets to receive spiritual guidance, insight, or direction from God.⁴¹ According to Quayesi-Amakye, the neo-prophetic movement is similar to Akan divination in that it teaches churchgoers to rely on prophets.⁴²

From the above observation, it could be asserted that there is no viable evidence that neo-prophetic Christians are in some ways influenced by ATR. That is to say that similarity does not imply sameness. For instance, Christian and traditional prayer may be similar but not necessarily the same. Christian prayer involves direct communication with the ultimate reality whereas traditional prayer is mediated through lesser divinities and ancestors. Regardless, it may be conceded that there is no concrete separation between Akan cosmological ontology pre-conversion and post-conversion. There are many instances it appears Christians cannot separate their Christian faith from their traditional beliefs and practices. For instance, in situations where it becomes difficult for Akan Christians to forgive their offenders, some resort to self-vindication and seek the services of traditional priests to invoke spells on the offender, though such practices are against Christian teaching. In other instances, some Christians inquire from the traditional priest to recover lost items while others undergo some traditional rites to purify themselves of any curses. This is evidenced by the claim of one prophet who stated,

Many Christians in my church and the entire community still resort to invoking curses on one another. During funerals and festivals, these same Christians also pour libations and perform certain rites, which are in direct contrast to the Christian teachings. Interestingly, they try to Christianize such acts by referring to some passages in the bible. I have witnessed some members coming for counselling and asking me to consult the dead, mediums and other entities. All these concepts are influenced by the traditional African religion.⁴³

In an interview with an elder of the congregation, he mentioned that some members belonging to the church had received sanctions from the church for indulging in these practices and due to that, others who did not want to be sanctioned have stopped attending church. Notwithstanding, these same practices continue to persist in the church. Some members will try to even disguise themselves to be part of a community festival or celebration, which involves ancestor worship and lesser divinities.⁴⁴

ATR Influence of Christian Ceremonies and Rites

Again, it was observed from the study that during key life events of Christians such as marriage ceremonies, funerals, naming ceremonies, etc., the dualism of ontological viewpoints of Akan Christians is brought to the fore. Commenting on this, one of the fetish priests shared that:

Many children were named at my shrine here and after they were taken to church to also be named by the church. Such parents believe in the traditions of their people and have strong bonds with their ancestors. People who lack understanding of the ways of our ancestors criticize us without even

⁴¹ Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion* .

⁴² Joseph Quayesi-Amakye, *Prophetism in Ghana Today: A Study on Trends in Ghanaian Pentecostal Prophetism* (Scotts Valley, California: Create Space Publishing, 2013).

⁴³ Interview with the Parish Priest of Manso Domi- Beposo Anglican Parish concerning why members keep on Combining the traditional religious practices with that of the Christianity. 10th April, 2020.

⁴⁴ Interview with a congregational leader and spoke person, 10th April 2020.

knowing us... We cannot say libation will not be poured because the deceased is a Christian. Christian's burials also are similar to our burial and one can hardly tell the difference.

It is clear from this finding that certain cultural elements of the African religio-cultural worldview cannot be done away with because they have shaped Christian ceremonies. For instance, even though children are named in churches, many Churches still utilize the symbolism of water and wine in child naming just as is done in the ATR. This paradox may be attributed to the formative background of people whose homes had a lot of traditional religious backgrounds before conversion. That is to say, the very ethos of the traditional beliefs and practices are inculcated in them the very moment they are born and they literary grow into them. Many people take great pride in their religio-cultural background even after conversion. In recent times, it is common to find many churches having traditional Sundays where church members are encouraged to represent their various cultures and traditions. Evidently, these are attempts towards inculturation. Moreover, Akan Christian families largely maintain a traditional orientation towards events of the life cycle from birth to death.

Other instances of cultural elements of the African religio-cultural worldview that persist include the participation of Christians in the invocation of their ancestors to witness and bless their marriages or funerals. This is usually done through traditional rituals and libation prayers before engaging in other Christian rituals and praying in new tongues. Furthermore, when there is calamity in a particular family or community, Christians seek intervention from traditional priests to mitigate on their behalf without cognizance of their Christian faith. It will be apt to assert that, it may be practically impossible to separate the culture and traditions of the people even after conversion. That is because these acts give them a sense of identity and responsibility to a larger society. Thus through ceremonies at significant life evnts ATR exerts some influence over Christianity.

ATR Influence on the Neo-Prophetic Concept of Spiritual Warfare

The study also found out that, African traditional religion has highly influenced the Christian concept of spiritual warfare. It is possible for someone however to contend that the bible makes mention of spiritual warfare. The researchers' response will be that, even though the bible significantly mentions spiritual warfare, the form in which Christians engage in this warfare bears much semblance to that of the ATR worldview than that of the Bible. The neo-prophetic concept of spiritual warfare delves into Akan cosmological universe to account that the presence and debilitating activities of evil spirits may be tied to ones identification with and generational connection to certain family peculiarities such as, thrones, altars and totems. Consequently, such linkages needs to be severed for the evil activity to warded off through prayers and some demonstrative symbolic actions via what is termed "akwankyerε" to wit spiritual guidance or direction. According to Allport's 1958 Theory, people's philosophies are typically based on their value systems. To put it another way, their principles dictate what matters and does not matter in life.

A respondent specifically remarked that the concept of spiritual warfare and the belief in spiritual entities who have the power to destroy lives emanates from African spirituality. He asserted that:

Spiritual warfare is not new to Africans, as our very foundational beliefs and practices involve belief in the existence of benevolent spirits and evil spirits. If I am not mistaken, many people believe the spiritual world has a direct influence on their physical life. Even many Christians engage in what they term spiritual warfare due to their traditional belief in the spiritual world. There are countless times Christians refer to such powers when engaged in spiritual warfare. Therefore, I think in many ways, ATR has influenced Christianity.⁴⁵

This is in accordance with Van der Walt's assertion that African Christians produced dualistic Christianity, which brought about schizophrenia in the lives of the Africans.⁴⁶ This finding also resonates with Larbi's assertion that the African worldview and belief practices in many ways have shaped Christian thoughts in Africa.⁴⁷ The finding further aligns with the Pew Research Center report that, notwithstanding centuries of Christian dominance in Africa, the traditional African religions remain widespread in the majority of the African nations it surveys. It furthermore indicated that "many Africans actively practice Christianity, but they

⁴⁵Interview with Obaapeyin Abena Benie, a member of the Anglican Church, 28th July, 2020

⁴⁶ B.J. Van Der Walt, *The Liberating Message: A Christian Worldview for Africa* (Potchefstroom: Institute for Reformational Studies, Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education, South Africa, 1994), 8.

⁴⁷ Larbi, *Pentecostalism: The Eddies of Ghanaian Christianity*, 29.

also believe in witchcraft, evil spirits, sacrifices to ancestors, traditional religious healers, reincarnation, and other aspects of traditional African religions."⁴⁸

Discussion Summary

The similarities in the stylistic forms, emphasis and experiences of neo-prophetic doctrines and practices and the traditional practices and beliefs have given more insight into the perceived influence of ATR on the neo-prophetic strand of Christian expression. There is a deficit in theological and practical responses from the church regarding the overindulgence of its members in traditional beliefs and practices.

This research agrees with the remarks Turaki that, "The African receives the gospel while standing on the platform of his African religious and cultural heritage."⁴⁹ This explains why though they see themselves as belonging to the church but still patronize the powers of the gods and the ancestors when it comes to matters of ascertaining the truth or otherwise of a situation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study has indicated that there is a tendency for Christians to engage in syncretism, hence it is recommended that Christian theological reflections should be strengthened to educate the Christians to be able to draw the lines between possible ATR practices and their Christian belief practices.

It is also recommended that a comparative study that will examine the extent of the influence between the mainline churches and the Pentecostal/Charismatic churches should also be carried out. This will enable the church to have a better understanding of the extent the ATR has influenced the entire Christian landscape in Ghana. Thus, prompting probable interventions which will be aligned with traditional Christian views.

Notwithstanding the evidence of possible syncretism, a clear distinction should be made between the culture of the people and the religious activities of the people since at times the church wrongfully accuses members even if they are performing culturing duties. This will help the church authorities to enculturate the culture of the people within the Christian liturgy.

CONCLUSION

The study has highlighted a significant trajectory between the African religio-cultural worldview and its influence on neo-prophetic Christianity. Indeed, one cannot validate whether the actions and inactions of the church could be termed syncretism because there are several pieces of evidence in the Christian theological enterprise which seem to support these actions. Again, it will be somehow problematic to clearly quantify the extent African spiritual ontology has influenced contemporary Christian practices. Nevertheless, the natural tendencies of the African as a highly religious and cultural being make it plausible to assume such a position. The matter becomes serious when the church throws its support into partaking in traditional beliefs and practices. With the unending call for contextualized Christianity by many African theologians, there is a need for a clearly thought-out modality to ensure the extremities are curtailed. This is important as there have been several religious movements which sought to Africanize the Christian faith and have combined beliefs of the ATR which seem to be in contrast with the traditional Christian practices. Again, when many Christians see themselves as having the duty to protect what has been transferred to them by their forefathers and thus are vulnerable to engage in syncretic worship. The article concludes by asserting that there is a thin line between inculturation and syncretism and thus the church will need an intentional approach to balance the two.

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⁴⁸ Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, "Tolerance and Tension: Islam and Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa" (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 1615 L Street NW Suite 700, 2010).

⁴⁹ Yusufu Turaki, *Christianity and African Gods: A Method in Theology* (Potchefstroomse: Potchefstroomse Universiteit vir CHO, 1999).

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