

The significant role of rites of passage in African traditional religion: an enquiry basis for Christian mission field in South Africa

It is common that when people find themselves out of their peripheral line they view that which is out of their scope negatively. This has happened to Africa when missionaries landed on the shores of our land. I cannot emphasize more on the fact that even the gospel of Christ was brought to our shores in a European pot plant. The message of the gospel was coated and packaged with western culture. Jews believed that one needs to follow Jewish practice of circumcision before being accepted into the Jewish community. This Jewish spirit of putting a fence around the gospel with their cultural laws and practices was evident at the time of missionaries and it is still evident even today. The Jews could not see their religion outside their culture. Their Christ could not fit in other people's religion therefore they had to convert others to the Jewish community – that is exactly what the missionaries did when they arrived in Africa. Their Christ could not fit in African culture and they had to dispel everything African as barbaric, uncivilized and superstitious.

When missionaries arrived in Africa they denounced traditional music, artistic work, images and songs and dance as bad and immoral. Those who joined Christianity had to completely renounce all that they were and take a new form and most of the time the new form was western. For example, black converts had to take a new name after baptism. African attire was replaced with western clothes. Furthermore, a differentiation was then made between “*amagqobhoka*” (those who renounced their way of living and accepted civilization and Christianity) and “*amaqaba*” (those who preferred to continue with their red ochre). Amaqaba were then labeled as barbaric and uncivilized. Furthermore, it was brought to my attention by Mr. Siyabulela Tonono, and I agree, that which was demonized, seen as bad or barbaric is now glorified and accepted as it is in a western form of makeup brands whilst the red ochre is still seen as barbaric and uncivilized (facebook, 2020).

I further agree with many scholars who believe that early missionaries had a flawed understanding of African culture (Fiedler 1996; Mugambi 2002; Mokhoati 2017). Historically, western theology, concepts, philosophies and anthropological interpretation about African culture became unfair, undermining and distorted. This interpretation has viewed African culture as demonic and barbaric and promoted western culture as superior to African culture. This has brought a birth of those who want to see a decolonized theology and Christianity.

This paper shall deal with the significant role of rites of passage in African traditional religion and how this can form a basis for Christian Mission field in South Africa today. Furthermore this paper notes briefly that for mission to be effective it must be contextual, discusses the African

Traditional religion rites of passage in an effort to unearth its significance, its effects and influences, its role and benefits, how these rites can be used as tools of reinterpreting Christianity in Southern Africa today.

Firstly, rites of passage in African communities have proven to sustain the community values, brought development in its participants, and systematically ushered participants to different stages of life. Secondly, culture and religion are intertwined and religion shape and influences how people live. Thirdly, criticism of rites of passage as barbaric, irrelevant and demonic has left many in a vacuum without understanding of what they should do; some hold both culture and Christianity whilst others do these rites secretly fearing criticism and condemnation.

On the other hand, the definition of religions has been dominated by Western philosophies. Jaco Beyers citing Crosby in his article states that how these religions are arranged is according to the perspective and understanding of the West (Beyers 2010). Unfortunately, the arrangement and perspective of the West has viewed African religions as superstitious.

Fourthly, the practice of both Cultural rite and Christianity form part of life in an African. And Anselmo Vilanculo would say “For the African, religion pervades every aspect of life” (Vilanculo 2009: 234 – 245). The fact that “religion pervades every aspect of [African] life” (Vilanculo 2009: 234 – 245) makes it difficult for an African to separate his culture from any other religion that he chooses to adhere to. Also, culture is imbedded in their lives that it is not easy to separate it from their lives. Scholars argue that Africans fail to choose between Christianity and African traditional practices because both play a role in their lives. For example, Joel Mokhoati argues that “Christianity connects them to God while African traditional practices provide a lasting bond with ancestors” (Mokhoati 2017).

On the other hand there are those who believe that Christianity should be abandoned because it is colonial religion and absurd. On the other hand, Christianity is imbedded in the lives of Africans in such that Mbiti refers to it as indigenous, traditional and African (Mbiti 1996). Therefore calling for its termination in the lives of Africans is a futile exercise; neither does ignoring African Traditional “rites of passage” will be helpful.

Mission must be contextual

Without dealing vastly on the topic of mission and defining what mission is; it is worth noting that mission must be contextual. The aim is to communicate the gospel in an African context; therefore the gospel must be contextual. For effectiveness in mission, one needs to cultivating the lifestyle of those whom you do mission with and understanding how things are done. In other words, one needs to understand their lifestyle, what makes them who they are and what their belief is; something that some missionaries failed to do. In other words, for mission to be effective, it must be contextual.

Christo Lombard noted David Bosch’s observation in mission. This observation by David Bosch needs to be taken into consideration when doing mission in this era. Christo Lombard notes “David Bosch believed that knowledge of the socio – cultural and ritual context in which African religion is imbedded was important for communicating the gospel” (ed. Lombard 1999). On the same breath, Rev Andile Mbetse asked the Methodist people “are we able to communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ to Southern Africans today through songs, hymns and liturgies that meet the people where they are? (Malinga and Richardson 2006). In other words, there is a call for a gospel

communicated in an African way. Therefore, we need to use what is known and common to African in order to communicate the truth of the gospel. When this is done, it should be in a way that notes the uniqueness of each religion, done without the intention of absorbing the other religion or distorting what the religion stands for. In other words, For the benefit of mission, elements that are not in contradiction with the Christian Faith can be used to further the gospel.

David Horner asserts “if we hope to make a real difference in how missions shape the mission of each local congregation, we have to begin with an honest assessment of where we find ourselves now. Knowing where we are going not only needs the context of where we once were but also where we stand presently regarding the call of Christ to make disciples of the nations” (2011).

Muzorewa emphasizes this point when describing African Theology as an “attempt to respond to a mandate to construct a biblically based and relevant theology that speaks to the spiritual needs of African people” (1985). The question we need to answer is: does our theology speak to the spiritual needs of African people?

Kasomo Daniel makes reference to Imbalu ceremony, that the participants in African traditional religion rites or ceremonies are baptized Christians who “have one foot in cultural beliefs and another in Christian religion” (Daniel 2009: 156 - 166). And John Staudenmaier agrees that culture is so entrenched in human beings in such that it cannot be completely baptized (Staudenmaier 1994: 2). This attitude from the Imbalu ceremony, Nehemiah Tile’s story and all those who broke away from the missionary establishment mentioned by Professor Daryl Balia proves that there is a desire of a theology and mission work that is African.

With that in mind, I therefore present that we need to examine African Traditional rite of passage and see if we cannot use them to reinterpret Christianity for South African Christians. Of course, I agree that every religion has its own negatives and positives, and therefore we cannot condemn the whole system just because it has the negatives. Rather than throwing the baby with water we must engage the religion and find common ground and use it and discard the negativities. For example, the system of education in the apartheid era was domestication education yet it yielded positive fruits; it was meant to keep black children slaves. However, through the same education system we have theologians, politicians, black presidents and many dignitaries. We cannot therefore throw the baby out with the bathwater.

Furthermore, the late Ross Olivier, speaking about John Wesley, he said, “I have a hunch therefore that Mr. Wesley would say to us, when my missionaries brought the gospel of Jesus to you, it was in the form of a potted – plant. It was your task to remove it from constraints of the pot and plant it in your African soil so that it would be nurtured by African nutrients” (Malinga & Richardson 2006). In other words, Ross Olivier was making a call that it is within the Southern Africa inhabitants to make sure that the gospel they received from missionaries becomes relevant to Southern Africa.

We have to take into account that the Greco – Roman religious cults and the Egyptian cults impacted on Christian religion. What made Christianity to be a better religion than the mystery religions was the use of the mystery religion elements to its benefit and conquered all other

religions. At times, it might not be direct copying of the cult to Christianity but a result of the shared cultural environment. Similarly with the use of symbols, early Christians made use of the pre – existing symbols from their communities to communicate the gospel truth.

Secondly, culture is characterized by constant change rather than static. In other words, culture can be stretched and pushed to change at all times. With teaching and enlightenment, culture can be changed. There are elements and practices that could be changed from the rites of passage and used in Christianity to make it a better religion. For example, the Xhosa culture of the early Fathers is not the same as the Xhosa culture experienced by our generation. There are many early behaviors that were changed due to the influence of civilization.

Identity and community

These two elements have a huge and great role in the life of an African. A picture of the two elements gives the reader a glimpse and understanding of the rite of passage discussed below.

Identity informs every person who he is and a person's identity depends on his background. An African defines himself in relation to others or his community, hence the principle "*cognatus sum ergo sum*", meaning I am related therefore I am, is prominent within the African community. Edmiston says "to ask who I am is both intimate and a public question of identity and sense of self, it is socio – cultural and an individual issue, it is how one relates to others and it is an ethical question asking how one ought to live his life and act in the world (2008).

Rites of passage are about life changing and soul changing. After reading the journals on rites of passage, one agrees with Amy F, Davis Abdallah that rites of passage "have the purposes of transformation"(Abdallah 2013: 9) – transforming from old phase to new phase of life; be it a change from the living to an ancestor or young to adulthood. Similarly, rites of passage of Christianity are about life changing and soul changing. It is life changing and soul changing when you accept Christ. Hence St Paul when addressing the Corinthian church asserts "therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here! (2 Corinthians 5: 17).

Firstly, one needs to understand the concept of community. Kasomo Daniel notes a very crucial aspect of the African life. He penned "everything that happens to a person is shared from conception, birth, naming, educating, initiation, marriage and death" (Daniel 2009: 156 – 166). He further notes that a person then becomes part of the clan rather than being an individual in a family (Daniel 2009: 156 – 166). In other words, life in an African setting is communal. An African proverb says "*umntu ngumuntu ngabantu*" literally meaning "a person is a person through others. In a community a person does not live in isolation but is related to the rest of the community.

In an African setting people share, love one another and participate together on issues relating to the community. Communal is then a foundation of African worldview. Eben K Nhiwatiwa in his book "preaching in the African context" states that "An African belongs to a community...everyone is related to everyone else" (Nhiwatiwa 2012). This relationship extends to the dead. It is in this concept that these elements should be viewed.

Three features of rites of passage

Rites of passage have three features; separation, transition and incorporation. For the benefit of this paper I will not discuss the first two and rather put focus on incorporation as it speaks to the above two elements.

1. Incorporation

Dictionary defines incorporation as “the inclusion of something as part of a whole.” Whilst the initiate is in training, he is separated from the community. For training to be complete, the initiate must be brought back to the community in a new status. For example, a boy who went for initiation is separated from the community and taught values at initiation school. After he has completed his training he is incorporated to the wider community as a man. Another example is at a time of death; death separates the deceased from his family. After a certain period there is a rite that is performed to bring back the deceased as an ancestor. This rite of passage will be explored later under “ukubuyiswa rite”

Types of African religion rites

According to James Cox there are three categories of rituals i.e. calendric rituals, life cycle rituals and crisis rituals (2010). This paper shall deal with life cycle rituals.

African traditional religion has different types of rites; however, there are common types that are practiced by many Africans, though called in different names, they have similarities in them. Procedures followed in these rites may be different but the ultimate goal is the same. How James Cox describes the rite of *kurova guva* (*ukubuyiswa*) is different from what I have gathered from the research amongst the Zulu speaking people. For example, it is not necessary for the Zulu speaking people to consult and “*inyanga*” before performing the ritual and any family member could preside over the ceremony as long he/ she is a family elder. This then eliminates the issue of consulting “Sangomas”, which seems to be in contradiction with other views in Christian Faith.

1. Birth rite

There are rites of passage followed when a child is born. Be it African or Christian rites of passage. In ATR a child is celebrated through a ceremony called “*imbeleko*”. On the other hand, in Christianity a child is celebrated through naming and baptism (Luke 2: 21 – 28, 1 Samuel 1: 19 – 28, Exodus 2: 1 – 10, Mark 10: 13 – 16). Prominent features in birth rite are symbols. For example, in baptism water symbolizes washing of sins and a candle symbolizing Jesus’ light¹, whilst burying an umbilical cord symbolizes connection to mother earth and family lineage. My call is that we can create a liturgy that can incorporate the African understanding.

¹<http://www.uwo.edu/religionet/er/christ/cslife.htm>

2. Initiation rite

Though this rite is not prominent in the Zulu speaking people, it is important to mention it. Initiation rites are found in the bible. Jesus, Abraham and his descendants were circumcised (Luke 2: 21 – 39, Gen. 17: 1). This was an event that marks the entry to new life. The initiate is separated from the community and adjusted to the new context in preparation for the re-emergence to the community as a new person. Initiation rite of passage in African Traditional religion is a rite of transition from childhood to adulthood.

On the contrary, Milasi A. Judith says “Christian initiation rites can be a powerful tool in shaping the lives of Christian teenagers as they move into adulthood. With God’s help, they can be used to produce responsible, spiritual, vibrant young adults who will bless the church of Christ in Africa” (Judith 2006: 101).

3. Death and burial rite

Death comes in many forms and death is feared; others die because they were sick, in warfare, accident and many other ways. Some people fear it more than others. How the person died in African Traditional religion is important. Death then is handled differently. Each cause of death has a ritual and rites to follow. For example, a person who died in a car accident or gunshot has different rituals to a person who died a normal death. Each death is handled according to the rules and rites appropriate for that particular death. It is observed in African culture that if the rite is not handled accordingly there are consequences. Death is viewed as misfortune and a ritual is to be performed to curb the misfortunes. A killing of an animal is prominent in this ritual and a request from ancestors to stop the misfortunes is made. According to Klaus Nürnberger “death is considered to be contagious and dangerous for the survivors. The family and its sympathizers must be protected and strengthened against the vicious power of death” (Nürnberger 2007). Hence the ritual and request to ancestors becomes necessary.

In African Traditional religion it is believed that if the burial rites are not done correctly, the spirit of the deceased can linger around and come back to haunt the living, hence Klaus Nürnberger states that it is believed in ATR that if funeral rites are neglected there is a possibility of homeless spirit (Nürnberger 2007).

It is also believed that the deceased spirit can cause serious troubles for the family. Therefore the spirit should be sent to a proper place and make sure that the spirit does not linger around. He further states that “some rituals are designed to prevent the deceased from returning, or getting into the hands of witches” (Nürnberger 2007). Therefore it becomes imperative for the living to make sure that these rites are performed for their own sake. Hence all these rituals need to be followed properly.

Amongst the Zulu speaking in Piet Retief there is a ritual that is performed when a person has died in a car accident, gunned down or stabbed to death. A goat is used as a sacrifice so that the incident should not happen again. The goat should not be skinned and should not be eaten, it is burnt to ashes. Those ashes are taken inside the yard and buried.

What is important in this ritual is blood; it is believed that this blood would close the wounds and prevent similar incidents in happening. In three instances where I observed, this blood is never mixed with any other substance. What is prominent in this rite is the elder speaking to the ancestors and commanding that such incident should not happen again.

4. Ukubuyiswa rite

The basic understanding in this rite is that Africans believe that the deceased will find rest when they are brought home; they need to be incorporated to the community. A grave is not a home neither it is a final destination. It is therefore imperative for the family to make sure that their loved one is at rest. Africans therefore crafted a ritual of bringing the deceased home to rest. I note that for both Africans and Christians a grave is never viewed as a permanent living abode.

With this in mind, coupled with the idea that life in African set up is communal and extend to death, a rite of home – bringing was constructed.

This rite of “ukubuyiswa” is tightly linked to ancestorship. For better understanding of this rite one needs to also note that the cause of this rite arose because there is a belief that ancestors play an active role in the lives of their descendants, have powers and they have great control over the living. It is believed that they have influence in one’s life, have power to approve or disapprove, has the power to inflict sickness, barrenness or misfortunes and protects and defend those who believe in them (Adeyemo 2006). Secondly, Klaus Nürnberger agrees and states that ancestors “make their will known, and express their displeasure in the form of droughts, barrenness or other mishaps in the lives of their descendants” (Nürnberger 2007). Furthermore, Yusuf Turaki in Africa Bible Commentary observes that “if burial ceremonies and rituals are not properly observed, the spirit of the ancestor is believed to be capable of haunting the living in an unpleasant way” (Adeyemo 2006). In complementary to the above statement, encyclopedia states that ancestors “serve as the guardians of the living...” Every person has a fear of misfortunes and evils, for African traditional religion, especially those that are inflicted by the dead.

Nhiwatiwa K. Eben says “the role of ancestors is that of mediums, to take human message to the embodiment of all the spirits (God)... God the spirit can only be approached by ancestors”. Hence at a time of burial the coffin will be put down at the entrance of the homestead and the deceased will be sent to the world of the dead with requests. It is worth noting that those who died poor, as criminals and witches are not given full respect and place in the list of ancestors and therefore this gives an opportunity to replace with an ancestor who was purely perfect and holy. I believe that in an effort to bring a gospel that is African, Christ could be placed at the center, and be placed as the chief ancestor for every family and every ceremony performed.

Christian faith can craft liturgies that are African Christian in a manner of responding to the fears and the unknown. Paul found an altar within a religious city of Athens with this inscription: “to an unknown God” (Acts 17: 16 – 34). I believe that the Athens had crafted this altar due to lack of knowledge about this God. Rather than destroying the altar without teaching about this unknown God of them, he gives them proper teaching.

Symbolism

Symbols are prominent in the rite of passage. Amy F, Davis Abdallah notes that “rite of passage is enhanced by rich symbolism. Symbols have power, but that power is often regulated by the community that uses those symbols” (Abdallah 2013: 11). Dictionary defines symbolism as “an artistic and poetic movement or style using symbolic images and indirect suggestions to express mystical ideas, emotions, and states of mind”. In umemulo a spear is used to represent victory and strength, fat is used as a sign that the girl is a virgin, dancing is done by the Father of the girl to show appreciation. A smile can symbolize the feeling of affection. One symbol can mean two different things. It is therefore important to understand the symbols used in African traditional religion rite of passage lest they are interpreted incorrectly.

Also, one needs to understand that these symbols are not means to an end but just a representation. It is a dramatization. One challenge about these symbols is that many take these symbols as means to an end; without them the ceremony is incomplete. In turn, it makes those who participate in a ceremony that has symbols to put their trust and belief in those symbols.

A branch called “*umlahlabantu’* or “*umphafa*” or *umlahlankosi*” plays a significant role in case of death and the rite of bringing back the spirit of the deceased back to the community. For some, the branch represents or symbolizes the spirit of the deceased. Hence the branch is part of many funerals. Other cultures require a certain expression, behavior and rituals; and each culture dictates rules to be followed. Personally, in all funerals that I preside over I often use a candle as a representation of the deceased and as the candle is switched off, church and family finds closure and allow the deceased to rest in peace.

Washing of hands

In every funeral I ever attended in the black context I noticed a bowl with water next to the gate and people washing their hands before getting into the homestead. It is believed that death is a misfortune and certainly there would be a need for purification. Water is linked with cleansing. This then serves as a symbol of cleansing. It is believed that the community needs to cleanse itself from the darkness of death and that death should not follow them to their homes. Many therefore perform these rites for in case the belief of spirits returning to haunt them is true. A Christian liturgy or symbol of cleansing the family and the community can be crafted in order to replace this belief.

What role has the rites of passage played?

Kasomo Daniel notes that “rites of passage in general are of central importance in the life of the community where they are performed” (Daniel 2009: 156 – 166). And Professor Elizabeth Onyii Ezenweke also agrees with Kasomo Daniel by saying “rites take a glaring place in African traditional life and it is an issue that forms the African lifestyle” (Ezenweke 2012: 22). In other words, these rites of passage become the pulse of the community. Its life is determined by these rites.

It is worth mentioning that the rites of passages of African Traditional religion have a great influence and play a pivotal role in the African communities. These rites of passage have formed a view point of life for those who adhere to them. Many have lived their lives understanding this particular way of living. Rites of passage have played a pivotal role in the life of adherents. For example, in a Xhosa culture you remain a boy till you die if you have not went for the manhood initiation. According to Kasomo Daniel this view is held by the Masaba of Uganda. He notes that the “rite makes one social because without it a Mumasaba male has no social status” (Daniel 2009: 156 – 166). Furthermore, Will Scott notes that “effective rites of passage are of considerable value to the development of the individual and the survival of the culture.” (Scott 2018)

In life one is expected to play a significant role in the life of a family and the community. There are roles and responsibilities that a person need to learn and apply in life for the benefit of both. Responsibilities such as providing for your family, taking care of family and others, and providing protections to your family are prominent in the lives of Africans. Rites of passage provided a platform to learn those roles and responsibilities. Furthermore, Childish behaviors (including boyish mischief) are sometimes excused in an African set up, at the child stage, however, once you become a man you need to act up to your new status. As a man, you are not expected to be seen acting like a boy. Rite of passage played a pivotal role in raising boys to be respected community men.

Rites of passage have proven to be a vehicle to transmit knowledge from one generation to the other. Hence David G Blumenkrantz and Marc B Goldstein say “what Arnold van Gennep described as rites of passage were *community – created* and *community – directed* experiences that transmit cultural values and knowledge to an individual (or individuals)” (Blumenkrantz & Goldstein 2010). Furthermore, David G Blumenkrantz and Marc B Goldstein say “the rites of passage process not only guides the individual’s transition to a new status, but equally important, it created public events that celebrated the transition and reaffirmed these community values” (Blumenkrantz & Goldstein 2010). In other words, rites of passage are crafted in such a way that they give guidance to those who observe them, balances and create a certain order in their cycle of life and provide cultural safety until the next generation.

In case of death, rites of passage have psychological effects for those going through it. At a time of death and funeral, all these rituals or rites of passage are helpful in dealing with Post – Traumatic Stress disorder. These rituals and rites help the deceased family to deal with the pain of death, bring comfort to the family and give closure to the family members of the deceased.

When Klaus Nürnberger talks about the ancestors and that communication with them is indirect, he states that “the most important vehicle of ‘presence’ is ritual” (Nürnberger 2007). Analogous, in African traditional religion, ‘the vehicle of social or status change is the rite of passage’. In other words, whilst communicating with ancestors rely on performing ritual and inadequate if not done, so it is with rites of passage, change of status is depended on the rites of passage.

Dr David G Blumenkrantz and Marc B. Goldstein says “rites of passage create expectations for socially appropriate behaviors” (Blumenkrantz & Goldstein 2010). In other words, at the stage of transition, the initiate is trained in how he must behave and rites of passage compel the inductee to behave in a certain manner.

Amy F, Davis Abdallah notes that “the role of role of passage into ... womanhood is to create opportunities for girls to gain knowledge, skills, and a disposition that seeks maturity and development in these relationships” (Abdallah 2013: 9 – 10). An example in the Zulu culture is “umemulo.” Though Amy F, Davis Abdallah spoke of rites of passage in helping daughters to reach their Godly potential, she notes that “a rite of passage creates space where daughters are not simply taught to be Christians, but to be Christian women” (Abdallah 2013: 9 – 10), similarly, in African traditional rites of passage for coming out of age, initiation to manhood creates a space of teaching initiates to be African women and men.

Fourez, G, state that “rites often function as points of no return...well performed rites break boundaries and lead people and groups to the frontiers of which in some cases they were ignorant. They produce profound effects which are often as effective as psychotherapy” (Fourez 1981).

Rites of passage proved to have helped the community to deal with people’s morals, relationships, behavior, respect of elders and others, instilling communal values and teaching its adherents about life. Though Will Scott reflected on what happens to a person who does not make the transition effectively, he stated the importance of a healthy rite of passage.

He notes that “a healthy rite of passage ... helps open a person to a sense of identity, purpose, connection to the community and responsibility for their relationship with the larger matrix of life...” (Scott 2018). Additionally, he penned, “in absence of effective rites of passage that are held as sacred by the community at large, youth in the modern world are left at a great loss” (Scott 2018).

Professor Manu Ampim argues that “the transition to adulthood is exceedingly difficult in Western societies because there are no systems of adulthood rites to systematically guide the young person through this important stage in his or her life cycle” and further argues that “in western culture adulthood is seen as a status achieved at the age of 18 or 21... on the other hand, African societies systematically initiate boys and girls²” It is also noticeable that in these traditional rites the participant is taught on ways of adulthood, guided morally, and taught about social responsibilities as compared to leaving the young ones without guidance.

Professor Manu outlines that without these systems, there is a development of teenage confusion, chaos and uncertainty³, and thus these systems are important and relevant for today’s context.

²(<http://www.manuampim.com/AfricanInitiationRites.htm>).

³(<http://www.manuampim.com/AfricanInitiationRites.htm>).

Conclusion

Positive of the incorporation of the rites of passage

There are common factors in birth rite and Baptism. One common factor that could be used in this rite of passage is the welcoming of the child into the communal sphere and teachings provided by that community. The church has a responsibility of teaching the infant in Christian ways⁴ just as Africans believe that “It takes a village to raise a child” and that the community has a responsibility of raising the child in African ways. It is worth noting that whether the umbilical cord is buried or thrown in the dustbin is not essential, similarly, whether a child is baptized in a font or pool is not essential. What is important is the act of baptism or welcoming the child. Therefore, a liturgy of discarding the umbilical cord coupled with the act of baptism could be beneficial tools for reinterpreting Christianity to fit the African context.

Secondly, I believe that incorporating Christian rite of passages with African traditional rites of passage of initiation could produce massive results in formation of our children. The motive of both African traditional religion rite of initiation and Christian rites of shaping lives of teenagers into adulthood is to produce responsible adults, therefore, there are commonalities shared and need to be celebrated.

Death and its misfortunes, fear of homeless spirits, fear of spirits bringing trouble to the living and fear of witchcraft caused many to do the rites, despite being born again Christians.

Fifthly, African traditional religion adherents believe that ancestors are mediators between them and God whilst Christians believe that Jesus Christ is the only mediator between man and God.

Amy F, Davis Abdallah notes that “most Christian churches seek to grow their members’ relationships with God and with one another; in fact exalting Christ (relationships with God) and loving people (relationship with others) is sometimes the mission statement of churches” (Abdallah 2013 12).

On the other hand, Klaus Nürnberger notes that “while they [Christians] confess Christ as the redeemer of the world, continue to appeal to their ancestors in times of distress”. He then ask the question “Who is more proximate to African Christians, the ‘risen Christ’ or the ‘living dead’? (Nürnberger 2007) However, Yusufu Turaki makes a beneficial suggestion that “it can be said that Jesus has come to fulfill our African ancestral cult and has taken place of our ancestors, replacing them with self. He has become the mediator between God and African Society” (Adeyemo 2006)

With all that is said in this paper, together with the commonalities of values and virtues of African Traditional religion rites of passage and Christianity, one is obliged to suggest that there is a need of integrating African culture and Christianity, lest we find ourselves with challenges in doing mission. Rather than perpetuating ideologies that cause threat to God’s mission and unity, we need to integrate these religions for the betterment of God’s work.

⁴<http://www.uwyo.edu/religionet/er/christ/cslife.htm>

The paper has proven that there is a desire of mission work and theology crafted in African culture. It was also evident from the interviewees that any rite be it in ATR or Christianity that brings betterment of life and change from one bad state to better one is most welcomed. Our liturgies can be changed and incorporate understanding of the African philosophies and concepts.

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