

SYNCRETISM AMONG CHRISTIANS; BENIN CITY AS A CASE STUDY

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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project work was carried out by **EZE Anthonia Ifunanya** with matriculation number **ART1901799** in the Department of Religions, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, Benin City under my supervision

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to almighty God and to my parents.

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I am forever grateful to God Almighty who has been my source of strength in this great institution, for his endless love, zeal, opportunities and life which sustained me during the duration of this course.

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ABSTRACT

Syncretism is worldwide and it's affect almost any two religion that meets. It is also perceived in the encounters of two worldviews. The belief is one of the challenges facing Religion in contemporary times.

Christianity is faced with a stark reality that the Christian faith did not permeate the culture of our people well enough, thus there is such confusion and a mirage of different practices with professing Christianity. This can be seen in the lifestyles and beliefs of some Christians in Benin City particularly in times of difficulties in Life. Thus the aim of this research work is to examine the double allegiance of faith among some Christians in Benin City who interestingly are devotees of both Christianity and African traditional beliefs. This research work set to critically examine the factors that are responsible for persistent of religious syncretism among some Benin city Christians. This Research work will adopt a descriptive method for data analysis, personal interviews and library resources that will constitute the primary and secondary sources of data.

This data will be collected from published and unpublished articles. This research work tends to offer dialogue as a way forward to achieve authentic spirituality in any religion one may opt for.

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the study.

The study on the syncretism of Christians in Benin is situated within the broader context of religious diversity and cultural hybridity in the African nation of Nigeria, Benin city to be exact. Benin is a unique state in Nigeria with a rich history of diverse religious traditions, including indigenous beliefs, Islam, and various Christian denominations. The term "syncretism" refers to the blending or merging of different religious and cultural elements, resulting in a unique and often dynamic religious landscape. The reality and complexity of the challenge posed by syncretism to the spread of Christian faith are often downplayed as lack of faith on the part of Christians and are attributed to the absence of proper catechesis, as if catechesis, preaching, and instruction were the total answer. The insight of Mbiti (1991) comes to the fore here. For him syncretism is inherently like a familiar spirit to all people on earth: "Even within Africa itself, religion takes on different forms according to different tribal settings. For that reason, a person from one setting cannot automatically and immediately adjust himself to or adopt the religious life of other people in a different setting. Even if they are converted to another religion like

Christianity or Islam, they do not completely abandon their traditional religion immediately it remains with them for several generations and sometimes centuries (14–15). The observation of Mbiti (1991) remains plausible and valid till date in most areas of Christian dominance in Nigeria. Hence, Sharpe (1986) notes that “differences of country and race and language would inevitably mean differences of religion.” The practice of syncretism in Africa today is as a result of culture change. And it has ushered in the age of cultural hybridization. Put another way, theologically untenable syncretistic beliefs and practices may not vanish quickly; syncretism cannot be wished away. As Quadri (2013) says, “In spite of the profession of Christianity and Islam, many Nigerians are involved in syncretism; they outwardly display Islam or Christianity while they are inwardly deeply entrenched in traditional religion.”

Syncretism is the blending or merging of different religious beliefs, practices, or traditions. In the context of Benin City's Christian community, it refers to the incorporation of traditional indigenous beliefs and practices into Christianity.

Benin City, located in the southern part of Nigeria, is known for its rich cultural heritage and history. It has a significant Christian population, with a diverse range of denominations and churches.

Syncretism in Benin City refers to the blending of indigenous African religious and cultural practices with introduced elements, often from European and Christian traditions. This fusion is a result of historical encounters between the indigenous Edo people and European colonizers, primarily the Portuguese. It's characterized by the coexistence of traditional deities, rituals, and festivals with Christian beliefs, creating a unique cultural and religious tapestry in Benin City, Nigeria. Syncretism among Benin City's Christians is not uncommon and can be observed in various aspects of their religious practices. This phenomenon is influenced by a variety of factors, including the historical interaction between Christianity and traditional indigenous religions in the region.

One prominent example of syncretism among Benin City Christians is the incorporation of traditional cultural elements into Christian rituals and ceremonies. This can be seen in the adoption of traditional dances, music, and attire during Christian worship services. Some churches also include elements such as the use of traditional symbols, charms, or even ancestral worship as part of their religious practices.

In the light of the foregoing, this article, applying historical and analytical methods makes a critical appraisal of the concept of syncretism in Religion and its

practice in Africa with focus on Nigeria, Benin City as a case study.

1.2 Clarification of Terms

At this point, it will be very important to define some of the key words used in this work. Those keywords include;

- **Syncretism:** Syncretism is the blending or fusion of different religious beliefs or practices. In the context of Benin City, it refers to the integration of traditional African religious elements with Christian beliefs and practices.

- **Traditional African Religions:** These are the indigenous religious beliefs and practices of the Edo people in Benin City, which existed prior to the introduction of Christianity. They involve the worship of ancestral spirits, deities, and the performance of rituals and ceremonies.

- **Christianity:** Refers to the religion based on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. In Benin City, it was introduced by European missionaries, primarily the Portuguese, and later other Christian denominations.

- **Deities:** Deities are divine beings or spirits that are worshipped in traditional African religions. In syncretism, some of these deities may be incorporated into Christian practices or equated with Christian saints.

- **Christian Saints:** These are individuals in Christian tradition who are recognized for their exceptional holiness and are often invoked for intercession. In syncretism, local deities may be associated with Christian saints.

- **Rituals:** Rituals are a set of prescribed actions, ceremonies, or customs performed as part of religious or cultural practices. In syncretism, rituals can combine elements from both traditional African religions and Christianity.

-**Benin City:** It is the capital of Edo state in southern Nigeria. The indigenous religion of the Edo people, including the worship of deities and ancestral spirits, remains an important part of the city's culture. It has also seen the syncretic blending of traditional beliefs with Christianity.

These terms help clarify the key concepts and dynamics of syncretism among Christian communities in Benin City, where the blending of traditional African religions and Christianity has created a unique religious and cultural landscape.

1.3 Statement of the Problem.

Syncretism beliefs and practices is a major problem among different religions in Nigeria, and some Benin City Christians in particular. This syncretistic beliefs and practices among some Benin City Christians has been traced to some factors. These factors often goes a long way in affecting the Christian faith of some of the Christians

indulging in this syncretic practices and in the long run posing a sort of double allegiance to two religious beliefs and practices.

In the end, pointing to the shallow extent to which the Christian teachings and practices has permeated into the life's of these individuals.

1.4 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this research work is to critically examine the factors that are responsible for persistent of religious syncretism among some Benin City Christians.

Objectives for a study on syncretism among Christians in Benin City:

- To Assess the Prevalence of Syncretism: Determine the extent to which traditional African religious elements have been incorporated into Christian practices among Benin City's Christian communities.
- To Examine the Impact on Theological Beliefs: Investigate how syncretism affects the core theological doctrines and beliefs of Christians in the region, exploring where conflicts and agreements arise.
- To Analyze the Influence on Religious Identity: Assess how syncretism impacts the religious identity and self-perception of Christian believers in Benin City.

- To Investigate Social and Cultural Implications: Explore the social and cultural consequences of syncretism within Christian communities, examining its effects on local customs, rituals, and social cohesion.
- To Identify Potential Challenges and Opportunities: Identify the challenges and opportunities presented by syncretism among Christians in Benin City and propose strategies for addressing or leveraging them within the faith community.

1.6 Significance of the Study

There are several people who tend to gain and benefit from the outcome of this research, Syncretism among Christian's, Benin city Christian's as case study.

1. **Christians:** Christian's are one of the major beneficiaries of this research. This will contribute to their understanding and examine the double allegiance of faith among Christian's in Benin City.

2. **Scholars and theologians:** Scholar and theologian can use this research to have understanding of how syncretism has being practiced by Christian's over the years in Benin city, Nigeria and the evolving relationships between African cultural practices and Christianity.

3. **Students:** The findings from this research can serve as valuable educational resources, helping students to better understand the various syncretic practices among Christians in Benin City.

4. **General public:** This will give the public a deeper understanding of syncretism and it can promote social cohesion within the Christian community, as well as between Christians and those who still practice traditional religions.

1.7 Scope and limitations of the Study

This study is strictly limited to the religious syncretism with reference to some Christian faithful in Benin City.

It delved into different forms of religious syncretism, causes of such religious syncretism as well as possible way forward to the curbing if not total eradication of religious syncretism among Christians within Benin City.

1.8 Methodology

The writer makes use of interview in the collection of primary data for this research. Books, Journals, articles and encyclopedia are also consulted. This Research work will adopt a descriptive method for data analysis, personal interviews and library resources that will constitute the primary and secondary sources of data.

This data will be collected from published and unpublished articles

1.9 Organization of the Work

The first chapter deals with the introduction to the Syncretism in Benin City where emphases are laid on the background to the study. Clarification of some keywords in the study of this research. statement of Problems, Aim and Objectives of the Study, Significance of the Study, Scope of the Study, Methodology and Division of work. Chapter two focuses on Literature review, while chapter three focuses on the research methodology. Chapter four deals on findings and results of the research. Chapter five focuses on conclusion, recommendations, and evaluation of the Research work.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Concept of Syncretism

Scrutinizing literature on theological exchanges, religion and missions highlights the proper definitions of the term "syncretism" with subtle and varying ways in which the term has been used by scholars. The proper definition of the term and what it signifies including the theological issues that makes it problematic is the focus of this sub-heading. The English word "syncretism" comes from the Greek word "*synkretismos*". Its origin is the custom of the people who lived in the Island of Crete in ancient days, who always fought themselves, but when enemies from outside attacked, they combined force with each other to combat their foreign enemy. They called this practice "*synkretismos*", which comes from the verb meaning 'to combine'. The concept is also employed to refer to the uniting of quarrelling brothers in the face of common enemies. Generally, syncretism would refer to the attempt to unite together those elements which do not agree (Gehman, 2001). Tippet (cited by Yamamori, 1975) defines syncretism "as the union of two opposite forces, beliefs, systems or tenets so that the united form is a new thing, neither one nor the other". This agrees with the understanding of Schreier (1994), who defines syncretism as the

“mixing of elements of two religious systems to the point where at least one, if not both, the systems loses basic structure and identity”. Pinto (1985) has a dismal concept of syncretism. In his opinion, it is the “fusion of incompatible elements” or the “mingling of authentic notions and realities of the revealed faith with realities of other spiritual worlds”. By this, he is saying that elements of other religions are uncritically borrowed and fused into Christianity, watering down or spoiling Christianity in the process (Chidili, 1997).

Heavily perturbed by the problem of syncretism, Schineller (1992) called for the abolition of the word because it bears many connotations and is no longer helpful or constructive. In so suggesting, he failed to suggest an adequate word to replace syncretism, and so the word is retained. As long as the church is universal and Catholic, she must dialogue with other religions, and if she must make herself truly present among them, she must take in something of other religions, so as to make Catholicism the religion of the people. Shorter (1977, p.43) speaks of “crude syncretism”, while Saneh (1985, p.43) speaks of “uncritical syncretism”. In this case, we distinguish between “critical syncretism” and “uncritical syncretism”. While a “critical syncretism” can be good, “uncritical syncretism” is misleading.

2.2 Different Forms of Syncretism

Syncretism, the blending or combining of different beliefs or practices, manifests in various forms across different cultural and religious contexts. Here are several forms of syncretism:

1. Religious syncretism
2. Cultural syncretism
3. Linguistic syncretism
4. Artistic syncretism and others

For the sake of this research work we shall focus more on Religious syncretism.

Religious Syncretism

Religious syncretism refers to the blending or merging of different religious beliefs, practices, and traditions to create a new, hybrid system of faith. This phenomenon often occurs in regions where diverse cultures and religions come into contact, leading to a fusion of elements from various spiritual traditions. Here are a few examples of religious syncretism:

Vodou (Voodoo): Originating in Haiti, Vodou is a syncretic religion that combines elements of West African Vodun with Roman Catholicism. Vodou practitioners often incorporate Catholic saints into their pantheon and rituals, maintaining a unique blend

of African and Christian spiritual practices.

Santería: Santería, originating in Cuba, is a syncretic religion that emerged among descendants of African slaves. It combines elements of Yoruba spirituality with Roman Catholicism. Santería practitioners may associate Yoruba deities (Orishas) with Catholic saints and often conduct rituals that include Catholic elements.

New Religious Movements: Some contemporary spiritual movements and New Age religions draw on diverse religious traditions, blending elements from Eastern and Western spiritual practices, esoteric traditions, and indigenous beliefs.

Religious syncretism often reflects cultural adaptation, survival strategies, and the human inclination to find common ground in diverse belief systems. It results in unique religious expressions that incorporate elements from multiple sources, contributing to the rich tapestry of global religious diversity.

2.3 Causes of Religious Syncretism

Religious syncretism is a complex phenomenon influenced by a variety of historical, social, and cultural factors. Here are several causes that contribute to the development of religious syncretism:

Cultural Contact and Interaction:

Trade and Migration: Regions experiencing significant trade or migration often

witness the exchange of cultural and religious ideas, leading to the blending of beliefs and practices.

Colonialism and Conquest: During periods of colonialism and conquest, indigenous cultures often faced pressure to adopt the religion of the colonizers. However, rather than complete conversion, a syncretic blending of indigenous and imposed beliefs sometimes occurred.

Political Integration: When diverse regions or communities come under a single political authority, there might be attempts to unify diverse religious practices under a common framework, leading to syncretism.

Economic Factors and Trade Networks: Economic ties between different regions facilitate cultural and religious exchanges. As merchants and traders move between areas, they carry their beliefs and practices, contributing to syncretism.

Religious Tolerance: Regions characterized by religious tolerance may see the coexistence of various faiths, allowing for the exchange and integration of religious elements without outright conflict.

Missionary Activities: Missionaries may adapt their religious messages to resonate with local beliefs, making it easier for communities to accept the new faith. This process can lead to the blending of indigenous and foreign religious elements.

Social and Political Power Dynamics: The dominant religious or political group may encourage syncretism to create a sense of unity among diverse populations, fostering stability and control.

Natural and Cosmic Events: Natural disasters or cosmic events might trigger religious reinterpretations or the incorporation of new spiritual elements as a way to explain or cope with such occurrences.

Human Spiritual Needs: Individuals and communities may syncretize religious beliefs in an effort to address their spiritual needs, finding meaning and connection in a combination of diverse traditions.

Changes in Leadership: Changes in religious leadership or the emergence of charismatic figures may bring about reinterpretations of existing beliefs and practices, leading to syncretism.

Religious syncretism is a dynamic process influenced by a combination of historical, social, and cultural dynamics. It reflects the adaptability of human belief systems in response to changing circumstances and interactions between different religious traditions.

2.4 The Dividing Line between Syncretism and Inculturation

Inculturation specifically refers to the adaptation of religious beliefs and

practices to the cultural context of a particular group or community. It occurs when a religious tradition seeks to express itself in a way that resonates with the cultural expressions and worldview of a specific people.

A definition of the theological content of inculturation can be considered from a variety of angles. Its content is contained in the words of the Gospel of St. John, “And the word became flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn 1:14). It therefore finds its suit in the incarnational parameters already set by Christ, when, although he was God, took human flesh and lived within a human culture. According to Crollius (1986), enculturation means:

The honest and serious attempt to make Christ and his Gospel of salvation ever more understood by peoples of every culture, locality and time. It is the reformulation of Christian life and doctrine into the very thought patterns of each people.... It is the continuous endeavour to make Christianity ‘truly feel at home’ in the cultures of each people. (p. 11).

In the contention of Arrupe (1990), enculturation is:

The incarnation of Christian life and of the Christian message in particular cultural context, in such a way that this experience not only finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question, but becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies the cultures, transforming it and remaking it so as to bring about a new creation. (p.

Syncretism of the Christian gospel occurs when basic elements of the gospel are replaced by religious elements from the host culture. It often results from a tendency or attempt to undermine the uniqueness of the gospel as found in the Scriptures or the incarnate Son of God. In inculturation, Christianity is not brought into a synthesis with something alien to it. It is the seed of the gospel that is already present in a particular culture. The reason for this synthesis is in fact the possibility of compatibility. Inculturation is not a negative phenomenon, but when it is not guided by the right principles it could become a crude syncretism. Whatever distinction is made here, there will always be disagreement between churchmen and theologians on whether or not a particular action is genuine inculturation/development of syncretism in Ezenweke & Kanu: Perspectives of Syncretism & its Modern Trend: Christian & African Traditions the pejorative sense. However, some degree of openness and tolerance is required in dealing with new views.

2.5 Religious and Cultural Landscape of Benin City

Benin City, the capital of Edo State in Nigeria, boasts a rich and diverse religious and cultural landscape, characterized by a blend of traditional indigenous practices, Christianity, and Islam. Here's an overview:

1. **Traditional Religion:** Benin City has a strong connection to its traditional religion, often referred to as Edo religion. The Oba (king) and the royal family play a significant role in these indigenous practices. Traditional festivals like the Igue Festival and the annual Igue-Osunde ceremony are celebrated with cultural displays, rituals, and performances. Ancestral veneration is a prominent aspect, with many families maintaining ancestral shrines.
2. **Christianity:** Christianity, particularly various Christian denominations, has a substantial presence in Benin City. Churches of different denominations, ranging from Roman Catholic to various Protestant churches, are scattered across the city. The Oba of Benin, as a symbolic leader, has traditionally supported religious tolerance, allowing for the coexistence of indigenous practices and Christianity.
3. **Islam:** Islam also has a presence in Benin City, with mosques and Islamic communities contributing to the religious diversity. While not as dominant as Christianity or traditional practices, the Muslim community plays a role in the broader religious fabric.
4. **Cultural Heritage:** Benin City is renowned for its historical and cultural heritage, notably the ancient Benin Kingdom. The Oba's Palace, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, stands as a symbol of the city's cultural significance. The city is known for its

art and craftsmanship, including the famous Benin Bronzes, which reflect the artistic prowess of the region.

5. **Festivals and Celebrations:** Various cultural festivals are celebrated throughout the year. These festivals showcase traditional dances, ceremonies, and rituals, attracting both locals and tourists. The Ugie Festival is another significant cultural event that involves the Oba's blessing and the appeasement of the gods.
6. **Language and Tradition:** The Edo people have a distinct language and cultural identity. The Bini language is widely spoken, and cultural norms and traditions are passed down through generations. Traditional attire, including coral beads and elaborate garments, is worn during cultural events and ceremonies. The religious and cultural landscape of Benin City reflects a dynamic interplay between indigenous traditions, Christianity, and Islam. The city's historical significance, coupled with its vibrant festivals and cultural practices, contributes to its unique identity in Nigeria's diverse cultural mosaic.

2.6 Patterns of Some Syncretic Practices among Christians in Benin City

Practice of divination among some Christians: Benin Christians mix aspects of Christianity with African traditional religious doctrines, nearly always happen during christening (naming) ceremonies. In this instance, some Christians go to the diviner to

find out which particular soul reincarnated. Elsewhere, they first carry out African traditional religious naming rites, and later proceed to church for baptism and dedication. , some of the proceedings, where in most instances, diviners will be consulted before the selection of a Benin traditional ruler who is a Christian. For this purpose, the candidate will be traditionally initiated into the Iwebo title institution before being crowned king of a particular town. Often, this rite is performed in accordance with the "will of the gods of the land" to ascertain whether or not the candidate, initiated into this sacred institution, will make a good king.

Some of the reasons for the practice of divination among Christians include to find ways of consolidating personal security and wealth; to inquire into the nature and causes of illness/ death; to discover ways of preserving life and making progress; to discover the mind of God for the future and for one's destiny, and so on. Divination, therefore, illuminates suffering, alleviates doubts, and restores value and significance to the lives of such practitioners, especially in times of crises. The practice of divination is as old as our humanity. It exists in all the cultures of the world, in different ways, and in various forms. In the Old Testament, Moses warned the people of Israel against the practice of divination:

There must never be anyone among you who makes his son or daughter pass through fire, who practices divination, who is a

soothsayer augur or sorcerer, who uses charms, consults ghosts or spirits, or calls up the dead. For the man who does these things is detestable to Yahweh your god (Deut. 18:9-14).

The catechism of the Roman Catholic Church also short-listed other forms of divination to be rejected:

Recourse to Satan or demons, conjuring up the dead or other practices falsely supposed to "unveil" the future. Consulting horoscopes, astrology, palm reading, interpretation of omens and lots, the phenomena of clairvoyance, and recourse to mediums all conceal a desire for power overtime, history and in the last analysis, other human beings, as well as a wish to conciliate hidden powers. They contradict the honour, respect, and loving fear that we owe to God alone (Maduka 1991:3).

The above-listed forms of divination derive from the desire to surpass human limitations and penetrate the future and the unknown. For Kasomo (2012), divination is an art or a practice of discovering the personal, human significance of future or, more commonly, present or past events. This suggests that divination is an inquiry into the existential meaning of human life, which can only be achieved through the manipulation and guidance of supernatural forces. Kasomo (2012) observed that diviners, witchdoctors, or sorcerers played (and continue to play) a key role in the protection of life from perceived enemies. Their knowledge and power enable them to

proffer treatment for diseases, exorcism, and the incapacitation of an enemy. The practitioners also offer medicine for good fortune, love, success, security of person and property, and protection from sorcery and witchcraft (Peek 1991:103). This medicine could be in the form of herbs (and thus ingested), or as body parts from animals (and thus made into charms and amulets, which may be hung on certain parts of the body).

Reasons for Divination

In Benin City, divination subsists in the failure of individuals to cope with crises as well as the fear of uncertainty. Diviners are widely regarded as gateways to the unveiling of the mysteries of human life. As such, some Christians approach diviners for answers to their circumstances as well as for information about future occurrences. According to Parrinder (1949, p.152), “the diviner seeks to interpret the mysteries of life, to convey the messages of the gods, give guidance in daily affairs, and settle dispute to uncover the past and look into the future”.

For the Benin, divination is called "Emwan", and it represents a pivotal aspect of traditional religion. According to Metuh (1985), the role of the diviner is indispensable for the social, political, religious, and personal life of the Benin. This explains why it is always difficult for some people to shrug off divination, even after

conversion to Christianity. Hence, some Christians resort to divination not only to obtain knowledge about the future, but also and more so to discover ways of avoiding misfortunes such as sudden death and illness, as well as pacifying angry or revengeful ancestors. Often, some Christians approach diviners to know the "real" cause of their illness, and whether or not such causes are mystical and/or genetic. This behaviour underlines a crisis of faith as well as the difficulty of making the Christian faith an unadulterated part of their daily lives. For some people, this is a sign that Christian churches lack the power to address their material-spiritual problems and cannot, therefore, provide directives in times of crisis. The vast majority of Benin writers blame this perception on the barrenness of Christian spirituality and contend that Christianity has failed to satisfy the spiritual desires of its members. Asiegbu (2000) suggests that the problem resides in the processes of keeping Christians true to their beliefs, and thus guaranteeing the relevance of Christianity to both their material and spiritual world view. Provided this gap exists between the two, the practice of divination will endure within what is a crisis of Christian faith.

Practice of Charms alongside Christian Faith and Sacraments

In Benin culture, particularly within traditional spiritual practices, the use of charms and sacramentals often occurs in tandem for various purposes, including

protection, healing, and spiritual guidance. These practices are often deeply intertwined with the belief in spiritual forces and the influence of ancestral spirits or deities.

For instance, in ceremonies or rituals related to spiritual healing or protection, a traditional healer or priest may employ both charms and sacramentals. Charms, often referred to as "adimu" or "agba," can consist of specially prepared objects, substances, or symbols believed to possess spiritual power or protective qualities. These charms might include items like amulets, specially prepared herbs, or talismans designed to ward off evil spirits, provide healing, or bring good fortune. At the same time, sacramentals, which could be items sanctified by spiritual or religious significance, may also be incorporated into these rituals. This may include elements like blessed water, incense, or consecrated objects from Christian religious practices (if the individual or family also identifies as Christian). The use of sacramentals from Christian faith might occur alongside traditional charms, reflecting the syncretic nature of spirituality in Benin. For example, in a healing or protective ritual conducted by a traditional healer, you might find the use of a charm created from specific herbs or objects believed to possess spiritual energy or protective properties. Alongside this charm, the healer might also employ blessed water or consecrated

items from Christian practice, representing the blending of traditional and Christian elements within the ritual for the desired spiritual outcome.

Reasons for Charms

Spiritual Protection and Healing: Charms are often believed to possess specific spiritual powers or protective qualities within traditional belief systems. People may use charms to protect themselves or their homes from negative spiritual forces or to promote healing. Sacramentals from Christian faith may also be seen as sources of spiritual protection or divine intervention.

Cultural Tradition and Heritage: Charms and traditional practices are deeply rooted in the cultural heritage of the Edo people. Using charms may represent a connection to ancestral traditions, providing a sense of identity and continuity with the past.

Personal Beliefs and Preferences: Individuals might use both charms and sacramentals based on their personal beliefs, experiences, or what they perceive to be effective for addressing their spiritual needs. It could be a matter of personal preference or a way to cover various spiritual bases.

Adaptation and Flexibility: People in Benin might employ both charms and sacramentals due to the perceived effectiveness of diverse spiritual practices. This

adaptability allows individuals to utilize a range of methods that they believe will bring them protection, healing, or guidance.

Availability and Accessibility: Charms and sacramentals may be readily available and accessible within the local cultural and religious landscape. Individuals may choose to utilize both based on what they have access to or what is culturally familiar

Practice of Traditional Oath-Taking vs Christian Oath-Taking

According to Okeke et al. (2017), oath-taking strongly affirms the desire to do something, like making a promise that must be kept. People took oaths but carelessly defaulted in the specifications. It is the individual's responsibility to adhere strictly to the promise or prepare for what is usually a disastrous outcome. Oath-taking involves and demands a strong and all-embracing commitment because there is a tendency that one's whole life is implicated. Oath-taking solicits a measure of faithfulness and honesty, as the ties between the oath-taker and fulfiller assume the status of an unbroken chain. Symbolically, oath-taking demonstrates the degree of seriousness in a person's allegiance to processes and consequences. It is usually supported with a seal that remains a secret between the parties involved. This seal makes the enterprise definite so that it cannot be changed or argued about. This concept of a seal is akin to an oath that a man and woman take during marriage. It is usually sealed with blood as

a mark of an indissoluble covenant, plan, and act. Consequently, the parties involved must do well not to contravene the oath, as the repercussions might be dire.

While explaining the nature and types of oath-taking, as well as the reasons for oath-taking, Okeke et al. (2017) noted that public oath-taking practices target individuals who aspire to or are in positions of authority within government. In this instance, a seal would normally represent the certificate of return. In a political context, defaulting leads to either indictment or prosecution according to the law of the country. Another type of oath-taking involves parties regarded as the "living dead" where the ancestors demand commitment, sincerity, fidelity, and uprightness from the individual. Those who know or have experienced the negative implications of this type of oath-taking never engage in it.

The essential point about oath-taking is that it compels the parties concerned to avoid defaulting, especially for fear of misfortunes, punishment, or death. Some Christians prefer to swear by some divinity or African traditional religion sacred objects rather than by the Christian Bible. They contend that, unlike the Bible or Christian God, such divinities promptly and adequately mete out punishments for any breach of oath. Some Benin devotees choose to swear by both the Christian and

African traditional religion sacred artifacts, if only to justify the support of both sides.

This, too, is syncretism in practice.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 SYNCRETIC ELEMENTS IN BENIN CITY: IMPACTS, CHANGES, CHALLENGES AND CONTROVERSIES

3.1 Syncretic Elements in Christian's Practices in Benin City.

In Benin City, as in various other regions, syncretic elements in Christian practices refer to the incorporation of local cultural, religious, or traditional beliefs into the Christian faith. These elements often manifest in the ways Christian rituals, ceremonies, and expressions of faith integrate with local customs, creating a unique blend of Christianity with indigenous practices. Some examples of syncretic elements in Christian practices in Benin City may include:

i. Incorporation of Traditional Symbols: In Benin City, the incorporation of traditional symbols into Christian practices is a notable aspect of religious syncretism. These symbols, which are deeply rooted in the city's rich cultural heritage, may include items like the 'Ukthurhe' (a ritual staff symbolizing peace and interconnectedness) or representations of ancestral figures. These traditional symbols are often integrated into Christian contexts, reflecting a blend of ancestral veneration and Christian beliefs. This synthesis demonstrates how local culture adapts and merges with introduced religious practices, creating a unique expression of faith that

resonates with the community's identity and historical background. Christians in Benin City might incorporate traditional symbols or objects into their religious practices. This can include the use of indigenous art, symbols, or artifacts within Christian churches or during religious ceremonies.

ii. Blending of Christian and Traditional Festivals: Christian celebrations and festivals may reflect a syncretic mix with local traditional festivities. The timing, rituals, or themes of Christian celebrations may align with or incorporate elements from traditional cultural events. For instance, Christian holidays like Christmas and Easter may incorporate traditional cultural elements such as indigenous music, dance, and rituals. This fusion reflects the coexistence of Christian beliefs with the rich cultural heritage of Benin City, offering a distinctive expression of faith that acknowledges and integrates local traditions into the celebration of Christian festivities.

iii. Syncretism in Worship Music and Dance: In Benin City, syncretism in worship music and dance involves blending traditional and Christian elements. Local rhythms, instruments, and dance styles find expression in Christian worship, creating a unique fusion of cultural and religious practices. This syncretic approach aims to resonate with the community's heritage, enriching the worship experience by incorporating

traditional music and dance forms into Christian ceremonies. Christian worship services might incorporate local music styles, rhythms, and dance forms. This fusion creates a unique worship experience that resonates with the cultural identity of the community.

iv. Ancestral Veneration within Christian Framework: Ancestral veneration within a Christian framework involves integrating traditional practices with Christian beliefs. This may include incorporating the remembrance and honor of ancestors during Christian ceremonies, adapting rituals to align with Christian teachings. This syncretic approach reflects an attempt to harmonize ancestral veneration with Christian faith, demonstrating the complex interplay between local traditions and introduced religious practices in Benin City. Some syncretic practices involve integrating elements of ancestral veneration within Christian contexts. This could involve incorporating prayers for ancestors or incorporating traditional rites alongside Christian ceremonies.

v. Use of Indigenous Languages: Traditional languages are often incorporated into Christian worship, prayers, and hymns, reflecting a fusion of local cultural expressions with Christian teachings. This syncretic approach allows for a more inclusive and culturally resonant religious experience that bridges the linguistic and

spiritual aspects of the community's identity in Benin City. Syncretism can be observed in the use of local languages within Christian liturgy, prayers, or hymns. This makes the Christian message more accessible and culturally relevant to the local population.

vi. Healing and Deliverance Practices: Healing and deliverance practices under syncretic elements involve a blend of traditional and Christian rituals. Traditional methods, such as herbal remedies or spiritual rituals, may intertwine with Christian prayers and laying on of hands. This syncretic approach reflects an integration of local beliefs in spiritual healing with Christian concepts of divine intervention, creating a distinctive and multifaceted approach to addressing health and spiritual concerns in the community. Syncretic elements may be present in Christian healing and deliverance services where local beliefs in spiritual healing or exorcism are integrated into Christian practices.

3.2 Incorporation of traditional African Religious practices.

The incorporation of traditional African religious practices into Christianity often involves syncretism, where elements of indigenous beliefs are blended with Christian rituals and theology. Benin City, which is located in southern Nigeria, has a long history of traditional African religious practices. These practices include belief in a

supreme being, as well as a pantheon of lesser gods and spirits. Ancestor worship is also an important part of traditional religion in Benin City, as well as rituals such as divination, sacrifice, and ceremonial dance. In recent years, there has been an increased interest in incorporating these traditional practices into the Catholic faith. For example, some priests in Benin City have incorporated traditional music and dance into their liturgies, and have sought to find connections between African spirituality and Catholic teachings. This phenomenon varies across regions and communities. Here are some of the practices;

3.2.1. Worship Spaces and Symbols:

i. Sacred Spaces: Many sacred places in Benin City have been incorporated into the practice of traditional African religions. One of the most well-known is the Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove, which is a UNESCO World Heritage site. The Grove is home to a shrine dedicated to the Yoruba deity, Osun, and is a popular destination for pilgrims who come to pray, make offerings, and seek guidance. Other sacred places include the Ise Hill, which is associated with the god Ifa, and the Oba's Palace, which is a powerful symbol of traditional authority in Benin City. Christian churches also may adopt architectural elements reminiscent of traditional African religious structures. Some churches incorporate open courtyards or natural settings into their

worship spaces.

ii. Symbols: Traditional symbols and motifs might find a place within Christian churches, reflecting a fusion of indigenous and Christian visual languages. In Benin City, traditional symbols such as the adinkra cloths have been used in the incorporation of traditional African religious practices in a number of ways. For example, some Christians in Benin City wear adinkra cloths as a way of incorporating their traditional heritage into their faith. Additionally, some local churches have begun incorporating adinkra symbols into their architecture, such as by incorporating designs from adinkra cloths into stained glass windows or carved reliefs. Finally, some priests in Benin City use adinkra symbols in the decoration of ritual objects, such as by incorporating the sankofa symbol, which represents the importance of learning from the past, is often incorporated into sacred objects in Benin City. Another commonly used symbol is the nsibidi symbol, which represents the path of life. This symbol is often used in Benin City to represent the journey of the individual and the importance of making good choices in life. Additionally, the nkyinkyim symbol, which represents the twists and turns of life, is often incorporated into ritual objects as a reminder that life is full of challenges and changes.

3.2.2. Liturgical Practices:

i. Rituals and Ceremonies: The incorporation of African religious practices into rituals and ceremonies in Benin City also extends to funeral rites. For example, the "seven days of mourning" is a traditional ceremony that takes place after someone has died. During this time, family and friends come together to celebrate the life of the deceased and to help them make their journey to the afterlife. This ceremony often incorporates elements of traditional Yoruba religion, such as music, drumming, and dancing. Additionally, some families may consult with diviners to determine the cause of the person's death and to seek advice on how to properly commemorate the deceased. Christian ceremonies might incorporate elements from traditional rituals, such as the use of drums, dance, or communal gatherings, giving a distinct flavor to worship services.

ii. Festivals and Celebrations: Festivals and celebrations also play an important role in the incorporation of traditional African religious practices in Benin City. The "Ovia" festival is a major festival that takes place every year and is dedicated to the goddess Ovia. During this festival, people make offerings to the goddess, perform rituals, and engage in traditional dances. The "Igue" festival is another major festival that takes place in December and is dedicated to the ancestral spirits. This festival

involves a number of rituals, including purification ceremonies and ancestral offerings. Additionally, people may visit shrines and offer prayers during this time. Christian celebrations might align with traditional festivals, either in timing or by incorporating elements from these festivals into Christian celebrations.

3.2.3. Ancestral Veneration and Saints:

i. Syncretism with Ancestral Beliefs: Syncretism with ancestral belief systems is a key feature of the incorporation of traditional African religious practices in Benin City. For example, many people in Benin City still maintain shrines to their ancestors and offer prayers and sacrifices to them. Additionally, there are a number of traditional beliefs and practices that are associated with ancestor worship, such as the belief in reincarnation and the use of divination to contact the spirits of ancestors. Finally, some traditional ceremonies, such as the Igue festival, incorporate rituals that honor and celebrate the ancestors. Some Christian practices might incorporate elements of ancestral veneration within a Christian framework. Saints in Christian traditions might be equated with ancestral spirits in certain syncretic practices

3.2.4. Healing and Spiritual Practices:

i. Incorporation of Traditional Healing Practices: Traditional healing practices are also an important part of the incorporation of traditional African religious practices in

Benin City. These practices include herbal medicine, spiritual cleansing, and the use of traditional medicines and charms. Many traditional healers, known as "babalawos," are consulted for a variety of health issues, ranging from physical ailments to spiritual problems. These healers use a combination of traditional methods, such as divination, herbal remedies, and prayers, to diagnose and treat patients. They are often seen as playing a crucial role in the community, especially in rural areas where access to modern healthcare is limited. Christian healing services may integrate elements of traditional healing practices, such as the use of herbs or rituals associated with spiritual cleansing.

3.2.5. Language and Communication:

i. Use of Indigenous Languages: The use of indigenous languages is another important aspect of the incorporation of traditional African religious practices in Benin City. Many of the traditional ceremonies and rituals are conducted in one of the local languages, such as the Bini language. For example, the Igue festival is conducted entirely in the Bini language, and the use of the language is seen as an important part of the festival's authenticity and cultural significance. Additionally, some traditional healers will use prayers and incantations in the Bini language as part of their healing practices. Christian liturgy, prayers, and hymns might be conducted in

indigenous languages, making the religious experience more culturally accessible.

3.2.6. Christianity as a Protective Force:

i. Integration of Christian Symbols for Protection: The integration of Christian symbols for protection is another important aspect of the incorporation of traditional African religious practices in Benin City. Many people in Benin City will wear or carry objects with Christian symbols, such as crosses or images of Jesus or Mary, as a way of seeking protection from evil spirits or misfortune. This practice is sometimes seen as a form of syncretism, or the blending of two different religious traditions. For example, the Bini people may combine the use of traditional charms with Christian symbols, believing that the combination provides additional protection. Some individuals might incorporate Christian symbols, such as crosses or Bible verses, as protective elements within traditional spiritual practices.

3.3 Syncretic Rituals and Ceremonies in Christian worship in Benin city.

In our own country, Nigeria, Benin city in particular we have many similar stories of pastors who either self-proclaim or are acclaimed by their adherents as healers, witchcraft expellers or root-problem solvers. During the day in their churches they carry the bible, and at night they visit occult, herbal, traditional healers, fortune tellers etc. to get power. Similarly, some church adherents now commonly visit any

place (Christian or non-Christian) where things are reported to be "happening". They go to their primary church by day and secretly (or sometimes publicly) attend to the other religion or belief system. Some have even decided to term it "giving to God what belongs to him and to Caesar that which belongs to him". It is no longer unusual to visit a Christian home and find effigies of both their Christianity and those of the ATR. As previously stated, Christianity did not wipe away the ATR belief system. The initial missionaries attempted to spread the Christian faith by keying into what people already knew, indirectly creating a syncretistic platform which may have lead to integration of the practices that are contrary to the Christian faith into Church practices. A current example of syncretistic practice in the Church is the perception and understanding of the Holy Spirit as a destructive part of God that is intended to give out immediate punishment to offenders. In the real sense and as presented in the New Testament of the Bible, the Holy Spirit is never destructive but rather the comforter and the advocate who teaches the truth. The way we are now using "Holy Ghost Fire" reflects the concept of Esango, the God of thunder and lightning, who is invoked when there is a need to destroy an offender. Some examples of syncretic rituals and ceremonies that might be found in Christian worship in Benin City include;

3.3.1. Use of Traditional Music and Instruments: The use of traditional music and instruments is another important aspect of the incorporation of traditional African religious practices in Benin City. Many traditional ceremonies, such as the Igue festival, feature drumming, singing, and dancing. These elements are seen as a way of communicating with the spirits and creating a connection between the physical and spiritual worlds. Additionally, many traditional healers will use musical instruments, such as drums or flutes, as part of their healing rituals. The use of traditional music and instruments is seen as an essential part of maintaining and preserving the cultural heritage of Benin City. Christian services may include traditional African music, drumming, and dancing, which are integral to local cultural expressions. These elements can be integrated into the worship service, adding a distinctive local flavor.

3.3.2. Incorporation of Ancestral Veneration: The incorporation of ancestral veneration is another key element of traditional African religious practices in Benin City. In the Bini tradition, ancestors are seen as powerful spiritual forces that can provide protection and guidance to their descendants. As a result, many people in Benin City will make offerings to their ancestors, such as food or drinks, as a way of showing respect and seeking their help. Ancestral veneration is often seen as a way of preserving cultural traditions and maintaining a connection to the past. In some cases,

elements of ancestral veneration, a significant aspect of traditional African religion, might be subtly integrated into Christian practices, such as remembering and honoring ancestors during Christian holidays or services.

3.3.3. Libation and Offerings: Libations and offerings are an important part of the incorporation of ancestral veneration into traditional African religious practices in Benin City. Libations, or ritual pouring of liquid offerings, are often made to the ancestors as a way of showing respect and seeking their help. For example, water or palm wine may be poured on the ground or into a bowl, and prayers are recited while the offering is made. Offerings of food, such as yams or kola nuts, may also be made. These offerings are seen as a way of showing gratitude and inviting the ancestors to share in a feast. The practice of pouring libations, a common ritual in African traditional religions, might be adapted and incorporated into Christian worship, symbolizing blessings, prayers, or offerings to God.

3.3.4. Traditional Healing and Exorcism Rituals: Traditional healing and exorcism rituals are also an important part of the incorporation of traditional African religious practices in Benin City. In the Bini tradition, there are a number of different rituals that are used to heal physical and spiritual ailments. These rituals may involve the use of traditional herbs, prayers, or the recitation of incantations. Exorcism rituals are also

used to expel evil spirits or negative energy from a person or place. These rituals often involve the use of special prayers, the burning of incense, and the recitation of sacred texts. Christian worship in syncretic contexts may include elements of traditional healing and exorcism practices, where local beliefs in spirits and ancestral powers are intertwined with Christian concepts of healing and spiritual warfare.

3.3.5. Festivals and Holy Days: Festivals and holy days are another key aspect of traditional African religious practices in Benin City. There are a number of different festivals celebrated throughout the year, each with its own unique rituals and customs. The most important festival is the Ogu Omadagbe festival, which is celebrated every four years and involves a number of rituals, processions, and sacrifices. Other notable festivals include the Igue festival, the Eda festival, and the Iso festival. In addition to these large-scale festivals, there are also a number of smaller-scale holy days that are observed throughout the year. A Christian festivals such as Christmas and Easter might be celebrated with additional rituals and customs that are indigenous to the Benin culture. These could include specific traditional ceremonies, processions, or communal feasts.

3.3.6. Blessings and Curses: Blessings and curses are another key element of traditional African religious practices in Benin City. Blessings are believed to bring good fortune and protection, while curses are believed to bring misfortune and harm. In the Bini tradition, blessings and curses are often given by the chiefs or priests of the community. They may be given in response to a request from an individual, or they may be given to an entire community. Blessings and curses can be given in a variety of ways, such as through the recitation of incantations, the use of special amulets, or the performance of ritual dances. Elements of traditional African beliefs in blessings and curses might be incorporated into Christian teachings and practices, often with a focus on spiritual warfare and the power of prayer.

3.3.7. Rites of Passage: Rites of passage are an important aspect of traditional African religious practices in Benin City. There are a number of different rites of passage that are observed throughout a person's life. The most important rite of passage is birth, followed by naming, weaning, coming of age, marriage, and death. Each of these rites of passage involves a number of rituals and ceremonies that are designed to help the individual transition into the next stage of life. For example, the birth rite of passage often involves the sacrifice of a goat, while the marriage rite of passage typically involves the exchange of gifts and the blessing of the newlyweds.

Christian rites of passage such as baptisms, weddings, and funerals might include traditional African elements. For instance, a Christian wedding in Benin City might blend both Christian vows and traditional marriage rituals unique to the local culture.

3.3.8. Symbols and Artifacts: Traditional African religious practices in Benin City make use of a variety of symbols and artifacts, each with its own specific meaning and purpose. For example, masks are often used in religious ceremonies and rituals to represent different spirits or deities. Additionally, statues and paintings are often used to represent specific aspects of the culture, such as the ancestors or the natural world. Other common symbols and artifacts include shells, horns, drums, and calabashes. Each of these symbols and artifacts has a unique role to play in the traditional religious practices of the Bini people. The use of traditional symbols, artifacts, and regalia can be observed in some Christian churches. These items, often imbued with cultural and religious significance, can be used in a way that harmonizes with Christian worship.

Syncretism also has allow Christianity to adapt to local cultures, making it more relatable and accessible to communities with diverse cultural backgrounds. It also help to foster inclusivity by incorporating local customs and traditions, making Christianity more attractive and relevant to a broader audience. Syncretism can

contribute to a more flexible interpretation of Christian doctrines, allowing for diverse expressions of faith.

3.4 Impact of Syncretism on Christian Beliefs and Practices.

The impact of syncretism on the ethnic denominations of African religion among the Benin people; the Benins version cannot be over-emphasised.

The ethnic denominations of African religion among Nigerians, particularly Benin religion stands the risk of being overwhelmed and subsumed into the dominant Christian religion which represents the cultures of Western Europe. Furthermore, syncretizing elements of Islamic and Christian religions would automatically rob the Africans of their culture and identity.

Already, most adherents of the ethnic denominations of African religion among the Benin people have moved in large numbers to Islam and Christianity. This has left only a few committed adherents of the indigenous religions. Thus, if the onslaught on the religion and culture of the ethnic nationalities of Africans in the Rural side of Benin city is not curtailed, sooner than later, the whole place would have been filled with foreign ideas, cultures and values.

In the face of globalization and its challenges, this is not the fate that should befall any of the denominations of African religion anywhere. This would if permitted usher

in the cultural neo imperialism of the Africans in the 21st century where globally, there has been cultural renaissance and non-Africans have been coming back to Africa to study African cultures.

Other impacts of syncretism on Christian Beliefs and practices include;

3.4.1. Blending of Beliefs and Practices: The traditional African religious practices of the Bini people have been significantly impacted by the process of syncretism, or the blending of different beliefs and practices. Over time, the Bini people have integrated elements of Christianity, Islam, and other faiths into their traditional beliefs and practices. This blending has resulted in a complex and dynamic religious landscape, in which traditional practices and beliefs coexist with those of other faiths. In some cases, this has led to the emergence of new and unique religious traditions, such as the Brazilian-inspired Olorum sect. Syncretism often leads to a blending of Christian beliefs with elements from other religious or cultural traditions. This can result in unique interpretations of Christian theology, new religious rituals, or the incorporation of non-Christian symbols and practices into Christian worship.

3.4.2. Theological Adaptations: In addition to the blending of different beliefs and practices, the process of syncretism has also led to the theological adaptation of traditional African religious beliefs. For example, the concept of a supreme deity has

been adapted to include aspects of the Christian God, while other traditional deities have been syncretized with saints from the Catholic faith. Additionally, the concept of a spirit world has been adapted to include elements of the afterlife found in Christian and Islamic teachings. As a result of these adaptations, traditional African religious beliefs have taken on new meanings and significance in the context of modern-day Benin City. In syncretic contexts, some Christian theological concepts might be reinterpreted to align more closely with local beliefs. For example, the Christian concept of the Trinity might be understood in ways that resonate with indigenous spiritual concepts.

3.4.3. Rituals and Celebrations: The rituals and celebrations associated with traditional African religious practices in Benin City are a central part of life for many people. The most important rituals include the Ogu festival, which celebrates the ancestors and the harvest, as well as the Igue festival, which celebrates the transition from one year to the next. These festivals are marked by a range of activities, including dancing, singing, and the consumption of special foods and drinks. Other notable celebrations include the Mbori festival, which celebrates fertility, and the Edi festival, which celebrates the birth of twins. Christian rituals and celebrations might incorporate elements from other religious traditions. This could include the use of

traditional music, dance, or local customs during Christian festivals and ceremonies.

3.4.4. Moral and Ethical Influences: Traditional African religious practices in Benin City have had a significant influence on the moral and ethical beliefs of the people. The traditional belief system emphasizes a strong sense of community, as well as the importance of respecting and caring for one's elders. Additionally, the traditional belief system places a strong emphasis on the importance of living a life of honesty, integrity, and kindness. These values are reflected in the daily lives of many people in Benin City, and have shaped the moral and ethical values of the community as a whole. Syncretism can influence the moral and ethical teachings of Christianity within a community. For instance, traditional cultural practices and values might be integrated into Christian teachings on social behavior, family life, and community relations.

3.4.5. Changes in Worship Style: The traditional African religious practices of the Bini people have undergone some changes in recent years, particularly in terms of worship style. While traditional rituals and ceremonies have largely remained the same, there has been a shift towards a more "modern" style of worship, which incorporates elements of Christian-style services. This has resulted in the emergence of new forms of worship, such as the "new generation churches," which combine

traditional beliefs with contemporary forms of worship, such as the use of instruments and modern dress. These changes in worship style reflect the evolving nature of traditional African religious practices in Benin City. The style of worship in Christian communities can be significantly impacted by syncretism, often reflecting local cultural and religious practices in music, prayer, sermon delivery, and other aspects of worship.

3.4.6. Community Identity: The traditional African religious practices of the Bini people play a significant role in shaping the community's identity. The rituals and ceremonies associated with these practices provide a sense of continuity with the past, and a connection to the land and the ancestors. They also provide a sense of community and belonging, and a shared set of values that bind the people together. Additionally, the public nature of these rituals and ceremonies helps to reinforce the community's identity as a distinct group, with its own unique history and culture. For these reasons, traditional African religious practices remain an important aspect of life in Benin City. Syncretism can play a role in shaping the religious identity of a community. It can create a unique form of Christianity that is distinctly different from more orthodox or mainstream forms, fostering a sense of communal and cultural uniqueness.

3.5 Changes in Christian Theology and Doctrine in Syncretism

Syncretism in Benin City, as in many parts of the world where Christianity intersects with indigenous beliefs, has led to significant changes in Christian theology and doctrine among its people. The syncretism of traditional African religious practices with Christianity has also had a significant impact on Christian theology and doctrine in Benin City. The introduction of traditional beliefs and practices into Christian worship has led to a greater emphasis on the role of the ancestors and the spiritual world, as well as a greater focus on community and shared values. Additionally, traditional African concepts of healing and redemption have been incorporated into Christian doctrine, and traditional African rituals such as the pouring of libations have been incorporated into Christian liturgy. In this way, traditional African religious practices have influenced and changed Christian theology and doctrine in Benin City. These changes are often a blend of traditional religious beliefs and Christian elements. Here are some ways in which syncretism has influenced Christian theology and doctrine in Benin:

3.5.1. Integration of Traditional Beliefs and Practices:

i. Change: Traditional religious beliefs and practices of the Edo people, such as ancestor veneration, have been integrated into Christian practices. This has led to a

greater tolerance of traditional beliefs and practices, and a more inclusive approach to religious worship and community life. In this way, syncretism has led to a more diverse and pluralistic understanding of religion in Benin City.

ii. Theological Impact: The theological impact of the syncretism of traditional African religious practices with Christianity has been significant, particularly with regard to the concept of salvation. In traditional African religious belief, salvation is seen as a communal and ongoing process, rather than a one-time event. This contrasts with the traditional Christian view of salvation as a one-time event that happens after death. However, the integration of traditional African beliefs and practices into Christianity has led to a shift in the understanding of salvation, with a greater emphasis on the importance of community and shared values. This integration affects the Christian understanding of the communion of saints, prayer, and the afterlife.

3.5.2. Ritual Syncretism:

i. Change: The role of spiritual leaders has also changed in syncretism, with a shift away from the traditional hierarchical structure of African religions towards a more decentralized and participatory model. In traditional African religions, spiritual leaders, such as priests or diviners, were seen as the sole arbiters of religious authority. However, with the syncretism of traditional African religious practices with

Christianity, there has been a shift towards a more democratic and open system, in which individuals are able to play a more active role in religious life. This has led to a greater emphasis on the role of the laity in spiritual life. Christian rituals might incorporate elements from indigenous ceremonies, like the use of specific symbols, music, and dance that are native to Benin culture.

ii. Theological Impact: The theological impact of the changing role of spiritual leaders in syncretism can be seen in the shift from a top-down system of authority to a more horizontal model of religious leadership. This has led to a change in the understanding of the role of the spiritual leader from one of absolute authority to one of guidance and support. The spiritual leader is seen as someone who can help individuals find their own path to salvation, rather than as someone who determines salvation for them. This has had a significant impact on the way that religious life is understood and practiced in Benin City. This leads to a more culturally resonant form of worship, which might alter the traditional Christian liturgy to some extent.

3.5.3. Adaptation in Festivals and Holy Days:

i. Change: The adaptation of traditional African religious festivals and holy days in syncretism has also had a significant impact on the way these events are celebrated and understood. In traditional African religions, festivals and holy days were often

associated with specific times of the year, such as the rainy season or the harvest. However, with the syncretism of these traditions with Christianity, the focus has shifted to the liturgical year of the Christian calendar. This has led to a greater emphasis on the festivals and holy days associated with Christianity, such as Christmas and Easter. Christian festivals such as Christmas and Easter are sometimes celebrated with local customs and traditions.

ii. Theological Impact: The theological impact of the adaptation of traditional African festivals and holy days to the Christian calendar has been significant. The blending of the two traditions has led to a reinterpretation of the meaning and significance of these events. For example, the traditional festival of Ogu has been linked to the Christian holiday of Easter, with the emphasis shifting from the agricultural cycle to the theme of resurrection. This has had a significant impact on the way that the festival is understood and celebrated, as well as the theological meaning that is ascribed to it. This adaptation can lead to a deeper contextual understanding of these festivals, embedding them within the local cultural narrative.

3.5.4. Concepts of Sin and Salvation:

i. Change: The concept of sin and salvation has also changed significantly in syncretism. In traditional African religions, sin was often understood in terms of a

person's actions and their impact on the community. However, the influence of Christianity has led to a focus on sin as a state of being, with salvation seen as the only way to escape this state. This has had a significant impact on the way that people understand their relationship with God and the role of religion in their lives. The concept of forgiveness has also been altered, with the focus shifting from collective forgiveness to individual forgiveness. The understanding of concepts like sin, salvation, and spiritual warfare can be influenced by traditional beliefs in spirits and ancestral curses.

ii. Theological Impact: The theological impact of the adaptation of the concept of sin and salvation in syncretism has been far-reaching. In traditional African religions, the focus was often on the communal aspects of sin and redemption. However, the influence of Christianity has led to a more individualistic approach, with a greater focus on the individual's relationship with God. This has had a profound impact on the way that people view their role in society, as well as their responsibilities towards others. It has also affected the way that sin is understood, with a greater emphasis on personal responsibility for actions. This may lead to a theology that heavily emphasizes spiritual deliverance and the breaking of generational curses.

3.5.5. Role of Spiritual Leaders:

i. Change: The role of spiritual leaders has also changed significantly in syncretism. In traditional African religions, spiritual leaders often held positions of authority and were seen as representatives of the ancestors or deities. However, in syncretism, the role of the spiritual leader has become more pastoral, with a focus on guiding and supporting individuals in their religious journey. This has led to a change in the way that spiritual leaders are viewed, with a greater emphasis on their role as teachers and counselors rather than authorities. This has had a significant impact on the way that spiritual life is lived and practiced in Benin City. Christian leaders in Benin might also take on roles similar to those of traditional spiritual leaders, acting as mediators, healers, or diviners.

ii. Theological Impact: The theological impact of the shift in the role of spiritual leaders in syncretism has been significant. In traditional African religions, the spiritual leader was seen as a conduit for the divine, with the authority to interpret the will of the ancestors or deities. However, in syncretism, this role has been downplayed, with more emphasis placed on the individual's relationship with God. This has led to a greater focus on personal revelation and interpretation of religious teachings, rather than on the authority of the spiritual leader. This has had a

significant impact on the way that religious doctrine is understood and applied in everyday life. This can blur the lines between the roles of pastors and traditional spiritual figures, impacting ecclesiology.

3.5.6. Mixture in Moral and Ethical Teachings:

i. Change: The mixture of moral and ethical teachings in syncretism has led to a blending of different religious traditions, with each contributing its own unique perspective. Traditional African religions often focused on communal values, such as respect for elders, honor, and loyalty. Christianity, on the other hand, often places a greater emphasis on individual responsibility and personal morality. In syncretism, these two worldviews are brought together, leading to a blend of teachings that emphasize both communal and individual values. This has led to a complex and nuanced understanding of ethics and morality, with a focus on both individual and community responsibility. Christian moral and ethical teachings might be influenced by traditional values and norms.

ii. Theological Impact: The theological impact of the mixture of moral and ethical teachings in syncretism is significant, as it has led to a shift in the way that religious values are understood and applied. In traditional African religions, ethical values were often seen as being absolute, with clear rules and guidelines for behavior. Christianity,

on the other hand, emphasizes the individual's ability to make moral choices, with a greater focus on intention and motivation. In syncretism, these two perspectives are blended, leading to a more complex understanding of morality. This has led to a greater emphasis on understanding the reasons behind one's actions, rather than simply following a set of rules. This could lead to a unique ethical framework that resonates more closely with the cultural context of the Benin people.

3.6 Challenges and Controversies Arising from Syncretism in Benin City.

Syncretism in Benin City, as in other regions where traditional beliefs and practices intersect with Christianity, brings about various challenges and controversies. These challenges often arise from the tension between maintaining orthodox Christian beliefs and incorporating elements of indigenous spirituality. There have been a number of challenges and controversies arising from the syncretism of traditional African religions with Christianity in Benin City. One of the most significant challenges has been the issue of syncretism itself, as some have criticized the mixing of traditional African religious practices with Christianity. This is often seen as a watering down of the Christian faith, or a rejection of the unique teachings of the Bible. Other challenges have included the issue of polygamy, which is still practiced by some in Benin City despite its contradiction with Christian teachings. Finally,

there has been controversy over the role of traditional healers, who are often seen as competing with Christian. The challenges and controversies include;

i. Theological Purity:

Theological purity has been a significant concern for many Christian leaders in Benin City, as they have struggled to define and uphold the tenets of their faith while also accommodating the practices of traditional African religions. Some have argued that theological purity is impossible in a syncretic context, as the mixing of different religious traditions will inevitably lead to a blurring of the lines between them. Others have argued that it is possible to maintain theological purity through clear teaching and a focus on the Bible as the sole source of religious truth. This has been a source of tension and debate within the Christian community in Benin City.

ii. Cultural Identity vs. Religious Orthodoxy:

One of the most significant challenges facing the Christian community in Benin City is the tension between cultural identity and religious orthodoxy. While many in the community are committed to upholding the tenets of Christianity, they also value their cultural traditions and practices. This has led to a debate over which takes precedence - cultural identity or religious orthodoxy. Some argue that cultural practices should be embraced and integrated into the Christian faith, while others

believe that such practices should be rejected in favor of a more "pure" form of Christianity. This debate has had a significant impact on the Christian community in Benin City, and has led to a variety of different approaches to syncretism.

iii. Conversion and Evangelism:

Conversion and evangelism have also been a source of tension and debate in Benin City, as some have argued that the process of syncretism has led to a watering down of the Christian message. They argue that it is not possible to be both a Christian and a follower of traditional African religions, and that those who practice syncretism are not truly converted. Others have argued that syncretism is a natural and organic process, and that it is possible to be both a Christian and a follower of traditional African religions. This debate has led to a range of different approaches to evangelism and conversion in Benin City.

iv. Interpretation of Scripture:

Syncretism can affect how scripture is interpreted and understood, potentially leading to interpretations that are heavily influenced by local beliefs and traditions. This can lead to disputes over biblical interpretation and the authority of scripture.

v. Role of Christian Leaders:

Christian leaders in syncretic contexts often face the challenge of navigating

between traditional roles and expectations within the society and their roles as Christian pastors or priests. This dual role can lead to questions about the appropriateness of certain practices and rituals conducted by these leaders.

vi. Impact on Liturgy and Sacraments:

The incorporation of indigenous elements into Christian worship can lead to significant alterations in liturgy and the administration of sacraments. This raises questions about the validity of these rites within the broader Christian context.

vii. Ethical and Moral Standards:

There can be a clash between Christian ethical teachings and traditional moral values, especially in areas related to marriage, family life, and community relations. This can result in a divergence of views on what is considered ethical behavior among Christians in Benin City.

viii. Generational Differences:

Generational differences have also played a role in the challenges and controversies surrounding syncretism in Benin City. Many younger generations are more open to syncretism, seeing it as a way to maintain their cultural heritage while also embracing the teachings of Christianity. However, many older generations are more resistant to syncretism, seeing it as a betrayal of their faith and their cultural

identity. This generational divide has been a source of tension and conflict within the Christian community, and has made it difficult to reach a consensus on how to approach syncretism.

ix. Religious Conflicts: There have been a number of incidents of religious violence in the city, often related to the debate over syncretism. In some cases, Christians have been attacked by those who see them as a threat to the traditional religion, and in other cases, traditional religious practitioners have been targeted by Christians who see their practices as incompatible with Christianity. This violence has made it difficult to find a peaceful resolution to the debate over syncretism, and has caused significant suffering for those who have been affected by it.

x. Identity Crisis: For many in Benin City, the debate over syncretism has led to an identity crisis, as they struggle to reconcile their religious and cultural identities. For some, syncretism represents a way to maintain their cultural heritage while also embracing the teachings of Christianity. However, for others, syncretism feels like a betrayal of their faith and cultural identity, leaving them feeling lost and unsure of how to proceed. This identity crisis has been a source of great distress for many individuals and families, and has made it difficult to find a sense of belonging or purpose.

CHAPTER FOUR

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SYNCRETIC CHRISTIANS AND OTHER RELIGIOUS GROUPS.

4.1 Interactions Between Syncretic Christian's and other Religious Groups.

Interactions between syncretic Christians and other religious groups in Benin City are often characterized by a blend of respect, dialogue, and occasional tension. Syncretic Christians may engage in dialogue with adherents of other religions, seeking common ground and understanding. However, tensions can arise due to differing beliefs and practices, particularly when syncretic elements challenge the boundaries of traditional religious identities. Overall, interactions vary, with some fostering mutual respect and cooperation, while others may encounter conflicts over doctrinal differences and cultural practices.

Additionally, interactions between Syncretic Christians may participate in cultural events and ceremonies organized by other religious groups, fostering mutual understanding and appreciation of diverse traditions. Syncretic Christians may engage in evangelistic efforts, seeking to share their unique blend of beliefs with members of other religious communities, which can lead to both dialogue and contention. Interfaith initiatives and community projects may bring syncretic Christians and

members of other religious groups together to address social issues, promoting unity and cooperation despite theological differences.

Finally, other religious groups may view syncretic practices as deviations from orthodox beliefs, leading to debates and disagreements over theological purity and authenticity. Syncretic Christians and other religious groups may navigate cultural sensitivities and boundaries when sharing spaces or collaborating on joint initiatives, striving to respect each other's traditions while promoting mutual understanding.

4.2 Challenges and Opportunities for Religious co-existence in Benin City.

Benin City, like many other places, faces both challenges and opportunities for religious co-existence.

4.2.1 .Challenges

i. Religious Tension: Benin City, like many other places, experiences tension between different religious communities. This tension often arises from differences in beliefs, practices, and interpretations of religious texts. Misunderstandings and stereotypes can fuel animosity between groups, leading to conflicts and division within the community. People start to see themselves as different from others who have different beliefs. They might not trust each other and might even believe

negative things about each other. Sometimes, this tension can lead to fights or even violence between different religious groups. It stops people from talking openly and working together to solve problems. It can make society feel divided, with people feeling like they don't belong because of their religion.

ii. Political Interference: Political agendas sometimes exploit religious differences for personal or political gain. Politicians may manipulate religious sentiments to mobilize support or divert attention from other issues. Politicians might use religion to create conflict between groups for their own benefit. They could make unfair rules that favor one religious group over others, causing resentment. Their actions might make people feel more divided along religious lines. Political leaders might ignore efforts to bring different religious groups together. During elections, they might use religion to stir up emotions, making tensions worse.

iii. Extremism: Extremism in Benin City means some people have very strong and sometimes dangerous beliefs about religion. This makes it hard for everyone to get along because they might not accept other people's beliefs, use violence, or make others feel scared. It divides the community and threatens people's freedom to practice their religion peacefully. Extremists may try to force their beliefs on others, threatening the freedom of people to practice their religion peacefully. People may

feel afraid to interact with others who have different beliefs, leading to less understanding and cooperation.

iv. Historical Grievances: Historical grievances, like past conflicts or unfair treatment between religious groups, make it hard for people to get along in Benin City because People may still feel angry or hurt about things that happened a long time ago. These bad feelings can be passed down through families, keeping tensions alive. Certain events from the past can still make people feel very upset or defensive. People from different religions may see the same events differently, leading to disagreements and misunderstandings. It's tough to build trust and work together when there's a lot of bad history between groups.

v. Lack of Dialogue: Insufficient opportunities for meaningful interfaith dialogue and collaboration may impede efforts to foster understanding and cooperation among religious groups. If people from different religions don't talk to each other, they might not understand each other's beliefs. This can lead to misunderstandings, conflicts, and a lack of cooperation. Talking and listening to each other helps build relationships and makes it easier for everyone to get along.

4.2.2. Opportunities

i. Interfaith Dialogue: Encouraging conversations and discussions between

different religious groups can promote understanding, empathy, and mutual respect. This can be done through organized events, community forums, and educational programs. Interfaith dialogue means people from different religions talking and listening to each other in a respectful way. It's like sitting down with someone who believes differently from you and having a friendly chat to understand each other better. This helps people see that even though they have different beliefs, they can still get along and work together.

ii. Cultural Exchange: Celebrating religious festivals and traditions together can foster a sense of unity and appreciation for diversity. By participating in each other's cultural and religious practices, communities can build stronger bonds and promote tolerance. Cultural exchange means sharing and experiencing each other's traditions and celebrations. In Benin City, this can help people of different religions understand and respect each other better. By participating in each other's cultural events, they build friendships and break down barriers, promoting unity and acceptance.

iii. Education: Providing education about various religions helps dispel stereotypes and misconceptions, fostering a more inclusive society. Schools, religious institutions, and community organizations can offer workshops, courses, and resources to promote religious literacy and understanding. Teaching them about different religions so they

can understand each other better. Encouraging them to care about and respect others' beliefs. Showing them that they have things in common, even if they have different religions. Teaching them to think for themselves and question stereotypes. Giving them skills to solve problems peacefully when religious differences come up.

iv. Community Engagement: Grassroots efforts that focus on building relationships and fostering empathy among religious communities can help bridge divides and promote peaceful coexistence. Leaders can demonstrate respect for all religions and promote inclusivity through their actions and words. Leaders can also initiate and facilitate conversations between religious groups to promote understanding and cooperation. Leaders can speak out against extremist ideologies and actions that promote division and intolerance. They can provide resources and support for programs and events that bring people of different religions together. Lastly, they can promote values of tolerance, respect, and acceptance of religious diversity within their communities.

v. Legal Frameworks: Enforcing laws that protect religious freedoms and rights can create a conducive environment for religious coexistence and harmony. Legal frameworks provide rules that protect the rights of all religions. This means everyone can practice their beliefs without being treated unfairly. These rules also help prevent

fighters between different religious groups by providing fair ways to solve problems. Overall, these laws make sure that everyone's beliefs are respected and that everyone can live together peacefully.

vi. Community Engagement: Grassroots efforts that focus on building relationships and fostering empathy among religious communities can help bridge divides and promote peaceful coexistence. Community engagement means getting people involved in activities and projects together. By doing things like working on projects, having conversations, or celebrating events together, people from different religious groups can learn about each other and get along better. This helps build friendships and understanding, making it easier for everyone to live together peacefully.

4.3. Syncretism and the future of Christianity in Benin City.

Syncretism is when different beliefs or practices from different religions or cultures mix together. In Benin City, this means blending traditional African beliefs with Christianity.

The future of Christianity in Benin City with syncretism could go two ways. It could help Christianity become more relevant to the local culture, making it stronger. But it could also cause confusion or conflict if people mix too many beliefs together and

lose sight of what Christianity really teaches. So, the future depends on how people handle this blending of beliefs. For the future of Christianity in Benin City, syncretism presents both opportunities and challenges. On one hand, it can make Christianity more accessible and relevant to the local culture, helping it to grow and thrive. On the other hand, it can also lead to confusion or conflicts if the blending of beliefs becomes too mixed or if it strays too far from core Christian teachings.

Ultimately, the future of Christianity in Benin City with syncretism will depend on how believers navigate this blending of beliefs. It will require thoughtful reflection, dialogue, and discernment to ensure that the integrity of the Christian faith is maintained while also respecting and honoring local traditions. On one hand, syncretism can enrich the spiritual experience of believers by connecting Christianity with local culture, traditions, and beliefs. It can make Christianity more relatable and accessible to the community, fostering a deeper sense of belonging and identity among believers.

However, there are also challenges associated with syncretism. Mixing different beliefs and practices can sometimes blur the boundaries of Christian doctrine and lead to theological confusion or compromise. It may also create tensions within Christian communities, as some believers may struggle to reconcile traditional African

practices with orthodox Christian teachings. Others include;

i. **Cultural Relevance:** Cultural relevance refers to how well Christianity connects with and relates to the cultural norms, values, and traditions of the community in which it exists. In Benin City, where traditional African beliefs and practices hold significant cultural influence, the future of Christianity lies in its ability to resonate with the local culture. By embracing elements of syncretism and incorporating traditional African rituals, symbols, and customs into Christian worship and spirituality, Christianity can become more culturally relevant to the people of Benin City. This can help bridge the gap between the faith and the everyday lives of believers, making Christianity more accessible and meaningful to the community.

ii. **Spiritual Synthesis:** Spiritual synthesis allows believers to integrate aspects of traditional African beliefs, such as ancestor veneration or spiritual healing practices, with Christian theology. This blending of beliefs creates a unique spiritual identity that honors both cultural heritage and Christian faith. Also by By incorporating traditional African rituals, music, and symbols into Christian worship services, spiritual synthesis enriches the worship experience for believers. It creates a sense of continuity with cultural traditions while deepening the spiritual connection to Christian teachings. Spiritual synthesis makes Christianity more relevant to the

everyday lives of believers by addressing their spiritual needs within the context of their cultural reality. It offers practical solutions and guidance grounded in both Christian teachings and indigenous wisdom.

iii. **Bridge to Evangelism:** Syncretic practices may serve as a bridge to evangelism, as they provide common ground for dialogue and engagement with non-Christian communities in Benin City. Evangelization efforts that recognize and respect local cultural traditions and beliefs can be more effective in reaching people in Benin City. By acknowledging and incorporating elements of syncretism, evangelists can establish common ground with the community and make Christianity more accessible and appealing. Evangelization is not just about converting individuals but also about building relationships and engaging with the community as a whole. By actively participating in community events, offering support, and addressing local needs, evangelists can build trust and credibility, making Christianity more appealing and accepted.

iv. **Adaptation and Innovation:** Syncretism encourages adaptation and innovation within Christianity, as believers creatively incorporate indigenous practices into their worship and religious expression. Syncretism encourages Christians to adapt their beliefs and practices to the cultural context of Benin City. By integrating elements of

traditional African spirituality into Christianity, believers can make the faith more relevant and accessible to the local population. Syncretism inspires Christians to innovate new approaches to evangelism and outreach that take into account the cultural dynamics of Benin City. Believers may use indigenous symbols, storytelling, and rituals to communicate the Gospel message in ways that resonate with the local population.

4.4. Potential Trends and Development in Syncretic Practices.

Over time, potential trends and developments in syncretic practices has been noted and some may include:

i. Diversification of Syncretic Beliefs: The diversification of syncretic beliefs means that people are mixing together different ideas and practices from various religions or cultures to create new beliefs. It's like blending different ingredients to make a new recipe. So, instead of just following one set of beliefs, people are combining elements from different traditions to form their own unique way of understanding the world and their spirituality. Syncretism may continue to evolve, leading to the emergence of new syncretic beliefs and practices that blend elements from diverse religious and cultural traditions. This could result in a wide range of syncretic expressions, each reflecting unique combinations of influences.

ii. Digital Syncretism: Digital syncretism is when people use computers, phones, and the internet to mix together different religious or cultural ideas. It's like combining different ingredients in a recipe, but instead, it's done online. So, instead of just following one set of beliefs, people can explore and combine ideas from different traditions on the internet to create their own way of understanding the world and their faith. The rise of digital technology and online platforms may facilitate new forms of syncretism, as people access and share religious and cultural content from around the world. Online communities and social media platforms could become spaces for the exchange and synthesis of diverse religious beliefs and practices.

iii. Globalization and Urbanization: Globalization is like sharing ideas and traditions with people from all over the world. So, different beliefs mix together more easily. Urbanization is when more and more people move to cities. Cities become places where lots of different cultures meet and mix. So, in cities, people's beliefs can blend together and create new ways of practicing religion. Globalization and urbanization may contribute to the spread of syncretic practices across geographical and cultural boundaries. As people migrate and interact with diverse cultures, they may adopt and adapt syncretic beliefs and practices from different regions, leading to the globalization of syncretism.

iv. Secular Syncretism: Secular syncretism is like mixing different non-religious ideas and beliefs together. It's when people combine things like cultural traditions, philosophies, or social movements without focusing on religion. So, instead of just following one set of beliefs, they create their own unique way of thinking and living that blends different non-religious ideas. Syncretism may extend beyond religious beliefs to include secular ideologies, philosophies, and cultural movements. People may blend religious and secular worldviews, incorporating elements of both into their personal beliefs and practices.

v. Ethical and Environmental Syncretism: Ethical and environmental syncretism is when people mix together ideas about how to live ethically and protect the environment. It's like combining beliefs and practices from different cultures and religions to create a way of living that cares for both people and the planet. So, instead of just following one set of rules, they create their own unique way of doing good and protecting nature. Syncretism may increasingly incorporate ethical and environmental concerns, reflecting growing awareness of social justice and sustainability issues. Believers may integrate principles of environmentalism, social activism, and ethical living into their syncretic beliefs and practices.

vi. Interfaith Dialogue and Collaboration: Interfaith dialogue and collaboration means people from different religions talk and work together. It's like sharing ideas and helping each other even if they have different beliefs. So, instead of focusing on what makes them different, they find ways to understand each other and work together for common goals. Syncretism could foster greater dialogue and collaboration between different religious communities, as people seek to reconcile and synthesize diverse beliefs and practices. Interfaith initiatives and dialogues may promote understanding, tolerance, and cooperation among syncretic and non-syncretic religious groups.

vii. Legal and Political Recognition: Legal and political recognition means that syncretic practices are officially accepted and acknowledged by laws and government authorities. It's like getting official approval for blending different beliefs and traditions. So, instead of being seen as strange or unofficial, syncretic practices are recognized as valid expressions of people's faith and culture. Syncretic practices may gain legal and political recognition in some contexts, as governments recognize the rights of syncretic religious communities and accommodate their beliefs and practices within the legal framework. This could lead to greater acceptance and visibility of syncretism in society.

viii. Critical Reflection and Debate: Critical reflection and debate means thinking carefully and talking about different ideas and beliefs. It's like discussing and questioning why people believe certain things and how they practice their faith. So, instead of just accepting things without thinking, people take the time to talk and think deeply about their beliefs, which can help them grow and change. As syncretism becomes more prominent, there may be increased critical reflection and debate about its implications for religious identity, authenticity, and integrity. Scholars, religious leaders, and practitioners may engage in dialogue and discourse to explore the ethical, theological, and social dimensions of syncretic practices.

4.5 Strategies for Addressing Syncretism within the Christian Community.

Addressing syncretism within the Christian community requires a thoughtful and nuanced approach. Here are some strategies that can be adopted:

i. Theological Education and Discipleship: Provide comprehensive theological education and discipleship programs to equip believers with a solid understanding of Christian doctrine and teachings. It's like going to school to learn more about God and what the Bible says. Christians study the Bible and other teachings to understand what they believe. It's about following the rules and teachings of Christianity. Christians learn what is right and wrong according to their faith, and they try to live

their lives in a way that pleases God. Christians practice their beliefs regularly and make sure they understand them well so they won't be led astray by other teachings or practices that aren't true to their faith. This can help Christians discern and critique syncretic practices that deviate from biblical principles.

ii. Cultural Sensitivity and Contextualization: Encourage cultural sensitivity and contextualization in Christian outreach and ministry efforts. It's being respectful and understanding of other people's customs, traditions, and ways of life. Christians try to learn about and appreciate the cultures of the communities they live in or interact with. Also, it's about adapting the Christian faith to fit the customs and traditions of different cultures. Christians try to find ways to express their beliefs in ways that make sense to people from different cultural backgrounds.. Christians try to make their message easy to understand and relevant to the lives of the people they're trying to reach, so it's more likely to be accepted and embraced. Recognize the value of cultural expressions while ensuring they align with biblical truths. Engage with cultural traditions respectfully and seek to understand their significance within the local context.

iii. Scriptural Engagement and Discernment: Taking the Bible as guidebook to understand what God wants us to know. Christians study the Bible to learn about

God's teachings and how to live according to His will. It is also about being thoughtful and careful about what we believe. Christians use their understanding of the Bible to think critically about ideas and practices that might not match up with what God teaches. And also It's like picking the right path when faced with different choices. Christians use their knowledge of the Bible to decide what beliefs and practices align with God's truth and what might lead them away from Him. Promote regular engagement with Scripture and encourage believers to develop discernment skills grounded in biblical principles. Equip Christians to critically evaluate syncretic practices in light of Scripture and guide them in making informed decisions about their faith.

iv. **Community Dialogue and Engagement:** Foster open dialogue and engagement within Christian communities to address syncretism. Provide opportunities for discussion, reflection, and mutual accountability, allowing believers to share their perspectives and concerns in a supportive environment. like having a conversation with your friends or neighbors. Christians get together to talk about their beliefs, share their ideas, and listen to what others have to say. It's about hearing from people with different experiences and viewpoints. Christians talk openly about their faith and listen respectfully to others, even if they have different beliefs. It's like being part of a

team that wants to make things better. Christians come together as a community to discuss issues related to their faith, find common ground, and work towards solutions that honor God and respect each other.

v. Pastoral Care and Counseling: Offer pastoral care and counseling to individuals and communities affected by syncretism. It's like having someone to talk to when you're going through a tough time. Pastors and counselors listen to people's problems, offer advice, and provide comfort and support. It's about keeping people on the right path spiritually. Pastors and counselors help Christians understand their beliefs better and stay faithful to God, even when they're facing challenges or doubts. It's like having a safe place where you can be yourself without judgment. Pastors and counselors create an environment where people can talk openly about their struggles, ask questions, and explore their faith without fear. Provide guidance, support, and spiritual mentorship to help believers navigate complex cultural and religious dynamics while remaining rooted in their Christian faith.

vi. Leadership Training and Mentorship: Invest in leadership training and mentorship programs to equip Christian leaders with the skills and knowledge needed to address syncretism effectively. It's like going to school to learn how to be a good leader. Christians who want to help others and lead their communities learn skills like

communication, problem-solving, and decision-making.

It's like having a coach or a teacher who shows you the way. Christian leaders get advice and support from more experienced mentors who help them grow in their faith and leadership abilities. It's about being a role model for others to follow. Trained leaders lead by example, showing others how to live according to Christian values and resist syncretic beliefs and practices. Empower leaders to provide pastoral guidance, facilitate theological discussions, and promote biblical fidelity within their congregations.

vii. Collaboration with Indigenous Churches and Leaders: It's like teaming up with friends who share your goals. Christians from different backgrounds come together to support each other and achieve common objectives. It's about sharing knowledge and experiences. Christians from indigenous churches and leaders share their unique perspectives and insights, helping everyone grow in their faith and understanding. Appreciating what makes each person special. Christians respect the traditions and beliefs of indigenous churches and leaders, recognizing their valuable contributions to the Christian community. Collaborate with indigenous churches and leaders who have a deep understanding of local cultural contexts. Learn from their experiences and insights, and work together to develop culturally relevant strategies

for addressing syncretism within the Christian community.

viii. Prayer and Spiritual Warfare: It's like having a conversation with a close friend. Christians pray to God, sharing their thoughts, feelings, and requests, and listening for His guidance and support. It's about standing up against negative influences and evil forces. Christians engage in spiritual warfare by praying for protection, resisting temptations, and asking God to overcome obstacles and challenges in their lives. It's like relying on a superhero to keep you safe. Christians believe that God is stronger than any evil force, and they trust Him to help them overcome spiritual struggles and lead them to victory. Recognize the spiritual dimension of syncretism and engage in prayer and spiritual warfare. Seek God's guidance and intervention in confronting syncretic practices, and rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to bring about transformation and renewal within the Christian community.

By implementing these strategies, Christian communities can effectively address syncretism while remaining faithful to biblical truth and promoting cultural sensitivity and engagement.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0. EVALUATION, SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION.

5.1. Evaluation

Syncretism among Christians in Benin City can be evaluated in terms of its positive and negative effects. On the positive side, syncretism can be seen as a way of accommodating and incorporating local traditions and practices into the Christian faith, making it more relevant and accessible to the people of Benin City. It can also be seen as a way of strengthening community bonds and building bridges between different religious and cultural groups. On the negative side, syncretism can be seen as a dilution of the purity of the Christian faith, and it can lead to confusion and conflict within the community. One of the key issues that arise in the context of syncretism in Benin City is the question of whether syncretism is a form of apostasy (abandoning the Christian faith) or simply a natural adaptation of the faith to local traditions. Proponents of syncretism argue that it is a valid way of interpreting and practicing the Christian faith, and that it does not conflict with the fundamental tenets of Christianity. Opponents of syncretism argue that it undermines the authority of the Bible and the teachings of Jesus, and that it can lead to a loss of faith among Christians.

5.2 Suggestions

In light of this research, this study wishes to make the following suggestions;

1. Christians in Benin City environs, should focus on building bridges of understanding and respect between different religious and cultural groups. They should also emphasize the importance of maintaining the integrity of the Christian faith, while at the same time being respectful of the traditions and practices of others. It is important to find a balance between maintaining the purity of the faith and being open to cultural exchange and adaptation. This will help to promote a more peaceful and harmonious society in Benin City.
2. Another suggestion is for Christians in Benin City to focus on education and understanding of the Bible. A deeper understanding of the Bible can help to dispel misconceptions and confusion about the faith, and it can provide a basis for more meaningful dialogue and discussion between Christians and other groups. This will also help to address some of the underlying issues that may contribute to syncretic practices. Additionally, there should be an emphasis on developing strong community bonds and building a sense of belonging among Christians in the area. This can help to reduce feelings of isolation and marginalization, which can contribute to syncretic practices.

3. Another suggestion for the Christian community in Benin City to develop a clear set of guidelines for how to engage with other religious and cultural groups. This should include a clear distinction between syncretic practices and cultural exchange, and it should provide guidance on how to engage in respectful dialogue and avoid misunderstandings. Such guidelines should be developed in consultation with other religious and cultural groups in the area, and they should be taught and promoted in churches and other Christian institutions. This can help to create a shared understanding of the role of religion in society, and to promote tolerance and mutual respect.

4. A final suggestion for Christians in Benin City is to promote a culture of self-reflection and introspection. This can include practices such as meditation, prayer, and reflection on scripture. Such practices can help to develop a deeper understanding of the faith, and they can also provide a space for Christians to critically examine their own beliefs and practices, and to assess whether they align with the teachings of Jesus. This can help to prevent the temptation to engage in syncretic practices, and it can promote a more authentic and mature expression of the Christian faith.

5.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, the writer believes that syncretism among Christians in Benin City is a complex and sensitive issue. It involves a variety of factors, including cultural, historical, and religious factors. It is important to understand the context and historical background of syncretism in the area, and to approach the issue with sensitivity and understanding. The writer also believes that the recommendations that she have made can help to address the issue in a constructive and respectful way, while still maintaining the integrity of the Christian faith. It's also important to note that the issue of syncretism among Christians in Benin City is not unique to that area, and similar issues exist in other parts of the world. As Christianity continues to spread and evolve, it will inevitably encounter other cultures and traditions. As a result, there will always be a need for Christians to be aware of the potential for syncretism, and to be sensitive to the challenges and opportunities that this presents. The writer believes that this issue will continue to be a source of discussion and debate for Christians around the world.

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