

# Identity formation at the dawn of liturgical inculturation in the Ethiopian Episcopal Church

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This article reflects on the impact of the inculturation of liturgy in the Ethiopian Episcopal Church (EEC) on identity formation within the context of African Christianity. In the EEC, the quest for African Christian identity formation is essential in understanding the role of black culture at the advent of the inculturation of liturgy. Inculturation can be viewed as the meeting and interaction of the Christian gospel and local cultures where neither the liturgy nor the cultures are superior than the other. Thus, it is vital to understand the inculturation of liturgy and its implications for African Christian identity in the EEC. There is a need for an official guiding principle or doctrinal and theological position on use of language and instruments associated with ancestor veneration at all levels of the EEC. The aim of this article is to clarify how the transformation of the EEC liturgy shaped the African Christianity's identity of its members. It also attempts to provide clarification on the use of language, symbols, and instruments associated with traditional healers in the liturgy and how it creates identity confusion within the EEC. Lastly, we discuss some of the limitations in the liturgical inculturation endeavour in the EEC.

**Contribution:** This article contributes to a wider discourse of Christian identity formation from the perspective of the coming together of Christianity and African culture. It also contributes to the quest of EEC members for being authentic Christians while also being proud Africans. Specifically, it contributes to the EEC's quest for African identity through the inculturation of liturgy.

**Keywords:** identity formation; African Christian identity; identity crisis; African Indigenous Churches; liturgy; inculturation.

## Introduction

The main source of the identity confusion within the Ethiopian Episcopal Church (EEC) is the conflict between those who desire to preserve the traditions of Westernised worship and those who seek to make worship Africanised to the extent of including veneration of ancestors. Religious denominations are identified by their worship practices and as such liturgy contributes to the identity of a church and its members. Klaasen (2016:1) came to a similar conclusion that faith plays a significant role in the formation of identity and that faith creates the space for cohesive coexistence. The focus of this article is to explore the impact of inculturation of liturgy in the formation of African Christian identity. We proceed with reference to the hypothesis that diverse African cultural practices contribute to the formation of Christian identity. According to Enegho (2017):

Constructing a contextual approach to African Christian identity formation is a challenge which many researchers are attempting to find ways to address. Inculturation theologues give the Christian faith a local shape and also partly integrate elements of other religious practices. (p. 207)

We read in Chupungco (1992:25) that, 'according to De Napoli (1987), the term inculturation was coined in 1973 by G.L. Barney, a Protestant missionary'. Shorter (1988:11) defines inculturation as 'the creative and dynamic relationship between the Christian message and a culture or cultures'. Inculturation of liturgy is not a new phenomenon in the history of the Church. This idea is supported by Chupungco (2003) when he makes the following observation:

While Roman Catholics started to use the vernacular in the liturgy only after Vatican II, Lutherans have had four hundred years of experience. Music is another area where Lutherans can claim a longer tradition of using popular songs in contrast with the Latin Gregorian chant. It may be flattering for Lutherans to know that Roman Catholics, no doubt influenced by Lutherans, adopted the use of hymns for the entrance, offertory, and communion rites of the Mass, where in the past only psalms were sung. (p. 248)

The reforms of the Catholic liturgy introduced by Martin Luther in 1523 and 1526 contributed to the reformation of the spiritual identities of believers. A similar undertaking was necessitated by

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liberation developments in Africa. Magesa (1991:19) articulates this idea as follows 'the attainment of independence in many African countries, was followed by calls for the contextualisation, concretisation, accommodation, adaptation, indigenisation, localisation, incarnation or Africanisation of the church and theology in Africa'. These were the early indications of inculturation in Africa, where the dialectical relationship between Christianity and the African way of life emerged. Oladipo (2017) reflects on the Africanisation of Christianity this way:

Whereas missionaries have always been interested in Christianizing Africans, converts in Africa have equally wanted to Africanize Christianity. Thus, once it had been Africanized and crafted in indigenous idioms, Christianity grew in significance across sub-Saharan Africa. The biblical stories of Christianity became African stories, so too its myths, histories, songs, rituals, and symbols. The process by which Christianity has become one of Africa's traditional religions and is now rooted in indigenous African idioms and cultures is long and multidirectional. (p. 5)

Togarasei (2016:101) maintains that 'Many African societies remain divided and at war on the basis of identities, be they racial, ethnic, tribal, creedal, gender, class, language, and other identities'. The quest for African Christian identity in worship and the Catholic tradition liturgy in the EEC require extensive exploration and explication as it might lead to confusion resulting in a Christian identity crisis.

The outline of this article is as follows. It will give a brief account of the liturgical inculturation process in the EEC. This will be followed by a discussion on how the transformation of the EEC liturgy shaped the African Christianity identity of its members in the theoretical and narrative framework as the methodology. A discussion on the use of language and instruments associated with ancestor veneration in the liturgy and how it creates identity confusion within the EEC will be provided following our framework of narrative. Finally, we discuss the challenges of the transformation of liturgy in the culturally diverse EEC.

## Brief historical background of the Ethiopian Episcopal Church

It is helpful to start by giving a synopsis of the stages of the EEC's development so that we can properly locate the liturgical inculturation and the perceived identity crisis within the EEC. In 1892 Rev. Mangena Maake Mokone (1851–1936) – a Methodist priest – and his contemporaries founded the Ethiopian Church at Marabastad, Pretoria. The name was inspired by Psalm 68:31b 'Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God'. This initiative was motivated by the racist treatment he endured in the Methodist Church and it paved the way for black Christians to press for the expression of African Christianity and reaffirmed the need to develop African spirituality and a true non-tribal all-African church. Lamola (1988:8) says this about the character of the Ethiopian Church 'The historical significance of the Ethiopian Church was that whereas the hitherto pattern of the founding of

AIC's was tribally conditioned, this church was to become consciously non-tribalistic'. It is for this very reason that the EEC rejects racism, tribalism, ethnicity, and super-group mentality and embraces cultural diversity.

In 1895 Rev. James Mata Dwane (1848–1916) – a Methodist priest – joined the Ethiopian Church Pretoria Conference. Dwane soon established ties with the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) in America. He later became disillusioned with the AME Church. After correspondence between Dwane and the Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, an agreement was reached and a Compact was signed in Grahamstown on 26 August 1900 and the Order of Ethiopia was created. Through this Compact the Ethiopians would have valid Episcopal orders of the Anglican Church and the EEC would be entrenched in the Catholic tradition.

The dream of the Ethiopians to have their own bishop was fulfilled after 1999 when the first Bishop of the Order of Ethiopia Bishop Sigqibo Dwane (1941–2006) was consecrated on 24 April 1982. In 1998, the Order of Ethiopia was granted autonomy by the Anglican Church. Dwane introduced liturgical reforms that fully embraced African culture. This pioneered the task of transforming the liturgy of the Anglican Church to reflect the quest for African Christian identity and the Catholic tradition.

## Liturgy and identity

The word liturgy comes from a Greek term *leitourgia*, which literally means service of the people or work done on behalf of the people. Within the church it is used to describe all the public service worship that takes place, as it draws the people into the work of God. Liturgy is the primary encounter of Christians with the triune God and fellow Christians. This takes different forms ranging from the communion in the Eucharist, fellowship in wedding celebrations, and funeral services, among others. The general public identifies religious denominations based on their worship practices and as such liturgy contributes to the identity of a church and its members. In liturgy there is an encounter of culture with the Gospel, where the relevant elements of a local culture such as language, music, and instruments are integrated in a way that is harmonising and giving life to liturgy and as such liturgy is what people do and what defines them. To this end, Oladipo (2017:17) asserts that 'in the church, the event principle of time management has translated into liturgical liveliness wherein every worship service is an event'. In the EEC, these worship services are usually long but are also made quite interesting with liturgy to usher African worshippers into the spiritual world.

It is worth noting that the EEC falls within the category of mainline churches sharing some of the basic characteristics of the missionary churches. At the same time, it describes itself as an African Indigenous Church. Ntombana (2015) clarifies this situation:

Mainline churches continue to be divided on how to accommodate the quest for African identity and culture in their worship practices. Some African Independent Churches (AIC)

have a clear stand in relation to African ritual practices, they fully practise their rituals and have incorporated them in their Christian faith. For them, there is no conflict in practising rituals and ancestral veneration while being a committed Christian. The AIC incorporated African rituals into their church services and they are open about it. (p. 106)

Within the EEC there is no consensus on the issue of separating Christian rituals and ancestral veneration. It is for this reason that we attempt to explore the impact of inculturation of liturgy in the formation of African Christian identity in the EEC. Adogame (2016:4) admits that 'the perception of religion as a phenomenon completely separate from culture is not a suitable reflection of the embedded nature of religion in African worldviews' The dual characterisation of the EEC as an African Indigenous Church and a church within the Catholic tradition is a primary source of the perceived identity crisis.

Within the EEC there is an unresolved misinterpretation of the relationship between African cultural practices and Christian faith practices and to what extent African customs can be accommodated in liturgy. Another issue is the great discontent among some Africans that the liturgy embodies Western ethos and that it has not been adequately Africanised. Some strongly argue that African beliefs and ritual practises should be fully incorporated in the liturgy.

For the latter, there is no conflict in practising African rituals and ancestral veneration while being a devoted Christian. Others have a strong view that the issue of ancestral veneration and ritual practices is the matter for individuals or families to decide. (Ntombana 2015:115)

Another difficulty arises from the fact that African customs are diverse with each clan and ethnic group having different traditional adherences compared to each other. Contextualising inculturation of liturgy by incorporating acceptable cultural practices is beneficial in shaping African Christian identity.

Identity on the other hand is a complicated and unclear concept that plays a central role in personhood. That is why there is often superficial and simplistic understanding of this concept, or a misperception of different terms used to explain the meaning of identity. An anthropological and sociological approach to the concept of identity is needed to simplify some of the misperception. In an anthropological approach cultural pattern is applied in order to explain the origin of identity and the difficulty of its meaning. A sociological approach specifies individuals' identity in terms of the groups to which they belong. In the culturally diverse EEC, it is important to clearly define our identity – a sense of who we are and where we belong. Identity as we use it here, 'has a meaning within social, political, cultural and theological contexts' (Klaasen 2021:2). The creative and dynamic accommodation of culture in liturgy makes the gospel to take roots in the local values and the ways of living of the people so that the people identify with the liturgy without sacrificing the basic tenets of the gospel. Identity formation is the shaping of identity elements focused on achieving a particular

outcome and created within a particular context. According to Schachter (2005):

Formation of identity must take into account multiple structural objectives and goals, then the resulting compromise structure may theoretically take many different forms, depending on the relative importance given to each of these needs and goals. (p. 382)

The concept of identity formation relates to individuals' identity and the way it is shaped, transformed, and upheld in interaction with a particular setting. Identity is grounded on 'mutual willingness for change, and identity is thus not bounded but rather relational and perhaps dialogical or interdependent' (Hermans 2001; Markus & Kitayama 1994). Individuals' cultures and religion influence contents of their identity, values, beliefs, character, and worldviews. 'The relational aspect of identity relates to social identity which is described by the way individuals manage their interpersonal roles within social groups' (Bornman 2010). Giddens (1993) cautions:

[T]o the fact that social identities are different in different historical contexts: While traditional identity conveys from generation to generation, in modern societies identity is conceived as a matter of rational action and being dynamic. He thinks that one may speak of identity as a symbolic construction, which helps people to find their own place in time and preserve continuity. (n.p.)

The statement attests to the complexity in defining and describing African Christian identity in the EEC and demonstrates that it is not a straightforward concept. Golubović (2011) alluded to the fact that:

[T]he concept of identity has been used in different terms: a) as a primordial identity being conceived as a naturally given and unchangeable entity – belonging to the ethnic category; and b) as a socio-cultural, political or ideologically constructed collective sense of communal or personal identity. (p. 26)

We proceed on the basis that identity (either personal or collective) is socially constructed in the sense that it is the result of beliefs and practices in society. Shaping identity in the EEC suggests that the liturgical teachings are to focus on constructing African Christian identity. 'These theological doctrines are used to explain issues of identity and there is a direct relation between Christianity, liturgy and identity' (Klaasen 2021:2).

## Contextualising the identity crisis in the Ethiopian Episcopal Church

This section attempts to examine the perception of identity crisis as it manifests within the EEC. We understand identity at an individual level as well as at a religious level. Oppong (2013:13) states that 'the first way of conceptualising identity brings up the issue of involuntary dimension of identity, while the second raises the issue of adaptability of identity'. Commenting on these two ways of looking at identity, Mokhoathi (2016b) offers the following explanation:

The involuntary dimension of identity concerns the elementary core of personality which does not change or at least changes slowly over a long period of time. This kind of identity is God given. The adaptability of identity concerns the transitory changes and developments in identity that occurs due to new life experiences, and social milieu outside of primary groups. (p. 18)

Founders of the Ethiopian Church envisioned a church that is truly African. Hence the EEC describes itself as the African Indigenous Churches. Through the affiliation with the Anglican Church, the EEC has been characterised as a Catholic church and a mainline church through much of its existence, particularly in the areas of polity, liturgy, and music. The EEC community is diverse not only in language and culture but also in the practice of African traditional customs. This leads to a diversity of views between those who fully embrace African traditional customs as a way of life and those who indirectly reject certain practices.

Like most African Christians, the Ethiopians have for a long time been hesitant to renounce all of their traditional beliefs and practices. For generations, Christianity has created contradictions for Africans: They have to decide whether to abandon their African customs for them to be legitimate Christian, or to maintain a dual life, following enthusiastically the Word God on Sunday and then diluting it during weekdays. Mokhoathi (2016a:2) comes to a similar observation that 'the strain of having to live by double standards for African converts brought about some difficulties in the appreciation of the Christian identity'. Furthermore, according to Mugambi (2002:520) the primary concern for African Christians was: 'What should be the proper relationship between Christian identity and a Christian's cultural identity?' However, demonising everything that is valued by African Christians and claiming that everything that comes with Western Christianity is approved by God is counterproductive.

The conflict between Christian doctrines and cultural practices has always been a challenge for the EEC even before Dr. S. Dwane introduced liturgical reforms. There is a disconcerting knowledge gap within EEC on how the Christian tradition interfaces with cultural practices, especially the issue of ancestor veneration. On the matter of gospel and culture Dwane (1986) makes this comment:

On the face of it, this need for the Gospel to take root by assimilating what is best in every culture, and transforming it, appears to be a straightforward matter which should be taken for granted and cause no dispute. (p. 20)

When one looks at what in fact is happening in the EEC one sees a different understanding. Many embrace the use indigenous language, music, African instruments and rituals as compelling resources for their own worship experience while some are sceptical of these adaptations to varying degrees. The apparent identity conflict of the EEC being African Indigenous Church within the Catholic tradition presents an opportunity to reflect on the liturgical practices and how they can be beneficial in clarifying Christian identity

formation. Dwane (2004:7) suggests that 'in the African context Christian identity should be deeply rooted in cultural ethos as one of the important channels through which African Christians demonstrate the Christian faith and identity'.

## Liturgical language and symbolism

The liturgy becomes meaningful when it is mediated in the vernacular language and culture. The language, text, images, and instruments used in worship have an effect in shaping Christian identity and personhood. In an attempt to make public worship relevant to members of the EEC, liturgy is written in their own language, using art and symbols in the way that they connect with them.

Signs and symbols, in the context of religion, express and represent transcendent reality, such that they make it possible for men and women to get in touch with it through their senses: vision, hearing, taste and smell. (Krajnc 2014:311)

The integration of vocabulary, symbols, and metaphors associated with traditional healers in the EEC liturgy causes consternation among many with a negative attitude towards divination. Language is one of the most significant aspects of a people's identity because it is the most common medium of communication. People use their own language and symbols in the way they communicate liturgical celebration. According to Francis (2014:6) inculturation is 'the process whereby pertinent elements of a local culture are integrated into the texts, rites, symbols, and institutions employed by a local church for its worship'.

Mtuzze (2008) elaborates on some of the challenges in the EEC liturgy pertaining to the fact that:

[U]sage of *camagu/bayede/pula* (let there be peace) in the EEC liturgy evokes the presence of ancestral presence that was previously associated with paganism and could not be brought into Christian worship. The very God-name *Qamata/Modimo/Mvelingqangi* that the missionaries eschewed and regarded as pagan became the primary reference to God Almighty. The use of *impepho* (incense) – a herb that is conventionally used by traditional healers to drive away evil spirits – clearly indicated radical change from the old to the new. (p. 238)

Impepho is an indigenous African plant that is dried and burnt to help communicate with ancestors. The use of drums is a characteristic feature (*igubu* or *isigubhu* or *sekupu*) – traditionally, the drum was the heartbeat, the soul of most African communities. The instrument is played on various occasions and for a variety of ceremonies, particularly in African churches (Levine & Caplan 2005:81–83). The drum used in EEC has skin membranes at both ends and is similar to the one used by traditional healers and Zionist churches. Traditional healers use drums together with the clapping of hands and dance to the rhythm of drums to connect, communicate, and listen to ancestors. This represents a fundamental shift from the familiar Western forms of liturgical language, gestures, postures, images, decoration, vessels, and vestments. The emotional attitude or response to



these reforms remains largely difficult to evaluate or appreciate except when it is explicitly expressed. The traditionalists in the EEC insist on certain 'proper' forms in worship while the modernists embrace the reforms as part of redefining their Christian identity.

### African Indigenous Church in the Catholic tradition

Another probable source of identity confusion is Article 2 of the EEC Declaration of Faith (Ethiopian Episcopal Church 1999) that states the following:

But we also believe that the God of biblical revelation made himself known to our ancestors as Nkulunkulu, Modimo, Dal'ubom, Xikwembu, Qamata, and various other names, and that there is continuity as is promise to fulfilment, between the faith which sustained them, and what we now declare. It is obvious to us that there is a common ground in which the African heritage meets and interacts creatively with the Christian tradition. With this in mind, we dedicate ourselves to the task of working with Christians of other traditions, for the realisation of an African indigenous church in which the fruits of this interaction will be harvested and shared with the whole body of Christ.

African Indigenous Churches and churches in the Catholic tradition have distinct Christian practices both in their theology and doctrine. It is clear that there is a desire and appetite among the Ethiopians to marry the two.

With this in mind, we dedicate ourselves to the task of working with Christians of other traditions, for the realisation of an African indigenous church in which the fruits of this interaction will be harvested and shared with the whole body of Christ.

Therefore, a clear understanding of this important doctrinal statement necessitates critical evaluation. Where do we start with the harvesting in order to have a 'catholic African indigenous church or African indigenous catholic church'? The starting point in this debate is unpacking the concept of AIC (African Independent Churches, African Indigenous Churches, African Initiated Churches or Afro-Christian Churches) and how this strand of Christian faith 'meets and interacts' with the Catholic tradition. Ntombana (2015:106) connects this dilemma to the fact that:

[T]he African Independent Churches have a clear stand in relation to African ritual practices; they fully practise their rituals and have incorporated them in their Christian faith. For them, there is no conflict in practising rituals and ancestral veneration while being a committed Christian. (p. 106)

In the EEC the issue of ancestral veneration is for individuals or families to choose and the church does not criticise or encourage it.

### Ancestral veneration

The veneration of ancestors is grounded on adoration and respect for the dead and the belief that whilst they are deceased, they still relate to us. It is for this reason that Article 9 of the EEC Declaration of Faith states that 'our ancestors by

nature and by grace are close to us and minister in special ways to our needs'. According to Jarvis (2009:19), 'ancestor veneration means that African people live with an acute awareness of the spirit and believe that most events have some relationship to the influence of the people without bodies'. Furthermore, Mokgobi (2014:24) asserts that 'The colonial authorities and subsequently the apartheid government imposed a Western worldview on the people of South Africa without an attempt to determine the validity of the African worldview on issues such as traditional African healing and traditional African religion or spirituality, which are in most cases mutually interwoven.' In the words of Mdende (2013):

[W]hen the first generation of people died, they joined the spiritual world where the Creator lives. Ancestors then, became the messengers of the Creator and also the supervisors of the physical world. (p. 77)

This suggest that in the African Traditional Religion setting, ancestors are mediators between the living members of the clan and their Creator or God. However, in Christianity Jesus Christ is the only intermediary between people and God. Christians connect directly with God, or through Jesus Christ, whereas in traditional religious settings people communicate with God through the deceased ancestors. Many Christians do not like to be associated with the ancestral rites because it involves reverence and veneration of other spirits which is in contradiction to their Christian faith. When it comes to ancestral veneration, the following questions arise: Is there something unpleasant about African ritual practices, especially traditional healers (igqirha or isangoma or ngaka ya setso) that discomforts us deeply? Are we so comfortable with the Western lifestyle that we would like to forget about African rituals as they remind us of what was meant to have died a long time ago?

These questions are also pertinent in the EEC. Within the EEC, there are some who believe that just as God spoke through his prophets, so is he doing through the ancestors, albeit in different ways. As stated earlier, this belief is captured in Article 9 of the EEC Declaration of Faith (Ethiopian Episcopal Church 1999) that declares:

We believe in the communion of the saints, and so affirm that in the risen and glorified Christ, and through the Spirit, our ancestors by nature and by grace are close to us and minister in special ways to our needs.

This statement captures the sentiment expressed by Van Dyk (2001) that:

[A]ncestors are the living-dead, compassionate spirits who are blood-related to the people who believe in them. The ancestors continue to show an interest in the daily lives of the relatives that are still alive. (p. 63)

The sentiments articulated by Van Dyk raise the following general questions, especially within the EEC: Is it appropriate for Ethiopians or Christians in general to follow practices and rituals to honour and preserve a good relationship with the ancestral spirits? Have we rejected our ancestors and adopted

European ancestors who think that they know God better than our forefathers? Is the Western culture superior, better, and more acceptable to God? Are we demonizing practices that are admired by Africans yet promoting practices that are revered by Europeans? To respond adequately to these questions and to the concept of African Christian identity formation, it is necessary to locate the debate on the meeting and interaction of these two viewpoints. There is a general agreement and acceptance in the EEC on the role and celebration of ancestors by grace (saints and martyrs) which we celebrate annually on All Saints Day (01 November). However, there seem to be differences of opinion regarding the celebration of our ancestors by nature or blood (the faithful departed) which we commemorate on 02 November. Even the language used in the description of the two categories of ancestors seems problematic on the surface. The discontent here is between the Christian practice and the African cultural practice. In the Christian traditional setting, it is clear that we only consider those ancestors who were faithful and there is evidence of their faithfulness in the mission of Christ through the Church. In the African traditional setting, all ancestors are celebrated and venerated regardless of their social status when they were still alive. In Christianity, the ancestors who rejected Christ cannot be accommodated in the church's liturgical celebrations.

The role of the ancestors is a contentious issue for many African Christians, as well as in the EEC. The lack of clarity on this matter is of great concern to the EEC resulting in different interpretations based on individuals' worldview. When members of the same church have different beliefs about pertinent doctrinal positions, serious problems of identity crisis may arise. According to Cilliers (2008:12), 'the sense of belonging strengthened the sense of identity'. This certainly encourages a debate on the meeting of the two religious traditions in which African religion accepts the Christian tradition and willingly accommodates it and Christian tradition also accepts the elements of African religion. It will be demonstrated later in the article as to how Dwane shaped the Ethiopian Christian identity through the transformation of liturgy.

### Christian priesthood and ancestral divination

The problems associated with ancestral veneration have been articulated earlier in the article. This section demonstrates symptoms of identity crisis in the EEC regarding priesthood and divination. The Cambridge Dictionary defines a diviner as someone who claims to be able to say what is going to happen in the future using special powers or abilities. In 2018 during an interview for the vacancy of an archbishop in the EEC one of the candidates openly declared to have heeded a calling for divination. Indeed, for him and many others there is no conflict between being a priest and diviner. Subsequently a Commission (2019) of enquiry was established to investigate the following questions:

- Is there compatibility between Christian priesthood and African traditional divination?

- What are the likely outcomes where the two spirits that have converged in one person (especially a church leader), start competing for dominance?
- When the two spirits co-exist in one person (a church leader) are they not compromising the leader's duty to unite the church?

Mpumlwana (2019) had this to say on this subject:

In the African religiosity ancestors are mediators and can often be the principal directors of liturgical and ritual processes – *izihlwele zithi makwenziwe oku noku* (ancestors instruct that this or that must happen). This is a role that our ancestors by grace, the saints, are rarely known to play in spirituality. The latter are more intercessors rather than directors of spiritual practices and rituals, leaving the directing to God through the Holy Spirit. In a way this introduces a situation where there can be tension between the directive of God the Holy Spirit and that of one's ancestors that are not subordinated to Christ. (p. 8)

The issue of priests who are also traditional healers or diviners has always been a silent debate in the EEC. There have been murmurs about few priests who are diviners and the conflict it may present if both callings reside in one person. The main point is: which of the two takes precedence in the private life and pastoral work of a priest? 'The fact that EEC categorises herself as an African Indigenous Church aggravates the question about the location of the EEC in the identity continuum' (Dweba et al. 2019:25). In a practical sense, divination by a priest can lead the form of double calling, in which a priest in a church liturgy openly celebrates a ritual of divination by calling on the clan ancestors. The diviner priest may not recognise the conflict as some African practices are included in the liturgies of the EEC such as the praying for an animal to be slaughtered and other liturgical function that connect the living and the dead.

In African societies, traditional healers perform many roles such as custodians of the traditions and customs, guardians of culture and counsellors. This has led some African healers to start churches that focus on healing, spirituality, and prayer. The African Christian spiritual healers' inclination for spiritual healing practices has strong biblical patterns. Waruta and Kinothi (2004) suggest:

[T]hat divination and other magical practices in which traditional people engage to avert witches must be replaced by prayer, counselling, the Christian rite of confession and the acceptance of the use of charismatic gifts just as Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 12:4–11. (p. 94)

Bishop Dwane suggested that the Gospel be used as a sieve (*isihluzo*), through which our cultural practices are tested. We need to relook at what should be the nature of that sieve and what must it allow to go through. Dweba et al. (2019:2) suggest that 'the nature of the sieve has to be established beyond doubt or suspicion of cultural imperialism'. Liturgy and practices in the EEC have a correct foundation in the

Gospel, the sieve, through which culture is tested and that which goes through the sieve of the Gospel, is acceptable, and that which does not, must be rejected. Klaasen's (2018:9) assertion that 'the identity of human beings is rooted in their identity as God's creatures, being made in the image of God' will be valuable in locating African Christian identity within the liturgical practices of the EEC.

## African Christian identity formation through liturgical inculturation

This section discusses in the detail the impact of the liturgical inculturation in the formation of African Christian identity in EEC members. The findings of the EEC Commission are indicative of a situation where the EEC members are lacking in knowledge on critical doctrinal matters. In the analysis of the questionnaire survey, Dweba et al. (2019:42) conclude that the 'inconsistencies in the respondents' views are indicative of different interpretations of the church's doctrine which is not desirable'. Consistent with Ntombana's (2015:106) assertion, the Commission's findings confirm that:

[T]here are disconcerting views that give the impression that when church members are not at church, they can do as they please, whether or not what they are doing, contradicts the values of the church.

It is for this reason that the conceptualisation of liturgical inculturation that is suitable for and relevant to the formation of African Christian identity in the EEC needs to be clarified. This provides an attempt in reconciling the interplay between African cultural practices and liturgical inculturation applied in the formation of African Christian identity. Chupungco (1989:29) describes liturgical inculturation as 'the process whereby texts and rites used in worship by the local church are so inserted in the framework of culture, that they absorb its thinking, language and ritual patterns'. Inculturation of liturgy helps believers to locate their identity in a particular cultural context. In this regard, Bediako (1989) makes the following insightful observation:

Perhaps the real significance of the concentration of interest on the African religious past in African theology has been to make the issue of identity itself into a theological and Christian problem. (p. 59)

In the early stages of Christianity in South Africa, white and black ministers prohibited the customs and traditional practices of the African converts. Accordingly, the church guidelines were in conflict with daily lived experiences of the people and Africans could not freely express their own cultural identity. This motivated the EEC leaders and their followers to introduce reforms that were informed by factors such as spiritual, cultural, political, and social issues to entrench it as an African Indigenous Church. Moreover, 'it is an accepted position that the African Initiated Churches (AICs) were formed as a result of the search for a unique African identity and culture' (Manganyi & Buitendag 2013). Their worship has truly indigenised to a point where divine Holy Spirit healing is intertwined with traditional healing. Within the EEC, worship

practices adopted a completely new approach of expression, integrating cultural practices and the daily lived life experiences of people while preserving the Catholic character. These liturgical reforms shaped the identity of Ethiopians as African Christians in a way that affirms the relevance of their cultural practices in Christian worship.

The subject of African identity has become a common conversation in the modern life of African Christians. From its inception, the EEC envisioned an African church that embraces African spirituality and sense of the divine rooted in the African cultural worldview. The notion of liturgical inculturation has been on the agenda of theological debate in the African continent and beyond. This validates the fact that the transformation of liturgy should take into cognisance the way of life of local communities. Inculturation according to Magesa (2004:17), 'should be understood as the process whereby, the faith already embodied in one culture, encounters another culture'. In the EEC, it is observed that there is an acceptance between an affirmation of the inherent goodness of African culture and the widespread reception of the Christian faith. The inculturation of the liturgy process in the EEC continues to encounter new and often unexpected challenges. These challenges emanate from different misunderstanding and misinterpretation of important church documents such as the liturgy and the Declaration of Faith. Bishop Malusi Mpumlwana (2007) has offered an insightful and broad 'interpretive reflection' on the Declaration of Faith. Mpumlwana (2007:2) avers that 'through the Declaration of Faith we have an identity, a mission and guiding principles'. It seems that this inspiring interpretation by Bishop Mpumlwana has not been widely canvassed within the EEC as some still believe that the EEC is the church of African customs (iNkonzo yamasiko). The inculturation of liturgy in the EEC was motivated by the quest for African Christian identity and the pluralistic African culture by undergoing transformation of liturgy. The New Catholic Encyclopaedia (2022) succinctly summarises the connection between liturgy and culture as follows:

Throughout the history of Christian worship, liturgy and culture have always been intricately entwined: the culture of a given group of people yielded great influence on the forms, symbols, language, time and place of their worship. (p. 1)

Accordingly, African Christian identity is shaped in a particular context, in a particular location, particular historical setting, and a particular culture. Maluleke (2013:477) asserts that 'African culture and African Traditional Religions (ATRs) have long been acknowledged as the womb out of which African Christian identity must be born'.

The aspects of the EEC liturgical inculturation have an impact on African Christian identity formation. They are helpful in resolving some of the religious complications caused by issues of culture and Christian identity. The EEC liturgy attempts to unite members to transcend cultural, language, and ethnic barriers. It is an expression of Christian identity through faithfulness to Christian tradition. It is important to understand that the EEC liturgy is at the heart of the cultural



and traditional experiences to adapt some of the elements of culture that point towards the gospel of Christ. These cultural elements include various rituals such as baptism parallels in the African cultural practice of imbeleko (a celebration to introduce and welcome a newborn child to both the living and ancestral spirits), instruments associated with traditional healer, and reflection on the Eucharist from African viewpoint. The transformed liturgy shapes the identity of Ethiopians that is deeply rooted in the consciousness of the Christian faith teachings. In the EEC worship the attire, music, dance, and rhythms are part of Orthodox Christianity while influenced by the desire to retain the identity of the indigenous people. The African symbolism in the EEC liturgy forms part of affirming the African Christian identity of Ethiopians as African Christians created in the image of God. Dwane's inculturation of liturgy task greatly contributed to the rise of African Christology and deeply shaped the identity of Ethiopians. Ethiopians now have an identity that is distinct from the Anglicans. Dwane (1999:152) validates this idea by saying that 'at last the Ethiopians could with dignity identify themselves as Ethiopians, instead of having to give a long and embarrassing explanation why were called "Order" and not church'. Although Dwane's liturgical reforms embraced African culture and identity, they were inadequate to completely address the diverse cross-cultural and intercultural challenges at play in the EEC. The vocabulary, imagery, and metaphors Dwane used were related more to the Xhosa cultural perspective and were not sufficient to accommodate all diversity encounters and limitations in the shaping of African Christian identity within the EEC.

## Conclusion

Religious institutions such as churches are considered as one of the social institutions within a society. Indeed, religious practices permeate its members and communities in which they are established. The EEC liturgical inculturation shaped the African Christian identity of Ethiopians as a common identity rather than an ethnic or tribal one. This African Christian identity is formed by emulating the identity of Jesus Christ. The EEC liturgy tries to close the gap between African cultural identity and contemporary Christianity identity by combining certain acceptable cultural practices, instruments, and symbols into the worship life of the people. Dwane continued to construct the Ethiopians' identity with the sound doctrines of the gospel with theological justifications. This article extends on Dwane's attempt at African Christian identity formation through the inculturation of the liturgy. There is a need for an official guiding principle or doctrinal and theological position on how to deal with the issue of ancestor veneration at all levels of the church. Unless exploratory questions about EEC identity do not become the subject of serious debate, the disagreements regarding the perception of our identity will continue and will give rise to complications in interpersonal and intercultural relations.

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P.K. conceptualised and wrote the research article. J.S.K. reviewed and supervised the writing of the article.

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