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THE TRAJECTORIES OF CHRISTIANITY AND AFRICAN RITUAL PRACTICES: THE PUBLIC SILENCE AND THE DILEMMA OF MAINLINE OR MISSION CHURCHES

ABSTRACT

In South Africa, there are mainly two Christian traditions on Christianity and African ritual practices. One being from missionaries and now mainly trailed by most white Mainline Churches and Pentecostal Churches. The other is by African Independent Churches (AIC). The first group oppose and condemn Christian involvement on any rituals related to ancestors. However, the second group perceive no conflict between Christianity and African rituals. This paper presents a brief discussion on the beliefs and views of various Christian groups on African rituals, focusing mainly on black members of the Mainline Churches. In this paper I examine literature from the 18th century and also revisit my ethnographic work which focuses on this theme in the democratic South Africa. Findings of this study suggests that black members of mainline Churches are still caught in between two identities; one being the Western package of Christianity and the African ritual practices.

1. INTRODUCTION

There have been various studies, both theoretical and ethnographic work done by various academics such as Turner (1967), Barret (1968), Mbiti (1975), Sundkler (1961 & 1967) and some of the latest writings written by members of Mission or Mainline Churches (MC) as it will be shown later. However, there is a dearth of literature and ethnographic studies on the

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stance of MC in relation to African ritual practices. Members of the MC have written extensively on the history and beliefs of African Independent Churches or African Initiated Churches (AIC) but are silent on their position as far as Christianity and ancestor relationship are concerned. The main problem resonates from the fact that members of MC do not freely express their Africanness in Church, but when they are outside the Church they freely perform African traditional rituals and customs which include practices such as *ukubuyisa* (the ritual reincorporation of the living-dead), *imbeleko* (ritual inclusion of babies into the clan), *ukwaluka* (rite of passage into adulthood), and visiting of traditional healers to seek guidance from ancestors. The other reality is that as much as elders of the MC are comfortable with the practice of African rituals behind the Church doors, young people find problems with this as to them it translates into two identities. The main problem is not the practice of rituals but the fact that they are practiced away and kept a secret from other Church members, moreover that they are members of Churches that are known to be against such practices. The following abstract by Njeza et al (1998:1) is a reality of a situation young people find themselves in.

I am an African and I am a Christian. I grew up in an environment where it was quite normal to accept mainline Christian beliefs and lifestyle, however, my parents also practised certain African traditional rituals like *ukubuyisa* (the ritual reincorporation of the living-dead), *imbeleko* (ritual inclusion of babies into the clan) and *ukwaluka* (rite of passage into adulthood) and *lobola* (the traditional process followed in customary marriage by isiXhosa speaking people).However this latter dimension in my parents' identity was exercised discreetly outside the Church. Apparently, the inevitable predicament from this did not appear as a problem for my parents as it does for me. For the individual the existence of the two systems co-existed even though for the Church the African one did not exist. However, as I begin to reflect on my personal African Christian identity I discover that I have inherited a legacy of confusion and identity conflict in my life. The problem for me is that 'the other' dimension which acknowledged our African traditional heritage was somehow tagged on and operated in disguise. This resulted in what seemed to be a split personality and an identity crisis because it led to the denigration and destruction of Africanness.

The above is Njeza's personal experience in quest for possibilities of African Christianity within Mainline Churches. The view and belief of MC might be taken obvious and straight forward, but it is not. As one can note that Njeza's parents comfortably practised both the mainline tradition and African rituals, while Njeza was uncomfortable with the practice; as a result he felt like he was living a double life style. What makes matters worse

for Njeza is that his parents performed the African rituals away from the Church practices. The main struggle is not just the secrecy of performing certain African rituals but an issue of two identities where one has to put the other aside when practising the other. For example, one cannot openly talk about or announce during a Church service that they will have a ritual practice and the Church members are invited, or a Church minister cannot openly practise as a traditional healer like the case of the African Independent Churches.

For more than one hundred years, Africa has been a meeting place for fundamentally two different Christian traditions (Amanze 2003:43; Matobo et al. 2009:105), i.e. the African tradition-orientated Christianity and Western-influenced Christianity. Each of these two traditions possesses its own worldview regarding African traditional practices and rituals. The latter has been due to the influence of missionary teachings and the other broke away from MC in order to embrace an African contextualised Christianity. The first category (with black and white) includes Churches such as Presbyterian Churches, Methodist of Southern Africa, Anglicans and Roman Catholics and Charismatic, Evangelical and Pentecostal Churches (the self-acclaimed born-again churches). The second category (mainly black people) is made up of various AIC such as Ethiopian Churches, Presbyterian Church of African, African Methodist Episcopal and various Zionist Churches. Due to Western missionary influence, the first group regarded all forms of African practices and rituals as “ancestral worship”; consequently, members were forbidden to participate in any of the rituals (Mills 1939:1). Since breaking away from the MC, the second group embraced African rituals and most incorporated them in their Church services. The African Independent Churches have a clear stand in relation to African ritual practices; they fully practise their rituals and have incorporated them in their Christian faith. For them, there is no conflict in practising rituals and ancestral veneration while being a committed Christian. According to this viewpoint the African perspective of religion is not the same as the western definition,

religion is closely bound up with the traditional way of life, while this way of life has shaped religion as well (Mbiti 1975:9).

Religion embraces the tradition (history and identity), the state of being (prosperity, wellbeing, sickness suffering and oppression) and the future state of the person (sickness, ageing and ancestors). Life itself is a spiritual journey hence in all phases of human experiences there is the existence of *uQamata*, *uThixo* (God) or *uNkulunkulu* (Supreme Being).

However, Mainline Churches are silent on the issue, which leaves space for individuals to decide on whether to practise African rituals or

not. Furthermore, there is a proliferation of literature regarding life and practices of African Independent Churches while the experiences of African Christians within the mainline Churches are under recorded. To make matters worse, the mission Church leaders write more about the belief and views of African Independent Churches and not about themselves. The findings of this study suggest that currently in most Mainline Churches, the issue of ancestral relationship and ritual practices is left with individuals to decide. Mission churches like the Presbyterian and Methodist do not have a specific stand on the matter. Findings further show that black congregations are caught in between the package of Western Christian and practising their traditional rituals. The main contentation of this paper is that although leaders can hold various views on certain matters and congregations can be diverse on various practices and influences, they cannot afford not to have a stand on a matter that relates to one's being and one's identity. The issue of ancestral relationship cannot be left to individuals to make a personal choice due the fact that it was exactly the gist of missionary preaching and is what set apart *igqoboka* (converted) from *iqaba* or *umntu ibomvu* (a red person or a heathen). Secondly, the fact that others within the same denomination refer to it as evil and a sin, then it must be attended to and deliberations must be made in relation to their teaching and doctrine. Here I intend to show that it is a known secret that most MC members still practise African rituals but they do not talk about it more especially in the Church.

2. BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH METHODS

The idea for this paper was triggered between 2009 and 2011 while I was doing fieldwork on the role of Xhosa male initiation in behavioural change of the boys as they graduate to manhood. While I was visiting initiation schools, I met *abakhwetha* (initiates) and also interacted with them after their graduation. I did not necessarily ask the informants about their church affiliation as it was not part of the study at the time. However, it was interesting to find that among some of the *abakhwetha* and *amakrwala* (*new men*) there was some pride in how they were initiated; as a result they volunteered information about their church affiliation. Some did not necessarily mention their specific church affiliation but said that they were "born again" and some said they were "saved" and that their initiation was different from those who were initiated traditionally. Most of them said that "*soluke isicawa, hayi isiXhosa*" (we were initiated in a church manner, not in the orthodox manner). The assertion of the *abakhwetha* and *amakrwala* and the observations challenged me to wonder exactly how Christians vary in the practice of initiation and other ritual practices more especially those related

to ancestral veneration. Consequently, between 2012 and 2013, I pursued further research to ascertain perceptions and practices of different churches members on various ritual practices. During this study, 50 Christians from Mainline and African Independent Churches were interviewed and further group discussions with various people were conducted. Various rituals were attended and observations were done in some areas of Mdantsane and King Williams Town. In addition, individual interviews were conducted with some leaders and ministers of the Methodist Church of South Africa, Uniting Presbyterian of South African, African Presbyterian of South Africa also called *amarhabe amnyama* (black Presbyterians) and various Zionist Churches. All ethical procedures for this study were followed including making sure that the rights and privileges of informants were respected.

3. MISSIONARIES AND AFRICAN PRACTICES

Scholars agree that Christianity supported by European colonial powers and European culture changed the face of religion, politics and culture in the African continent (Wanamaka 1987:281; Nmah 2010; Anderson and Pillay 1997; Jafta 2011). Early in the 19th century, various missionary societies embarked on a campaign to convert African people to Christianity by sending their missionaries to various African countries (Nmah 2010:484). According to Nmah (2010:490), missionaries were part of a larger programme of European colonisation of African and their beliefs and actions must be seen in then light of their connection with the European trader, diplomat and settler. As a result, missionaries viewed African people as “pagans” and “objects” of missions, and missionaries were “good Samaritans” bringing the civilising influence of Christianity to Africa (Clark 2005:143). There was a common misconception among missionaries that African people had no religion prior to their arrival; thus, Africa was called a “dark continent”. The work of missionaries gave birth to Mission Churches or Mainline Churches such as Methodists, Presbyterians, Dutch Reformed, Monrovia, and various Charismatic and Pentecostal movements such as Faith Mission and Full Gospel (Anderson and Pillay 1997:229; Clark 2005:144). From their arrival in the 19th century in Southern Africa, missionaries generally required that their converts abstain from practising most African customs and rituals (Ray 2009:105). Missionaries perceived most African rituals and practices as evil and referred to African people as “worshippers of demons” or worshippers of ancestors (Anderson and Pillay 1997:76). Such customs included practices such as *ukubuyisa* (literally means to bring back) - a ritual performed for the late household head to bring their spirits back, polygamous marriages, inheritance of wives, traditional dancing, and sacrificial rituals, paying of *ilobola*, initiation practice and beer drinking (Pauw 1975:21). According to

Jafta (2011:61), the teaching of missionaries played a role in detribalisation and undermining the African society due to the fact that each of the customs they condemned played a significant role in the maintenance of the tribal society. It appears that the teaching of Christianity was that African people could not follow their “pagan” ways and, at the same time, practise Christian religion. Christian converts became a group or a community among the African people without reference to their traditional kinship-based social structures who were under missionary authority (Pauw 1975:21).

The teaching by missionaries created two communities, the *amaqaba* or *ababomvu* (red, Unconverted and uneducated) and *amgqobhoka* (educated and Christianised) communities. The Western lifestyle was defined as enlightened or “better life”, which implied that the un-educated were living in darkness or were backward. Missionary wives taught African women converts to knit, sew gowns and shifts, and plait straw for hats; as a result Western clothing was a symbol of civilisations and better life. The so called Christian names in the form of Biblical names like John, Joseph and Timothy were a symbol of new identity (Anderson and Pillay 1997:77). All those who were found to be practising African rituals and practise were disciplined and at times were excommunicated from the church. Those who were found to contravening the missionary teaching were only allowed back to the Church after undergoing the church ritual of repentance and cleansing, which included public confession and assurance that they would not do it again (Ray 2009:5; Matabo et al. 2009:15). Missionaries perceived African people as polytheists due to the fact that they had a very strong connection with ancestors and performed a number of rituals related to them. The other reason for missionaries to oppose African rituals and practices was that they did not know what was going on there and had no access to the ritual meetings. For example, during initiation, boys were taken away from the community and missionaries had no right to visit them; as a result, missionaries viewed initiation as some kind of secret society which they knew nothing about and whose influence on the boys they could not control. Indeed, the details of the initiation ritual used to be a well-guarded secret among men before it became a subject of public debates as is the case today. The missionaries thus had reason to be suspicious of its intentions, goals and long-term impact on society. Literate shows that not only missionaries that objected African practices and rituals but in general Mainline Churches inherited and adopted the missionary rejection of rituals as an official stand (Theron 1996; Afeke and Verster 2004:50).

4. MISSIONARY TEACHINGS AND HYPOCRISY

Although Christianity appears to have won over traditional religions of South Africa, the truth is more complex; the vast majority of African people including Mainline Church members religiously practised their rituals and ancestor practices. To some extent, more especially among the clergy, there was some adherence to missionary teaching but most African people secretly practised their rituals. According to Mills (1939:1),

[a]s subordinate agents, Xhosa clergy had very limited opportunities to advance views and positions that differed from their missionary mentors on any issue upon which the latter had categorical views.

Tiyo Soga was an example of the products of the missionary schools; as a result, he was not initiated at a time when it was unthinkable for a Xhosa man not to be initiated (Khabela 1996:10; Mills 1939:12). At school, Soga was the object of spite from fellow black students which emanated from the fact that he was not traditionally circumcised and it is reported that he experienced this animosity all his life (Khabela 1996:53). Things became worse when he practised as a preacher, the fact that he was not initiated created problems for his ministry as the African traditionalists refused to listen to *inkwenkwe yomfundisi* (un-initiated minister) (Williams 1983:2).

Even though some of the clergy followed missionary prescriptions, the majority of African people still perform their rituals and other African practices. In 1881, the Wesleyan Methodist clergy, James Lwana and Abraham Mabula were disciplined for accepting *lobola* for their daughters (Mills 1980:8). Nehemiah Tile, just before he withdrew from the Methodist Church, was found guilty of contributing an ox for the circumcision of the Tembu paramount heir, Dalindyebo (Mills 1980:8). Even in the 1960s and 1970s, it was observed that at the core of African Christians including those in Mainline Churches was the rituals and practices related to ancestors (Pauw 1975:140-144). Mainline members still risked suspension from their leadership positions and excommunication from the Church because they deemed their rituals as their identity and could not do without them. In spite of the disciplinary measures enforced by missionaries and clergy, literature shows that not every converted person adhered to missionary teachings in fact a vast majority of the Mainline Church members secretly practised their rituals without the knowledge of missionaries and the clergy. Reverend J.J.R. Jolobe explained how he and his brother who were both Christians had, under disguise of visiting relatives, arranged to be initiated and their father Reverend James Jolobe did not know about it until some years later (Mills 1980:12). Literature suggests that as time went by African people carved a space within the perimeters of mainline churches where they

could exercise these other aspects of their identity (Pauw 1975). It seems that even though missionaries preached against African practises, African people still secretly performed their rituals. Those who were in urban areas often secretly went to *emakhaya* (rural homes) to attend to their rituals and then went back to urban areas and continued with their Christian duties. Missionaries were never successful in their campaign against traditional practices; rather the only outcomes of their campaign were to promote deception, breaches of discipline, disobedience of children and hypocrisy Mills (1939:12). As a result, Xhosa Christians lived two lifestyles; one of a Christian or Western nature and the other of a traditional nature with rituals performed at the homestead (Pauw 1975:66).

5. THE BIRTH OF AFRICAN INDEPENDENT CHURCHES

Later in the 1900s there was a beginning of African consciousness and African cultural identity sought which was led by some black clergy. This influence gained momentum in the early 20th century when some of the educated black elite sought to recover African symbols they could integrate into their Christian faith. African people began to wrestle with questions of identity, questions related to being an African and a Christian were asked. Eventually, some of the *amaqaba* and *amagqobhoka* began to redefine the meaning of faith and found that there was no conflict in practising African rituals and in being a Christian. They then argued that African people never worshipped ancestors as missionaries have suggested. African people have simply venerated their ancestors and have always been monotheist by worshiping *uThixo* (God - Xhosa) or *uNkulunkulu* (the highest being - Zulu), Modimo (God - Sesuthu). Their explanation was that *umdali* (the creator) is the most high and is in the spiritual realm and the living cannot fully communicate with him due to the fact that they are not in the spirit but in the flesh. They then relied on those who have gone (the dead) or ancestors to *camagusha* (to intercede) on their behalf and so various ceremonies were a way to appease ancestors to talk to *umdali* on their behalf. Their contention was that they were misled by missionaries who carried an agenda to westernise them and thus they labelled African traditional practices "evil" or "pagan". Some opted to continue with their practices behind the backs of the missionaries, while some opted to break away from white domination and started their own African Independent Churches, a movement known then as Ethiopianism. AIC created a space for African Christians to follow Christianity without being divorced from their cultural activities while they could openly oppose white domination (Pauw 1975:418). It has to be acknowledged that the rising of the Zionist

and other African Independent Churches (AIC) brought a change in the understanding of church and the African way of life (Pauw 1975:436).

Amanze (2003:143) also observed in Botswana that the issue of veneration of ancestors created another brand of Christianity which attracts many Christians because they find it relevant for them as Africans in their struggle for human existence both spiritually and materially. For instance, in the 1980s, the African Independent Churches were found to be attractive to African Christians and to researchers because they seemed to offer a more “authentic”, Africanised version of Christianity than the presumably Western-oriented Mainline Churches (Mayer 2004:448). In both Anthropological and Christian literature the African Independent Churches are well known and well defined (e.g Sundkler 1961; Pauw 1975; Appiah-Kubi 1979). The anthropological work published on the African Independent Church in the 1960s and 1970s show how the AIC instigated the development of alternative to the then still dominant structural-functionalist paradigm, which failed to address “social change” in a theoretically adequate way (Mayer 2004:447). Not only anthropologist but even African Independent Churches leaders like Mzimba, (1928) Makhubu (1988), and Ngada and Mofokeng (2001) themselves have taken time to write about their beliefs and values. Both in Anthropological and in Christian literature one cannot deny the fact that at the core of AIC is their relationship with ancestors and rituals performed for them. Hence, academics like Mbiti (1976) have taken time in detailing with the role and meaning of the living dead as he calls them in the lives of African people. Some of these Churches, like the Zionist Christian Church and other independent churches were started by black Africans who were not necessarily clergy or evangelists in mission churches. The African churches recognised the practices which were opposed by missionaries such as polygamy, initiation practice, *ukubuyisa* (ceremonies for appeasing ancestors) etc (Pauw 1975:425). The church history that has been discussed above led to the current situation in the African Independent Church.

Christians were also influenced by politics; as they sought their identity they began to see a need to stand for themselves and sought not only their cultural freedom but their political freedom as well. In the 20th century, Christian converts were well-educated; as a result, they were independent, self-sufficient and self-propagating so they had the freedom to choose their religious beliefs. At this time, there was also a strong growth of cultural nationalism and black consciousness among Africans in South Africa and in Africa at large. Some of the church clergy and leadership were also political leaders, so this created a bond between African local churches and the society. Leaders of African Independent churches were at the forefront of politics which led to the formation of various South African political

movements and parties such as the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), and the African Native National Congress (which later became the African National Congress – ANC).

6. THE CURRENT STANCE OF THE BLACK MAINLINE CHURCHES AND AIC

During my ethnographic study, I found out that there were two views and practices related to ancestral veneration, i.e. the view of Pentecostal Churches and the view of Mainline and African Independent Churches. Pentecostal Churches clearly describe themselves as churches that have nothing to do with ancestors. In fact they share the same opinion with missionaries by regarding any consultation of ancestors as “worshipping” them; thus they regard that as evil and sinful before God. One can conclude that just as the practice of ancestral rituals defines the belief and faith of African Independent Church, the non-practice of African rituals is what defined Pentecostal Churches. One would hear them in their testimonies and in their preaching confessing their faith in Jesus Christ and saying the Jesus freed them from ‘worshipping’ ancestors. It was also interesting that Pentecostal Churches did practice initiation but performed what they called *ukoluka kwecawa* (Church initiation) which included full observance of the practice not ceremonies they deem to be associated with ancestors and those that they perceive to be against their Christian principles. For instance, they did not have *intsonyama*, they did not talk to ancestors during the ceremony and they did not have alcohol like the case of AIC and MC and also did not have an *igqira* (traditional healer) present during initiation.

In practice there is no difference between most black Mainline Church members and African Independent Churches. Both the African Independent Church and most Mainline Church members practise African customs and rituals including initiation with all their traditional and orthodox practices including the existence of all rituals and use of alcohol. All ritual activities of initiates who were said to be members in these Churches were performed in the traditional or orthodox manner, the coming in and the graduation ceremonies were similar to all rituals associated with it. Even the *intsonyama* practice was done and in some cases there was the presence of a traditional healer and all that was not questioned and viewed as anti-Christian. The main difference between the AIC and MC is that the AIC as a collective has taken a stand to redefine themselves openly as African and not Western Christians. The AIC incorporated African rituals

1 An initiate is fed a strip of meat cut from the right leg of the goat – this symbolises introduction of the boy to his ancestors.

into their church services and they are open about it. Currently, the African independent churches in general still do not separate Christianity from African cultural life, meaning that there is no conflict between Christian conversion and the performing of African rituals and other practices. There is no separate traditional and Christian life to them; all life is one and complete so they do not have to hide that they performed traditional rituals. They do not see ancestral practices as worship of ancestors as suggested by missionaries but as a way of appeasing or venerating them. Generally, African independent churches agree that ancestors are an important part of African culture; therefore, they should not be demonised. As a result, they have incorporated them in their church liturgy. For instance, it is common among them to use language usually used by traditional healers such as *camagu* (let it be so) and *siyavuma* (we agree) instead of “Amen” used by most Christians. It is also very common that the church ministers can also be traditional leaders and church members openly consult them. At times, in church they even announce that a church member will have a ritual ceremony and also encourage others to attend. Even in some funerals, if the deceased was an *igqirha*, during the service the Minister or elder gives a chance to *amagqirha* (plural of *igqirha*) to sing and perform rituals related to the calling of *ubugqirha* (being an *igqirha*) and that is not viewed as a religious conflict.

However, the Mainline Church members separate church life from African ritual life, in the sense that individuals or family members can perform their African rituals at home, even consulting an *igqirha* as long that is kept a family matter. Members who are called to traditional healing are also accepted in the Church as long as they only consult at their private spaces and that they keep it to themselves, otherwise the Church does not promote that. Contrary to the African Independent Church, in the Mainline Church, traditional healers are not allowed to perform their rituals at funerals even if the member was an *igqirha*. The view is that *amagqirha* can go and perform the ritual at the home of the deceased and not in the Church.

Among the Mainline Church there were two groups, those who perform rituals and those who do not, with the majority of those who openly perform all their rituals. The two opposing views also included ministers and Church leaders. For example, some ministers said that they did not practise or support African rituals but allowed their members the space to practise their beliefs. All members of the Church must understand each other's beliefs and practices. Literature indicates that in the 1960s and 1970s, rituals were performed in secret, making sure that the clergy and the missionaries did not know about the occurrence of these events; presently, rituals are openly performed as long as they are kept away from the Church. Each group did not report any discrimination even the

minority one (those who do not perform rituals) were comfortable. Unlike the Pentecostal Churches, the Mainline Churches do not preach against ritual practices and ancestors; as a result when one attempts to criticise the African rituals, others will whisper “*yeka into zabantu*” (leave people’s things alone). Most Mainline Churches as a collective have not yet come up with a stand on the issues related to rituals but there is a Church tradition or doctrine adopted from missionary teachings that is against ancestral veneration. During this study, the informants were aware of that teaching and apart from the current status core of each person doing what they want; the missionary stand has not been interrogated. In addition, most elders among the informants said that they were very comfortable with the current opinion and practice of Mainline Churches in relation to ancestral veneration. However, during the interviews for this study most youth expressed frustration that the Churches did not have a known stand on the topic. Some said that it did not matter whether the Church was for or against rituals practices but as long as there was a common stand on the issue. Some expressed that they always feel embarrassed whenever they are asked of the Church stand on the issue and they cannot clearly articulate it. Some remarked that to some extent, the lack of opinion does create argument among themselves as young people and such arguments never come up with any solution and in the end it has to be the Church leadership that gives direction on the matter. Some said that the church does have seminars about African heritage and African culture but a clear stand in relation to African ritual practices is never communicated.

7. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study show that the character of black Mainline Church members in relation to their ancestors and rituals is the same as that of the African Independent Church. The main difference is that the black Mainline Churches do not promote or talk about rituals in Church but in essence most of them; more especially the elders find no conflict between being a Christian and practising African rituals and practices. Undoubtedly, from the onset, the missionaries were clear with regard to ancestors and African rituals; the teachings of Pentecostal Churches and the African Independent Churches are also clear, but surprisingly, the black members of Mainline Churches are silent on the subject, which is the main concern of this paper. The main issue is that in their own published literature they write a lot about African people and their cultures including ancestral veneration and rituals but do not come out on their stand as Mission Churches with regards to the topic. We see that narrative with authors like; Magoba, Dandala, Jafta, Mekoa and others. In a recent book written

in honour of Dr. Mogopa there are various chapters on African practices and African Independent Churches. For instance, Chapter 8, Mokoetsi (2011: 146), talks about inherent traditional preaching and he quotes a lot of Mbiti (1986: 1975) who openly argues that African traditional practice and rituals including ancestral veneration constitute African Christianity.

Mokoetsi only contextualises his literature to preaching but fails to scrutinise the broader black Methodist belief with regards to Mbiti's assertion. We find the same narrative in Chapter nine and ten by Mogopa (2011:170-197) where a discussion of African traditional practices and African Independent Churches are highly commended and appreciated but still there is no way forward drawn for black Methodists. The only known stand among the MC is by teaching of missionaries which forbids any kind of ancestral relationship. The current stand and practice suggests that the MC have now moved away from the teaching and influence of missionaries with regards to ritual practices but have not yet come out with one voice like they have done with regards to racism, discrimination and apartheid policies. One can see their stand on their practice of African rituals at home, and this leads one to conclude that they are at the same space as the black mission Church members of the 1900s, who secretly practiced their rituals at home in fear of missionaries. I also recall when I was at University of Fort Hare between 2006 and 2007 teaching Theology; I often over-heard students from African Presbyterian Church teasing students from Uniting Presbyterian and Methodist Church, saying that at least as the African Independent Church, they have come out and openly practise their rituals without fear of white people. They further noted that Mainline Churches believe in ancestral practices and rituals but are too scared to incorporate that into their liturgy due to fear of white people. The difference in this instance is that they are not afraid of excommunication, but they just do not want to offend their white counterparts. The current situation of the Mainline Church seems to perpetuate division among themselves; for example, black members who oppose African ritual practices might easily offend those who are pro-ritual practices and vice versa. Members are left on their own to decide what to believe and to practice with regards to this issue. One would agree with me that this is a doctrinal matter, for the fact that missionaries suspended and excommunicated members who participated in them, that on its own suggest that it cannot be left in the hands of lay people. There is a need for the clergy to scrutinise this in reference to the current Mainline Church in the democratic South Africa. The Mainline Churches need to deliberate on the issue of African identity, culture, ancestral veneration and ritual practices and take a stand on it. This will give direction to ordinary members and will further assist them to know what they believe and reasons for the belief.

8. CONCLUSION

It seems that in belief and in practice there is not much difference between Mainline Church and African Independent Church members regarding practice of African ritual practice. Even though in the Mainline Churches, African rituals have not been incorporated in the Church, but African Mainline Church members are free to participate in their rituals at home. Some people like Njeza find this as a conflict while some like his parents find no clash on the two. The main challenge is that even those who are comfortable with it are aware of the teaching of missionaries and the general stand of their Churches, which is against such practices. Again just like in Pauw's informants, the current situation to some extent does create hypocrisy in sense that they know that the doctrine of the Church is against ritual practices but they still perform them. This paper poses a challenge to various faith groups to review their views, beliefs and practices and also explain why they do things the way they do. The young generation born in the democratic South Africa is not afraid to ask questions and the elders must be able to give them information on such important Church teachings before they depart from this world. It is hoped that various Mainline Church groups will openly discuss these issues and finally reach some kind of consensus.

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