

Combining Christianity and Traditional Religion in Madagascar.

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Abstract

Many Malagasy people combine Christianity and Traditional religions in their religious practices in Madagascar. They identify themselves as Christian but still perform practices related to Traditional religion. This paper aims to determine how this combination between two religions, which have different principals, is possible. Hudgson advances the concept of inculturation that is well adapted to our research. By using a comparative method between Christianity and Malagasy traditional belief, we are able to understand why Christianity did not face fierce resistance from natives who encounter the first missionaries, and also how Malagasy Christians did not abandon their traditional religion. Data used in this research is from an ethnographic field work undertaken by two missionaries, but also coupled with my own field work conducted in Madagascar. The main findings in this paper are that Traditional Christianity and Malagasy Traditional religions have a lot of similarities and even sometimes complementary, which allow compromise between them. Nonetheless, a new form of Christianity does not allow any form of compromise with Malagasy Traditional religion, even more, it challenges the Traditional Christianity. This new form of Christianity adopts a radical perspective about religion.

Key words: Religion, Christianity, Malagasy Traditional Religion, Inculturation.

Abbreviation

ATR: African Traditional Religion

MTR: Malagasy Traditional Religion

PCC: Pentecostal Charismatic Church.

Introduction

When we talk about Christianity and ATR (African Traditional Religions), opposition between them is always the first coming into our mind. It is like opposing modernity to traditional or, opposing new to old. This conception comes from the fact that ATR was prior to Christianity. In fact, before the first missionaries step in Africa, locals have already religious belief which may differ from region to another. Several differences in religious principals, practices and inner belief separate the two groups of religions. The term “group” is here a necessity as Christianity has Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, Lutheran and so on within; ATR have even more diversity. Missionaries felt compelled to evangelize natives to save their soul from the damnation of Hell. In their conception, only Christians can have salvation; so their mission is to turn locals into Christians and their soul will be saved. That is to say, the arrival of missionaries should be a threat to ATR because if locals embrace Christianity, they have to leave their traditional belief as several principals are in contradiction with Christianity. Theoretically, it

should go that way, but practically, the fact is otherwise.

One day when I went to church Saint-Luc, in Madagascar, a Christian from that church told me he and his family plan a turning of the corpse next week. The turning of the corpse is a Malagasy tradition where people change the wrap of their deceased ancestors. This practice is, in some ways, in contradiction with his Christian belief as during that ceremony, people will ask blessing and protection from ancestors. For Christianity principals, dead are dead and have no hold on living ones. Additionally, God is almighty and only he can provide blessing. In fact, when a priest gives blessing to believers, he is just a medium in which God gives his blessing. To put it simple, blessing is only from God. This is not an isolated fact, many similar stories about performing Christian and Traditional religious practices have been heard throughout the island, such as people seek diviners' advice to choose a suitable date for wedding, which is performed at church, or people telling stories about how their ancestors came to talk to them to do a specific deed while he is a member of Christian church.

This situation makes us think that Traditional belief did not disappear after locals adopted Christianity, more; people could manage combining the two religions as they make it one in their religious life. How two religions, which are different in many points, can be combined as one in people's life?

When Christianity enters in Africa, it went through a process of localization (Gerrie ter Haar, 1998). Christianity in Europe was slightly different from the one in Africa because Christianity has to adjust among African culture. In fact, religion is a part of culture. As such, it has to be in harmony with other

elements inside to be functional in the society, thus being accepted by people in that society. This view of functional elements inside one system, here culture, is the essence of functionalism paradigm. That is also the case for Madagascar. Prieto, a missionary who spent decades in Madagascar, and his work will be used in this research, stipulates that if missionaries want to successfully evangelize Malagasy people, they have to accept that Malagasy people have their prior culture and system of belief that missionaries have to respect and to take into consideration (Rabenoro, 2000). Later in this paper, we will see how Prieto shows Malagasy tradition and Christianity is rather complementary.

Before going further, let's us explain first some main concepts that we usually use in this paper.

Several specialists in anthropology of religion use the term of ATR (African Traditional Religion) to define the traditional belief and religious practices of African people. Kamara (2000) distinguishes five components of ATR "belief in God, belief in the divinities, belief in spirits, belief in the ancestors, and the practice of magic and medicine". If ATR encompass all African traditional religion, MTR (Malagasy Traditional Religion) is one part of it because Madagascar is part of Africa and MTR has all characteristics that Kamara cited above. In fact, MTR believe in God, it has also several divinities on its own, spirits are all over MTR believers' prayer, and so is the worship of ancestors. And if these believers are sick, they go to diviners to seek healing. That is to say, MTR is another form of ATR, but more specific because of its geographic location. About Christianity, a lot can be said about, but in our study, we conceive it as a foreign religion which has been brought to Madagascar by missionaries. This foreign religion has been adopted and adapted by locals and become

part of their life. The question is then, how the combination of Christianity and MTR has worked greatly among Malagasy people?

As our paper mainly focus on religion, it is wise to give a definition of this concept. Edward Burnett Tylor (1871) defined religion as "the belief in spiritual beings". Christians believe in "All Mighty God" and in Christ is his son. The belief in Christ is the essence of Christianity. This point marks the difference of Christianity from other religion such as Islam which conceives Christ as a prophet, not a son of God. MTR also believe in God. In fact, even before the arrival of the first missionaries in the island, natives already used expressions related to God and spirits in their daily life. If the Malagasy want to affirm that he said the truth, he would say: "Shall God kill me if I lie" or he can also say: "By God, it's true". He dares swearing before God when he knows he's telling the truth. Or in situation of great anger, he can curse the person with who he is anger at as: "Shall God kills you" or "Shall God close your eyes". Natives already belief, thus they already had religion before the arrival of Gospel in the island.

But this definition on itself is not complete because religion is not only a matter of belief, but also a practice. Saying I believe in Christ does not make a Christian, one has to show his belief through religious practices; and then, can be called as such. That is why; completing this definition given by Tylor, with the one given by Durkheim is more suitable for our study. In fact, Durkheim (1915) defines religion as "unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things". Practice is a part of religion that cannot be ignored. Every religion has its own specificity in religious practices. Christians have the tradition to go to mass every Sunday or kneeling when they pray. MTR has also

its own religion practices such as scarifying ox in order to ask favors from God. In his definition, Durkheim also evokes the notion of sacred. Sacred things are not limited to gods or spirits. In fact, Christians believe that Christians cross is sacred, MTR believe that the North-East side of the house is sacred because this is the place that ancestors' spirit will come through.

Before getting further, we have to explain some issues. During the field work, natives have very slight demarcation between cultural tradition and MTR. Taking the worship of ancestors, people conceive it as perpetuation of Malagasy tradition, while in social sciences perspective, it can be viewed as a religion practices because it has some relation with supernatural and also it enters already in the realm of sacred. This is just a kind reminder for further reading of this article because one may see some practice as part of cultural legacy, while in fact; it is a matter of religion.

Method and data use

In this current paper, we are going to use a comparative religious study. The most famous figure of this approach was Harvey. As we stated earlier, we want to know how MTR and Christianity can, not only coexist, but also adopted equivalently by natives. Thus, comparing their similarities and differences can help us to achieve our goal. But a mere comparison won't be enough to do so; we need to incorporate a mechanism in which natives will adjust Christianity with their Malagasy belief and tradition. The notion of inculturation, introduced by Hodgson, is well suited in our research to analyze this mechanism of adaptation of Christianity by natives. Hudgson (2005) defines inculturation as a process when local Africans adopt Christianity but adapt it to their own context.

In very simple term, it is a process of indigenization.

In this research, the term “Natives” is preferred to emphasize the fact that Christianity was an imported religion. Nonetheless, by the mechanism of inculturation, it becomes a part of Malagasy society.

When social sciences undertake research on religion, they consider at least one of these aspects of religion which are: collective, ritual, meaning and experience. Our research here focuses on the fourth aspect which is experience. In fact, we are going to see how it is possible for natives to have no issues on adopting Christianity without abandoning categorically their traditional belief.

Data used in this research is the result of anthropological field work did by two missionaries in Madagascar. The first anthropological work has been done by Lars Vig. He was a Norwegian missionary; he spent 27 years at Antsirabe (central plain of Madagascar) where he undertook anthropological work. He was especially interested in symbolism of MTR. His research and insight are the most valuable for us in this current paper. The second anthropological work that we use is the field work undertaken by Profita. Pietro Profita was an Italian missionary in Madagascar during 54 years in the island. In 1994, he was awarded as member of the Malagasy National Academy. This was a rare distinction for a foreigner who lived in the island. These two missionaries understand well Malagasy society, its belief and traditions. But their work has been done more than 50 years ago, as specialist in social sciences; we know that society is always in constant changes, that is why these data will be added with my own anthropological field. I did my field work at two different groups of Christians, one

is in a Catholic Church at “Saint-Luc”, and the second group is from a Pentecostal Church of “Jehovah’s Witnesses”. I interviewed 15 Christians from these two churches. My study field lasted two month, from February to Late March 2016. Results from the field work revealed very instructive information about religious practices in Madagascar.

One point to clarify is that Catholic and Protestant churches in Madagascar can be called “Traditional Christianity”. We use the term “Traditional” because this form of Christianity existed since the first missionaries came to evangelize Malagasy people, which means before the French colonization of the Island. On the other hand, Pentecostal churches can be referred as “New Christianity” as it was late to come to the island. In fact, Pentecostal church becomes more and more present among Malagasy society from 90’s. Choosing one church from “Traditional Christianity” and one church from “New Christianity” will be fruitful to our research.

Results

As a reminder, our research question was: How the combination of Christianity and MTR has worked greatly among Malagasy people?

To answer this question we use a comparative method coupled with the mechanism of inculturation introduced by Hodgson, as we said earlier. This section presents the result of our research. We will have three distinctive parts. The first part is similarities of the two religions. The second part is their dissimilarities and the last part is a special notion about Pentecostal church.

Conciliation between MTR and Christianity

MTR and Christianity have several similarities. Many aspects of MTR can be reflected in Christianity. This may explain why Malagasy people did not repulse Christianity when it comes to the island through missionaries work.

MTR and Christianity have similarity when it comes to the conception of God. God is the creator of everything, including man. According to the bible God says: ““Let us create human with the same appearance as us”. God creates one male and one female; put them in the Eden heaven. They enjoy everything that God created for them, they can eat all fruits they want but one located at the center of Heaven which is called “the forbidden fruit”. Regardless the rule of God, the couple ate the forbidden fruit, as consequence, God expelled them from heaven, and then, they become mortal. That is, from the bible, human become mortal.

Malagasy belief also has its version how human become mortal. In the beginning, ‘*Andriamanitra*’ (God) creates male and female humans. He gives them two choices. One is, they are immortals and can enjoy forever all things on earth. But the price to pay is, they cannot have children. They will stay forever alone in the earth. The second choice is, they can have children but become mortals. Having the idea of being alone forever, and especially, not having the feeling that all work they would have done will not be left as inheritance to the next generation, the couple choose the second option, rather to be mortal than not having descendants. So God granted their wish, so since that time, human will have descendants but in the same process, become mortals.

In these two religions, we can say, mankind become mortals after God gave them a choice. For

Christianity, it comes more as a punishment after eating the forbidden fruit, while for Malagasy traditional belief, it comes from a direct choice not to be alone in the earth. Nonetheless, all comes from a decision and action made by mankind, not from an absolute decision from God. The Christian God and the MTR God has same character, they leave choice to human. Nowadays, many natives believe the Christian God and the MTR God as same higher entity.

Both Christianity and MTR conceive God as powerful and even scary sometimes. God is good to people who show him humbleness but God can also be merciless to ones who is too bold before him. He can recognize the best in people, and can reward them. Or, he can punish people when they deserve it. All followers of MTR, or Christianity, or both will not dare to defy God or show him disrespect.

Also, God does not like whatever is bad. Only he is good. This principle of goodness from God is shared by Christianity and MTR. God protects people against misfortune and malice that witches and grey cats can bring to them. In fact, in Malagasy Traditional belief, grey cat is the fetish animal for witches, their presence is nuisance to normal people. This image of protecting God is the main foundation of Christianity. When Christians pray, they always say “God, protect me from evil”. God is good and do not like evil. As all people are his son, he will protect them from evil, God is their shelter.

God is the master of destiny. This conception is both shared by Christianity and MTR. God command life and death. He can maintain life, or take it back. Diviners and witch doctors try their best to save someone’s life when they are asked to, but in the end, only God has the last word if the person is

inclined to live or to die. That is why, console the family of the dead, people often say: “he went back to God”. This is one of the reasons why ancestors are sacred to Malagasy people; they are next to God in the afterlife. As for Christians, they believe everyone’s fate is on God’s hand and he is the only one who decides on living.

Another common point between the two religions is the belief on evil spirit in the world. In fact, fight against Satan, prince of darkness and people’s torment is one of the main core of Christianity. Believing in God is the only way to fight against evil spirits. MTR also believe in evil spirits, but they are not from Satan, they are invoked by witches to torment people.

Profita said he encounter a illness that terrify locals during his time as missionary in ‘Imerina-Imady’. This illness is called ‘Menabe’ (Big Red). Natives believe that this illness is caused by a spirit of a dead witch which takes over a body of a living one. It is comparable with demon possession in Christianity. An exorcism conducted by a specialized diviner, because not all diviners can do it, can heal this illness. But Profita said in his report that this illness becomes rare with time goes on. When asking natives what is the main reason of this, most of them think that Christianity have defeated this illness. This principal of fighting evil spirit facilitates the adoption of Christianity by Natives.

In 2016, Madagascar has been shaking by a numerous report of ‘Ambalavelona’ (when a spirit takes possession of one living body). Most of victims are girls between ages of 12 to 16. The ministry of education calls help from the FFKM (The Malagasy Council of Churches) to conduct an exorcism so these bad spirits will leave the girls

‘body. In fact, the Ministry of Education stated the existing positive correlation between non-baptized infants with contracting the ‘Amabalvelona’ illness. Notice is to say, politics and religion in Madagascar are sometimes intertwined.

When we talk about evil spirit, we should talk also about its opposite which is Good spirits or Saint Spirit, by Christians. Believing in Saint Spirit is one of the main characters of Christianity. Among numerous function to people’s life, this Saint spirit is conceived as an inner vital energy inside people and serves as a connector to the Creator. MTR has also its equivalent in that matter, which is called ‘Ambiroa’. It is the spirit which everyone has with him. When we go out of the house in the morning, we can see two shadows, one is the shadow of our own body, and the other shadow is of the ‘Ambiroa’. This spirit is sent by God to give vitality to people. Without this ‘Ambiroa’ (vital spirit), people become weaker and might lose his life. In fact, in some circumstances, this spirit might leave someone’s body and never come back. Without it, that person will die. Only the help of a diviner, through a specific religious ceremony, can bring back this spirit to the person’s body. Nonetheless, nowadays, many natives do not know the existence of this “Ambiroa” as it was replaced by Saint Spirit in people’s conception.

As for the ‘Ambiroa’, many natives do not know the meaning of ‘Kepikepik’Andriamanitra’. But Lars Vig (1960), during his ethnographic field work says that natives believe in these spirits. “Kepikepik’Andriamanitra” is spirits which reside next to God; Malagasy people call them as well “Irak’Andriamintra” which literally means “God’s

Messengers”. Natives believe they are the guardian of destiny. There are 36 of these guardians of destiny; 35 of them are surrounding the earth; one is located near the sun and act as leader. Each one of the 36 guardians carries a spear on their hand and they aim to protect the earth.

This conception of “God’s messengers” in MTR is quite similar to the concept of angels in Christianity. Christians believe angels are God’s army and they reside next to God. As an army, it has army leaders which are the “Arch-angels”. This latter is comparable to the ‘*Kepikepik’Andriamanitra*’ located near the sun. Angels are also sent by God to protect believers.

In their daily life, Malagasy people strongly believe in Destiny or called ‘*Vintana*’. ‘*Vintana*’ is a power which has a strong influence on many things. This power might be good or bad. It can be benefit to someone, or it might be the cause of his doom. It comes from God (*Andriamanitra*), it is absolute and any opposition to it is impossible and even unthinkable.

Christians also believe in Destiny. They believe destiny is from God and only God have hold on it. When Christians are going through difficult times, they may believe it as a test of faith from God; if this test will be enough to turn people’s back on God. When they have good things happening in their life, they say it is from God and it was their destiny to have it. The similarity between MTR and Christianity in here is the belief of God as master of people’s destiny, and also the power of that destiny over people’s life.

Another similarity is, at some degree, Priest and

diviners are alike. In fact, among Malagasy people, diviners are very well listened. They are believed to be empowered by nature and by God to help people in their life. If one person has a bad ‘*Vintana*’, which means his ‘*Vintana*’ is harmful to others or to him, or brings him all kind of misfortune, diviners are the ones who can help him to change that situation through rites and sacrifice. He will pray to God (*Andriamanitra*) and ancestors (*Ny Razana*) who are the only ones that have the authority to change the ‘*Vintana*’ or Destiny. Thus, diviners are individuals with specific knowledge about divinities and serve as connector between people and higher entities. His similarity with a Christian priest lies in this point. Priest is believed to be a connector between believers and God. They have more knowledge about God and can give advice to people who need religious guidance. Advises from priest are highly valued by Christians as they are considered to be “A man of God”. For some Christians, seeking advice from priest and diviners at the same time is not really an issue. One of my respondent just finished building a house, he seeks the advice of a diviner to choose a suitable date to inaugurate his new house. During the inauguration day, he asks a priest to bless his house. This action of asking advice from a diviner and blessing from a priest should be in contradiction according to Christianity principle, but my respondent was comfortable with it as he said, he is a “Malagasy Christian”. This expression means even if he is a Christian, but he can’t ignore Malagasy tradition.

All of these similarities between Christianity and MTR facilitated the inculturation of Christianity by natives. In fact it was easy for them to adopt Christianity because of many points each did not enter in direct conflict with their Traditional belief.

The concept of 'Kepikepik' Andriamanitra' and 'Ambiroa' might be unknown to nowadays natives, but the ones who had direct contact with the first missionaries found out that these two conceptions have its reflection in the "New coming religion" which is Christianity.

Additionally, there are several reasons why Christianity and MTR did not enter in conflict from the beginning. First of all, unlike Christianity, MTR was not created by charismatic leaders. In fact, all greatest religions in the world have known prophets or simply leaders who could convince followers through time (Monaghan, 2000). Christianity rallies his follower after Christ, Buddhism follow principals dictated by Buddha or Islam was founded by Muhammad. For MTR, nobody really knows how it came to be a religion. Secondly, unlike Christianity who has the bible to lean on, MTR does not have writing to record the old religion practices and stories. The only way that MTR survived was through "ears heritage" (*lovan-tsofina*), which means the next generations know traditional religion through tales, legends and performed practices done within their family and community. That is why, through the island, the way to worship God is slightly different depending the region but the conception of God is all the same. Thirdly, if Christianity is a worldwide religion, which means, it has an international characteristics, MTR is more an indigenous religion, it is performed only by smaller group in a specific area (Harvey, 2000). Christianity aims to be a universal religion, believing their laws and cosmology has to be followed by everyone. Even before colonization, missionaries already took the mission to evangelize African continent. They want to export Christianity and share the "Good words" with all people outside Europe. On the other

hand, MTR is rather a community and family belief. All religious practices are done within a defined or localized group. So conflict between MTR and Christianity is unlikely in matter of expansion because their nature and aims are different. If Christianity wants to impose its conviction to others, MTR wants to continue its tradition within family and community only. MTR tends to be Trans generational but we don't have a strong sense of fierce protectionism with it. It didn't see take Christianity as a threat.

And the last reason is the Malagasy taboo. Madagascar has a lot of taboos. Jorgen Ruud, in his book: "Taboo" (1960), listed all major taboo in Madagascar such as: saying out loud that someone is dead, cutting the nails of a sick person, all uncircumcised persons can't be buried in the familial tomb and so on. However, Priota stated that most of Malagasy taboo has no religious origin; instead they come from reality that their ancestors have endured or took advantage. Profita gives vivid examples to illustrate this assumption. In fact, from his field work in Imerina-Imady, Profita discovered that it was taboo to one family to raise a "Red-White Ox" because their ancestor was killed because of it. For another lineage, it is taboo to destroy aloe because one of their ancestors has been saved by hiding under it when he was chased to death by an enemy. As such, Transgression of a taboo is not a sin before God, but as a fault before ancestors. And remission of the transgressed taboo will not be done toward God but toward a qualified representative of ancestors.

That is to say, Malagasy taboo is not in the realm of religion, it is more a community or familial commitment, thus the arrival and the adoption of Christianity was not a real issue.

Main differences between the MTR and Christianity

We have seen above that Christianity and MTR share several points which facilitate the adoption and the inculturation of Christianity among natives. But stating that Christianity did not encounter rejection from natives is a false statement because there are some points completely different. Nonetheless with dissimilarities, the process of inculturation might still work.

The first dissimilarities between the two religions is the worship of ancestors. For MTR, ancestors have a very important place in people's life. When diviners pray, they always mention God alongside Ancestors. As we said earlier, only God and Ancestors may change people's destiny. Ancestors can give blessing to their descendants, or can curse them if some acts of disrespect have been done. On contrary, the principle on Christianity does not allow to believe in these forces. For Christians, there is only one powerful God and he is the only master of people's destiny. He does not share it with no one else. Plus, the principle of Christianity stipulates that the world of the living and the world of the dead are separated, and dead hold no power on living ones. Nonetheless, by the process of inculturation, native Christians still believe on power of ancestors as they are near God and are listen by God. Natives believe that ancestors will take their prayers to God. This particular belief is seen mostly among catholic believers. It is easier for them to accept this idea of ancestors' closure with God as all catholic around the world believe in normal people, who through remarkable deeds, become Saints and are close to God. In here, two opposite principles can be combined through a

process of inculturation.

When we evoke the worship of ancestors, we cannot avoid talking about 'Famadihana' (turning of the corpse). This is one of the most famous traditions in Madagascar. It consists on taking the corpse out of the tomb, changing the wrap of it, wrap it with a new "Red fabric" (*Lambamena*: particular fabric to wrap corpse in Madagascar) and put it back to the tomb. Normally, the first turning of the corpse is done five years after the death of the person. After this, the interval for doing it will be much longer.

During that day of festivity, cattle will be sacrificed. Family will gathered, and they invite the all village and others to join them in this ceremonial day. It is an honor for them to hold a very big ceremony, but also it is an honor to ancestors who watch them from above. They will hire musicians who will none stop incensing ancestors.

For different reasons, people spend a lot of fortune to do this ceremony. Some people say they have been compelled by ancestors to do it. Ancestors are getting cold, so show up in their dream and compelled them to cover with new red fabric. After that call, if these people do not follow what ancestors told them to do, misfortunes will came upon them.

Misfortune can also be a source of motivation for people to do the turning of the corpse. Natives believe that misfortune might be a punishment given by ancestors with any fault they committed to them. To ask forgiveness to ancestors, that person will conduct the turning of the corpse, so he will be close with his ancestors again and these latter will protect him and bring him fortune.

But good fortune which happened recently can also push people to conduct turning of the corpse.

Natives believe that good fortune is due to the protection from ancestors. Thus, to thank them, people will honor them with the turning corps, so this protection from ancestors will last long time. Malagasy people often say, “Where our wealth comes from if it is not given by ancestors?” this way of saying highlights the strong belief from natives of the power that ancestors hold on life of its descendants.

This conception of turning of the corpse and ancestors is a breaking point with Christian belief. In fact, in the principal of Christianity, protection, wealth and all good things are only from God. He should be the only one who is praised and feared.

Even with this clear separation in principle between Christianity and worship of ancestors, native Christians still perform this turning of the corpse. Asking about it, one of my respondents said: “God is God, and we obey him, but we cannot ignore our ancestors who will be angry at us if we disrespect them.” In this answer given to us, we can say that for that person, believing Christianity and MTR are two different things but can be reconciled when you respect them. They two can coexist.

The second demarcation between MTR and Christianity is the natives’ belief on ‘*Vazimba*’. ‘*Vazimba*’ are habitants of the island before the first immigrants from Indonesia and Malaysia comes and defeats them. They are believed to be short, less than 1m3 and have long hair. Most of the ‘*Vazimba*’ people have been wiped out but their spirits are honored by the descendant of the victorious side. Some witch-doctors go to the ‘*Vazimba*’ tomb to meditate, some of them say they go in interaction with the ‘*Vazimba*’ spirit and gain wisdom. Nobody in the island dare to disrespect these ‘*Vazimba*’

tombs. Natives strongly believe that ‘*Vazimba*’ spirits are still in the island. They can bring wealth and wisdom to people or, on the contrary, they can bring great misfortune to people who showed them disrespect. Believe in ‘*Vazimba*’ spirit is in contradiction with Christian belief. Nonetheless, some of my Christian respondents said that they believe in ‘*Vazimba*’ spirits but do not worship them as they follow the path of Christianity. However, they would not do anything to disrespect or bother these spirits (e.g. disrespecting their tombs or speaking badly about them)

The third difference between the two religions is the belief in after life. For Christians, death is the beginning of a new life. All people who follow the Christ will go to God, while people who did not will go to hell. For MTR there is no heaven or hell. However, people believe in the immortality of the soul. After death, their soul will not go to heaven or hell; it stays on earth on sacred mountains. There are several sacred mountains where souls will live after life, the most famous is undeniably the ‘*Ambondrombe*’, located in Vakinakaratra region. With its menacing and ghostly appearance, people believe that *Ambodrombe* is the “house of souls” after death. Add to that, the sound of the wind out from the mountain makes the natives think that it is the sound and music of the dead ones. Many natives, especially in that region, believe their ancestors reside at *Ambondrombe*. Nowadays, only few people still believe on this “House of souls”. People remember it as tales and legends. My respondents say they believe in Heaven and Hell after death, as they are Christians.

From the comparison of Christianity and MTR, we

can conclude that there are more similarities than dissimilarities among them. That is why the natives who were in contact with first missionaries could accept to convert to Christianity but they did not leave their tradition, in fact they adapted Christianity to their own society and culture. On the other hand, missionaries like Priota understood that in order to succeed on evangelize natives, they have to accept concession and let a slight change with the European Christianity to produce, as Blanco (2009) called “folk Christianity” or we can call it “Malagasy Christianity”. As our society is a legacy from our past, nowadays generation still practice this local Christianity. However, the last part of our findings will show that there is a form of Christianity which not allow comprise and stand firm in the fact that no conciliation is possible between Christianity and MTR.

PENTECOSTAL CHURCH

Compare to “Traditional Christianity” (Catholic and Protestant churches), Pentecostal churches are quite late on their arrival in the island. In fact, if Catholic and Protestant missionaries have been present in the island even before the French colonization in 1896, Pentecostal missionaries started their mission during 90’s. Their uniqueness is their conception of more radicalized Christianity, people call them “Religion of the Bible” as they value above all the words in the bible. To conceptualize this Pentecostal church, Birgit Meyer (2004), uses the term of PCC (Pentecostal Charismatic Churches) as they stress the importance of biblical doctrines, provide prophetic words, dreams and visions to their followers. Believers of these churches call each other brothers and sisters. The use of this world gives a sense of closure between fellowship members (Meyer, 1999). These churches are also

characterized by speaking in tongues, prayer healing, and deliverance from evil spirits. They are mainly guided by very charismatic leaders who use media to spread their words. People are more and more attracted to those prophetic churches. My field work among them revealed a huge gap with the interviewed Christians in Saint-Luc Church. Asking a question about performing the turning of the corpse, all of my respondents from Jehovah’s Witness church say that it is against their belief as the bible stated “the worlds of living and dead are apart”. They added that they will never do it because it is forbidden by their religion.

Asking about seeking advice from diviners, they say in their life, it cannot be; they say it is strictly forbidden to “real” Christians to go to there. We notice the term “Real” in here because these believers accuse the Traditional Christianity to deviate from the “Lead of the Bible” as we said earlier that Christians accepted both MTR and Christianity practices. For Pentecostal believers, the lead of the Bible is the only way to achieve Christianity, which is why they identify themselves as “Real Christians”. Pentecostal churches reject simply to apply any form of MTR in their religious practice of Christianity.

One of my respondents says that he is very grateful to the Jehovah’s Witness church as it saves him from damnation. He continues on saying that Catholic Church, where he belongs before his converting to Jehovah’s Witness, was deviant from the “Word of the Lord” and now he is reborn. This latter word “Reborn” is striking in the sense that it marks the rupture from the past. According to some believers in Pentecostal Church, Catholic and Protestant churches belong to the past, Pentecostal church is the new Christianity, it is a new fashion in Christianity (Maxwell, 2006)

Conclusion and discussion

Throughout this paper, we have seen how Christianity and MTR have been combined by Malagasy Christians. In order to gain natives favor, Christianity, brought by first missionaries, has to make concession and became a “Folk Christianity” or, in our case, “Malagasy Christianity”. This is the process of inculturation. Natives accept to be Christian without leaving completely the MTR. This process of inculturation was facilitate by the fact that MTR and Christianity share a numerous similarities such as global conception of God, his might, the concept of angels and holy spirit. Additionally, natives believe that Christianity is a weapon to fight against evil spirit. Nonetheless, even if with all of these similarities, Pentecostal churches challenge this inculturation and proclaim its aberration to MTR. It is inconceivable to their followers to perform MTR’s rituals (e.g. turning of the corpse). They opt for a radical view of Christianity. They claim to be the “True Christianity” as the only way to the “Lord” is through his words: “The Gospel”. They make a clear separation with the “Traditional Christianity” and even sometimes accuse them as “False Christianity”. Thus, Pentecostal churches take their demarcation, not only with MTR, but also with “Traditional Christianity”. But as a new form of Christianity, Pentecostal churches face reluctance from locals. It is undeniable that they attracted more followers these past decades, but the majority of Christians still follow the Traditional Christianity. Followers of these latter accuse Pentecostals to be blinded by Gospel and do not respect the value and tradition of Christianity. This research has focused on comparing MTR with Christianity. Comparing Traditional and New Christianity would be

fascinating as well and will allow us to improve knowledge about religious studies.

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