Decoloniality on Culture and Religion: Anglican Ritual performed on the Zulu King

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Abstract

Decolonial discourse continues to challenge Eurocentrism and, among other things, raises profound questions about culture and religion or their unreceptive interactions. Conversely, both culture and religion remain products of the social context in which they are located. Some have even gone so far as to conceptualize religion as a form of culture, or vice versa. Historically, however, in societies such as South Africa where dominant religions such as Christianity emerged with distinct Eurocentric cultural identities, the interaction of culture and religion remains a stumbling block. South African scholars have commendably long debated the inherent conflict between cultural practices and religion, and their impact on social bonds. The above picture, however, calls for further exploration or understanding of the intricate interaction between culture and religion. Consequently, several questions arise: Can one belong to a Western religion and practise African culture? Can an African traditional monarch belong to a Western religion, in particular Christianity? What are the implications of mixing indigenous culture with foreign religion in our society? What are the decolonial boundaries between African religion and Christianity? Can there be a healthy interplay between indigenous culture and Christianity? Can African Christianity be tamed into an indigenous cultural expression? Consequently, this paper encompasses responsive academic insights into the cultural–religious collision, particularly in the light of the recent coronation of the Zulu king in South Africa.

Keywords: Africa, Christianity, Conflicted interaction, Culture, Religion, South Africa

Introduction

The long-awaited coronation of King Sinqobile Misuzulu kaZwelithini, held at Moses Mabhida Stadium on 29 October 2022, attracted thousands of South Africans who either attended the ceremony in person or watched the live-stream from the comfort of their homes. Although most were fascinated by this historic event, some were stunned to see the primate of the Anglican Church in Southern Africa, Archbishop Thabo Makgoba, perform what appeared to be a Christian ritual, symbolically anointing the Zulu king with oil and putting a ring on his finger. Those who later criticised this symbolic gesture even went so far as to argue that the Anglican Church, due to its ties to England, performed such ritual on behalf of the British monarch. In line with these sentiments, Indonsa Yesizwe, a think tank focused on reaffirming traditional Zulu culture, called on the Anglican Church to explain its position, saying the ritual it performs leaves the Zulu nation somewhat naive in the face of a recolonization stunt. In other words – or as its founder, Professor Musa Xulu sought to put it – the ritual was degrading and resembled an attempt to recolonize the Zulu nation (Mavuso, 2022). To confuse matters further, caught in the middle was the Zulu nation's traditional prime minister, Prince Mangosuthu Buthelezi, who was also a faithful member of the Anglican Church during his life.

Buthelezi defended the Anglican Church's participation, arguing that the ritual was justified because King Misuzulu himself is a Christian who belongs to the Ibandla Ld Nazaretha, the second-largest African Initiated Church (AIC) in South Africa. He unapologetically stated: 'Through the liturgy, the archbishop did what the prophets of old did in the times of King David, even using the oil of anointing. This was wholly appropriate for a Christian King.' Responding to suggestions that Ibandla Lama Nazaretha was excluded from the ceremony, the church spokesman said their leader, Mduduzi 'Unyazi lweZulu' Shembe, was unperturbed by the ritual spectacle, as he had already performed the 'real rituals' which included the kraal-entering ceremony and issuing of the 'Godly certificate' (Phungula, 2022).

Consequently, several questions arise: Can one belong to a Western religion and practise African culture? Can an African traditional monarch belong to a Western religion, in particular Christianity? What are the implications of mixing indigenous culture with foreign religion in our society? What are the decolonial boundaries between African religion and Christianity? Can there be a healthy interplay between indigenous culture and Christianity? Can African Christianity be tamed into an indigenous cultural expression? This article encompasses responsive academic insights into the cultural–religious collision, particularly in the light of the recent coronation of the Zulu king in South Africa. To that end, it goes without saying that this article delves a little per into this question, to arrive at a coherent perspective. Since the question of religion and culture remains controversial and divisive in many respects, this presentation is not expected to be free from this tension, partly because the article reflects the collective thoughts or perspectives of academic scholars from the Research Institute of Theology and Religion (RITR) at the University of South Africa (Unisa). All of these contributing scholars are theologians, who specialise in different areas of this field. Therefore, as they should (or as expected), they approached this question from different points of view, sometimes even resorting to biased analyses or conclusions. However, the editorial team tried in one way or another to reorient such different perspectives and present a semi-coherent view, so to speak. In other words, although the body of this article may seem somewhat contradictory or paradoxical, the editors have sought to find a middle ground that captures the various elements in a unified form and presents them in a conclusion. Although the contributors relied largely on the available literature to answer the above abstract questions, they were all permitted to use other methods when searching for data.

Western religion and African culture

It would only be fair to open this aspect of the discussion by acknowledging what former practical theologians, Professors Manala and Theron (2009), prophetically articulated, from one of the Western-based churches. They argued that the Maranatha Church of Christ neglected and rejected healing ministry by opting for a Western way of living, functioning and service. As a result, [m]any of these members of the Reformed Church end up seeking assistance from the prophets of the African Initiated Churches (AICs), which embrace the African worldview and practice the church's healing ministry (Manala & Theron, 2009:2). There is a very clear link to this quotation and the first research question indicated above, since Western-based Christianity, which is part of bigger Western religion, has managed to dislocate the black masses and leave them not only vulnerable, but also seeking assistance from churches that connect with their culture. Although there may be many others, Western religions can be summarised as Christianity, Judaism and Islam, the dominant being Christianity. It is also necessary to clarify that the perception of Africa being a dark continent without a prior religion was aimed at European missionaries' conquest, and the exploitation of the continent. This view has already been refuted by many scholars (Goba, 1988; Maimela, 1991; Manganyi & Buitendag, 2013:1).

Undoubtedly, religion has become one of the pillars of life, and plays a significant role in developing people's quality of life (Ramírez-Coronel et al., 2023:1). This notion is well argued and supported by Mbiti (1991:1), who states that since Africans are notoriously religious, it

goes without saying that every aspect of their lives have been (and continue to be) touched by religion (see also Daniel, 2017:2). In particular, this view is echoed by Daniel (2017: 1), whose article argues that although it compromises their faith, most Christians (one of the Western religions) are found practising both their Christian faith and cultural burial rites as a way of maintaining their family bonds. There is no question that Africans are communal beings, and that is what enabled them to survive the colonial agendas imposed on them. While Western culture and Western religion are at peace with each other, the same cannot be said for African culture and Western religion. Unfortunately, an undeniable fact is that when Western religions came to Africa, they came as part of the colonial agenda, meaning Western missionaries and their churches were found to be partially weaponised to ensure the success of colonialism. Koama's (2016:59) opinion is undeniably correct, in stating that the role of religion in any social transformation is crucial, given that religions' protection and endorsement of oppressive structures became eminent from the West. As Koama (2016:6) argues, although black Africans subscribed to Western concepts of religion, that did not manage to dislocate them from their culture, which is why they attended Western churches yet returned home to practise their traditional rituals. The argument is that they would rather attend both separately, than abandoning their own culture. It is not easy to detect this double standard when days are celebratory. However, when sickness, death, funerals and burials arise, events are revelatory: losing a loved one is not only painful, but should also be accompanied by a series of traditions, taboos, and cultural rituals. That is why Ekore and Lanre-Abass (2016) note that African death is often looked at from both the cultural and the religious perspectives.

In as much as the search for a black identity begins with self-hatred – a perspective on which many scholars agree (see Baloyi, 2020; Pinkney, 2014) – this manifests itself as Africans pretending to want or try to be like their white oppressors, both culturally and religiously. The portrayal of this pretence is better explained by scholars such as Kathy Russell et al. (1993) and Parmer (2004). In "The effects of internalised oppression on the black community", Pinkney (2014) outlines how Western epistemologies and religion penetrated the black mind to the extent that many black people opt not only to adopt Western religion, but also their lifestyle, and even seek to look like whites.

The Health department in South Africa is faced with contestations of traditional resistance from the Western healthcare system. It is unclear why Western hospitals receive significant resistance from African people, particularly the older generation. Waldron (2010:52) argues that the hierarchy of knowledge resulted from the epistemological terrain, in which the indigenous and Western health professionals do not work from a level playing field, but encounter crossroads, contradictions and tensions. The peripheralisation of traditional health by Western medicine assisted only in positioning colonialism on top of the hierarchy of knowledge. For Prinsloo (2001:60), since the meaning of a holistic person in Africa is associated with the notion of "I am because we are", then it is important to note that relationships are important and can cause sickness if disturbed or tampered with. "A disturbed relationship is one of the causes of disease and thus has to be restored in order to cure the patient (Prinsloo, 2001:60). A case in point is a study by Msomi (2008:101), of a patient who asked to be discharged from hospital because he believed his healing would only be restored by visiting his ancestral home, performing rituals and restoring relations with family and his deceased mother, in the belief that his sickness was caused by not having attended his mother's funeral. The amalgamation of Christian religion and cultural traditions is evident in churches such as Shembe, the Zion Christian Churches, and others (Selepe & Edwards, 2008). Van Wyk (2004) is of the opinion that further discussions are needed to find ways of integrate nursing (traditionally dominated by Western thought, religion and mindset) and traditional healing (dominated by African culture and tradition). By contrast, Martin et al. (2013:56) suggest the "selective blending" of European Christianity and indigenous culture "to harmonise" the situation.

The dissatisfaction of Africans who are also members of a Western religion is evident in elements of pastoral care and counselling, especially during bereavement counselling. African scholars in the field are seeking ways of developing so-called African Grief Therapy (AGT), because they have identified that pastoral counselling is not catering for black bereavement. For Nwoye (2000), AGT will be inclusive of community participation and ritualisation that is African-based. This resulted from the observation that African mourning is prolonged, while healing was delayed and even individualised, which is very un-African. To that effect, many Africans would rather mix the Christian and cultural ways of mourning. As Kaoma (2016: 59) notes:

> The challenge of living in the West is that you are always caught unaware when it comes to explaining certain concepts about your culture. Once I was asked to explain how people would respond to the question: What is your religion? Without thinking, I answered that they would claim to be Anglicans or Catholics etc. Later on, I realised that in my culture the word "Religion" does not exist. To my people, religion is a Western denomination, thus the above response. They believe in God, the spirits and the ancestors. For instance, Traditionalists would refuse to be called "religious" if they refuse to subscribe to the Western concept of religion. As such, they self-identify as traditionalists. This is why many Africans would go to church and still come back and practice their traditional rituals and customs. To them the two are different and should not be brought into each other's way.

The truth is that Western Christian religions and religious imperialism failed to address African needs and aspirations which created a serious vacuum in their lives, faith in the ancestors (culturally bound) continued to be practised by Christians, in attempts to preserve good relations with departed kins (Bae & van der Merwe, 2008:1299; Manganyi & Buitendag, 2013: 2–3; Moila, 1991:37).

African religion and Christianity

Decolonial boundaries between African religions and Christianity refer to the ways in which African religious practices and beliefs have been influenced, adapted, or challenged by the introduction of Christianity during the colonial period and beyond. These boundaries are not fixed or universally agreed upon, but vary depending on cultural contexts, individual perspectives, and historical experiences. The topic is not new and has been marred by stereotypes, particularly from Western colonial circles.

Decoloniality is a complex and multifaceted field, and no single approach can capture its entirety.[i] It is important to engage in ongoing conversations, listen to diverse perspectives, and be open to different methodological approaches that align with the goals of decolonisation. In many African societies, the encounter between African religions and Christianity has resulted in syncretism,[ii] which is the blending or merging of elements from both belief systems. This often involves incorporating Christian symbols, rituals, or concepts into African religious practices, or vice versa. Syncretic forms of worship and belief have been observed to have developed in most African countries as a result of the interaction between African and Christian worldviews (Mashau & Ngcobo, 2016).

African religions and Christianity often have different cosmologies, understandings of divinity, and approaches to spiritual practices.[iii] Mbiti (1972)[iv] in his book, offers an overview of African religious beliefs and practices, including cosmology, in various African societies. These conceptual differences can create boundaries between the two belief systems. For example, African religions typically emphasise the interconnectedness of the spiritual and physical realms, the presence of ancestral spirits, and the veneration of natural elements, while Christianity tends to focus on monotheism, the divinity of Jesus Christ, and the salvation through faith. The introduction of Christianity to Africa was often accompanied by colonialism,

imperialism, and the imposition of Western values and structures.[v] As a result, power dynamics between African religions and Christianity emerged, with the latter often being privileged and considered superior. There have been movements of cultural resilience and resistance, seeking to reclaim and revitalise African religious traditions that have been marginalised or suppressed. These movements often challenge the boundaries imposed by colonialism, and advocate for the recognition and empowerment of African spiritual practices.[vi]

Decoloniality seeks to challenge and undo the legacy of colonialism in various aspects of society, including culture and religion. In the African context, decoloniality aims to challenge and transform the dominant cultural and religious narratives and practices imposed during the colonial era. Principles of decolonial cultures and religion in Africa involve pertinent points. Think of the recognition and celebration of the diversity of cultural practices and traditions, rather than the imposition of a singular dominant culture.[vii] This includes recognising and valuing indigenous knowledge systems, languages, and practices that were suppressed during the colonial era.[viii] Language is another important aspect of culture and a decoloniality principle that seeks to challenge the dominance of colonial languages such as English and Afrikaans in South Africa. It may include promoting the use and recognition of indigenous languages in all aspects of society, including education, media, and governance. Decoloniality also seeks to challenge and subvert those Eurocentric perspectives that continue to dominate cultural and religious narratives in Africa. This includes questioning the assumptions and biases underlying Western-based knowledge systems, and promoting alternative perspectives that are grounded in African and indigenous knowledge systems

The recognition of the importance of spirituality and its role in the lives of many Africans acknowledge and respect the diverse spiritual practices and beliefs of different communities. It challenges the dominance of Western-based religious institutions. Decoloniality recognises the ongoing impact of colonialism on African culture and religion, including the trauma and violence inflicted on indigenous communities. This acknowledges and addresses the historical injustices and traumas that continue to shape the cultural and religious landscape, also in South Africa. We need to pay attention to ethical considerations, ensuring informed consent, confidentiality, and the responsible use of data, and be aware of the potential power imbalances in research relationships and work towards creating equitable and just research practices. The imposition of Christianity by European colonisers had a significant impact on traditional African religious practices, leading to various dynamics and interactions between the two belief systems. Africa is a diverse continent with numerous ethnic groups and distinct religious traditions, and for those reasons generalisations must be avoided. At the very least we should acknowledge diversity, engage in respectful dialogue, conduct intersectional analyses, and listen to marginalised voices, among others.

African Christianity and indigenous culture

Religion and culture always have an intricate, inseparable relationship, to the extent that, in some contexts, they become synonymous. Their boundaries are so blurred that religion acts as the custodian of culture (Beyers, 2017). Just like culture, "religion is seen as part of a social system" (Beyers, 2017:4). Woodhead (cited in Beyers, 2017) defines religion as belief, which relates to a belief in particular doctrines, dogmas, and premises, as well as religion as an identity marker, suggesting that it is either a societal or an individual choice. With the above definitions one may argue that African Christianity can be part of African cultural expression and part of its social system.

In contemporary Africa, due to the advent of religious pluralism, people choose to adopt multiple religious belief systems. Their indigenous religion is their heritage, while Christianity may be adopted from other continents. Western Religion (particularly Christianity) can be adopted the concomitant health benefits, as someone may want to be treated in a Western

mission hospital, or to receive miraculous healing in the case of Pentecostal and charismatic churches. An individual may also adopt Western religion for educational purposes; for example, s/he may want to attend a church school, or obtain a bursary or scholarship from the church. Since the advent of Christianity in Africa, there has always been close interaction between African Christianity and African culture. Christian doctrines and views shape one's customs and behaviours. Christianity is part of cultural expression, shaping responses to socioeconomic challenges or issues. If there is a fusion of African culture and Christianity, the latter forms part of African cultural expression. As Beyers (2017:9) argues:

> In this endeavour of trying to reconcile cultures and religions, peace and harmony seem not to lie in creating peace between cultures and religions, but peace lies most probably in accepting the fact that peace and harmony between cultures and religions are most unlikely to happen.

While some aspects of Christianity may find expression in African culture, it is difficult to reconcile religion and culture. There will always be sticking points, especially on doctrines. For that reason, taming Christianity into African cultural expression is regarded as syncretism, as it involves the simultaneous integration of African indigenous religion and Christianity. Iheanacho (2021:3) asserts that "[r]eligions, like cultures, are porous by nature, on the recognition that they are open to intermixture and mutual borrowing from each other". This leads to some form of hybridisation or the amalgamation of religious beliefs within African culture (Mokhoathi, 2017; Stewart, 1999). That will always lead to modifications of spirituality in approaching daily challenges (Iheanacho, 2021). Although Christianity seems to be an overt part of the public life of many Africans, some individuals and communities continue to observe African rituals and beliefs, to help them cope with life's realities (Machinga, 2019; Mokhoathi, 2017). In a nutshell, Christianity can easily find a home in African culture, especially in aspects associated with ethics. As an example, the African ethic of ubuntu, which entails prizing communal relationships with other people, is the bedrock of the Christian ethic of neighbourliness (Magezi & Khlopa, 2021). Therefore, Christians' commitment to love and care for one another can easily find expression in African culture, where communalism is emphasised. Being human means being part of a community where one is cared for and expected to love and care for every member of society, and all of creation.

Interplay of culture and Christianity

No single culture in this world has an outright claim on Christianity as its own. Although Christianity has its origins in Jewish culture and religion, even this was challenged by the teachings of Jesus. His controversial statements, such as those found in Matthew 5:38-48, do not shy away from contesting the cultural–religious status quo, and set the tone for encounters between Christianity and culture. From there, the spread of Christianity is characterised by its engaging (and interplay) with cultures around the world. For example, Paul's Epistles engage not only the religious views of the early believers, but wrestle with ethics, morals and the worldviews held by the cultures of the Roman Empire. The Book of Revelation is a testimony to the strained relationship between Christendom and the Roman Empire, a socio-political culture which swallowed, damaged or eradicated any indigenous cultures that it encountered in its process of expansion. The question of whether there can be a healthy interplay between indigenous culture (specifically from the African context) and Christianity, is therefore not new. In fact, the interplay between Christianity and culture is (and will always remain) inevitable. The question hence should not be "Can there be a healthy interplay…", but should rather read: "How should Christianity engage with indigenous culture in a healthy way?", or even "What does a healthy interplay between Christianity and indigenous culture look like?"

To this end, several contributions have been made to attempts to describe and define the dynamics between Christianity and culture. Probably the most noteworthy of these is the

offering of H. Richard Niebuhr in his work *Christ and culture* (Niebuhr, 1975), in which he outlines five different positions:

- Christ above culture
- Christ against culture
- Christ and culture in paradox
- Christ of culture
- Christ transforms culture

As can be deduced from these positions, Niebuhr (1975) argues that neither Christianity nor culture exists monolithically, therefore it is impossible to arrive at a one-size-fits-all response to the question of Christianity's interplay with culture. Some aspects of culture will find great resonance with Christianity and vice versa, while other parts will find discord with the precepts of the Christian gospel. "Perhaps some aspects of culture should be rejected, others adopted, others transformed", argues Marshall (Marshall, 1991: 3).

Points of resonance will commonly be found where teachings in culture emphasise community and compassion, for instance in the philosophy of ubuntu. Christianity will find little to contradict in this teaching. By contrast, points of discord will be found in aspects of culture that have not previously been theologically engaged (or concluded) from the Christian perspective, such as the *Ukuthwasa* dilemma, where Christians claim to have received a calling to become traditional healers. Needless to say, Christian responses range widely from those welcoming a recognition of longstanding cultural beliefs into the Christian belief system, to those who openly and aggressively dismiss these as not complying with the teachings of the church.

What are some of the principles Christianity needs to be mindful of, when engaging with indigenous cultures? First, there should be a recognition that Christianity itself is the product, not only of religion shaping culture, but of cultures shaping religion (see, e.g., Treggiari, 1993, on how the "Christian" doctrine of marriage was shaped by Roman culture). Second, neither the Christian faith nor culture can be accepted as static; the dynamic nature of Christianity gives it the ability to change perspective,[1] while culture continuously adapts to all kinds of external forces, such as context, historical developments, technological advances and innovation. Change for both Christianity and culture is inevitable. Third, Christianity should accept that the truth it holds does not trump indigenous truths, carried from one generation to the next through the means of culture. Culture is a vehicle through which identity, memory and meaning are conveyed.

Christianity should therefore tread lightly when engaging with culture, for it does not interact with an add-on to the peoples it comes across, but is at the very core of their being. A dismissal of culture, or aspects thereof, becomes the dismissal of a people as a whole, along with their memory and identity.

Perhaps something is to be learnt from the Apostle Paul in Acts 17:22–28. Paul steps into the culture and tries to understand it. He acknowledges the indigenous truth, while holding firm to his own. Paul shares his truth with conviction and allows an honest engagement with his views. He does not force his views onto his audience, he simply shares it. In the process of engaging, some perspectives may change, while others become more concrete. The process of non-judgemental sharing becomes fertile ground for reflection, adaptation, and (possibly) change, both in Christianity and in culture.

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[1] Christianity has shifted on various issues throughout the ages. Take, for instance, its views on cosmology (see Bentley, 2018), ranging from notions that the Earth exists as a flat disc on pillars (literal interpretation of the Genesis creation narratives), to a common acceptance of the heliocentric nature of our solar system.

African Christianity as cultural expression

African Christianity is seen as an expression and interlocutor of African indigenous cultures. This phenomenon is also clearly demonstrated by the AICs, among others, who stand out as significant advocates of African cultural beliefs and practices. Lubaale (in Ross & Asamoah-Gyadu, 2018) correctly portrays the AICs as affirming "the place and value of African culture in the mission of God and build the confidence of Africans as a people whose culture can contribute to the extension of the Kingdom of God". Thus, Molobi (2009:5) is also correct: after conducting an empirical study among AIC leaders in Atteridgeville, Tshwane, South Africa, he concluded: "It is clear even from this very limited sample of interviews with AIC leaders that African tradition and culture are a present reality in their everyday existence." He also notes that these churches occupy an important place in African cosmology, and that their recognition and preservation in wellbeing is therefore central to the existence of Christianity in Africa. He views African Christianity as a meeting place of African traditionalism and Western-oriented traditional Christianity, where genuine growth of understanding occurs (Molobi, 2009:9).

The importance and place of indigenous cultures in African Christianity can also be inferred from the struggle of an AIC leader, Rev. Nehemiah Tile, who broke away from the Methodist Church in 1884. The driving force behind his struggle was his feeling that "both the church and the white government were trying to destroy his African culture and heritage" (Ngada & Mofokeng, 2001:4). He refused to be brainwashed into becoming a 'white' person, and continued to cultivate his African culture and traditions as AIC minister. The AICs could therefore be correctly understood, as Pobee and Ositelu (1998: 24) put it, as "seeking to communicate at the wave-length of Africans through their world-view, their non-conceptual medium of theologising (for example, dance and music), their exorcism and their other ways of accommodating traditional African religious beliefs and practices".

African Christianity is instrumental in bridging the gap between Western Christianity and African culture. It succeeded in solving the puzzle identified by Okwara (in Orji, 2016:75), who states for some scholars "the manner of communication of the gospel message of Christ to Africans is a major setback to the growth of Christianity in Africa. It is somewhat evident that the method of the evangelisation of Africa failed to respect the cultural contexts of the African people." African Christianity therefore seeks to respond positively to this challenge by promoting dialogue and harmony between Western Christianity and African cultural cosmology. Bediako (1995: 4) considers what he calls the "Christianising of pre-Christian traditions" to be the most important achievement of African theology. African Christianity therefore stands out as a courageous voice and conducive space for exchange on African indigenous cultural practices and cosmology in general.

Anglican Ritual on the Zulu King

The decolonial discourse has become a compelling force in confronting Eurocentrism and unravelling its invasive impact on societies worldwide. In South Africa, the coronation of King Sinqobile Misuzulu kaZwelithini and the ensuing involvement of the Anglican Church, together with the Christian rituals conducted on the occasion, raises questions about the implications of mixing indigenous culture with foreign religion. The incident highlighted the complex nature of cultural and religious interactions and affiliations in South Africa, with the Zulu monarch's traditional Prime Minister, Mangosuthu Buthelezi, defending the Anglican Church over the furore which the religious rituals performed on King Misuzulu, caused. Undoubtedly, the event has implications for cultural and religious hybridity, the historic legacy of colonialism and apartheid, identity, and authenticity. Moreover, the interplay between religion and politics, and the significance of alternate indigenous religious practices, were also called into question.

The coronation ceremony is an example of cultural and religious hybridity in which Zulu culture and Christianity intersect, making the entire scenario reminiscent of how religious traditions

can intertwine with cultural events. This is evident in Archbishop Thabo Makgoba's involvement as a representative of the Anglican Church. For Asad (2003), such actions can lead to the blending of beliefs and practices, thereby advancing cultural and religious pluralism within societies. However, critics of the ceremony make the compelling point that the participation of the Anglican Church in the ritual is indicative of colonial times, when the British monarchy had considerable influence over religious matters in South Africa. The Anglican Church in Africa is representative of the established Church in the imperial state of Great Britain. This conjuring of the connection to colonial relics is a reminder of the historical domination of Africa and the impact of colonialism on religious institutions (Mamdani, 1996). In light of Mamdani's (1996) analysis, the role of the Anglican Church in the ceremony may evoke discomfort, given Europe's exploitation of Africa, especially during the colonial era, as it gave rise to structural and institutionalised oppression, long after Africa gained its independence.

The fierce debate the coronation elicited, raises questions about identity and authenticity. Is the Zulu nation acquiescing to foreign influences and risking recolonisation? In this context, it becomes imperative to explore the ways in which individuals, institutions, and communities navigate the tensions between preserving their cultural authenticity and adopting elements of foreign religion (Appiah, 2005). Such an exploration would necessitate a deep enquiry into the interplay between religion and politics. The involvement of the late Prime Minister, Prince Mangosuthu Buthelezi, who was also a member of the Anglican Church, demonstrates how religion and politics intersect in South Africa. Moreover, the Prince's defence of the participation of the Anglican Church in the coronation as one also belonging to the traditional Ibandla Lama Nazaretha demonstrates the complexity of religious affiliation, and the pivotal role religion plays in politics and governance (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1991).

Significantly, Ibandla Lama Nazaretha's response to the incident, that their leader had already performed the 'real rituals' for King Misuzulu, is indicative of strong alternative indigenous practices. Moreover, various AICs in South Africa also offer alternative spiritual avenues for adherents (Smith, 1999). The entire situation is compelling for academics, clergy, and communities, as it showcases the ongoing negotiations between cultural preservation and religious adaptation in a country with a complex history of colonialism and religious diversity. The situation also brings to the fore the need for dialogue and understanding across religious, cultural, political and societal lines, where multiple belief systems and traditions intersect.

In a country like South Africa, with such overwhelming diversity, an important question to address would be: Can African Christianity find expression in indigenous cultural practices? Several factors must be considered when analysing and addressing this type of adaptation and enculturation. There must first be a recognition of the diversity with African Christianity: it is not monolithic (Cezula, 2015: 132), but encompasses a wide range of denominations, practices, and theological standpoints. In this context, undoubtedly, some traditions see their brand of Christianity as fully compatible with indigenous cultures, while others do not embrace such a view. Then there is also the question of syncretism and hybridity.

In many African contexts there is a blending of indigenous beliefs and practices with elements of Christianity. This syncretic approach has led to the development of unique forms of Christianity that embrace and incorporate indigenous cultural expressions. A common example is the incorporation of traditional music and dance in Christian worship services (Mokhoathi, 202: 2). Theological interpretation is another key category. Ndemanu (2018: 72), for example, argues that many Africans participate in Christianity and traditional African religions at the same time. Christianity therefore can coexist with indigenous cultures and as demonstrated through African Christianity, can be compatible with Christian doctrine. Nonetheless, it is crucial to address the colonial legacy in Africa, with its exploitation and domination, and the scepticism that may ensue because of it. It is, however, imperative to recognise that when addressing the issue of mixing indigenous culture with foreign religions,

we cannot take a one-size-fits-all approach: there must be ongoing dialogue, debate, discussions, and negotiations to continue to shape and reshape the evolving relationship between identity and belief.

The African king in Western religion

The question, "Can an African traditional monarch belong to a Western religion, in particular Christianity?" was sparked by the events unfolding at the certificate handover ceremony for King Misuzulu ka Zwelithini. Even before we explore this context it is important to note that this area of study requires insights into the rituals, symbols, and practices that bring together African traditional beliefs and Christianity. Understanding the impact of such a question, it is important to locate the relationship between the Zulu monarchy and Christianity – particularly the Anglican Church. In the southern African context, as with many colonised regions, colonisation affected everyone – including monarchs. King Mpande of Aulu had a warm relationship with missionaries, and it was during his reign that Christianity grew in the empire. "At the height of his power Mpande, unlike his predecessor, welcomed Christian missionaries from the Natal Colony to the Zulu empire" (Shamase, 2015: 1). The missionaries were granted permission to enter the kingdom, and their agency was not purely to spread the gospel. "The missionaries were not overtly imperial agents, but acted as informants on affairs within the empire for the benefit of the British colonial establishment in Natal" (Webb, as cited in Shamase, 2015:1). The king also had his own strategic motives, amongst which was aligning the kingdom with missionaries so that there would be protection from attacks by the Voortrekkers. It was in these engagements that even the royal households were infiltrated with the gospel.

"King Solomon became the Zulu nation's first Westernised king. As a boy he had left the Island of St Helena as an Anglican, for St Helena happens to be one of the Dioceses of the Anglican Church; the Church of the Province of Southern Africa" (Buthelezi, 2019). It is against this background that the Anglican church enjoyed relations with the AmaZulu Royal house up to the time of King Goodwill Zwelithini, hence his funeral was presided over by the Anglican Primate of Cape Town. For this reason, the Anglican church was invited to preside over the ceremony where the President of the Republic of South Africa was to hand over the Certificate of Recognition to the king. The event, that took place at the Moses Mabhida Stadium, was therefore not a coronation service but rather a fulfilment of legislative process. The Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Amendment Act 41 of 2003 (Republic of South Africa, 2003, p. 14) states that "(2) The recognition of a person as a king or a queen in terms of subsection (1)(b) must be done by way of – (a) a notice in the *Gazette* recognising the person identified as king or queen; and (b) the issuing of a certificate of recognition to the identified person."

The coronation had already taken place at kwaKhangelamankengane Royal Palace in Nongoma. This certificate handover ceremony was marred by discontent, as the Anglican Bishop continued to use what seemed like the coronation rites performed by the Bishop of Canterbury over British monarchs. The ceremony included a pledge of allegiance to the nation, anointing rites where the bishop, as a commoner, touched the head of the king. Another element that offended many, was the fact that the choir that assisted the bishop then sang the colonial translation of the English national anthem, where the prayer is translated as "God save Africa". These elements caused discontent, and had a number of people calling on the bishop to apologise for belittling the AmaZulu nation and affirming them as subjects of the British Empire. The issue of his majesty King Misuzulu is particularly complex, because in a short space of time he has been associated with the Seventh Day Adventists (the Regent, Queen Mantfombi's church) and with the Nazareth Baptist Church (Shembe), which is an AIC. Amongst the AmaZulu the concept of being an atheist or agnostic is unknown, because religion is embedded within the culture and way of life. The king's role is particularly important because, as leader of the people, the role is priesthood as the king is expected to represent

the nation is all acts of worship or veneration. The question, then, is: Can a king perform this role, yet be subjected to another person who goes so far as to anoint him? This clash became visible during the certificate handover ceremony. One way of understanding it, would be through the acceptance of the doctrine of *Persona Christi*. Buthelezi, in his explanation, took it even further back in the Old Testament times: "Through the liturgy, the archbishop did what the prophets of old did in the times of King David, even using the oil of anointing. This was wholly appropriate for a Christian King" (Mavuso, 2022a).

If one takes all these factors into account, the Christianisation of the amaZulu monarch shows that there has been a fairly healthy relationship between Christianity and AmaZulu monarchs. The person on the throne has both personal agency and the cultural priestly agency, and for almost a century, kings have tried to balance this relationship. The hierarchy that exists within African traditional religion places the responsibility of representing the nation to God on the shoulders of the king or queen. Many monarchs have embraced Christianity, and have sought ways to integrate their faiths with their cultural lives, as have done many African households. One factor that will be interesting to observe during the reign of Misuzulu, is whether he fully aligns himself with the Shembe Church, and of course what influence that will have on the cultural festivals of the nation. Shembe is a Sabbath-observing church, and the king would then have to move many events scheduled for a Saturday to a different day. There is a strong interplay between cultural power, religious authority and political manoeuvring that the monarch must balance at all times. This continued study will require the engagement of all concerned, such that the embarrassing scenes at Moses Mabhida Stadium are avoided. Progressive African monarchs have been Christian and have allowed for the integration of African cultural practices with their Christian beliefs and this is commendable.

Conclusion

This article looked at the conflict between religion and culture from the standpoint of King Misuzulu ka Zwelithini's official recognition ceremony. In many African contexts (or at least as many witnessed during the Zulu king's recognition ceremony), there continues to be a blending of indigenous beliefs and practices with elements of Christianity. Although decolonialisation remains an ongoing and never-ending process, it is important to partially recognise that culture and religion – whether indigenous or Western – always overlap or are in conflict with one another. What is perhaps important, however, is to continually ensure that when these two forces interact, neither's autonomy is undermined. Since the recognition ceremony took place two months after the traditional coronation, the interaction of culture and religion in this case meant neither harm nor subversion of context. We therefore conclude that, for culture and religion to coexist, it is important to engage in ongoing dialogue and discussions that mediate and further underline the evolving relationship between identity and faith. It's critical to retain a holistic perspective and take into account the unavoidable interactions between indigenous cultural practices and Western religions, such as Christianity, in societies like South Africa.

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