

(1)

SUBCONSCIOUS SYNCRETISM AMONG YORUBA CHRISTIANS IN ONDO STATE, NIGERIA

By

JEGEDE, DEBORAH OLUWASEUN

Department Of Christian Studies and Religious Communication, Faculty of Arts,
University of Abuja, Nigeria.

CHARLES OGUNDU NNAJI. PHD

Department Of Christian Studies and Religious Communication, Faculty of Arts,
University of Abuja, Nigeria.

&

THERESA ABOK-AKPAN. PHD

Department Of Christian Studies and Religious Communication, Faculty of Arts,
University of Abuja, Nigeria.

ABSTRACT

This study investigated into common subconscious traditional beliefs among Yoruba Christians in Ondo State, Nigeria. The study adopted a qualitative research design using a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of pastors regarding the interaction between Christian faith and traditional Yoruba beliefs. The population comprised pastors from selected Pentecostal and Orthodox churches across Ondo State. A purposive sampling technique, complemented by simple random sampling, was used to select sixty (60) pastors from the three senatorial districts of the state. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that beliefs in ancestral spirits, destiny, witchcraft, spiritual forces, traditional medicine, and ritual practices remain prevalent among many Yoruba Christians despite their Christian profession. The study further found that participation in certain traditional festivals, reliance on charms for protection, and consultation of traditional spiritual practices continue to exist in subtle forms, reflecting the persistence of subconscious syncretism. It recommends the strengthening of discipleship programmes, enhanced theological education on African Traditional Religion and contextual theology, and continuous pastoral guidance to assist believers in harmonizing their cultural identity.

INTRODUCTION

Yoruba people have a unique culture and religious practices that have been passed down for generations. Their religion, also known as Yoruba religion, is a combination of traditional beliefs and deities from West Africa. It is a polytheistic religion, meaning that they believe in multiple gods and goddesses. These deities are believed to have a direct influence on the daily lives of the Yoruba people. Yoruba religion is based on the belief in one supreme deity, known as Olodumare, who is considered the creator

of the universe (Abogunrin 23). However, the Yoruba people also worship other deities, known as Orishas, who have specific roles and responsibilities in the world.

The Yoruba people have many rituals and ceremonies to honor their deities and ancestors. These rituals often involve offerings of food, drinks, and sacrifices to the gods. They also have priests and priestesses who serve as intermediaries between the people and the deities. Aside from their religious practices, the Yoruba people also have a strong sense of community and family. They believe in the importance of ancestors and place a lot of emphasis on respecting and honoring them. This is seen in their daily lives through various traditions and ceremonies. Yoruba religion plays a significant role in the lives of the Yoruba people and is deeply ingrained in their culture. It is a complex and fascinating aspect of their society that continues to thrive and evolve in the modern world (Adega 9).

Christianity was first introduced to the Yoruba people through the efforts of European Christian missionaries during the 19th century. These missionaries sought to spread their religion and convert the Yoruba people, who at the time practiced traditional indigenous religions. The missionaries were initially met with resistance and skepticism, as Yoruba religious beliefs and practices were deeply rooted in their culture and traditions (Abogunrin 27). However, over time, some Yoruba people began to embrace Christianity and its teachings. The introduction of Christianity to the Yoruba people led to a syncretism of traditional Yoruba beliefs and Christian practices, creating a unique blend of the two religions. Many Yoruba people incorporated elements of Christianity into their traditional religious practices, while others fully converted to Christianity and abandoned their traditional beliefs (Aderibigbe 4).

As Christianity gained more followers among the Yoruba people, churches and schools were established throughout the region, further spreading the religion and its teachings. Today, Christianity is one of the major religions practiced by the Yoruba people, alongside Islam and traditional indigenous religions (Dopamu 5). The introduction of Christianity to the Yoruba people was a gradual process that was met with both resistance and eventual acceptance. Through the efforts of European Christian missionaries, Christianity became a significant part of Yoruba religious practices and continues to be a prominent belief system among the Yoruba people. Christianity has played a significant role in the domination of Yoruba land. It was introduced to the region during the 19th century by European missionaries, and has since spread throughout the area. The influence of Christianity on Yoruba as observed by (Adewale 8) culture and traditions can be seen in various aspects, such as the adoption of Christian holidays and practices, the establishment of churches and schools, and the conversion of many Yoruba people to the Christian faith.

The domination of Christianity in Yoruba land can also be attributed to the impact of colonialism. As European powers conquered and colonized many African countries, they also brought their religion with them. This led to the widespread influence of Christianity in Yoruba land and other African

regions. Moreover, the spread of Christianity was aided by the efforts of missionaries who dedicated themselves to the conversion of Yoruba people (Aderibigbe 13). They established churches and schools, providing education and other resources to the local population. This helped to attract more converts to the Christian faith. Another factor that contributed to the domination of Christianity in Yoruba land was the syncretism of traditional Yoruba beliefs and practices with Christian ideologies. This allowed for a more seamless integration of Christianity into the existing culture, making it more acceptable and appealing to the Yoruba people (Adegboyega 8).

Despite the dominance of Christianity in Yoruba land, (Adewale¹⁰), noted that there are still pockets of resistance and a strong connection to traditional Yoruba beliefs and practices and Yoruba religious and subconscious syncretism. Yoruba religious and subconscious syncretism is a complex and deeply ingrained aspect of Yoruba Christian culture in Nigeria. It is the blending and integration of traditional Yoruba religious beliefs and practices with Christian beliefs and practices. This syncretism is a result of the long history of colonization and missionary work in Nigeria, which led to the conversion of many Yoruba people to Christianity while still holding onto their traditional beliefs. The syncretic nature of Yoruba Christian beliefs according to (Adewale¹²) is reflected in the ways in which traditional Yoruba deities are incorporated into Christian practices. For example, the Yoruba deity Oshun, known as the goddess of love and fertility, is often equated with the Virgin Mary in Yoruba Christian churches. This is seen as a way to bridge the gap between the two belief systems and make Christianity more relatable to the Yoruba people. This practice is common among the Yoruba Christians in Ondo state Nigeria. It is based on this that this study seeks to investigate into factors responsible for subconscious among Yoruba Christians in Ondo State Nigeria.

The main objective of the study is to investigate into common subconscious syncretism among Yoruba Christians in Ondo State. While the specific objectives are to:

1. Explore the common subconscious beliefs held by Yoruba Christians in Ondo State;
2. Find out the extent traditional Yoruba religious and cultural values influence these subconscious beliefs;
3. Assess how church teachings and pastoral leadership address (or fail to address) subconscious traditional beliefs among members.

METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

1. What are the common subconscious beliefs held by Yoruba Christians in Ondo State?
2. To what extent do traditional Yoruba religious and cultural values influence these subconscious beliefs?

3. How do church teachings and pastoral leadership address (or fail to address) subconscious traditional beliefs among members?

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative research design, specifically a phenomenological approach, in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences and perceptions of pastors regarding subconscious traditional beliefs among Yoruba Christians in Ondo State, Nigeria. The qualitative design was considered appropriate because it allows for detailed exploration of subjective meanings, cultural interpretations, and pastoral experiences that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative measures alone.

Population of the Study

The population of the study comprised pastors in selected Christian denominations across Ondo State. These pastors were drawn from Pentecostal and Orthodox churches. These pastors were chosen because of their direct involvement in counselling, teaching, and pastoral care, which places them in a strategic position to observe and respond to the interaction between Christian doctrine and indigenous traditional beliefs among congregants.

Sampling Technique

The study employed a purposive sampling technique. This was used to ensure that only pastors with relevant pastoral experience and sufficient knowledge of congregational dynamics were selected. Purposive sampling was appropriate because the study required participants who had experienced and observed issues relating to subconscious traditional beliefs within church settings.

In addition to purposive selection, a simple random sampling technique was used within the selected strata to ensure fairness and reduce selection bias. The pastors were drawn from the three senatorial districts of Ondo State, namely Ondo North, Ondo Central, and Ondo South.

Sample Size

The sample size for the study consisted of sixty (60) pastors. The distribution of the sample across the three senatorial districts was as follows: twenty five (25) pastors were selected from Ondo Central Senatorial District, twenty one (21) pastors were selected from Ondo North Senatorial District, and fourteen (14) pastors were selected from Ondo South Senatorial District. This distribution was guided by the relative concentration of churches and population density of pastors in each senatorial district, with Ondo Central having the highest concentration.

Sampling Procedure

The selection process involved several stages. First, a list of churches and pastors was obtained from major Christian associations and denominational bodies within each senatorial district. From these lists, eligible pastors who had served for a minimum number of years and were actively involved in pastoral duties were identified through purposive criteria. After identifying eligible pastors, simple random sampling was employed to select participants from each senatorial district. Names of eligible pastors were written on slips of paper and placed in separate containers according to their senatorial districts. In Ondo Central, twelve five pastors were randomly drawn; in Ondo North, twelve one pastors were randomly drawn; and in Ondo South, fourteen pastors were randomly drawn. This ensured that every eligible pastor within each district had an equal chance of being selected.

Instrument for Data Collection

The main instrument used for data collection was a semi-structured interview guide. The interview was designed around five key research questions covering: subconscious traditional beliefs among Yoruba Christians, the influence of Yoruba religious and cultural values, the role of church teachings and pastoral leadership, contributing social-psychological-spiritual factors, and strategies for addressing subconscious traditional beliefs.

The semi-structured format allowed the researcher to ask predetermined questions while also providing flexibility for probing deeper into responses where necessary. This was important for capturing detailed narratives, personal experiences, and contextual explanations from the pastors.

Method of Data Collection

Data were collected through face-to-face interview sessions conducted with each of the thirty-three pastors. Interviews were carried out in their respective churches or agreed neutral locations to ensure comfort and openness. Each interview session lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. With the consent of participants, responses were recorded using an audio device and supplemented with handwritten notes to ensure accuracy.

Method of Data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed using thematic analysis. Responses from the interviews were transcribed, coded, and grouped according to emerging themes aligned with the five research questions. The analysis focused on identifying recurring patterns, similarities, and differences in the pastors' perspectives on subconscious traditional beliefs and their interaction with Christian doctrine.

Findings were presented in narrative form using direct quotations from participants to preserve authenticity and reflect the lived experiences of the pastors. This approach ensured that the voices of the participants were accurately represented without distortion.

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Interview Question And Responses

“What are the common subconscious beliefs held by Yoruba Christians in Ondo State?”. The researcher guided the interviewees on some of these subconscious beliefs by mentioning them to hear their submission. Some of these subconscious beliefs include:

The answers to the question were similar by some Pastors and slightly different due to environment. For instance, twenty-eight pastors interviewed agreed and explained that belief in ancestral influence, destiny, traditional medicine, and witchcraft remains common among Yoruba Christians in Ondo State. One pastor stated, “We still observe that many Yoruba Christians unconsciously believe strongly in ancestral influence. In my church at Akure, some members still speak about their late fathers appearing in dreams and directing family matters.” Another pastor explained, “One major subconscious belief among Yoruba Christians is the belief in destiny and predestination. Many members in our church often say, ‘Ayanmo ni,’ meaning destiny cannot be changed completely.” A different respondent added, “In our ministry at Ondo town, belief in witchcraft remains very common among Christians. Whenever somebody suddenly becomes sick or loses money, people quickly suspect witches or spiritual enemies.” Another pastor noted, “Many Yoruba Christians still believe in the power of sacrifices and rituals even after conversion to Christianity. I have seen cases where members secretly returned to family shrines during annual festivals because they feared family curses.” One pastor further remarked, “The issue of traditional medicine is still deeply rooted among Yoruba Christians. Some members prefer herbal treatment prepared by traditional healers before going to hospitals.” Another respondent observed, “Belief in omens and signs is still common. Some Christians believe certain birds, dreams, or unusual events carry spiritual messages.”

Another group of twelve pastors explained that family traditions, spiritual fear, ancestral worship, reincarnation, and festival participation still shape the behaviour of many Yoruba Christians. One pastor explained, “In many Yoruba communities, family and communal identity remain very strong. Christians still believe family decisions are more important than individual choices.” Another respondent added, “Fear of spiritual forces controls many Christians more than faith in God. Whenever business problems arise, some members immediately suspect spiritual attacks from enemies or neighbours.” One pastor also remarked, “Festival participation remains a hidden challenge. During annual traditional festivals in Ondo State, many Christians still attend masquerade ceremonies because they believe avoiding such events may attract misfortune to the family.” Another interviewee stated that, “Many Yoruba Christians still maintain subconscious respect for ancestral worship. Some families pour libation during burial ceremonies even when the deceased was a Christian.” A different pastor observed, “One major issue is the belief in reincarnation. Some members believe children resemble dead relatives because those ancestors returned spiritually through birth.” Another pastor added, “Many Christians in Ondo State

still hold the belief that spiritual attacks are responsible for delayed progress. Members sometimes attribute academic failure, infertility, or poverty entirely to village witches and curses.”

Ten pastors interviewed also identified belief in charms, rituals, divination, curses, and spiritual protection as common subconscious beliefs among Yoruba Christians. One pastor stated, “The belief in sacred objects is still present among Christians. Some members secretly keep charms, spiritual rings, or family protective items while attending church regularly.” Another interviewee explained that, “Yoruba Christians still place strong importance on traditional ceremonies. Even Christian weddings and funerals sometimes include traditional rituals because families fear cultural rejection.” A pastor further noted that, “Many Christians still consult traditional spiritualists privately while soliciting for solution to their problems. When problems persist despite prayers, some secretly visit herbalists or diviners for solutions.” Another pastor added, “Belief in curses and generational bondage remains very common. Members frequently request deliverance prayers because they believe family curses are affecting their finances and marriages.” One interviewee remarked that, “Another subconscious belief is excessive fear of death connected to spiritual attacks. Some Christians believe enemies can spiritually terminate their lives prematurely.” Another pastor explained, “In Yoruba society, respect for elders and ancestors is highly valued. Many Christians struggle to separate respect for elders from spiritual reverence for ancestors.”

Another three pastors agreed that dreams, festivals, sacred places, spiritual inheritance, and nocturnal spiritual activities continue to influence Yoruba Christians subconsciously. One pastor stated that, “Dream interpretation influences many Christians in Ondo State. Members believe that, every dream carries spiritual meaning.” Another interviewee stated that, “Some Christians still believe strongly in traditional festivals connected to community protection and prosperity.” He remarked, “Many people unconsciously believe that certain locations or forests possess spiritual powers. Some members avoid particular roads or rivers because of traditional stories about spiritual beings living there.” Another pastor added, “The belief in spiritual inheritance is still widespread. Some Christians think family occupations, successes, or failures are spiritually transferred from ancestors to descendants.” Another interviewee further explained that, “Yoruba Christians still value communal spiritual identity. In some villages, entire families participate in traditional rites together even when individuals are Christians.” A pastor stated that, “Many members believe evil powers operate mostly at night. Whenever unusual problems occur, they associate the occurrences with nocturnal witchcraft activities.”

Another set of four pastors maintained that traditional rulers, childbirth rituals, parental curses, business blessings, supernatural manipulation, and beliefs about special births remain strong among Yoruba Christians. One pastor remarked, “Some Christians still believe in the spiritual authority of traditional rulers and palace rituals.” Another interviewee stated that, “There is still belief in protective rituals during childbirth and marriage. Elderly relatives often insist on performing traditional rites to secure

the safety of newly married couples or newborn babies.” A different pastor explained, “Fear of curses from parents or elders influences many Christians. Some people obey harmful family traditions because they fear parental curses.” Another pastor observed, “Many Yoruba Christians unconsciously believe success requires both spiritual and traditional backing. Some traders attend church services and also use traditional blessings from family elders before opening businesses.” One interviewee noted that, “Belief in supernatural manipulation remains common. Some members believe enemies can spiritually exchange destinies or block opportunities of greatness or success in business.” Another pastor added, “Some members still attach spiritual meaning to twins, unusual births, and inherited family traits.”

The remaining three pastors maintained that spiritual consultation and fear of traditional deities continue to influence many Yoruba Christians in Ondo State. One pastor stated, “Many Christians continue to believe strongly in spiritual consultation before major decisions. Before buying land or travelling abroad, some families secretly consult traditional elders or diviners for direction.” Another respondent remarked, “One hidden belief among Yoruba Christians is the fear of offending traditional deities connected to the community. Some members participate in cultural rites because they believe refusing may bring calamity upon the family or village.” The last pastor concluded, “From my years of ministry in Ondo State, Yoruba Christians still carry many traditional beliefs subconsciously despite embracing Christianity. These include belief in witchcraft, ancestral influence, traditional rituals, destiny, spiritual attacks, sacrifices, and festivals. Many Christians try to balance biblical faith with inherited cultural traditions.”

Interview Question Two And Responses:

“To what extent do traditional Yoruba religious and cultural values influence these subconscious beliefs?”

Twenty-one pastors interviewed noted that traditional Yoruba religious values strongly influence the subconscious beliefs of many Yoruba Christians in Ondo State. One pastor stated, “The traditional belief in destiny, known as Ori, still influences many Christians deeply. In our church, members often believe that a person’s success or suffering has already been spiritually determined before birth.” Another interviewee remarked that, “Respect for ancestors remains very strong among Yoruba Christians. Even committed church members still honour family ancestors during burial ceremonies because they fear family rejection.” One pastor added, “Fear and reverence for traditional deities still affect many Christians unconsciously. Some people avoid speaking against community deities because they believe such actions may attract spiritual punishment.” Another pastor observed, “Traditional rites connected to birth, marriage, and death continue to influence Christian families. During weddings and funerals, many families still insist on observing cultural rituals inherited from their ancestors.” An interviewee in another development, further explained that, “Sacred symbols and rituals still command respect among Christians in Ondo State. Some members attach spiritual importance to family objects,

traditional marks, and ritualistic practices.” Another pastor opined that, “Traditional Yoruba culture seemingly has shaped the mindset of many Christians from childhood, making these beliefs difficult to separate completely from Christianity.”

Another group of fourteen pastors ascertained that Yoruba cultural upbringing continues to strengthen subconscious traditional beliefs among Christians. One pastor remarked, “Many Christians grew up hearing stories about Ori and destiny from their parents and grandparents. Even after becoming Christians, these teachings still influence how they interpret life situations.” Another respondent added, “The Egungun tradition still affects many families spiritually and culturally. Some Christians attend masquerade festivals because they believe the ancestors protect the community.” One pastor stated, “Fear of traditional gods remains hidden in many Christian homes. Some members secretly participate in traditional sacrifices because they fear offending local deities.” Another pastor explained, “Traditional transition rites during childbirth, marriage, and burial are still common among Christians in Ondo State. Families often insist on performing these rituals to maintain cultural identity.” An interviewee further noted, “Many Christians still regard traditional symbols as sacred. Certain family objects are preserved because people believe they carry ancestral blessings.” Another pastor added, “These cultural values are transferred from one generation to another, making them continue subconsciously among Christians.”

Ten pastors interviewed also maintained that traditional Yoruba religion influences the prayer patterns, fears, and decision-making of many Christians. One pastor observed, “Belief in destiny influences how many Christians respond to challenges. Some people believe prayer can only reduce suffering but cannot completely change destiny.” Another interviewee remarked that, “Respect for ancestors affects burial practices among Christians. Some families still pour libation or perform rituals for dead relatives before Christian burial services could be conducted.” A pastor stated, “Fear of deities influences behaviour in many communities. Some Christians avoid rejecting traditional festivals publicly because they fear spiritual attacks.” Another pastor explained, “Traditional rituals connected to marriage negotiations and naming ceremonies still exist strongly in Christian families.” One interviewee further remarked that, “Sacred symbols such as beads, staffs, and inherited family objects are still respected among many Christians.” Another pastor clarified that, “Traditional religion has remained influential because many people see culture and religion as inseparable.”

Another four pastors agreed that Yoruba traditional values influence both educated and uneducated Christians in Ondo State. One pastor stated, “Even educated Christians still believe strongly in Ori and predestination. They often explain success and failure through destiny rather than personal effort.” Another respondent added, “The influence of ancestors remains powerful in family compounds and village communities. Some Christians still seek ancestral blessings before major ceremonies.” One pastor remarked, “Fear of traditional deities influences many people during community festivals.

Christians participate in rituals mainly to avoid social conflict.” Another pastor observed, “Traditional rites of passage continue because families see them as part of Yoruba identity and heritage.” One interviewee explained that, “Sacred rituals and objects are often inherited from grandparents, making younger Christians continue respecting them unconsciously.” Another pastor added, “These traditional values are deeply rooted in the social structure of Yoruba society and continue to influence church members.”

Another set of six pastors maintained that traditional Yoruba values continue to shape Christian worldview and social relationships. A pastor remarked that, “Belief in destiny affects career and marriage decisions among Christians. Some families believe certain marriages are spiritually destined while others are forbidden.” Another interviewee explained that, “Respect for ancestors influences how Christians relate with elders and family traditions.” A pastor stated that, “Fear of deities still affects some church members during village ceremonies and annual festivals.” Another pastor noted that, “Traditional rituals connected with childbirth and death remain common because many people believe they provide spiritual protection.” An interviewee further observed that, “Symbols such as ancestral staff, beads, and ritual materials are still respected with fear and reverence.” Another pastor stated that, “Traditional Yoruba religion, continues to influence Christian thinking because many believers were raised within strong cultural traditions before accepting Christianity.”

The remaining five pastors maintained that traditional Yoruba religion and cultural values still have significant influence on subconscious beliefs among Yoruba Christians in Ondo State. One pastor stated that, “Many Christians combine church teachings with traditional beliefs inherited from their families. This mixture affects their understanding of destiny, ancestors, and spiritual powers.” Another interviewee remarked that, “Traditional religion still influences how Christians respond to sickness, death, misfortune, and family conflicts.” The last pastor interviewed submitted that, “The influence of Yoruba traditional religion remains very high because cultural practices, festivals, ancestral respect, and spiritual fears are still deeply embedded in the daily lives of many Christians in Ondo State.”

Interview Question Three And Responses:

“How do church teachings and pastoral leadership address or fail to address subconscious traditional beliefs among members in Ondo State?”

Thirty-one pastors interviewed explained, many churches, pastors and leaders do not adequately address subconscious traditional beliefs among church members. A pastor stated, “In many churches, Pastors focus more on prosperity, miracles, and church growth without addressing the traditional beliefs members are tenaciously holding on to internally.” Another interviewee remarked, “Church teachings sometimes, neglect deep cultural beliefs inherited from childhood. Many Christians still believe in ancestral influence and spiritual attacks because these issues are not discussed openly during sermons.” One pastor while interviewing him said, “The teaching on original sin is often presented without

connecting it to the traditional fears and spiritual beliefs common among Yoruba Christians.” Another pastor explained, “Many churches also fail to address hidden traditional ideas about gender roles and hierarchy because they lack capacity for the narrative. Women are sometimes expected to remain silent because of cultural beliefs mixed with church teachings.” One interviewee further observed, “Pastoral leadership sometimes encourages excessive hierarchy in the church, making members fear spiritual authority rather than understand Biblical leadership.” Another pastor opined, “Teachings such as ‘love the sinner, hate the sin’ are often repeated without properly helping members understand how cultural prejudice and traditional beliefs affect their behaviour.”

Another group of seven pastors maintained that many church teachings only address outward behaviour while ignoring subconscious traditional beliefs among members. One pastor remarked, “Some churches condemn idol worship publicly, but they do not help members deal with fear of ancestral curses and village deities.” Another interviewee explained, “The concept of original sin is often taught in a general way without addressing how traditional beliefs shape people’s understanding of sin and spiritual bondage.” One pastor stated, “Traditional ideas about male superiority still exist in many churches because, pastors sometimes interpret scripture through cultural traditions.” Another pastor added, “Church hierarchy can become too rigid. Some members believe pastors possess almost supernatural authority, which reflects traditional beliefs about spiritual power.” One interviewee observed, “Many Christians continue participating in traditional rituals secretly because church leaders rarely create open discussions about such issues.” Another pastor submitted, “Churches need more intentional teaching that confronts subconscious fears, inherited beliefs, and cultural practices directly.”

Twelve pastors interviewed also explained that pastoral leadership sometimes unintentionally reinforces traditional beliefs rather than correcting them. One pastor stated, “Some pastors preach messages that increase fear of witches and spiritual enemies instead of helping members develop Biblical faith.” Another interviewee remarked, “Deliverance teachings in some churches focus too heavily on ancestral curses, making members believe every problem comes from traditional spiritual attacks.” One pastor observed, “Teachings about sin are sometimes used to condemn people without addressing the cultural roots of their beliefs and behaviours.” Another pastor explained, “In some churches, women are denied leadership opportunities because of traditional cultural assumptions disguised as Biblical teaching.” One interviewee further added, “Pastors sometimes enjoy excessive respect and unquestioned authority because, members already come from cultures that honour spiritual leaders almost absolutely.” Another pastor stated, “Many church leaders are aware of these traditional influences but, avoid discussing them deeply because they fear offending older church members and community leaders.”

Another six pastors explained that, lack of proper discipleship contributes to the persistence of subconscious traditional beliefs among Yoruba Christians. One pastor remarked, “Many converts are

not properly taught how to separate Biblical faith from inherited traditional practices.” An interviewee added, “Church members often continue consulting traditional healers because, churches do not provide enough counselling and spiritual guidance. Members become too dependent on pastors for every decision instead of developing spiritual maturity.” Another pastor explained, “Traditional beliefs about gender and authority still influence how families function within the church.” respondent observed, “Some pastors preach tolerance using phrases like ‘love the sinner, hate the sin,’ but they fail to challenge deeply rooted cultural discrimination and prejudice.” Another pastor added, “Church teachings often address visible sins but ignore hidden traditional fears and spiritual assumptions affecting members.”

Another set of two pastors maintained that many churches in Ondo State have not developed strong biblical education capable of confronting subconscious traditional beliefs effectively. One pastor stated, “Many Christians still fear village gods and ancestral spirits because churches rarely teach deeply about freedom in Christ.” An interviewee remarked, “Some pastors avoid discussing traditional beliefs because many church members are elderly people strongly attached to culture.” One pastor added, “Teachings about original sin sometimes fail to address practical cultural realities facing Yoruba Christians.” Another pastor explained, “Church hierarchy can become unhealthy when members treat pastors like traditional spiritual mediators instead of servants of God.” One interviewee further noted, “Traditional beliefs about gender continue because, church teachings are sometimes mixed with cultural customs.” Another pastor stated, “The church must intentionally provide Biblical teaching that addresses both visible behaviour and hidden subconscious beliefs among members.”

The remaining two pastors explained that churches and pastoral leaders still have significant responsibility in helping Christians overcome subconscious traditional beliefs. One pastor stated, “Church leaders need to create open teaching sessions where members can discuss fears about ancestors, witchcraft, curses, and traditional rituals honestly.” Another interviewee remarked, “Pastors should combine Biblical teaching with counselling and discipleship so that Christians can gradually overcome inherited cultural fears.” The pastor concluded, “Many Yoruba Christians sincerely follow Christianity, but subconscious traditional beliefs remain because churches have not consistently addressed them through sound teaching, practical discipleship, and spiritual guidance.

Summary

The findings of this study reveal that Yoruba Christians in Ondo State still retain a wide range of subconscious traditional beliefs despite their commitment to Christian faith. These beliefs are deeply rooted in cultural upbringing and include belief in ancestral spirits, destiny (Ori), witchcraft, reincarnation, omens, traditional medicine, sacrifices, rituals, and participation in festivals. The study shows that these beliefs are not merely surface practices but are embedded in the worldview of many

believers and continue to shape their interpretation of life events such as sickness, success, failure, marriage, and death.

The study further established that traditional Yoruba religious and cultural values exert a strong influence on these subconscious beliefs. Values such as reverence for ancestors, belief in destiny, fear of deities, sacred rituals, and rites of passage continue to shape the thinking and behaviour of many church members. Even among committed Christians, these cultural values remain influential because they are transmitted through family structures, community practices, and long-standing cultural traditions that predate Christian conversion.

It was also found that church teachings and pastoral leadership do not consistently address these subconscious traditional beliefs in a direct and systematic manner. While churches focus on doctrines such as salvation, holiness, and spiritual growth, many pastors tend to overlook the deep cultural and psychological roots of traditional beliefs. As a result, some members continue to hold dual perspectives, combining Christian teachings with inherited cultural assumptions about spiritual forces, gender roles, authority, and destiny.

Research Observations / Findings

Based on the outcome of data analysed, the following have been summarized as the major observations and findings of the study

1. Persistence of Subconscious Traditional Beliefs

The study revealed that Yoruba Christians in Ondo State maintain various subconscious traditional beliefs, including ancestral spirits (Egungun), community and family solidarity, traditional medicine, reincarnation, omens, ritual practices, spiritual forces, sacrifice, destiny (Ori), polytheism, witchcraft, sorcery, and festival observances. These findings align with the work of Idwu (34), who noted that Yoruba traditional beliefs such as ancestor veneration, ritual practices, and belief in spiritual forces continue to influence Christian converts. Similarly, Bolaji Idwu (62) in *Olodumare: God in Yoruba* Belief observed that conversion to Christianity does not entirely eliminate indigenous beliefs; instead, these values are often integrated subconsciously into Christian faith, particularly in areas like Ondo State. Practices such as ancestral remembrance and participation in festivals are often reinterpreted through Christian frameworks, demonstrating a blending rather than a rejection of cultural heritage.

2. Influence of Yoruba Cosmology and Rituals

The findings further indicate that beliefs in destiny (Ori), respect for ancestors, reverence for deities (Orisa), transitional rituals (birth, marriage, death), and the sacredness of symbols are key cultural factors shaping subconscious beliefs among Yoruba Christians. (Idwu 67) emphasized that Yoruba spirituality is deeply interconnected with daily life, and these indigenous elements persist even after

conversion. (Olupona 91) provides ethnographic evidence from Ondo, showing that concepts like Ori, Egungun, and Orisa guide moral decision-making, social cohesion, and identity. Rituals of transition are maintained, often blending Christian prayers with traditional rites, and symbolic objects such as palm wine, candles, and white garments retain cultural significance. (Peel 20) similarly documented that Yoruba Christianity is syncretic, incorporating traditional spiritual concepts into Christian practice, such as interpreting angels or saints as intermediaries reflecting Orisa reverence.

3. Challenges in Church Teachings and Leadership

The study found that church teachings and pastoral leadership often fail to address these subconscious beliefs. Concepts such as original sin, strict gender binaries, hierarchical structures, and the principle of “love the sinner, hate the sin” frequently overlook indigenous cultural understandings of destiny, spiritual causality, and social hierarchy. (Ogbu Kalu 28) observed that African churches, particularly among the Yoruba, struggle to engage with these traditional beliefs, which persist subconsciously due to Western-influenced missionary theology. Pastoral neglect in contextualizing doctrine leads congregants to navigate traditional beliefs privately, sustaining dual religious adherence and limiting effective spiritual guidance.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study and the various implications which have been highlighted, the following recommendations were made:

1. Develop culturally sensitive discipleship programs that address subconscious syncretism by teaching biblical principles while acknowledging Yoruba cultural heritage. Strengthen preaching, counseling, and catechism to clarify Christian doctrines and discourage uncritical blending of traditional practices with Christian faith. Encourage open dialogue in congregations about the challenges of syncretism rather than ignoring or condemning it.
2. Incorporate courses on African Traditional Religion, Yoruba cosmology, and contextual theology into seminary and Bible college curricula. Train future pastors and Christian workers to critically engage indigenous worldviews and guide congregations in balancing cultural identity with Christian faith.
3. Parents and elders should be intentional in teaching children the distinctiveness of Christian faith while also transmitting Yoruba values in ways that do not conflict with core Christian doctrines. Home-based devotions and storytelling should consciously distinguish between cultural practices and spiritual convictions.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. Yoruba Christians in Ondo State continue to hold various subconscious traditional beliefs. These include belief in ancestral spirits, the importance of community and family, the power of traditional medicines and healing practices, reincarnation, omens and superstitions, traditional ceremonies and rituals, spiritual forces, sacrifice, destiny (Ori), ancestral worship, polytheism, witchcraft, sorcery, and festival practices. These findings demonstrate that conversion to Christianity does not entirely displace indigenous Yoruba spiritual concepts.
2. Key Yoruba cultural and religious values strongly influence subconscious beliefs among Christians. These include belief in destiny (Ori), respect for ancestors (Egungun), fear and reverence of deities (Orisa), rituals marking transitions such as birth, marriage, and death, and the sacredness of symbols and ritual objects. These factors reflect the deep integration of traditional cosmology within Christian practice, shaping moral conduct, worldview, and spiritual perception.
3. Church teachings and pastoral practices often fail to address these subconscious beliefs. Examples include doctrines such as original sin, strict gender binaries, hierarchical structures, and the maxim “love the sinner, hate the sin.” Pastoral leadership frequently overlooks how traditional concepts of hierarchy, destiny, and spiritual causality persist among congregants. This gap leaves believers negotiating traditional beliefs privately, reinforcing dual adherence to Christian and indigenous spiritual systems.

The investigation into the root causes and contributing factors responsible for the persistence of subconscious syncretism among Yoruba Christians in Ondo State, Nigeria, carries several implications for religion, culture, education, and policy:

1. The findings challenge churches and Christian leaders to re-examine their teaching methods, discipleship strategies, and approaches to inculturation to ensure that Christian practices are clearly distinguished from traditional religious influences. It highlights the need for contextual theology that respects Yoruba culture while avoiding the uncritical blending of Christian and indigenous beliefs.
2. The study draws attention to the enduring strength of Yoruba cosmology and worldview, which continues to shape religious identity even among professed Christians. It reveals how cultural identity and ancestral traditions subtly influence worship and belief systems, suggesting that any attempt to reform syncretism must engage cultural heritage rather than dismiss it.
3. Religious education curriculum in churches and schools may need to address subconscious syncretism by teaching critical awareness of cultural-religious practices. Seminaries and theological

institutions could benefit from incorporating modules on African traditional religions, inculturation, and interreligious dialogue to better prepare leaders for addressing syncretic tendencies.

Works Cited

1. Abogunrin, Samuel O. Religion and Cultural Integration in Africa: A Case Study of Nigeria. University of Ibadan Press, 1986.
2. Adega, Andrew Philips.
3. “The Influence of Syncretism on the Ethnic Denominations of African Religion in the Benue Valley of Nigeria: The Tiv in Perspective.” *International Journal of Culture and History*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2022
4. Adega, Susan Olubukola. *Èró ò kan t'èsìn: Religious syncretism in the performance of Ero festival in Owo Kingdom, Ondo State, Nigeria*. 2024, 42-50
5. Adegboyega, Toyin Falola. Culture and Customs of Nigeria. Greenwood Press, 2001.
6. Adeolu, Oluremi. C. *Yoruba Customs and institution: A case study of Akoko town. Nigeria: Alunyi*, 2018.
7. Aderibigbe, Isaac. S. Religion and Politics in Nigeria. Longman Nigeria, 1983.
8. Adewale, Yinka Adewuni, Eyitayo Adewale Adelakun, Ayodele Adeyinka Atowoju, and Abiodun Omolara Adelakun. “Implication of Religious Syncretism on Baptist Mission Work in Ojo Island, Lagos State Nigeria”. *African Journal of Culture, History, Religion and Traditions*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2023, pp. 86–97. 8. Ajedokun, Felix O. “Syncretic Tendencies in Selected Contemporary Prayer Practices Among Christians in Nigeria.” *Research Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies*, vol. 11, no. 5, 2025, pp. 105–117
9. Balogun, Muhsin Adekunle. ”Syncretic Beliefs and Practices amongst Muslims in Lagos State, Nigeria”: With Special Reference to the Yoruba Speaking People of Epe. PhD diss., University of Birmingham, 2011.
10. Bamaiyi, Abdulrahman A. Religion and Society in Nigeria. Kaduna: Baraka Press, 2010.
11. Idowu, Bolaji E. “*Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief*. London: Longmans, Green and Co. 1962.92-103
12. Idowu, Bolaji E. “African Traditional Religion: A Definition”. London: SCM Press. 1973, 29-38
13. Martin, Luther H. Hellenistic Religions: An Introduction. Oxford University Press, 1987.
14. Mbiti, John S. African Religions and Philosophy. Heinemann, 1969.
15. Nnaji Charles Ogundu “The origin and true meaning of Philosophy. Abuja super unique press, 2012.
16. Nnaji Charles Ogundu “Theistic and socionomic-origin of Philosophy.” *Open journal of Philosophy* vol 3, no. 1, 2013

17. Nnaji Charles Ogundu "Monastic philosophy of the origins of University Education." Open journal of Philosophy, vol 5, no. 4, 2015
18. Nwankwo, Chibuzo. "Religious Dualism and Implicit Syncretism Among Nigerian Christians." Journal of African Religious Studies, vol. 12, no. 2, 2018, pp. 88–104.
19. Nweke, Kizito Chinedu. "Christianity and the Indigenous Spiritualities of the Igbo People: From Multi-Religiousness to Synculturation." Religious: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama dan Lintas Budaya, vol. 7, no. 2. Nigeria". Stellenbosch Theological Journal, vol. 7, no. 1, 2021.
20. Ogbu Kalu Mark "Religion & Culture: How Christianity Interacts with Indigenous Religions, Islam, and Modern Secularism in Nigeria." International Journal of Religious and Cultural Practice, vol. 10, no. 7, 2025.
21. Ukah, Asonzeh F.K. "Religious Mobility and Syncretic Consciousness in Contemporary
22. Yamamori, Tetsunao. Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity. Baker Academic, 1996.
23. Yetunde Aluko, Oluwasegun Onobanjo, Nurudeen, Alliyu. "The Centrality of Women in Moral Teaching in Yoruba Family System". *The Nigerian Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*. 2011.35-50.