

Chapter 7

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON ANCESTOR WORSHIP

7.1 INTRODUCTION

For the purpose of this study, the emphasis was on the religious nature and functions of ancestor worship. The underlying religious phenomena of animism, shamanism and totemism also received attention. While considering the phenomenon of ancestor worship in Africa, Korea and Japan we focused on two dimensions, namely the social function and the religious significance of ancestor worship, as well as the accompanying rituals in each of these contexts.

This chapter is devoted to a theological reflection on these elements. It will be done against the backdrop of the relationship between ancestor worship and Christianity, focused by the ministerial and missiological concerns motivating this study in the first place. It will be addressed in the last section of this chapter.

Consequently, the following questions need to be addressed:

- Does ancestor worship constitute a form of idolatry?
- Is it at all possible to integrate ancestor worship and Christianity?
- What are the differences in cosmology between traditional religions and Christianity?
- How do contextualised theologies deal with these issues and what hermeneutical problems do emerge?
- How have the Catholic and Protestant churches addressed the matter of veneration of the ancestors and/or saints?
- What are the implications of inculturation as a missiological principle?
- What is the appropriate model for missionaries and churches to follow when faced with ancestor beliefs and rituals?

These questions are directly related to the hermeneutical problems in African and Japanese indigenous churches which have been discussed at length in Chapters 3 and 5 respectively. Consequently, this matter will not be explored here again. However, the particular religious elements specific to ancestor worship which threatens the essential character of Christianity and Christian worship needs to be discussed. This is a very relevant issue because not only African and Japanese indigenous churches but also Korean Churches have been influenced by the cosmology espoused by traditional and folk religions (Chae 2002, Mullins 2004, Bediako 1995).

7.2 ANCESTOR WORSHIP: A CRITICAL EVALUATION²⁸

At the heart of the controversy over the practices of ancestor worship is the theological questions around the notion of idolatry and whether or not ancestor worship is in fact a form of idolatry (if viewed from Christian perspective). The notion that ancestor worship is a form of idolatry has been the main objection of Christians against the practices of ancestor worship over centuries.

However, Fasholé-Luke (1974:211) suggests that “the worship offered to God and that offered to the ancestors can exist side by side without contradiction or idolatry,” meaning that ancestor worship does not constitute idolatry and therefore is not in conflict with worshipping God.

However, in order to determine whether or not ancestor worship is a form of idolatry, one has to examine what the Bible says about idolatry and whether a Biblical definition of idolatry can be reconstructed. Therefore, one needs to examine the meaning of the first commandment. Is ancestor worship a form of idolatry and therefore incompatible with Christianity or is it merely a form of veneration or a social-ethical expression of filial piety?

7.2.1 The first two commandments: A clear prohibition of idolatry

According to Rosner (1999:21-30) the theological foundation for the judgment and outright rejection of idolatry is the fact that God is a jealous God. The belief that any form of idolatry rouses God’s jealousy is found consistently in the Old Testament. This notion is continued in the Second Commandment (cf. Exodus 20:5; Deuteronomy 5:8-10) and Exodus 34:14 which clearly states: “... for you shall worship no other god, because the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.” Furthermore it gives an explanation of the adjective “jealous”, and it explains the divine name, “Jealous”.

However, the admonition in Exodus 20:3: “... you should not have any gods before me,” does not mean that it denies the existence of gods other than the true God. Instead it appears to indicate that if these other gods did exist, none of them should be given the worship which is owing to the true God. This implies a prohibition on idolatry because God is said to be jealous when worship which is owing to Him is given to idols

²⁸ In his description of ancestor worship in the Old Testament, Chiu (1991:21-34) remarks that the Israelites did not follow the practises of ancestor worship in spite of the cults practised by their pagan neighbours. Furthermore, Chiu states that totemism was not found among the people of ancient Israel. It is important to note that other scholars such as Hattori (1991:36), Rowley (1967:111-143), Thompson (1963:92) and de Vaux (1961:448) acknowledge that the pagan nations neighbouring ancient Israel may have influenced them to follow some heathen practises. The important thing to bear in mind though, is that the First Commandment “was also directed against the less important private cults, in particular against any manner of worship of the dead.” A person who turned to mediums and to spiritists (Lev 19:31; 20:6-7; Deut 18:11), and the mourners who shaved their hair and beards partly and made cuts on their bodies (Lev 19:27-28; 21:5; Deut 14:1), were all condemned because these practices were considered to be pagan. Yamaguchi (1991:43-54) and Lee (1991:55-59) have also discussed the problem of ancestor worship from a New Testament perspective. Yamaguchi (1991:43) argues that the New Testament contains a clear condemnation of ancestor rituals, such as the mortuary rites, the mortuary tablets, the anniversary rites for the dead. Furthermore, Lee (1991:55) mentions that the ancient Romans and Greeks deified the images of men and performed acts of worship before them which Paul described as idolatry and condemned out of hand (Acts 14:8-20; 17:22-31).

or false gods. This is why it is not possible to define idolatry without reference to our attitude toward the image that represents the divine. Worship and idolatry are thus inseparable as Lee (1991:83) points out. Consequently, one has to take a closer look at how to define idolatry.

7.2.2 Towards a narrow definition of idolatry

When attempting to define Idolatry, one must bear in mind that it is essentially a term determined by perspective. In other words, in the Christian paradigm, idolatry denotes a cult or form of worship which is not part of the main stream or true religion. In Christian terms, idolatry then means a form of worship, adoration or veneration of images or material objects as symbolic manifestations of the deities or “gods”. Thus, the term can be extended to refer to the gods or deities represented by the idol or object concerned.

The first two commandments of the Decalogue prohibit quite clearly any form of idolatry including worshipping other gods and images (Exodus 20:1-2). Furthermore, Deuteronomy 17:2-7 stipulates that those who practise idolatry should face punishment by death.

7.2.2.1 Idolatry in the Old Testament

There are numerous accounts of idolatry in the Old Testament and it was more often than not associated with an object before which people practised acts of worship. In this regard, Comfort (1993:424) indicates that the accounts mentioned in the Old Testament which refer to idolatry generally refer to Israel’s pagan neighbours who followed a polytheistic religion based on physical images or representations of the deities they worshipped, specifically in Egypt, Mesopotamia and Canaan (cf. Genesis 31:19, 34; Numeri 33:52; Deuteronomy 29:17). The Old Testament accounts indicate that these nations believed that the idols or images of the deities were actual manifestations of the god they worshipped. By implication, they thus believed that the image possessed some power, presence and personality of the god (cf Isaiah 46:1-2).

Comfort (1993:424) further argues that Israel too was tempted to commit idolatry and turned away from God. There are accounts in the Bible which describe times when the Israelites created new idols of deities they had adopted and made sacrifices and performed acts of worship to them (cf. Deuteronomy 32:15–18; Jeremiah 44:15–19). The prophets who witnessed these acts of apostasy against God declared these idols impotent and objects of wood and stone which were to be viewed as insignificant (1 Chronicles 16:26, Isaiah 40:18–20). They frequently called upon the people to repent and return to God and warned of God’s imminent judgement if they did not (Isaiah 1:16–19, Isaiah 10:10–11; Jeremiah 9:15–16). The prophets like Isaiah and others ridiculed and scorned the vanity and emptiness of bowing down before images of wood and stone as recorded in Isaiah 2:8; 40:18-26; 41:1-2; 46:1-2 and 50:18-20.

Gehman (1999:73) points out bowing to idols or practising acts of idolatry constitute a form of spiritual adultery as Deuteronomy 31:16, Judges 2:17 and Hosea 1:2 points

out. The spiritual evils which the idols represent make them an abomination to the Lord (Deuteronomy 7:25) and a detested thing (Deuteronomy 29:17).

Futhermore Gehman (1989:231) looks at the use of related concepts and terms in the Old Testament and points out that there is some controversy in the translation and denotation of meaning. Most notable he argues that

- אֵין is understood to denote “nought, vanity, iniquity and wickedness.” This term only occurs in Isaiah 66:3 to refer to an “idol.” The intended meaning here appears to be that an idol is empty, nothing, vain, false and wicked.
- שִׁקְרָן on the other hand is understood to denote filth and impurity. According to Gehman (1989:231) it refers to the immoral rites associated with idolatry and hence to ceremonial uncleanness (Ezekiel 37:23; Nahum 3:6).
- גִּלְגֵּל as used in Ezekiel 6:4-6; 9; 13 means “droppings of dung”.
- אֵלִיל on the other hand, means a thing of nought, a good for nothing, a something that does not exist. This word is not only used for the images but for the pagan deities themselves as reflected in Psalm. 96:5; 97:7.

7.2.2.2 Idolatry in the New Testament

When one examines the accounts of idolatry in the New Testament one must bear in mind that the New Testament is founded on the revelation of God given in the Old Testament and the translation of the Septuagint translation into Greek. Gehman (1985: 232) points out that both the Old and New Testament are consistent in their condemnation of worship of false or heathen gods. Consequently, Paul states: “We know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and there is no God but one,” (1 Corinthians. 8:4) and therefore asserts that idols are only products of human sin and folly (Romans 1:23; Gal. 4:8).

Numerous scholars (Unger 1981, Gehman 1999, Comfort 1993) have pointed out that in the New Testament idolatry is understood in a broader application than mere bowing down before an idol. Unger (1981:512) points out that the New Testament’s notion of idolatry is also figurative and can be understood to include an undue obsession with any object less than God. Therefore, idolatry in the general sense would be paying of divine honours to any created thing or the ascription of divine power to natural agencies.

Gehman (1999:74) appears to follow the same reasoning because he points out that a person who becomes enslaved to the pursuit of riches may also find himself guilty of idolatry. Thus, Matthew 6:24 states that “no man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and Mammon.”

In this regard Comfort (1993:425) states that “covetousness” constitutes idolatry. In this regard, he refers to Ephesians 5:5 which makes it clear that idolaters are not only those individuals who go to pagan temples to worship false idols but also includes those who are greedy or covetous: “No fornicator or impure person or one who is greedy (that is, an idolater), has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God”

(NRSV). It stands to reason then that greedy, covetous persons, those who make their desires their object of devotion, are as guilty of idolatry as those who bow before an idol in a pagan temple. In this context, Comfort (1993:425) argues that *pleonexia* (“covetousness”) and *eidōlōlatría* (“idolatry”) are used synonymously (cf. also Col 3:5).

This is borne out by Gehman (1999:74) who argues that participation in heathen feasts were generally accompanied by immorality. Participation in such feasts constituted idolatry and the sin was compounded by the immorality associated with it and was therefore forbidden to Christians (1 Corinthians 10:14-22). Immorality and idolatry have been linked. Sexual immorality was generally one of the main attractions of idolatry in the past as reflected in Scriptures such as 1 Kings 14:23, Amos 2:7-8 and 1 Corinthians 10:7-8. As Gehman (1999:74) points out, it is hardly surprising that idolatry was frequently associated with admonitions against immorality in the New Testament (1 Corinthians 6:9; Galatians 5:20; Ephesians 5:5; 1 Peter 4:3; Revelation 21:8).

If one bears this description in mind, it is clear that the practices associated with ancestor cults cannot be excluded from idolatry. This means that any honours (owing to God) paid to an idea, ideology, entity, object or person other than God constitutes a form of idolatry. Therefore, paying homage to a human being or venerating a person (or the memory of such person) in a way which should be exclusive to God, makes such an individual guilty of idolatry. Furthermore, ascribing divine characteristics to a person (even a deceased one) constitutes also a form of idolatry. In essence then, individuals who venerate the ancestors in a worshipful manner practice worship and therefore idolatry. This raises another question: is there a difference between worship and veneration?

7.2.3 Worship or veneration?

One of the key issues in terms of ancestor veneration or worship centres around the practices in Africa and the controversy around whether or not the practices should be considered veneration or worship. Do Africans worship the ancestors or simply remember and honour them as some scholars (West 1975:185-187; Kuckertz 1981:10-11; Nxumalo 1981:73) suggest?

Some African scholars (Nyirongo 1997:37-40) have attempted to justify the use of ancestor rituals as a merely social or cultural phenomenon on the grounds that veneration cannot be considered idolatry. The reasons for this assertion are:

- that the persons performing the rituals to the ancestors deny that they worship the ancestors;
- secondly, they are venerating intermediaries and not gods;
- Africans never worshipped man-made objects; and lastly
- sacrifices to ancestors are a symbol of fellowship.

Hence Crafford (1996:16) argue that “it is incorrect to speak of worshipping of forefathers. They are not worshipped as gods, but are only honoured as members of the community, now only with higher status and power.” Crafford thus distinguishes between worship rendered only to God and veneration rendered to the ancestral spirits.

Gehman (1985:377) argues that the same applies to Roman Catholics. Catholics draw a clear distinction between the levels of honour given:

- *Cultus civilis* denotes “civil honour” which is given to earthly superiors, such as magistrates and kings.
- *Douleia* or veneration is given to the saints and angels.
- *Hyperdouleia* or highest veneration is offered to the Virgin Mary.
- *Latreia* or worship is paid to God alone.

By this hierarchy of terms Roman Catholics seek to justify their claim that they worship God alone in spite of the honour they render to various other beings.

Is it possible to distinguish between worship rendered to God and the honour rendered to the ancestors or are they two sides to the same coin? Can we agree with some of the African scholars' viewpoints? Thus, one needs to look closely at the terms used to denote worship in the Scriptures.

7.2.3.1 Exegesis of terms for worship

There are numerous Greek terms which denote worship in the New Testament. In broad terms, as Ryoo (1985:15) states, the fundamental meaning of the word worship implies an expression of respect and an attitude and acts signifying a recognition of the superhuman or supernatural character or status of the object of worship.

In this regard Turaki (1999:272) indicates that a study of the fundamental religious beliefs and practices of African Traditional Religion necessitates a close examination of the notion of worship. He identifies a number of Greek terms which are translated as worship, namely:

- προσκυνέω denotes “to make obeisance, do reverence to” and “it is used of an act of homage or reverence” to God (Matthew 4:10; John 4:21-24); to man (Matthew 18:26; to demons (Revelations 9:20); to idols (Acts 7:43).
- σέβομαι means “to revere, stressing the feeling of awe or devotion” and “it is used of worship to God” (Matthew 15:9; Acts 16:14; 18:7,13).
- λατρεύω means “to serve, to render religious service or homage” (Phillippians 3:3).
- εὐσεβέω means “to act piously towards” (Acts 17:23) (Vine 1970:235-236).

The Bible asserts that God alone is worthy of worship as stated in Psalm 29:2 but also records instances of individuals who worshipped other objects. In some accounts individuals were worshipped as in Daniel 2:46, false gods as reflected in 2 Kings 10:19, images and idols (Isaiah 2:8; Daniel 3:5), heavenly bodies (2 Kings 21:3), Satan (Revelation 13:4) and demons (Revelation 9:20). Thus, worship denotes the supreme honour or veneration given either in thought or deed to a person or thing. It stands to reason that the distinction which is drawn between the worship rendered to God and honour rendered to ancestors is nebulous at best.

In my view, whether or not Africans really worship their ancestors is difficult to prove or disprove because worship emanates from the innermost part of the being. What matters is not the outward ritual or external behaviour but the inward response of the heart towards God. The semantics of theological lexical distinctions may prove to be less

important when the question is considered whether ancestors are worshipped or venerated.

7.2.3.2 Critique of the ancestor veneration theory

At the core of the ancestor cult lies the dilemma of whether or not the ancestors are divinities or functioning as divinities. If the distinction between God and the ancestors is maintained one could argue that they are not functioning as divinities. The question arises to what extent God has been relegated to the background and has lost significance and to what extent he has been replaced by the ancestors who appear to play a much more significant role in their daily lives as Tempels (1959:43) suggests. Most traditional Africans acknowledge the existence of a Supreme Being or Creator but the nature of this Being is very nebulous and is perceived to be distant and uninvolved in their daily existences. The ancestors are foregrounded and to a very large extent fulfil god-like functions.

The same applies to the practices in Japan. The Sun Goddess who is considered to be the first ancestor was elevated from being an ancestor to a divine being in Japan. Thus, Lee (1991:86) argues that this would constitute a transgression of the first commandment.

If this is true, then this is a clear case of idolatry. The problem lies in the fact that different groups ascribe different degrees of importance to God and the ancestors respectively. This is where the crux of the matter lies. If honour which rightfully belongs to God is given to the ancestors, then this is a clear transgression of God's prohibition of idolatry. The question of the extent to which ancestor worship is compatible with Christianity is largely dependent on this.

Consequently, Pyun (1988:51) argues that ancestor worship constitutes idolatry and is therefore abominable before God for the following reasons:

- The idolised object or entity is something other than God and is therefore competing with God for the worshipper's devotion.
- Superstitious fear and dread of the wrath of the ancestors can become obsessive; and finally,
- It generally involves an object which has been allocated divine qualities or directly deified.

He also states that greed has been identified as one of the main incentives for idol worshippers. They worship it to meet their baser needs or secure some material conveniences.

Many who practice ancestor worship would however contest this argument. What is true is that a need for security and wellness do motivate ancestor worship. However, it also motivates religion as such, forcing the question why ancestor worship should not be considered worship or better still, idolatry.

Rituals in which the spirit of the dead ancestor is invoked cannot be regarded as mere veneration. In spite of the fact that those who participate in these rituals claim that

it is performed out of respect for the ancestors as in Africa, it has all the distinctive characteristics of ritual worship.

This is supported by Mbiti (1971:133) who argues that the ancestor rituals are not mere veneration but worship. According to him the living-dead are accorded immortality in two ways: individually, by how long a person is remembered by name and collectively, when no living person remembers them by name, but still cherish some memory of the group or era. It means ancestor worshippers do not need to have known the living dead in person. In such a case they do not differ much from symbolic images, or idols.

Furthermore, the psychological state of ancestor worshippers indicate that the rituals are not merely forms of veneration but idolatry. In this regard, Lee (1991:87) argues that the power and fear that the ancestors instil in their descendants makes the practices worship based on superstitious fear rather than veneration. Furthermore, he argues that this is not just a case of filial piety because the individuals who follow these practices attempt to communicate with something or someone who does not exist. Thus, the relationships with the ancestors in Korea, Japan and Africa are intrinsically idolatrous in nature.

7.3 PARALLEL DRAWN BETWEEN TRADITIONAL BELIEFS AND THE OLD TESTAMENT

We have already taken notice of some of the theological justifications used by indigenous churches in Africa and Japan for the integration and assimilation of ancestor worship. Many of these justifications rest on the premise that the rituals particular to ancestor worship are analogous to those described in the Old Testament. In this section, the appropriateness of such justification will be explored and considered.

7.3.1 The case for integration of ancestor worship and Christianity

The premise underlying the justification for integrating ancestor veneration into Christianity is summarised by Bediako (1995:69) who asserts that an African theology of ancestors does not indicate that African Christianity has no need of the Old Testament, but rather is an indication that the Old Testament validates this theology. Furthermore, Bediako argues that the Old Testament presents an account of God's dealings in the lives of His people whose faith was imperfect. The Old Testament offers a sample of faith experiences and journeys in the past with which African Christians can identify.

Turaki (1999:13) mentions that the African Christian experiences a seemingly irreconcilable juxtaposition in relating his traditional African Worldview to the Christian faith. This tension is one of the main driving forces which have led numerous scholars to develop a new theology by validating Africa's pre-Christian heritage.

Some African scholars (Turaki 1999:25; Bediako 1992:2; 1995:228) have argued that African traditional religions must be rehabilitated from Western ethnocentric caricature. The question arises whether or not it is possible to rehabilitate African traditional religion by way of Christian reinterpretation as Bediako suggests. Sawyerr (1963:268) cautions that the acceptability of such efforts must be determined by the Bible.

7.3.2 Sacrificing to the ancestors: is it Biblical?

Amanze (2003:50) claims that in most African societies where ancestor rituals are practised, the main function is to strengthen the bonds between the ancestors and their descendants. Olowola (1993:50), however, states that the main purpose of these sacrifices is to obtain favour with the ancestors and to appease the spirits and gain their protection.

Some scholars have asserted that the sacrificial rituals in ancestor worship are analogous to the sacrifices in the Old Testament. This begs the question, what was the significance of sacrifices in the Old Testament? Is there a comparison to be drawn between the ancestral sacrifices and those described in the Old Testament?

7.3.2.1 The significance of sacrifices in the Old Testament

Olowola (1993:55) points out that irrespective of what the Israelites may have thought of sacrifice, the prophets of the Old Testament consistently warned that Israel should not expect blessings because of their numerous sacrifices. Rather, they asserted that those who substituted sacrifice for genuine obedience to God, were odious to Him. Only when they lived lives devoted to God did their sacrifices become a manifestation of their obedience and could they expect God's blessing and abundance as described in Malachi 3:10. Rituals did not have any meaning in isolation, but formed part and parcel of the greater picture of devotion, worship and religion.

Phenomenological similarities between sacrifices in the Old Testament and those offered to ancestors in Africa may be interesting, but for the real meaning of such rituals one must interpret them within their wider cultic contexts.

Both Old Testament sacrifices and sacrifices in ancestor worship in Africa entail animals and food. Olowola (1993:56) points out that at earlier times some African tribes engaged in human sacrifice. It was also widely practised in the ancient world but of course the Israelites were forbidden to do so (Leviticus 18:21; 20:2-5; Deuteronomy 12:31; 18:10).

In terms of African traditional ritual, Olowola (1993:56) states that blood sacrifice has two distinct features which set it apart from sacrifices in the Old Testament. Firstly, the blood is understood to create a new bond between those who participate in the rite and secondly where deities or ancestors are worshipped the blood is believed to revitalise the one to whom the sacrifice is made. This is supported by Sawyerr (1967:77) who writes: "Since blood is a gift, which is a vehicle of the life offered to another, it not only revives the life of the recipients, but it also gives new life to the donors."

In the Old Testament sacrifices were never a means of revitalizing God or man. The Bible expressly forbids the Israelites to partake in blood (Leviticus 3:17). African priests and people do partake in blood and some actually drink the blood of the animal. If ancient Israelites acted similarly it is plausible that they have learnt the practice from surrounding nations, but the Psalmist makes it clear that this is an abomination and an unthinkable act in God's eyes: "Do I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?" (Psalm 50:13). To this rhetorical question the implicit answer is that such a thing is un-

thinkable. In the Old Testament the blood of the animal was poured out at the foot of the altar or sprinkled on the altar as a symbolic reference to the fact that the victim's life was given to Yahweh.

The most important distinction between African and Old Testament sacrifices is the one to whom the sacrifice is offered. The sacrifices described in the Old Testament were offered to Yahweh exclusively and strongly condemns practices where sacrifices are made to anyone else (Exodus 20:3-4). This is a most important matter of principle.

We conclude therefore that sacrificing to ancestors is essentially different from sacrificing in the Old Testament.

7.3.2.2 The significance of sacrifice in the New Testament

The notion of sacrifice is expounded and developed further in the New Testament to culminate in the ultimate sacrifice of Christ, the Son of God, for the sins of mankind. This one ultimate sacrifice invalidates any further sacrifices to the ancestors as Olowola (1993:57) points out.

The New Testament makes it clear that the sacrificial system of the Old Testament was a precursor to the complete and perfect sacrifice of Christ on the Cross for once and for all. The Old Testament sacrifices were a mere foreshadowing of this and were inadequate in themselves as Hebrews 10:1-4 points out. Consequently, even if African traditional sacrifices were found to be essentially similar to sacrifices in the Old Testament they would still be obsolete, when one considers Christ's sacrifice.

Amanze (2003:57; 1994:273) argues that many Africans who profess to be Christians still offer sacrifices to the ancestors. This is compounded by the fact that some African Independent Churches assert that the ancestors act as intermediaries with God. As a result the followers of these churches often seek the favour and blessing of the ancestors on a daily basis. In this regard Amanze (2003:57) cites the example of St Mark's Service Church where the ancestors are prayed to twice daily to seek their assistance in healing the sick and assisting in times of drought. The people appeal to the ancestors for their assistance by means of offerings and sacrifices. In many instances animals or a libation of local traditional beer and snuff are offered to the ancestors. As a result, Olowola (1993:57) argues that individuals who perform these rituals have a superficial grasp of Christianity and do not properly comprehend the enormity or significance of Christ's sacrifice for them.

Olowola (1993:59) argues that the sacrifice of Christ is uniquely significant. As a result of it He became the unique mediator of the new covenant. The notion of a covenant is not novel to Africans. Covenants were traditionally made between ethnic groups to guarantee that they would not wage war against each other. Such a covenant was in many cases ratified by the shedding of blood. Olowola (1993:59) describes for instance that the thumbs of leaders were cut and each party sucked the blood of the other. Acts such as these entrenched the use of blood to seal covenants.

The sacrificial death of Christ and spilling his blood made Him the Mediator of the new covenant which was essentially a new agreement between God and mankind

which includes African peoples. This is clear from Hebrews 9:15 -17 which states: “For this reason Christ is the Mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance – now that He has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant ... For a covenant is in force only when somebody has died” (Hebrews 9:15-17).

From the above it is clear that the New Covenant in Christ benefits all those who have accepted Christ as their merciful redeemer and intercessor with God. When this happens they are released from their sins and on the other hand receive the eternal inheritance which God promised. With this in mind, one has to ask why African Christians still believe it necessary to continue with traditional sacrifices for the ancestors. As a result of the covenant between Christ and mankind all Africans are released from this, as Olowola (1993:59) argues.

God sacrificed his only Son for the salvation of humanity. Nürnberger (2007:135) points out that Christ’s sacrifice represented reconciliation between man and God. He concurs that as a result of this sacrifice, humans do not need to bring sacrifices any longer (as in the Old Testament). God offered the blood and body of his only begotten Son so that mankind could be reconciled with Him.

Nürnberger (2007:135) asserts that sacrifices have become redundant and obsolete because just as Christ made himself available for sacrifice to humanity, so when we share in the life of Christ, we make our bodies available for God’s sacrifice to others as pointed out in Romans 12:1. Therefore, in Christ, Christians are involved in God’s sacrifice by serving others. It is interesting to point out that sacrifices and the priesthood were also abandoned in Judaism as a result of the destruction of the temple by the Roman Empire. Rabbinic theology followed the prophetic emphasis of keeping to the Mosaic law rather than performing ritual sacrifices. According to Nürnberger it is therefore quite ironic that African Independent Churches have sought to revive the notion of sacrifice and reinstated the priesthood. Clearly then, Protestants should not follow this example.

7.3.3 The uniqueness of Jesus Christ

Christ attained the position of unique Mediator with God by means of his death and resurrection. The Bible does not support the notion of African ancestors as intermediaries with God, much less as instruments of God for salvation of mankind.

The ancestors have been elevated to the position of mediators between God and human beings, mainly by African theologians (Muzorewa 1988; Bediako 1995) who have sought to find elements of continuity and synergy between the traditional African religion and Christianity. Afeke & Verster (2004:57) mention that in most cases ancestors are the recipients of prayers, sacrifices and offerings from their living descendants. The ancestor became an instrument of God to benefit their descendants.

The question which arises now is what are the differences between the ancestors who Africans believe are intermediaries with God and the risen Christ? Furthermore,

one has to include the Catholic conception of saints. To what extent is this doctrine supported by the Bible?

7.3.3.1 African and Biblical concepts of sin and salvation

There are significant differences between traditional African and Biblical conceptions of sin and salvation, in fact they express antithetical ideas. The African notion of sin is very anthropocentric as opposed to the Biblical notion of sin which is essentially theocentric. Similarly, the African notion of salvation is largely concerned with the here and now where the Biblical concern is aimed at eternal and eschatological salvation (with implications for the here and now).

7.3.3.1.1 Sin

Theron (1996:118) in his exposition of the African understanding of sin says that the African notion of sin is essentially communal. According to Shabangu (2004:187) sin is not considered to be a confidential or private matter, largely because the African's theory of existence is "*cognatus ergo sum*" – "I am related by blood, therefore I exist" (Asante 2001:361; Kysar 1986:70; Guthrie 1981:932). Consequently, in this paradigm which foregrounds the communal theory of existence, sin elicits disharmony and disintegration of society much like the medieval concept of the Great Chain of Being. Theron (1996:119) thus states: "Sin is chiefly an offence against one's neighbour. Disruption of the harmony of the status quo is the result of offended ancestral spirits or witchcraft. These evils can be removed, the balance and harmony restored, by proper sacrifices and traditional rites."

Theron (1996:118) points out that in Biblical terms, sin is essentially a transgression of God's will (John 8:46; James 1:15; 1 John 1:8) and thus constitutes a rebellion against Him. Such actions are by their nature sinful mainly because they are in opposition to the will of God or contrary to his laws. When man chooses to commit sin, he essentially negates God and thus breaches the human-divine relationship and ultimately defies God's sovereignty and honour. Sin is essentially disobedience engendered by wilfulness and misplaced pride.

This is not the case in African Traditional Religion where sin does not necessarily constitute a rebellion against God or a transgression of His law but rather a rejection of the accepted way of life or status quo which is believed to have been handed down by the ancestors, divinities and God. Essentially then, as Van Rheenen (1991:279 in Theron 1996:119) argues, the traditional life is perceived to be the ideal and the main concern for mankind is to preserve and maintain it, remain in harmony with it and to experience material prosperity and prestige as a result. Sin is thus considered to be a disruption of the cohesion of the ordered cosmos and the cause of disharmony.

Therefore, according to Theron (1996:119), when sin causes a disruption or disharmony, rituals are necessary to restore order and harmony. Van Rheenen argues that when one considers that the African notion of a community includes the departed, the living and those yet to be born, any infraction is not only against those who are cur-

rently alive, but also against the so-called living dead. Thus van Rheenen (1991:280) concludes that in this paradigm sin is generally morally relative and ambiguous.

7.3.3.1.2 Salvation

Shabangu's study (2004:186) refers to Asante's (2001:361) exposition on the African understanding of the concept of salvation. Asante (2001:361) argues that in the African paradigm, salvation is understood in a "this worldly sense" as opposed to the Christian understanding of salvation as essentially "other-wordly". In other words, for the African salvation is understood to mean getting answers for the daily problems of life and overcoming the agents of evil and the hard realities of daily existence. However, Asante (2001:361) points out that one should not assume that salvation in the African sense is reduced to the enjoyment of time, public esteem, prosperity and health and is thus devoid of moral conscience. He argues that Africans do maintain a belief that God, who is understood to be omnipotent, abhors evil and punishes individuals for their wicked acts.

Hence, Shabangu (2004:188) asserts that the African notion of salvation is essentially instrumental. In other words, it is conceived of as a catalyst which enables one to achieve successful adjustments in the face of daily economic, social, spiritual and psychological obstacles. Therefore if one attempts to achieve continuity between traditional Christian theology and traditional religion, theology must respond to African life and survival needs based on their unique worldview and cosmology. Thus, Shabangu maintains that theology for the African should not merely focus on intangibles and abstractions but should provide solutions for the immediate here and now and the daily practicalities which Africans face.

It is because of this immediacy that sin is reduced to anti-social acts in the African paradigm. Being saved is equated with being accepted into the community of the living and the community of the dead ancestors. Theron (1996:119) further points out that this acceptance includes a struggle for power or "vital force". Thus, Theron (1996:119) refers to Adeyemo (1979:93) who mentions that individuals who excel and prosper more than their peers are perceived to have been favoured by the ancestors. This favour is believed to be an indication of salvation and implicitly founded on the belief that a good life is dependent upon the ability to maintain a good relationship with the ancestors and the powers that be. Furthermore, Africans believe that God punishes the wicked and rewards the good individuals in the here and now.

This appears to be supported by van Rheenen (1991:290) who argues that salvation is perceived to be the resolution of cultural violations which have caused disharmony. Salvation thus re-establishes communal relationships and represents resolutions of social conflict. Adeyemo (1979:94) thus writes that "salvation... implies acceptance in the community of the living and the living-dead, deliverance from the power of evil spirits, and a possession of life force".

This differs from salvation in the Biblical sense. In the Bible salvation is directly related to deliverance from sin and the consequences of sin and guilt (cf. Romans 5:1; Hebrews 10:22), from the law and its curse (Galatians 3:13; Colossians 2:14) from death (1 Peter 1:3-5; 1 Corinthians 15:51-56) and judgment (Romans 5:9; Hebrews

9:28). The Bible defines salvation as founded in God's initiative and grace (Romans 3:21; 6:23; Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 2:8,9). Van Rheenen (1991:300). Salvation is God re-establishing his relationship with an alienated creation.

Therefore, Walters and Milne (1982:1060) state that salvation is essentially deliverance or release from sin and all its effects, unto a new life which is eternal. They point out that salvation does not necessarily equate material prosperity or worldly success (Acts 3:6; 2 Corinthians 6:10), nor does it promise physical health and well-being. They point out that although remarkable healings did and do take place as in Acts 3:9; 9:34; 20:9; 1 Corinthians 12:28) healing is not invariable. Therefore, it must not be assumed to be a right for the saved man as Scriptures explain in 1 Timothy 5:23; 2 Timothy 4:20; Philippians 2:25; 2 Corinthians 12:7-9. Walters and Milne (1982:1060) further argue that salvation does not necessarily include deliverance from physical tribulations and danger (cf 1 Corinthians 4:9-13; 2 Corinthians 11:23-28), nor even, perhaps, seemingly tragic events (Matthew 5:45). It does not mean being absolved from social injustice and ill-treatment (1 Corinthians. 7:20-24; 1 Peter. 2:18-25).

7.3.3.2 The dilemma of religious pluralism in African theology

Trying to marry elements of traditional African religiosity with the Christian paradigm give rise to a synthesis fraught with contradictions and problems. The fundamental theological issue is the claim that the Christian and Biblical notion of mediated salvation is also found in African traditional religions. Turaki (1999:29) wrote that God uses ancestors who act as intermediaries between God and mankind which is parallel to the Christian theology which states that Christ is the intermediary and intercessor for man with God. However, the dilemma which faces theologians is the corollary that if African traditional religions claim that God has instituted a valid and authentic means of salvation through the ancestors as intermediaries, then they have no need for the Christian and Biblical paradigm of salvation and mediatorship in Jesus Christ as the Messiah.

The traditional African conception of salvation has led some African theologians to conclude that the Christian paradigm of salvation has been manifest in traditional religion long before the beginning of the church. Therefore, as Adeyemo (1979:93-95) argues, the comparable equality between the traditional religions and Christianity makes the Christian notion of salvation to be another elective form of salvation which is equal to the African traditional understanding of salvation.

Turaki (1999:29) mentions that the fundamental theological issue in the concept of salvation in terms of African theology lies in the belief that all religions are equal. This premise implies pluralism and parity of all religions implying further that salvation is not exclusively bound to Jesus Christ. Hence, Turaki (1999:29) mentions that some African theologians and scholars postulate that salvation is not exclusively Christian and that it is entirely possible for individuals to be saved outside of the church and Jesus Christ. Therefore, the notion of African intermediaries is perfectly acceptable and legitimate.

Of course this is contradictory to the Biblical conceptions of faith, salvation and redemption. Fundamentally, in Christian terms, the fall and sin of mankind has altered

God's relationship to man and creation as a whole. Therefore, as Turaki (1999:30) argues, salvation and worship in Christian theology are firmly rooted in the creative and redemptive power and authority of God which has been made manifest in the creation and on the cross of Christ. Therefore, the centrality of Christ as the saviour and redeemer cannot be compromised.

7.3.3.3 African ancestors: Are they real mediators?

In his critique of Black and African theologies, Maluleke (1996:7) questions Bediako's interpretation of the so-called new African Theology. As Maluleke (1996:7) points out the way Bediako tries to solve the disjunction between African traditions and Christianity lies in establishing continuity between Christianity and traditional African culture. Thus Bediako attempted to identify Jesus as the supreme ancestor and considers African traditions to be a preparation for the Gospel.

However, Maluleke argues that this is essentially "a veiled refusal to confront the possibility of African traditional religions as independent systems that can be alternative to Christianity" (1996:7). Furthermore, he (1996:12) asserts that African theologians must attempt to redraft and problematise their relationship with the Bible as well as its place in African Christianity. One of the crucial issues which must be problematised and explored fully is the notion of the ancestors – who they are and what their roles are.

In this regard, Maluleke (1996:16) argues that there is the possibility that Jesus may not only become the Supreme Ancestor, but also join the ranks of other ancestors who are at the service of the Supreme Being in Africa. The question then arises whether they are to be construed as mediators with God and if so, does this make the role of Christ redundant?

The African notion of ancestors as intermediaries is diametrically opposed to the Christian theology which gives centrality to Christ as the mediator. Although the African view lacks distinction on this and related terms, Bae (2004:353) points out that there appears to be a dangerous confusion on the roles of the Son and the Holy Spirit in relation to that of the ancestors in African theology.

Bae (2004:353) cites Louis Berkhof (1941:473) who emphasised the role of the Holy Spirit as being the "efficient cause of regeneration." According to Berkhof, this regeneration involves a change in the spiritual condition of the individual. This change is effected solely by the work of the Holy Spirit, and is therefore beyond the scope of human beings (Ezekiel 11:19; John 1:13; Acts 16:14; Romans 9:16; Philippians 2:13). Therefore, Bae (2004:354) concludes that the dependence on the ancestors who are intrinsically unable to play this role as misplaced.

Turaki (1999:254) rejects the notion that ancestors are able to act as intermediaries. If the ancestors are to be considered familiar spirits who can act as intermediaries, they actually must be able to hear and answer prayers and petitions, which is in direct contrast to Biblical teaching. He argues that Christ is the only mediator who is entitled to receive such prayers and petitions. Therefore, if invocations, prayers or offerings are

directed at ancestors, those who perform these acts are committing idolatry because they accord the ancestors a position which rightfully belongs to Christ (Afeke & Verster 2004:56).

Turaki (1999:168) asks whether the functions accorded to the ancestors resonate with the Scriptures. According to him in the Old Testament the Israelite fathers (ancestors) (including the patriarchs) never were designated mediators neither did they perform this function in Israel. He does acknowledge that some of the patriarchs such as Enoch, Elijah and Moses did plead with God on behalf of the people (while living) but never assume the role of living-dead mediators (after their deaths). This was continued by the religious institution of the priesthood in the Old Testament.

Afeke & Verster (2004:57-58) concludes that at most the African ancestors acts as messengers of the living. The patriarchs were highly respected but not treated in the same way in which Africans treat the ancestors. He concludes that the patriarchs did not mediate with God for the people which implies that the suggested continuity between the patriarchs and African ancestors is not credible and therefore unfounded.

7.3.3.4 The differences between Jesus Christ and ancestors

Nürnbergger (2007:94-96) reflected at length on the theology of Paul and its relevance to the difference between the ancestors and the risen Christ.

When exploring the differences between ancestors and Christ he states that one needs to establish the formal similarity and dissimilarity between an ancestor and the risen Christ. He asserts that these fundamental differences are situated in the respective content of what they actually stand for. In other words, the actual differences do not lie in some ontologically conceived, objective existence or non-existence of the two entities, but in what they actually do to us.

Nürnbergger (2007:95) summarises the essential differences between the ancestors and the risen Christ as follows:

- Becoming an ancestor is a passage into the past, even though this past has power over the present. On the other hand, the resurrection of Christ is a passage into the future of God, even though this future can gain power over the present. Nürnbergger thus states that in Paul's terminology, the ancestor belongs to the genealogy of the first Adam, the genealogy of the "flesh", whereas Christ himself became the second Adam, the "new creation", the spiritual human being (Romans 5:12ff). Nürnbergger concludes that resurrection is an eschatological concept and that African traditions have no eschatology in the Biblical sense of the word.
- This explains why ancestors suck us back into the past, while Christ lures us into the future of God. The power of the ancestors lies in the power of memory. The power of Christ lies in the power of anticipation and hope.
- According to Nürnbergger, ancestors represent authority while Christ represents the freedom and responsibility of mature sons and daughters of God.

- Furthermore, the ancestors are understood to represent ethnic traditions as a legacy from the past whereas Christ represents God's vision of comprehensive and universal well-being.
- The redemptive power of Christ's sacrifice makes the kingdom of God accessible to humanity as a whole while the ancestors only concern themselves with the salvation and well-being of the clan and community.
- The power and authority of the ancestors is believed to be confirmed and reinforced by the clans' observance of appropriate rituals. This differs somewhat from the power of Christ's redemptive action which is manifest by believers through the proclamation of the Gospel by means of the Holy Spirit.

Bediako's study (1992:228) asserts that African believers have inherited the promises of the Old Testament by virtue of Christ and therefore asserts that the African Christian's ancestors are included in the line of Jewish ancestors through Christ and by implication exist in fellowship with the Old Testament ancestors or saints.

Turaki's (1999:25) criticism of Bediako's theory hinges on the fact that Abrahamic faith which is discussed in Romans 4 and Galatians 3, transcends biological birth because it is essentially covenantal and spiritual. Turaki (1999:25) thus asserts that the sainthood from the Old Testament which the New Testament saints inherited, was not founded in genealogy but was essentially based in faith, the same faith that Abraham had. Consequently, according to Turaki (1999:25) the implication is that Old Testament sainthood, as inherited by the New Testament saints, is spiritual. The link between the Old and New Testament is fundamentally covenantal and defined the relationship between God and Israel. He further argues that it was fundamentally prophetic and fulfilled by Christ according to Scripture as in Romans 1:1,15.

Afeke & Verster (2004:57) support Turaki's argument and point out that the cross of Christ did not substitute "Abrahamic faith". Abrahamic faith was in fact rooted eschatologically in the cross of Christ (Hebrews 11; Romans 4). Consequently, Afeke & Verster (2004:57) argue that this is the reason why God granted salvation to all those who had faith as Abraham had before the cross of Christ. Accordingly they assert that the theological issue here is not so much having either the Abrahamic faith or faith in Christ since both are linked prophetically and eschatologically and in terms of the Abrahamic covenant.

Irrespective of the continuity or discontinuity which scholars perceive between Christianity and African religious tradition, the crux of the matter lies with the notion of salvation.

Therefore Theron (1996:49) concludes that the role of the ancestors as supposed mediators with God is unfounded and contrary to the Bible. Any acknowledgement of a mediatory role for the ancestors constitutes an implicit declaration of redundancy of Christ as the only mediator.

7.3.3.5 The significance of Jesus' resurrection

A discussion on salvation in the Biblical sense cannot be complete without giving consideration to the significance of Christ's resurrection. Wanamaker (1997:293) assumes that Christ's death is similar to that of other ancestors and that Christ's death and after-life are similar to that of the ancestors. However, Afeke & Verster (2004:53) state that the resurrection and post-resurrection appearance of Jesus Christ do not fit into the African cosmology although an African would be comfortable with understanding the post-resurrection appearances as visional visitations of an ancestor. The crucial question which needs to be addressed is what the actual significance of Christ's death and resurrection is for Christians.

7.3.3.5.1 As the victory against the "Powers"

An important distinction between Christ and the ancestors lie in the fact that Christ emerged as victor over the powers of darkness and evil. In this regard, Bae (2004:351) cites Gates' (1979:199) solution to the question which considers the core of ancestor worship to be rooted in the "Powers" which were overthrown in the death and resurrection of Christ. Bae (2004:351) points out that these powers will see their ultimate destruction at the *parousia*, Christ's second coming. These powers have already been defeated in the resurrection of Christ and they are thus in his dominion. As a result of Christ's victory over these powers, Christians today are able to deny any hold these powers may have on their lives as explained in 2 Corinthians 2:14-17. As a result, the role of the ancestors becomes obsolete in the Christian paradigm of salvation.

Bae (2004:351) agrees with Lim (1984:229) who asserts that the animistic aspect of ancestor worship is challenged in the New Testament by Christ's resurrection and triumph over these powers (Col 2:15). Consequently, the victory of Christ is an ontological reality for "all who are indwelt by the Spirit of the mighty Christ" (Lim 1984:229).

Similarly, Berentsen (1985:178) attempts to relate a theological perspective on death closely to the Christological and eschatological ones. According to him the New Testament is clear in its assertion that Christ has defeated Death at his resurrection and that Death no longer holds sway over mankind. He asserts that because Christ took the sins and death of mankind upon himself, he abolished death and brought life and immortality to mankind through the Gospel as recorded in 2 Timothy 1:10. Berentsen thus states that it is directly as a result of Christ's resurrection that Paul may exclaim in 1 Corinthians 15:55 "Oh, death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?" and Peter in thankful adoration says: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." (1 Peter 1:3). Thus, believers in Christ have been liberated from the fear which haunts individuals who subscribe to ancestor worship.

7.3.3.5.2 As the model of mankind

Berentsen (1985:178) states that the death and resurrection of Christ means that death acquired a new meaning and eternal life became more than an idea. He argues that

Christ's atoning death and resurrection gave new meaning to the paradigm of sin and judgement. It became possible to understand death in eschatological terms. Death entered as the common enemy of mankind, but it has been conquered in Christ and will be ultimately destroyed in Christ's second coming. This is contrary to the eschatological paradigm of religions which adhere to ancestor worship. These religions have a cyclical notion of eschatology which is juxtaposed to the linear eschatological perspective of Christianity.

Berentsen (1985:183) points to the two elements which are of pivotal significance when one considers the resurrection and Christ's parousia from an eschatological perspective. Firstly, the resurrection is a resurrection of all men and not only those in Christ as recorded in Daniel 12,2; John 5, 28-29; Acts 24,15. Furthermore, it is understood to be a bodily resurrection of the total person, a resurrection in glory which Paul describes as "a spiritual body" for those who died in Christ (1 Corinthians 15:43-44). Thus, there is an upholding of man by God in and through death which encompasses both the righteous and the unrighteous and includes the complete person, body and soul (Acts 24:15).

In other words, ancestor worship testifies to the notion that ancestral spirits exist as immortal beings (although of limited "lifespan"). This is not compatible with Biblical understanding. The Bible understands life and death in terms of the relationship between God and man, because God is Lord over life and death (Psalm 139:8; Amos 9:2; Acts 2:24). Since the dead belongs to God, death did not constitute annihilation for the Israelite faithful (Chui 1991:27). Concomitantly, death represents an impenetrable barrier between the living and the dead (as discussed in Chapter 6).

When one considers this, it is evident that African scholars like Nyamithi, Akrong and Bujo who approach Christ as the great ancestor in an attempt to contextualise Christology in African theology face significant contradictions. When one contextualises theological formulations it is unacceptable to allow ancestors to usurp the intercessory role of Christ (1 Timothy 2:5) and negate Him as the fullness of all deity (Colossians 2:9). The intrinsic completeness of God in the Bible makes the roles assigned to the ancestors in African theology redundant. Thus, Christians should never venerate or worship the ancestors because doing so would place them in the position which is rightfully assigned to Christ and therefore constitutes idolatry. It is not a problem for Christians to show respect for those who have preceded them, but full allegiance belongs to God as the Sovereign of the universe.

Afeke & Verster (2004:58-59) assert that Christ is the unique Mediator and cannot be moulded to fit into the notion of ancestor worship. The descriptions of Christ in the Bible are not compatible with those of the ancestral beliefs. Consequently, Nyamithi's attempt (1984:36) to Christianise traditional elements of the ancestral beliefs is unacceptable.

7.4 CRITIQUE OF CONTEXTUALISED CHRISTOLOGIES

In the foregoing chapters we have looked at attempts of theologians in Africa and Japan to contextualise the Gospel with a view to those who encounter the Gospel in communities which are traditionally followers of the ancestral cult. The establishment of the Church in these countries has seen different approaches from scholars in terms of their attempts to develop a contextualised Christology. In this section we will assess the contributions of African theologians who have attempted to reinterpret Biblical and historical Christological dogma in terms which are essentially traditionally African and also relevant to the Africa of today. In this regard, Olsen (1997:249) mentions that it is only recently that academic theologians in Africa have attempted to show how the message of Jesus Christ has resonated within the vectors of the traditional African worldview.

With this in mind, this section will also explore the hermeneutical crisis which African theology faces as a result.

7.4.1 The hermeneutical crisis in African theology

Theologians who attempt to contextualise theology do so with the intent of making it relevant and meaningful in its application to a particular context. However, Kraft (2000:390) cautions that every “every kind of translation or contextual theological communication involves risk. There is no risk-free method of contextualisation”. Turaki (1999:19) mentions that that which goes beyond indigenisation or Africanisation is a matter of theological relevance. We will now take a close look at attempts to contextualise African theology and the hermeneutical crisis it faces.

7.4.1.1 *African theology as a religious heritage*

Bujo (1992:12) asserts that the main aim of African theology is that it attempts to find a way in which Jesus Christ can be an African among the Africans and therefore make Christianity more accessible to Africans. Desmond Tutu, who expressed himself at times in favour of Black theology, argues that African theologians have attempted to demonstrate that the African religious experience and heritage are real and legitimate. He argues that it should have formed the main vehicle for conveying the truths of the Gospel to Africa. He also asserts that many of the religious insights of traditional African religion are parallel to those of the Bible. According to Tutu, the African was more attuned to the realities of the Bible than the occidental ever was (1978:366).

Tutu’s views constitute a strong affirmation that the attempts in African theology to rehabilitate Africa’s rich cultural heritage and religious consciousness have been valid. Bediako (1996:57) however, argues that it remains important to appreciate why this effort has been made as a self-consciously Christian and theological one.

According to Hastings (1976:51) one of the main non-Biblical realities facing African theologians today is the non-Christian character of African religious tradition. As a result, African theology became “something of a dialogue between the African scholar and the perennial religions and spiritualities of Africa”. Olsen (1997:255) mentions that this was a cause of frustration for scholars like Hastings because the implication was

that “areas of traditional Christian doctrine which are not reflected in the African past disappear or are marginalised”.

7.4.1.2 Hermeneutical crisis of adaptionism

As soon as theologians attempt to reinterpret Biblical and theological dogma in terms of African traditional religion through the filter of their own prejudiced viewpoints, hermeneutical problems are inevitable. Most African theologians use structural similarities between African traditional beliefs and Biblical theology as a point of departure. The problem generally arises from the theological methodology they employ and their own prejudiced analysis.

Consequently, Olsen (1997:255) claims that the problems around Christology reveal an adaptionist approach especially in its uncritical or unconscious forms. He considers the interpretation of African primal religions as essential but warns that it gives rise to hermeneutical problems. His position is similar to that of p'Bitek (1971:88) who describes these scholars as “intellectual smugglers” who have introduced Greek metaphysical conceptions into African thought. As a result, p'Bitek states that the African divinities or deities as described by men of books are essentially mere creations of students of African religions as they are clothed in the attributes of the Christian God.

Olsen (1997:255) is of opinion that it is not strange that African theologians would attempt to find some areas of continuity between the two traditions. The problem is whether these similarities actually exist or whether they merely exist in the preconceptions of the Christian observer. The main challenge to exponents of adaptionism is not only whether or not they have interpreted the African tradition correctly but also whether they have remoulded it to comply with their Christian presuppositions.

Similarly, Dickson (1984:204) says that the question is whether adaptionism is initiated at the wrong end or not. Traditionally, in its classical form adaptionism first attempts to establish the foci of African religions and then attempts to relate them to Christian doctrine. The starting point should be not the Bible or Christian tradition, but African traditional religion assessed as a generic category. His hermeneutical problem therefore is that in spite of the fact that aspects of this culture are part of the present experience of the African Christian, the African experience is interpreted primarily according to Christian tradition and sources.

The problem then is that the adaptionist approach many African theologians display involves a convoluted or impure method as they do not realise that their understanding and experience of traditional religion has already been influenced to the core by Christianity.

7.4.2 Ancestral Christology: A critical evaluation

Chapter 3 explored the attempts of African theologians such as Nyamiti, Bujo and Ak-rong to interpret Biblical and historical Christological dogma in both traditional and contemporary African terms. Olsen (1997:249) says that theology is valid and relevant in terms of how it understands, interprets and translates faith at a given time, place and

human situation. Since Christian theology starts from God incarnate every attempt to arrive at a contextualised theology should focus on Christology. He further points out that African scholars such as Mugambi & Magesa (1989) and Schreier (1992), have applied themselves to this Christological task and have attempted to show how the message of Jesus Christ resonates within the categories of traditional African world-views.

Taylor (1963:16) mentions that African theologians have made a concerted effort to define the identity of Christ in African terms and in response to African realities. As a result, themes such as ancestor, chief, medicine man, guest, life, and master of initiation were adopted as new frames of reference to explain the reality of Christ.

Interestingly enough, Olsen (1997:251) remarks that in spite of this attempt to Africanise the identity of Christ and contextualise the Gospel for African realities on the premise that Africans would identify with the familiar elements more strongly, it has had little effect within the African church. There is little doubt that Christology was a topic for heated debate in theological circles, but none of the existing Christological models were able to effect a significant influence on the life of African churches.

7.4.2.1 Nyamiti and Bujo: a critical theological analysis

Numerous studies have been undertaken on Christologies in relation to ancestor beliefs in the African context. Lundström (1996:66-80) provides us with an authoritative survey of the contributions of African theologians in this regard. The attempts to contextualise Christology in African theology by scholars such as Nyamiti and Bujo will be examined next, particularly their contributions to Christology in terms of ancestorship.

7.4.2.1.1 Nyamiti's notion of Christ as our brother-ancestor

Nyamiti, adopted a creative approach to the African concept of the brother-ancestor as a model for Christology. Many elements in his theology can be used and adopted in an ecumenical context (For our earlier discussion of Nyamiti see 3.7.4.3, p 66).

As a Catholic theologian Nyamiti (1984:29) sticks to the Catholic doctrine that the eucharist should be seen as a sacrifice which re-enacts Christ's sacrifice on the Cross. However, his teaching about Christ's ancestorship to us through the saints presents problems even for the Catholic scholar. Lundström (1996:70) acknowledges that he tempers this teaching with an understanding of the saints as participators in Christ's ancestorship. Nevertheless the possibility of communication between the living and the dead remain problematic.

Lundström identifies a further problem. If the African ancestors are considered to be analogous to the Catholic saints, where do those Africans belong who never acknowledged Christ as their merciful redeemer. This answer is lacking in Nyamiti's theology.

Finally, Muzorewa (1988:255-264) points out that Nyamiti confuses the illustration or image with that which it is actually referring to. Muzorewa states that the model is useful for a Christological conceptualisation but rejects it as a form of Christology in itself. He argues that ancestrology should be considered a bridge or window which enables

one to get a glimpse of the nature and person of Christ. He does concede that many Africans are more than likely able to understand Christology better when it is presented with reference to the ancestral model.

7.4.2.1.2 Bujo's notion of Christ as proto-ancestor

Bujo's model is not as detailed as that of Nyamiti. He also emphasises different aspects of Christology (For our earlier discussion of Bujo see 3.7.4.2, p 65).

Bujo's notion of Christ being the proto-ancestor is confusing and problematic. He uses the prefix "proto" to denote the uniqueness of Christ's ancestorship. However, "proto" does not denote uniqueness but in rather conveys the sense of being the first of many such as Adam was the first among men. Lundström (1996:74) comments that this term is more than likely directed at European theologians rather than African laymen. A preferable term would more than likely have been "true ancestor" or "real ancestor".

Bujo's concept of life-force is more convincing and does capture something of the dynamic African thought.

7.4.2.1.3 Christologies of Nyamiti and Bujo: a theological evaluation

When one considers the Christologies of Nyamiti and Bujo in theological terms, it is clear that the notion of the ancestor is a living and dynamic model in African society imbued with rich symbolism and readily accessible to most Africans. Furthermore, as Lundström (1996:77) points out the notion of the ancestor can be applied in numerous ways to establish a multi-faceted picture of Christ. The concept provides useful parallels with the person and work of Christ such as death, entering into closeness with God, mediating between God and men and the provider of life and salvation and assuming responsibility for younger relatives.

However, ancestor Christologies have their own problems. Firstly, although they are useful for Christological conceptualization they should not become a kind of Christology in their own right. There is a real danger of conflating the picture with what it represents.

Similarly, ancestor Christologies run the risk of becoming a limitation in the African context. Ancestor beliefs are generally considered to be a conservative factor in society and may hinder social change and development. The consequence of this is that they may hinder individuals from understanding the true implications of Christ for their lives. Therefore, if the ancestor model is used, it is imperative to point out how Christ transcends and is superior to human ancestors.

Lundström (1996:78) asserts that there is no exact Biblical parallel to the ancestor model. Even the analogy between ancestors and the Catholic doctrine of saints is problematic. Therefore, Lundström cautions that when the ancestor model is used it must be used with caution and safeguards. He concludes that the ancestor model should be understood to constitute a picture rather than a model of Christology to explain the es-

sence of Christ. If used, the ancestor model could be complemented with other Biblical models such as Christ the priest, Christ the sacrifice, intercessor and protector.

Olsen (1997:252) concludes that until now scholars who focus on Christological research have been unable to reach consensus on a suitable African paradigm for Christ. African theologians often remark that Western theology is lacking when placed in the cultural, religious and socio-political context of Africa. As a result, Parrat (1995:197) asserts that African theologians have difficulty determining the theological categories they should use and the need they have to establish new and more relevant ones.

7.5 CRITIQUE OF ROMAN CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

When one considers the related notions of Communion of the Saints and the eucharist one must conclude that the theology underlying these notions hinges on three components, namely: hierarchical authority, the integrity and divinity of the individual consciousness and conscience, and transubstantiation.

Worrall (1999:352-361) asserts that Catholics believe that through the mystical presence of God's Spirit and the mystical incarnation of Christ transubstantiation can realise. Christ's mystical incarnation is extended beyond the sacraments, to include Christ's mystical incarnation in culture. The mission principles of inculturation espoused by Roman Catholicism give form to this notion. Furthermore, the eucharist as a manifestation of transubstantiation and its accompanying notion of communion appear to lend support to the notion of saints in heaven (and the possibility of living and deceased members to be included in a mystical union with Christ).

7.5.1 The communion of saints

We have discussed earlier the attempts of some African theologians to elevate ancestors to the position of mediators between God and mankind and their attempts to equate these ancestors to the Catholic notion of the saints. Similarly, some Japanese churches have attempted to provide a positive response to the concept of communal salvation. Communal salvation is understood to include the salvation of the dead and the living in Japanese churches as Mullins (1998b:55) explains.

According to Bray (1988:152) the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Communion of Saints is essentially an expression of the belief that the living and the dead were united in the body of the single Church. Therefore, Catholic Christians argue that it has a direct bearing on the church triumphant in heaven and attempt to use the doctrine to justify praying to the dead specifically to those saints who have been officially canonised.

However, as Scaer (1992:91) argues, for Protestants, the Communion of the Saints is considered to refer to the church itself while Catholics assign this role to the close association of heavenly saints with the church on earth. Evidently then, this necessitates a closer look at the notion of "communion of Saints".

At this point, it may be necessary to review the development of the saints in the Christian Church.

7.5.1.1 The development of the Roman Catholic doctrine of saints

The term “communion of the saints” does not originate from the Bible. Gehman (1999: 112) asserts that the term is derived from the Apostle’s creed which developed over a period of centuries. The phrase does not appear in the writings of the early Church Fathers and is not evident in the African Creed or other Creeds which were in existence before the 4th century AD, e.g. the Ante-Nicene Creeds. Reformers believed that the communion of the saints in the Apostle’s Creed was an expansion of the preceding phrase (“the holy catholic church”). They delimited the communion to the fellowship between the believers and Christ and fellowship between the Christians living on earth.

7.5.1.1.1 The saints in the early church

Dennis & Robert (1999:53) point out that the term “saint” (Latin: *sanctus/sancta*, Greek: *hagios/hagia*) originated in Catholic and Orthodox Christianity. They argue that the Christian veneration of saints may be rooted in the Greco-Roman idealization of heroes and the intense feelings for holy figures and the martyred dead in Judaism. Consequently, they argue that veneration has the sense of intimate friendship with invisible companions previously found in relationships with gods, demons, or angels. Furthermore, it also developed from the Christian cultic practice of communion with Christ who once existed as a human being but now lives eternally.

Gehman (1999:79) on the other hand indicates that the term “saint” initially denoted the martyrs as exemplars of the holy; particularly during the persecution raids of Nero (AD 54-68), Decius (AD 249-251) and Diocletian (AD 301-311) when many Christians were martyred for their faith. Dennis & Robert (1999:54) further indicate that by the third century AD, the populace venerated the tombs of the martyred Christians on the anniversaries of their deaths. As a result, Christians held to the notion that martyrs were immediately transported into heaven. At these occasions prayers were offered and the history of the individual’s death was reviewed before Holy Communion was observed. Later, members of the clergy held these public worship services at the tombs of the martyrs which in essence linked the tomb to the altar and over time their commemoration degenerated into something less than Biblical.

Gehman (1999:80) points out that prior to Constantine’s Edict of Toleration in 313 AD, Christians did not have the freedom to pay sufficient attention to studying the Scriptures. When Christianity was officially recognised by the Roman Empire, people flooded to the congregations with a limited grasp of the Gospel. At that time, culture played a significant role in the establishment of the Christian worldview. Gehman (1999:80) thus indicates that the church developed a sacramental view of Communion and Baptism for the dead as the Biblical doctrine of justification by faith was lost, the doctrine of purgatory to purge believers of venial sin developed.

Dennis & Robert (1999:54) argue that with the wane of martyrdom, the notion of the saint was expanded by the notion of confession (individuals who voluntarily shared the passion of Christ in asceticism, piety or heroic virtue). As a result, the saints assumed a mediating role between the living and God. Saints thus became conduits of supernatu-

ral power and were thus believed to have the ability to heal the sick and perform miracles at the sites of their tombs and with the use of relics.

7.5.1.1.2 The saints in the medieval church

During the medieval times, the ancestral dead and sacred dead were believed to be directly involved with the living. Dennis & Robert (1999:59) mention that the church assumed the role of intermediary between the living and the dead. Geary (1994:78) points out that prayers were offered for the dead in Church and if the dead were to speak it was believed that they were likely to do so through the priest or monk.

The church became more involved and established control over access to the relics of the saints as Johnson (1998:86) mentions: "Starting in the late third century and coming to dominance by the late fifth ... the saints in heaven went from being primarily witnesses in a partnership of hope to being primarily intercessors in a structure of power and neediness."

Dennis and Robert (1999:60) argue that the intercessory power of the saints and the ecclesiastic power of the bishops increased simultaneously. With the advent of the doctrine of purgatory, the ancestral dead were placed under the church's authority and thus lowered the barrier between the living and the living dead. As a result, it was believed that many individuals who had been damned to hell were able to return. Accounts of such visitations appeared to verify the teachings of the church. The dead were believed to have warned the living about the importance of confession, extreme unction and absolution at the point of death. Furthermore, Zaleski (1987:47) states that the dead were believed to be able to ask for sacraments or donations on their behalf, or that the living intercede with the Virgin Mary on their behalf. Therefore death was not considered the end of the process of attaining heaven. Finucane (1996:90) argues that the living were believed to have the ability to assist the dead with their prayers, mass and intercessions while the dead could assist the living with advice on proper belief and behaviour. This symmetrical relationship is very similar to the relationship between the living and the ancestors in African, Korea and Japan.

Protestants, on the other hand, viewed indulgences, masses and alms for the dead as meaningless. They also rejected prayers to the saints because they asserted that God alone had power. This controversy sparked the Reformation. Consequently, Finucane (1996:92) states that for Protestants any apparition would only be understood to be demonic, angelic or illusory.

Nürnbergger (2007:68) also indicates that the Protestant reformers rejected the redemptive role of the saints mainly because they believed that all who participate in the new life of Christ through faith are representatives and believers and implicitly saints. Deceased saints, they believed were at the most mere examples for them to emulate. In addition they believed that the doctrine of the saints which the Catholic Church expounded had been exploited to breed superstition and gain material wealth.

Hence, the fundamental principle for the Reformers was the pre-eminence of Christ. They believed that the Catholic doctrine of the saints had elevated saints into a position

which rightfully belonged to Christ and thus constituted a form of idolatry. The same thus holds true of the belief in the mediatory role of the ancestors in Africa, Korea and Japan.

7.5.1.2 *The New Testament view on saints*

In Chapter 6 it was made clear that the Bible clearly states that it is impossible for the dead to have fellowship with the living. Thus, one has to ask whether it is possible for the dead to belong to the community of saints. Furthermore, are the saints entitled to prayers from the living?

In response to this, Bray (1988:152) points out that traditionally Protestants reject the interpretation of the Catholic justification for praying to the dead because prayer may only be directed to God and Jesus is the only mediator between God and man. What does the Bible say about this? Nürnberger (2007:85-87) provides a useful exposition of the New Testament view on the saints. From his study it is evident that the saints in the New Testament refer exclusively to Christians living upon the earth and does not include the dead in heaven.

For the purpose of this study we will now take a closer look at some texts which provide an answer to this burning question.

Firstly Paul's letters to the Corinthians and Romans refer to the community of believers as the "body of Christ". Nürnberger (2007:85-87) thus indicates that Christ is not necessarily considered as an individual in this context but as a new and authentic communal reality. Furthermore, Nürnberger (2007:86) argues that this new reality is also referred to as "the" Christ (cf 1 Corinthians 12:12). If Paul considered the deceased to be included among those whose gifts of the spirit should be recognised and used, he would have stated it overtly.

Philippians 1:21-24 recounts Paul's thoughts about the possibility that he himself may soon die. Thus, Nürnberger (2007:86) asserts that he expects to join Christ at the point of death. This text does not mention the second coming of Christ but simply states that it would be better for him to depart and be reunited with Christ. He does however mention that it would serve the congregation's interests better if he remained alive in the flesh because this would mean that he would still serve them and Christ. Therefore, the implication is that if he had died, he could be of no further use to the congregation which indicates that once a person has died they cannot effect any change on the lives of the living. By implication there is no place for the so-called mediating role of the deceased in the theology of Paul. Furthermore, Nürnberger (2007:86) points out that Paul tells them not to grieve because they will continue to have fellowship with him. If Paul had believed that there existed an unbroken fellowship between the living and the dead he would not have indicated that the death of Epaphroditus would have added to his sorrow (cf Philippians 2:25-30).

The Letter to the Hebrews also describes an eternally present reality in the priesthood of Christ. Nürnberger (2007:88) argues that the final chapter of the letter indicates that the author turns our attention to the past and sketches a picture of the "great cloud

of witnesses that surrounds us" (12:1). This image is used by some exponents of the notion that the dead are still part of the community of believers. However, the cloud of witnesses refers to a long list of historical figures that the author considers to be exemplary faithful individuals. The reason why Paul lists these trustworthy and powerful servants of God is to provide encouragement to believers to "lay away every weight", to abandon the sin that "clings to us", and to persevere in following Christ who suffered and was glorified (Hebrews 12:1-2).

Nürnberg (2007:88-89) points out that the word "witnesses" here is not used to indicate that they are hovering and present, keeping an eye on what is happening in the here and now. The word here rather denotes what they have been doing in faith in the past serves as a witness to us in our present afflictions and tribulations. He argues that the text does not suggest that these deceased believers were alive and present and therefore able to communicate with the living and therefore available to us for guidance. Even more pertinently, it definitely does not include all the genealogical forebears of the believers.

Consequently, Nürnberg (2007:140) concludes that we should rather focus our attention on the saints (believers) who are currently alive because they are the ones who serve and who are in need of being served. The deceased cannot play an active role in the lives in the living just as an unborn cannot fulfil such a role yet.

Clearly then, these scriptures contradict the Roman Catholic doctrine of communion of saints.

7.5.1.3 The Roman Catholic saints and the ancestors: a comparison

Triebel (2002:195) has attempted to establish a link between ancestor veneration and the communion of saints in ecclesiology. Triebel bases this on anthropological findings which indicate that ancestor veneration is the expression of the family and tribal solidarity and continuity. This leads Triebel to suggest that Christians are no longer concerned with invoking the ancestors or praying to them but do invoke Christ and pray to Him. He continues that a prayer for the ancestors may be included. Furthermore, according to Triebel (2002:195-196) if the ancestors were Christians they then belong to the communion of the believers and in Holy Communion the ancestors are included by implication and are thus considered part of the *familia Dei*.

In other words, when one considers these words from Triebel, it appears that he relates the ancestors in African traditional religion to the Catholic Saints. This is reminiscent of Mosothoane's (1973:91) approach in which he asserts that the communion principle (encompassing the living and the dead) underlying the theology of the African church found a related theology, which focused on the Communion of Saints, in the Roman Catholic Church.

Scholars such as Gehman (1999), Nürnberg (2007), and Dennis & Robert (1999) on the other hand have focuses on analyzing the dissimilarity between Roman Catholic traditional relationship with the saints and the African traditional relationship with the ancestors. Consequently, these theologians have refuted the justification for traditional

beliefs and practices in African by comparing them to the Roman Catholic practice of venerating the saints.

African scholars, notably, Amanze (2003), Mbiti (1978:152) and Beken (1993:335) assert that it is imperative to distinguish between veneration and worship because according to them there are degrees of worship. They argue that Africans have traditionally worshipped God but venerated the ancestors which is very similar to the manner in which Roman Catholics claim to worship God but venerate the saints.

7.5.1.3.1 The Communion of Saints and the genealogical family²⁹

Many African Christians in the AIC's cling to a sense of fellowship with their departed ancestors based on a premise similar to that of the Catholic notion of Communion of Saints. As a result, communion with the deceased and ancestral spirits is accepted. This communion with the ancestors imbues the ancestors with new meaning as intercessors with God for their protection. The premise of a community which encompasses the living, unborn and the dead is an accepted Christian notion, but the notion that the living may communicate with the dead is unknown in the New Testament.

Furthermore if one considers the African notion of the church as the genealogical family, non-Christian ancestors can be incorporated into the church and be regarded as saved by implication. Turaki (1999:176) opposes this view which relates kinship in Christ to ecclesiology. According to Turaki, this view can be attributed to the age-mate kinship systems evidenced in the traditions of initiation in Africa. In other words, in a context of essential unity and continuity between people and their ancestors, conceiving of the church as a genealogical family can be construed to mean that the ancestors are included in the church.

Notably, Amanze's exposition (2003:55) of Christianity and ancestor veneration in Botswana pointed out that in most African Independent Churches such as the Zion Christian Church, Mount Ararat Church and others, the ancestors are understood to be an extension of the Church and constitute a community of saints as exemplified in the Roman Catholic Church. He concurs that these churches consider the ancestors to be intermediaries between God and his Church on earth and as a result prayers are made to God through them.

Theron (1996:35) points out that the Roman Catholic Church's doctrine on the communion of the saints holds that these saints intercede in heaven for the church on earth. The doctrine does not consider the saints to be omnipresent or omniscient divinities. They are believed to be humanly beings. The Catholic Church does draw a distinction between adoration which should be directed to God alone, and veneration which is directed at the saints. Consequently, Theron (1995:35) argues that during the invocation of the saints, it is always God who is addressed. The deceased who have not been

²⁹ African scholars such as Kuckertz (1981), Ela (1987), Fasholé-Luke (1974), Staples (1981) and Triebel (2002) have extensively explored the concept of the church as the whole Christ to that of the Christ as the Great Family. In general, what these theologians are doing is recasting the Roman Catholic theology of the Communion of Saints in the form of an African theology.

inducted as ancestral spirits can be compared to the faithful or saints who are believed to reside in purgatory. The induction of the ancestral spirits, Theron considers to be analogous to the release of the saints from purgatory as expounded by Staples (1981: 280).

Staples (1981:280-282) identifies some similarities between ancestral spirits and saints. He states that there exists a reciprocal relationship between the living and the dead and that blessings flow between the two parties. Furthermore, Staples asserts that both the saints and the ancestors are believed to assume the role of intercessors between God and mankind.

This is contrary to Dennis and Robert (1999:53) who argue that the ancestral spirits cannot be likened to the saints of the Catholic Church. According to them, the saints' relationship with the living is asymmetrical unlike the symmetrical relationship which is understood to exist between the ancestors and the living. They argue that veneration enables the saints to assist the living but that the living cannot have an effect on the saints. Therefore, they argue that veneration has an active and passive aspect. In passive terms, the presence of the saint is sufficient to provide solace for the living while they indicate that in active terms, the presence of the sacred dead may move the living toward the perfection embodied by the saints.

Nürnberg (2007:139) further explains the ontological difference between the ancestors and the saints. According to him, the saints are essentially deceased believers in Christ while the ancestors are merely genealogical forebears. The saints are spiritual examples while the ancestors are spiritual authorities. He further argues that saints are considered to be particularly holy persons while the ancestors may have been ordinary persons with their unique strengths and weaknesses. The saints are further limited in their movements and cannot exert a direct influence on the lives of the living as the ancestors are believed to have the ability to do. Nürnberg further mentions that the power of the ancestors is derived from the social structure rather than from God and that the ancestors are not particularly concerned with the salvation of souls but with the physical well-being of their descendants in their present life.

Nürnberg also states that the destination of the two entities differ. The saints are believed to exist in the presence of God for eternity while the ancestors eventually disappear in oblivion. Theron (1996:36) thus asserts that as a result of these essential differences, the ancestors cannot be likened to the saints in the Catholic doctrine.

7.5.2 The eucharist and Catholic spirituality

Nürnberg (2007:135) wrote that in the African context, the traditional religious family meal is essentially a sacrificial meal. In most African regions, sacrifices are not given to the Supreme Being. A goat or ox is slaughtered for the benefit of the ancestors. The living members are believed to be celebrating a family feast under the auspices of the ancestors who bind them together in a clan structure and wider community. This is similar to what is known in phenomenological terms as the ritual communal meal.

Phenomenologically this does not differ too much from the eucharist either. Elsener (2001:49) argues that the priest offers the sacrifice of Christ continuously to God when he consecrates the bread and wine. They may also sacrifice the merits of the saints to God. Thus Nürnberg (2007:135) asserts that if one offers sacrifices to God, it may be plausible to offer sacrifices to lower authorities in the hierarchy mainly because of the intermediary role attributed to them. This holds true for the practice of the saints in Catholicism and for the practices of sacrifices for the ancestors in Africa, Japan and Korea.

The emphasis on Mass may be one of the reasons for the greater success of Catholic missions in traditionalist societies. However, although the mass may resonate with the sacrificial religious meal, the question remains to what extent the Catholic missiological approach has ensured that individuals are receiving the Gospel and led closer to Christ.

7.5.2.1 The term

The term “eucharist” according to Scheffczyk (1997:137) as the common Christian designation for the central liturgical and sacramental event which Vatican II defines as “the source and summit of the Christian life” (*Lumen Gentium* 11) “from which the Church ever derives its life and on which it thrives” (*Lumen Gentium* 26). The Catholic Church used the term “sacrifice of the Mass” until the Council of Trent in 1545-63 at which the term “eucharist” was used for the first time. This became the preferred designation for the thanksgiving, praise and sacrifice which are at the heart of the ceremony. The term “the Lord’s Supper” however, provides a more direct link and reference to the ecclesiastical cultic event with the last meal of Christ and thus serves to identify this sacrament as an immediate institution of Christ.

7.5.2.2 The real presence of Christ in the eucharist

Roman Catholics believe in the actual presence of Christ in the eucharist. According to doctrine, they believe that the bread and wine actually change into his body and blood. This is known as transubstantiation. It became doctrine at the Council of Trent. Griffin (1999:217) argues that during the Catholic eucharist, the sacrifice or oblation of Christ is believed to recur in the consecration. This sacrifice is considered to be “present” in two senses of the word: the sacrifice happens in the immediate present, and Christ’s body is believed to be physically present in the eucharist.

Nürnberg (2007:132) however, states that this does not seem to establish his communicative or redemptive presence for the community. He states that the host, which is stored in a box near the altar, does not speak or listen. He remarks that it is significant that Catholic churches have altars dedicated to Mary and other saints in immediate proximity to the tabernacle where all the candles are burning. This alludes to an essential link between the eucharist and the saints.

Nürnberg (2007:134), a systematic Lutheran theologian, refutes the Catholic doctrine of the eucharist because according to him identification also explains the intention behind the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation.

Davies (1992:223) argues that in Aristotelian terms, the word “substance” denotes the particular quality of an entity which makes it what it is in essence. Hence, Davies states that a colourful piece of cloth can be used as a scarf for a lady or be declared to be the flag of a country. When that happens, the substance (essential meaning) changes from being an item of clothing to the symbol of a nation while the actual physical item remains the same.

Similarly, consecration of the bread and wine changes them from food to the self-sacrificing act of Christ on the cross. In Aristotelian terms “significance” is called “substance” and the material is called “accidental”. This is described as that because instead of the colourful cloth a piece of plastic sheeting may be used for the same purpose. Similarly, Davies asserts that Christ could have used fish and olives if they had been part of the Passover meal.

Müller (1997:199) claims that the Roman Catholic Church assumes a positive attitude towards ancestor worship insofar as the church can distinguish between the religious and the profane. In other words, the Gospel is seen to appropriate a relevant form for each people and thus constitute a revelation of the merciful love of God in a new way.

Scheffczyk (1997:139) argues that it is because we conceive of substance in terms of matter that we have difficulty with the notion of transubstantiation. He states that the misunderstanding could be removed if one considered alternative terms, such as transignification (change of signs) or transfinalisation (change in meaning) as some Catholic theologians have suggested. This was rejected because the Catholic doctrine had canonised Aristotelian philosophy. Consequently, Reformers were adamant that Christ was present through the Holy Spirit and that he spoke through the Word and sacrament and was thus accessible as a personal Saviour to each individual.

We will return to the Catholic notions of incarnation, transubstantiation and sacramentalism when dealing with inculturation (p 195).

7.5.2.3 Roman Catholic spirituality

The Roman Catholic Church adheres to a tradition of the integrity and divinity of the individual consciousness and conscience. Vatican II described it as follows: “The individual is sharing in the light of the divine mind ... His conscience is man’s most secret core, and his sanctuary. There he is alone with God whose voice echoes in his depths. By conscience, in a wonderful way, that law is made known which is fulfilled in the love of God and of one’s neighbour” (*Gaudium et Spes* 15).

The Mass is central to Catholic spirituality. The eucharist reflects their common understanding of the grounds on which the gathered community meets. This meeting is founded on a group mystical experience in the real presence of God. Catholics use

Matthew 18:20 to substantiate this because the scripture reads: “For where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them” (Worrall 1999:357).

The Catholic call to worship differs vastly from that of the Protestant. Protestant services are organised in such a way that the congregation are exposed to the Word of God. The eucharist is not required theologically to ensure the existential presence of God. In Protestant terms, God is present when his Word is present.

Clearly then in sacramental terms, there is a significant difference between the Catholic form of worship and the Protestant version of Christianity. Catholicism asserts that when they are in the presence of God, they are partaking of the “inward sacrament” during which God confers grace. Consequently, Catholic spirituality is more mystical than Protestant spirituality.

Nürnberg (2007:51) describes Catholic spirituality as one steeped in symbolism, mysteries and rituals. For centuries the Word of God was represented, augmented and/or replaced with pictures, icons, observances and performances and colourful processions in colourful garments.

7.5.3 Roman Catholicism and Protestantism

Roman Catholicism is essentially founded on the notions of hierarchical authority, incarnation and mystical spirituality. Protestantism on the other hand is based on the preached Word of God without any exaggerated symbolic or mystical traditions.

When considering the hierarchical structure of the Roman Catholic Church, Nürnberg (2007:68) points out that the Vatican represents a powerful and centralised authority which is rooted in the Roman Empire and culminates in the papal office.

According to Worrall (1999:352) one of the fundamental differences between different Christian interpretations of the faith is to be found in the area of religious authority. How can believers distinguish what is sanctioned by God and what is not? Thus he argues that the Catholic notion of religious authority is essentially linked to their doctrine of apostolic succession. This implies that authority is handed down from the apostles to the papacy and the college of bishops. In this regard Flannery (1975:374-375) argues that Peter and the rest of the apostles could be construed to constitute a unique apostolic college and similarly the Roman Pontiff who is believed to be Peter’s successor and the bishops who are construed to be the successors of the apostles. In Roman Catholic hierarchy the college or body of bishops has no independent authority, while the Roman pontiff, as vicar of Christ and pastor of the entire church, has supreme power over the whole church.

Clearly then the hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church is fundamental.

This is somewhat different from the Protestant notion that religious authority is akin to faith in the Bible. Consequently, the Protestant *sola scriptura* affirms that only the Scriptures as God Word has direct and absolute authority, provided that the hearer is inspired by the Spirit of God (Worrall 1999:352). Nürnberg concurs and states that Protestants focus primarily on the preached word of God and Protestant rituals are conspicuously underdeveloped by comparison. In the Reformed tradition the atmos-

phere of the church service is austere. Visual representations are taboo and the use of musical expressions is restricted. Liturgies and symbolic actions are reduced to a minimum. As a result, the Lord's Supper is celebrated only a few times per year (Nürnberg 2007:51).

7.6 MISSIOLOGICAL APPROACH TO ANCESTOR WORSHIP

Finally, we must reflect on the question of what an appropriate missiological approach should be in contexts in which ancestor worship is prevalent. How should the church make the Gospel accessible to people whose worldview and culture imply opposing principles and values? How does one reach these communities without sacrificing the authenticity or compromising the basic principles of the Gospel message?

7.6.1 Niebuhr's five models

Niebuhr (1951:1) pointed out that the relationship between Christ and culture has been "an enduring problem" throughout the history of the expansion of Christianity. This "enduring problem" is evident when one considers the cultural dilemma facing Third World today.

Scholars such as Stauffer (1994:9-10), King (1997:86), Chao (2000:99-100), and Nissen (2004:165) have explored the relationship between church and culture. However, Niebuhr identified as early as 1951 five possible models to define the nature of the relationship between Christ and Culture. His analysis became a classic point of reference to all who reflected on this issue since.

The first model which Niebuhr proposed is described as *Christ against culture*. This implies a negative attitude to culture as something hostile to the community. Niebuhr describes this as "Christ against culture" as expressed in 1 John. From our analysis it would be more natural to point to the "exclusive" stance in Revelation and the position of the weak in 1 Corinthians 8-10 (Nissen 2004:165).

The second model which Niebuhr proposes is *Christ of culture* which sees an essentially harmonious relationship between the Gospel and culture. This model perceives no tension or opposition between the claims of Christ and culture. In this model, Christ is essentially absorbed into the culture. Niebuhr could find no texts in the New Testament to illustrate this model. These first two models represent the polar extremities on the continuum, and he identifies three other models which are placed between these.

Christ above culture is the third model. According to this model Christ is not opposed to the culture or absorbed into it. Instead, Christ is perceived as coming to perfect the culture. In spite of the fact that Christ is considered to be discontinuous with culture, He remains able to fulfil its aims and aspirations. This model is parallel to the fulfilment theory.

Niebuhr's fourth paradigm places Christ and culture in a paradoxical and dualistic relationship. He describes this as *Christ and culture in paradox*. The nature of the paradox is that Christ is good and human culture is sinful and corrupt. According to Niebuhr

this is evident in 1 Corinthians 18:23 in which Paul describes the cross as a judgment to culture and the resurrection as a resource to a new life.

The final model describes Christ as the Transformer of Culture. The fifth model is *Christ the Transformer of culture*. This is a more hopeful and positive attitude towards culture which implies that there is a need for conversion or transformation of the culture. Niebuhr (1951:197) finds that the Gospel of John is an example of this model. Another and perhaps better example would be Romans 6 (Nissen 2004:165).

When one considers these models, the last is the most appropriate for countries in which religions have a strong focus on ancestral traditions. The reason for this is that it takes cognisance of the impact of sin on culture and the need for redemption from Christ as espoused in the Gospel. Transformation as a missiological paradigm takes into consideration the inadequacies and weaknesses of fallen human nature. Thus in countries such as Africa, Korea and Japan where ancestor worship is still prevalent, the fallen nature and broken reality of human culture can be transformed and a new worldview can be established to transform the value system and behaviour of culture in alignment with redemptive revelation. Consequently, Paul Hiebert (1985) asserts that Christianity provides a new hermeneutic context for cultural living. All persons must be transformed in the light of the new perspective of Christ. In other words, the aim of the mission ought to be to change and transform the cosmology of individuals by means of the Gospel.

The question now arises what is the definition of culture and worldview in anthropological terms? The answer to this will establish a point of departure for contextualisation as the preferred model for contexts in which ancestral traditions and ancestor worship is prevalent. This approach will be discussed later in this chapter.

7.6.2 Culture and worldview

The issue of ancestor worship has been anathema in Third World churches in countries such as Africa, Korea and Japan for quite a long time. However, ancestor worship is often used as a case of contextualisation where culture presents the church with a dilemma.³⁰

The intrinsic relationship between culture and ancestor worship is undeniable because ancestor worship can be construed as a response to what the relevant culture demands. This interplay has been discussed in detail with regard to the phenomenon in Africa, Korea and Japan. For example ancestor worship in Korea and Japan are firmly rooted in the notions of Confucianism, *Je* system and kinship structures as a cultural request and also emanated from religious phenomena such as animism, shamanism and traditional religion. Therefore, it stands to reason that to develop or establish the most appropriate mission strategy one needs to have a clear understanding of the concepts of culture and worldview.

³⁰ Lingenfelter (1998:16) argues that Kraft (1981) and Mayers (1987) view culture as a neutral vehicle through which God communicates to human being. However, Lingenfelter (1998) and Hiebert (1985) repudiate the notion that culture or worldview is neutral and believe that culture is created and contaminated by human beings.

7.6.2.1 Culture: an anthropological definition

Anthropologists, sociologists and philosophers have all attempted to define culture. However, Robinson (1993b:172) states that there is general agreement that culture constitutes a society's design for survival or the sum total of ways of living which has been developed by a group of people over a period of generations.

Oyama (1999:8) on the other hand, defines culture in anthropological terms as human activities. Geertz (1973:89) however, defines it as a system or historically transmitted pattern of meaning embodied in symbols and a system of inherited conceptions which are manifest in symbolic forms by means of which people communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitude towards life. This definition gives prominence to the inextricable relationship between culture and human life. It also emphasises that patterns are historically transmitted from one generation to the next and that it enables individuals to construct meaning in a system which is his/her culture.

7.6.2.2 The centrality of worldview in culture

When one attempts to define "worldview" one is faced by the daunting task of describing a vast and all encompassing concept. However, Kraft attempts to provide a working definition and indicates that "worldview as the core of culture, [it] function[s] on the one hand as the grid in terms of which reality is perceived and, on the other hand as that which provides the guidelines for a people's behavioural responses to that perception of reality" (Kraft 1996:52). He continues by saying that "worldview is the totality of the culturally structured assumptions, values and commitments (allegiances) underlying both a people's perception of reality and their responses to those perceptions" (1994: 2).

This is similar to Hiebert's definition (1985:45). He defines worldview as the set of basic assumptions about reality which underpin the beliefs and behaviour of a culture. He also mentions that these basic assumptions are taken for granted and never questioned. These assumptions constitute a consistent structure which orders people's experiences and gives meaning to their lives (Nishioka 1998:459). This is a helpful definition if one keeps in mind that it is not intended to be a comprehensive statement.

7.6.2.3 The clash of worldviews between East and West

Ancestor worship has sparked controversy between the worldviews of East, West and primal cultures for many years. Each of these worldviews has its own mechanisms to respond to a challenge of its fundamentals. Steinbronn (2001:256) in his description of the origins of the modern Western worldview mentions that until the end of the 17th Century the theistic worldview was dominant. However, Western consciousness experienced a radical paradigm shift between 1680 and 1715 during which time some individuals refuted Christianity's dominance and began to explore alternative views (also Glover 1984:10).

Ma (2003:166) points out that in the West various religious experiences have been reduced to abstract conceptualization which he calls scientific reductionism. Christian

theology found itself confronted by rationalism and positivism as fruits of the Age of Enlightenment.

Sarles (1988:65-66) provides an explanation for this and states that Protestants are sceptical about the miraculous because they have been conditioned by four negative characteristics of a Western worldview, namely: secularism, rationalism, materialism, and mechanism.

When discussing the juxtaposed views of East and West, Sarles (1988:66) refers to Hiebert (1989) who suggests that the Western worldview has excluded the middle zone. According to Hiebert, the Eastern worldview recognises three levels of reality. The first level is equivalent to the natural world perceived in the West. The second level, however, is quite different. It is the domain of spirits, ghosts, ancestors, demons, and earthly deities who reside in nature. This level also includes supernatural forces such as mana, planetary influences, evil eyes, and the powers of magic, sorcery and witchcraft (Hiebert 1989:41). The third level which Hiebert mentions concerns the transcendent realities of heaven and hell and the cosmic forces of Karma and Kismet.

Hiebert's description provides invaluable insight into how important it is for missionaries to have an understanding of the cultural context before they attempt to transform it. In this regard, Hiebert (1989:43) comments:

I had excluded the middle level of supernatural but this-worldly beings and forces from my own worldview. As a scientist I had been trained to deal with the empirical world in naturalistic terms. As a theologian, I was taught to answer ultimate questions in theistic terms. For me the middle zone did not really exist. Unlike Indian villagers, I had given little thought to spirits of this world, to local ancestors and ghosts, or to the souls of animals.

(Hiebert 1989:43)

Clearly then, it is imperative for missionaries to understand the cultural context. They must also have a competent understanding of the intricacies of contextualisation as missiological principle in order to determine which aspects of the worldview need to be transformed to articulate with the Gospel.

Today we know that to understand traditional cultures and devise an appropriate way of dealing with ancestor worship as part of a comprehensive strategy calls for missiological insight and practical intuition. Primal peoples proved to be a much tougher target than formerly thought.

7.6.3 Inculturation

Nissen (2004:163) states that inculturation has become an important missiological model in Roman Catholicism. This model asserts that the Gospel must take root in every culture and that the church must incarnate into every new culture. As a result, diversity is unavoidable because the inculturation of the one Gospel in numerous cultures gives rise to plurality.

Saayman (1990:217) remarks that the notion of inculturation is not groundbreakingly new.³¹ The first theologian to use the term was Joseph Masson who was a professor at the Gregorian University in Rome. The term was first used officially during the opening of the Second Vatican Council in 1962. Since then, as Domnwachukwu (2000:126) mentions, the term has become a relatively popular one among Catholic and Protestant theologians alike

Domnwachukwu (2000:126) cites Shorter's (1988:11) definition of inculturation as: "The on-going dialogue between faith and culture or cultures. More fully, it is the creative and dynamic relationship between the Christian message and a culture or cultures".

Oyama (1996:6) mentions that Pedro Arrupe (1978) presented a definition of inculturation in his letter to the Society of Jesus in 1978. This letter was instrumental in popularising the term "inculturation" through an analogy of incarnation. Arrupe's described inculturation as the incarnation of Christian life and message in a particular cultural context. The incarnation of the Christian message happens in such a way that the experience finds expression through elements particular to the culture in question and becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies the culture to transform it into a "new creation". In other words, as Oyama points out, Arrupe's definition highlights the dynamic dialogue and interaction between the Christian faith and culture.

Therefore, inculturation is considered to be the celebrated encounter between Christ and the cultures, a process by which the Church (including the Gospel) is incarnated in the various cultures of the world (Nyoyoko 2004:250). Accordingly, Schineller (1990:22) explains that inculturation "combines the theological significance of incarnation with the anthropological concepts of enculturation and acculturation to create something new." Therefore it is essentially the combination of incarnation and enculturation.

7.6.3.1.1 Incarnation

Numerous scholars (Cf. Oyama 1999:15; Bosch 1991:454; Amalorpavadass 1978:18-22) have indicated that they consider the Incarnation to be the basis of inculturation (See also 7.5.2, especially 7.5.2.2, p 189). This entails that the Gospel has to be "embodied" in a people and its culture. Nissen (2004:153) also argues that inculturation is a kind of ongoing incarnation. In this approach it is not so much a case of the Church being expanded, but of the Church being born anew in each new context and culture.

Domnwachukwu (2000:122) points out that supporters of the incarnation theory in missions argue that incarnation harkens back to God. God is the originator of missions (*Missio Dei*). Christ was sent by God to earth. He assumed a human form and adopted a human culture in order to reach mankind with his message.

³¹ In some instances, the terms "accommodation" and "indigenisation" are used as almost interchangeably with "inculturation". Van der Merwe (1996:671) mentions that notions of accommodation and adaptation resurfaced in the concepts of indigenisation and inculturation, i.e. of Church and theology amongst peoples and cultures of the Third World. Given the limited scope of this thesis, we will not deal with these terms. A more detailed understanding of these terms can be found in the studies of scholars such as Domnwachukwu (2000), Nyoyoko (2004), Van der Merwe (1996), Schineller (1990).

As Shorter (1988:81-82) sees it, Christ accepted the dynamics of cultural exchange as a consequence of his own inculturation and as it were encouraged missionaries to follow his example. However, this concept of inculturation is limited to the cultural education of the earthly Jesus. Shorter argues that with this understanding of cultural education which implies the “first insertion of the Gospel into a culture” one can overlook the ongoing dialogue which takes place between the Gospel and culture. Secondly, he indicates that it encourages a one-way view of inculturation because it is a Christology from above. Lastly, Shorter argues that this incarnation model may tempt people to succumb to the temptation of culturalism.

Oyama (1999:15) remarks that inculturation is based on the understanding of Christ which is found in John 1:14 which states “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” He states that Jesus was born in a culture and learned to live in it. His life incarnated in a cultural context presents the model for all Christians to follow. As a result Schineller (1990:20-21) asserts that incarnation is not “an option” but “an obligation”. Therefore taking account of other cultures and contexts is unavoidable when one exists in communion with Christ.

Nyoyoko (2004:247) also states that the term incarnation denotes the insertion of the Church into various cultures. This is based on the realization that the Church is at the centre of history and the whole human race. Similarly, just as Christ was in the midst of men, so the Church in which he continues to live, is placed in the midst to people. As Christ assumed a human form, so Nyoyoko argues the church ought to take seriously the fullness of what is genuinely human wherever and however it occurs.

Nyoyoko (2004:248) says that this is the reason why the Second Vatican Council taught: “If the Church is to be in a position to offer all men the mystery of salvation and the life brought by God, then it must implant itself among all these groups in the same way that Christ by His incarnation committed himself to the particular social and cultural circumstances of the men among whom he lived” (*Ad Gentes* 1).

7.6.3.1.2 Enculturation

In anthropological terms, enculturation denotes the process by which an individual acquires the mental representations (beliefs, knowledge, etc) and patterns of behaviour required to function as a member of a culture. Thus, Oyama (1999:17) describes it as a process of socialisation. In sociological terms it holds that culture is not endemic or genetic but must be transmitted. People who are born into a specific group or society acquire the culture of the group by means of socialisation. This transmission is a process which Domnwachukwu (2000:125) defines as enculturation. Enculturation is thus the process by which the culture of a society is transmitted from one generation to another.

There is some similarity between enculturation and inculturation. Shorter (1988:6) asserts that the parallel lies in the insertion of an individual into his or her culture and the insertion of the Christian faith into a culture where it was not previously present.

Van der Merwe (1996:672) points out that there is a clear relation between church and culture, and that religion in itself is a cultural phenomenon. Similarly, the church as

a cultural phenomenon cannot but be part of culture. Van der Merwe cites Kruger's assertion that "... religion is not a separate sphere of experience with a separate object of experience. It is the widest expansion, the deepest penetration of consciousness. To follow this trend as far as possible is the demand of religion. It is an intension (sic) and extension of ordinary life, science and art, the tendency towards truth, beauty and goodness taken to the limit of comprehensiveness and radicality."

7.6.3.2 Critique of Catholic mission principle

When one considers the Catholic mission principle, one cannot but look at it in the broader context of Roman Catholic theology, ecclesiology and cosmology.

7.6.3.2.1 An optimistic view of culture

Beyers (2001:132) asserts that the Catholic approach to enculturation of the Church is rooted in the premise of the latent presence of Christ in the culture in question. Mission entails raising his presence to the surface. However, he argues (2001:131) that just as Christ cannot be concealed within human nature, so Christ is not present *incognito* (in a concealed way) in culture. To claim to the contrary would presume that God is at work in cultures (and religions) to prepare human beings for the Gospel and salvation. It also implies that the human being is an essentially unblemished individual with the perfect ability to discover God, know God and serve Him by personal effort, to attain salvation in the grace of God.

This notion originated with Pelagius and his immediate followers who openly taught that man's moral character remained untainted from the fall and men were born with as much ability to do the will of God as Adam had been. In essence, they denied the effects of the Fall and the necessity of divine grace (Cunningham 1979:329).

Beyers (2001:131) argues that this is contrary to Paul's teaching in Romans 3:9-20 which makes it clear that sin is something that is inherent in all men and that only Christ was and still is without sin (Hebr 4:15). Sin has permeated every aspect of human existence including our thoughts and choices (Genesis 6:5; 1 Corinthians 1:21), in our will (Jh 8:34; Rm 7:14-21), in our emotions (Rm 1:24-27; 1 Timothy 6:10), as well as in our behaviour (Mark 7:21; Gal 5:19-21). Beyers thus concludes that the complete being of man has been corrupted by sin and cries out for divine restoration.

Therefore Beyers (2001:131) asserts that directly as a result of sin, mankind is incapable of arriving into the presence of God on our own. We are all subject to the judgement of God as stated in Genesis 3:24 and Matthew 3:7 and in ourselves incapable of doing the will of God.

Beyers (2001:132) thus argues that culture as a human phenomenon is included in the dispensation of sin. The point of departure of Protestant churches over that of Catholic theology is the essential sinfulness of man.

Müller and Sundermeier (1987:178) state that the criticism of Protestant theologians against inculturation is founded in the fact that like all creation, culture is due to sin an essentially broken reality. Beyers (2001:132) acknowledges that the Roman Catholic

theology does not deny this but rather pleads for a positive and more tolerant attitude towards the sinfulness of man. As a result they place larger emphasis on the fact that humans were created in the image of God. They assert that there exists within man "...something like a divine communion instituted within...", accordingly dialogue with people of all cultures is indeed possible (*Gaudium et Spes*, quoted in Müller & Sundermeier 1987:178).

Oyama (1999:7) mentions that at Vatican II the church took a decisive step towards a new relationship with culture. At this point, the church acknowledged the importance and autonomy of culture for humankind. The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*) reads: "There are many links between the message of salvation and culture. In his self-revelation to his people culminating in the fullness of manifestation in his incarnate Son, God spoke according to the culture proper to each age (G&S 58)."

The constitution reflected on the church's attitude towards culture of the contemporary world. It narrowed the gap between the church and the world. In doing so, the constitution established a relationship with culture which recognised the autonomy of culture. Therefore it states that "culture, since it flows from man's rational and social nature, has continual need of rightful freedom of development and a legitimate possibility of autonomy according to its own principles (G&S 59)."

The consequence of this is that the church has assumed a more co-operative stance in the relationship with culture to develop the human world. Oyama (1999:7) thus states that this provides an important element for the understanding of inculturation.

On the other hand, the Protestant point of departure is based on the premise that human beings like all of creation are inherently sinful and not naturally predisposed towards doing the will of God or wanting to know God. Netland (2005:150) thus indicates that during the last 50 years or so missiologists have developed a framework for attempting to understand and view culture as the gift of God's grace in creation and revelation as well as the product of human sin and a distortion of what God created. This differs drastically from the Roman Catholic premise which implies that the presence of Christ is already there and only needs to be tapped into. In spite of the fundamental differences in the underlying premises between Catholic and Protestant views on inculturation, there are practical methodological similarities in the implementation of their respective theologies.

7.6.3.2.2 Inculturation and syncretism

Any inculturation runs the risk of syncretism. Syncretism is according to Van der Merwe (1996) a religious phenomenon which is described in the Old Testament. It cannot always be avoided, but nevertheless we should be awake to it. Oyama (1999:36) says that because inculturation takes the dialogue between the Gospel and culture into account, it is natural that some of the influences will rub off on Christianity as a result.

Kraemer (1938:142) argues that Christianity is essentially anti-syncretistic because it is a religion based on prophetic revelation similar to that of Judaism and Islam. Van der

Merwe (1996) however state that certain premises and points of departure are more conducive to syncretism, i.e. an optimistic view of culture, a convergent vision of religions, acceptance of so-called points of common truth, a mystical-incarnational understanding of inculturation etc. This means that the Roman Catholic version of inculturation is especially prone to the danger of syncretism.

Hummel (1994:60) indicates that in terms of inculturation, theologians generally agree that there are two forms of syncretism today: firstly, an inculturation-syncretism and secondly principal syncretism which Kraemer described. Beyers (2001:135) cites Shorter (1988:67) who argues that syncretism or unsuccessful enculturation in the process of inculturation contains certain dangers for the community which may lead to the development of a sub-culture within the culture. This results in people becoming estranged from their own culture. The insertion of the new Christian identity may thus be accompanied by a loss of identity. Enculturation should ensure that local peoples retain their identity in spite of accepting the Christian identity. The converse is also true. If the local identity is over-emphasised, it may lead to the loss of the unique Christian identity.

Van der Merwe (1996) argues that syncretism does not imply a haphazard blending of religions. It may even take on the form of symbiosis in which religions acknowledge an underlying unity and similarity, interact and freely absorb from one another without sacrificing their unique identities.

We will turn our attention in the next and penultimate section of this chapter to another and in our opinion more comprehensive approach to the challenges repeatedly outlined.

7.6.4 Contextualisation

Contextualisation has become a major part of a wider theological debate, but with special relevance to Missiology.³²

According to Van der Merwe (1996:673) what we came to know as contextualisation started quite early in the Church. The Church manifested in congregations which allowed reasonable scope for local interpretations of the faith. Interestingly enough, while the early Christians distanced themselves from the cultic and ritual aspects of Hellenistic culture, they freely used the ideas, concepts, paradigms and philosophical systems which existed in the same culture. Van der Merwe describes this as an example of indigenisation of the early Christian theology in the Greco-Roman culture.

Van der Merwe (1996:9) states that many theologians have difficulty accepting that the principles of adaptation and indigenisation already applied in the early church. In this regard, he refers to JH Bavinck (1960:122) who remarked that Paul and his fellow

³² Theological and missiological contextualisation must be differentiated from *cultural contextualisation* and *Contextual Theology*. Cultural contextualisation deals with "the institutions of family, law, education and the observable level of cultural behavior and the use of artifacts" (Nicolls 1979:24). Theologians concern themselves with the worldview and cosmology, and the moral and ethical norms, the deeper levels of culture (Domnwachukwu 2000:119).

Contextual Theology is a type of liberationist theology with its own unique theological system. It tends to interpret the Bible message from its own particularly unique perspective. Contextualisation is a broader concept than Contextual Theology (Ann 1999:90).

Christians brought nothing other than the Gospel to their non-Christian audiences. As Van der Merwe rightfully asks, the question is whether or not Paul and his fellow Christians had indeed transmitted only the Gospel. He states that he is not only referring to overt manifestations of culture but also the role their personal conception of Christ, their context and their frame of reference played.

Kraemer (1938:311) wrote that it is not unlikely that Paul at the time used the figurative language and metaphors particular to the mystic cults to explain Christ's death at the cross. Accordingly, Van der Merwe argues that the manner in which Paul explained the Gospel made it accessible to Hellenist people at the time in spite of the fact that this brought him into disrepute with the Jews (and even his colleagues back in Jerusalem). Kraemer however pointed out that the frame of reference which Paul used did not affect the uniqueness of the Gospel. From the Biblical account it is evident that the early church differed vastly in character from the mystic cults of the time.

7.6.4.1 Contextualisation as mission approach

It is generally accepted that missions are concerned not only with the twin mandates of Christ, the Great Commandment and the Great Commission (cf. Mark 12:29-30; Matthew 28:18-20) but also the approach towards various foreign cultures.

Glasser and McGavran (1983:26) define the task of missions as to carry the Gospel across cultural and national boundaries to individuals who owe no allegiance to Christ and to encourage them to accept Him as Lord and Saviour to enable them to become responsible members of his church who follow the lead of the Holy Spirit in ensuring that God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven.

As a result of this responsibility, missiologists have attempted to gain a thorough understanding of culture and have explored appropriate contextualisations of the Gospel in different cultural contexts. Ma (2003:163) points out that the church has been involved in a constant interaction with its given culture and has also been subjected to the recent trend of self-awareness which has emerged among African and Asian Christians. This is notably prevalent in contexts in which ancestor worship is a controversial issue.

7.6.4.1.1 Two notions of contextualisation

Ahn (1999:89-90) points out that before one can attempt to define contextualisation it must be borne in mind that concepts such as indigenisation, adaptation, and accommodation have been explored at length in an attempt to ensure that the Church remains relevant to its culture. However, Ahn mentions that these attempts have not yielded satisfactory results because they have tended to relate the Gospel to past traditions and underestimate the forces in all societies which are enabling change as Newbigin (1989:142) points out. Furthermore, they implied that the missionary has brought with him the pure unadulterated Gospel and that an adaptation would be construed to be a concession of sorts to those who were not privileged enough to have had the advantages of having a Christian culture. This is a very colonialist mindset which should be avoided. Hence, the term contextualisation is preferable.

Domnwachukwu (2000:119) indicates that contextualisation is a relatively new term in terms of Christian missions and church growth. He states that Coe (1976: 21-22) first used the term to denote all that was implied in the familiar term “indigenisation” but also to describe a more dynamic relationship which is more open to change and essentially more future-oriented. Accordingly, he defines it as the missiological discernment of the signs of the times and taking note of where God is at work and calling for participation.

However, Pocock et al (2005:323) points out that some scholars were opposed to the term. For example, Fleming (1980:60-67) considers the term to be tainted by liberal theological presuppositions and would prefer to adopt the term context-indigenisation as Domnwachukwu (2000:119) states. After much controversy, the term was eventually accepted and is currently used by both liberals and evangelicals. Carson (1987a:220) notes that it is used in different ways. In this regard he mentions that the liberals tend to assign control to the context and the operative term is praxis which is utilised as a controlling grid to determine the meaning of Scripture. Evangelicals on the other hand try to assign control to Scripture. They cherish the contextualisation rubric because it serves as a reminder that the Bible ought to be thought about, translated into and preached in categories relevant to the particular cultural context (cf Glasser 1979:404).

Therefore, it is evident that evangelicals prefer to focus on the Gospel whereas the liberals focus on cultures and how they control or affect meaning of the Gospel from a hermeneutical perspective. For the purpose of this study, Carson’s second meaning of contextualisation will be used as the working definition of contextualisation.

7.6.4.2 The necessity of contextualisation

Cultures essentially comprise systems of beliefs and practices which are based on implicit assumptions which people make about themselves and the world around them and ultimate realities. The question which arises is how is it possible for Christians to communicate and exemplify the Gospel in terms of worldviews and practices in societies which are contrary to the Bible’s teachings? In order to arrive at a conclusive answer on how to address this dilemma we will now take a closer look at how Christianity has responded to non-Christian traditional religions by means of different mission approaches.

Hiebert (2000:381) points out that during the 19th century the Protestant church’s approach to non-Christian traditional religions was essentially outright rejection. Bosch (1991:291-298) asserts that largely as result of the Enlightenment, missionaries believe in the superiority of the Christian religion and similarly assumed that this included superiority in culture. As a result, non-Western cultures were denigrated. Furthermore, most churches at the time adhered to the notion that the people to whom they were ministering were essentially a case of *tabula rasa* – a blank slate with nothing in their current beliefs or culture which could serve as a touchstone to introduce the Gospel and relate it to their frame of reference.

According to Hiebert (2000:381) this outright rejection and essentially colonialist mindset was fraught with problems. It presumed a cultural vacuum which needed to be

filled. Ann (1999:92) cites the example of Western missionaries who attempted to suppress African traditions. New converts did attend church on Sunday but during the week reverted to their shamans and magicians to resolve their daily problems. Many missionaries were aware of this, but turned a blind eye because they did not really know what to do about it.

This phenomenon was explained in Chapter 3 where we described how Western missionaries have rejected African traditional churches because of their incompatibility with Christianity. As a result of the vacuum this created, AIC's developed to fill the gap. Furthermore, the phenomenal growth which these AIC's experience bears testimony to this need for a ministry which relates to the problems of the people in the African context.

Similarly, in Chapter 5, the Japanese context in which the prohibition on ancestor worship was a major obstacle for the conversion of Japanese people to Christianity. This was because they did not want to be separated from their ancestors. Christianity has not addressed the needs of the Japanese people and as a result, the Christian community in Japan is relatively small (Dale 1998:277-278).

The Roman Catholic response is on the other end of the continuum. Roman Catholic priests have basically considered the traditional ways as a good preparation for the Gospel and therefore considered accommodation of ancestor worship as vital. Hiebert (2000:382) thus mentions that the proponents of this approach express a deep respect for other religions and their respective cultures.

Hence the Roman Catholic Church asserts that some of the indigenous cultures and customs are inherently good and thus accommodation and assimilation can be practiced. According to Daneel (1971:246) assimilation here denotes the incorporation of indigenous customs. It is evident then that the Catholic Church is perceived to be more flexible and accessible in terms of traditional African customs in comparison to the Protestant churches (Theron 1996:23).

Hiebert (2000:382), however, points out that this approach does have serious flaws. It does not take into account that there are corporate and cultural sins and personal transgressions to consider. Sin is evident in some cultural beliefs and may be exhibited as group pride, segregation and idolatry. He argues that the Gospel does not only implore individuals but also whole communities to change. Kim, ST (1991:90) argues that many Catholic missiologists express a high regard and respect for other cultures and are subject to the dangers of syncretism and universalism. Furthermore, Hunsberger (2000:31-33) mentions that a further danger is that too much attention is given to external practices and rituals, so that they fail to engage more meaningfully with the culture of the church.

The third concept is that of a liberal Christian camp which is submitted to religious pluralism. Some African scholars like Maluleke (1996) have asserted that the claim of Christian uniqueness is an extension of Western imperialism into the religious realm.

However, there is now an increased awareness that the actual impetus behind religious pluralism today emanates from the Western world which grapples with the problems of modernity.

Finally, Pentecostal and charismatic camps in Christianity assumed a confrontational stance with regard to non-Christian religions. In this view, all non-Christian religions are perceived to be decidedly demonic. As a result, Yung (2000:87) concludes that they must be rejected out of hand and actively confronted in spiritual warfare. The only advantage with this position is that it takes the demonic dimension seriously and has opened up new avenues through prayers for greater efficiency in pastoral and healing ministries. Yung (2000:88) does however point out that it does not take into account God's general revelation to humanity.

7.6.4.3 Hiebert's methodological suggestion for traditional rituals

Hiebert (2000:382) proposes contextualisation to deal with non-Christian cultures who subscribe to the notion of ancestor rituals. This process Hiebert breaks down into three critical steps. In his opinion, firstly and as the point of departure one should collect and evaluate all the traditional customs with regard to the issue at hand. Missionaries and church leaders should help new converts to examine their traditional practices.

Secondly, Hiebert suggests that missionaries examine the Bible's view on the issues related to the matter. Here a theologically trained pastor or missionary plays a crucial role since he or she must examine the relevant scriptures exegetically and hermeneutically. This is a crucial step because unless people understand the Bible's view they will be unable to transform their cultural ways.

Hiebert's last step involves the community of believers to evaluate their traditional customs in light of their newly gained Biblical understanding and to decide how to relate church rituals to their cultural practices (Hiebert 2000:382),

When one considers Hiebert's model one can see that in the Korean context for example, Korean Protestant churches could have rejected the traditional funeral service and ancestor worship on the grounds of the inherent religious meanings of the rituals and have replaced it with the Christian ritual (*Chudohoe*) (Ann 1999:104).

It is remarkable that in spite of tremendous opposition, Korean Protestant churches substituted ancestor worship with memorial services. In this regard, Ann (1999:105) mentions that when one considers the fact that the traditional worldview was fraught with intrinsically religious elements, it would be very risky to adopt them into the church. Therefore, the Korean Protestants instituted a memorial liturgy to meet the cultural and social void which was left by abolishing ancestor rituals.

This approach exemplifies the penultimate underlying principle which should guide any decisions of this nature – one's commitment to God. In this regard, Lee (1988:88) asserts that this commitment allows him to worship only one God who has revealed himself through Christ and gave him a new perspective on life. This perspective requires the old tradition to be transformed. In other words, in terms of ancestor rituals,

as a result of a faith in Christ as the Lord and saviour, ancestral spirits are no longer a cause for fear and dread.

However, one must still bear in mind the Biblical notion of filial piety. The Bible draws a clear distinction between respect shown for the living and that which is shown to the dead. The Fifth Commandment has entrenched the need to honour and respect the living. However, venerating the dead cannot be construed to follow the Fifth Commandment as it has been shown to border on necromancy and contacting or invoking (evil) spirits, all of which are forbidden in Scripture. Furthermore, we have shown that venerating the dead as phenomenon displays attitudinal and emotional characteristics quite akin to that of worship, which on its part entails a transgression of the First (and possibly the Second) Commandment.

7.6.4.4 Contextualisation and syncretism

When one considers the underlying motivation for the development of contextualised theology (or theologies) as essentially ensuring that the Gospel is made accessible to cultures with a vastly different worldview, it stands to reason that the risk of syncretism is never far away. This is particularly true when one considers that most missionaries tend to explore the fundamental components of the traditional religions in order to find elements of commonality to establish a connection. In the initial phase of missionary preaching compromises are regularly made, especially when it comes to the ritualistic elements of some of the traditional religions on the grounds that they fulfil a social function and as such are not sully the Gospel.

Kraft (2000:390) warns against two kinds of syncretistic trends in contextualisation.

There are at least two paths to syncretism. One is by importing foreign expressions of the faith and allowing the receiving people to attach their own worldview assumptions to these practices with little or no guidance from the missionaries. The result is a kind of “nativistic” Christianity or even, as in Latin America, “Christo-paganism.” Roman Catholic missionaries, especially, have fallen into this trap by assuming that when people practice so-called “Christian” rituals and use “Christian” terminology, they mean by them the same thing that European Christians mean.

The other way to syncretism is to so dominate a receiving people’s practice of Christianity that both the surface-level practices and the deep-level assumptions are imported. The result is a totally foreign, unadapted kind of Christianity that requires people to worship and practice their faith according to foreign patterns and to develop a special set of worldview assumptions for church situations that are largely ignored in the rest of their lives. Their traditional worldview, then, remains almost untouched by Biblical principles.

Beyers (2001:134) refers to Nicholls’ (1979:33) description of theological syncretism. It is based on the assumption that all religion and theology is rooted in a cultural paradigm and as such it is impossible to identify the true words of God without the filters of culture. When considered in these terms, all Christian convictions are relegated to the generic timeless truths intrinsic to most religions and cultures.

Consequently, Beyers (2001:134) argues that when this happens divine grace is absorbed by nature and as a result Nicholls claims that “all claims to an authoritative Scripture; a unique incarnation, a particular salvation are progressively absorbed in cul-

tural relativism” (Nicholls 1979:33-34). This leads Nicholls to conclude that syncretism ultimately leads to the death of the church and the end of evangelism.

Beyers (2001:132) points out that a likely and plausible solution may be found in Costa’s suggestion (1988:xii-xiii) that true contextualisation actually means de-contextualisation, in other words a self-critical attempt at hearing the Christ of Culture as “Christ against culture”. In other words, he recommends perceiving Christ outside of any culture and this is supported by Bosch (1991:455) who argues that the Gospel should always be foreign to all cultures and therefore may never become enculturised to the point that it is impossible to distinguish it from the particular culture. This is because the Gospel is set to challenge cultures to make certain adjustments to comply with the requirements set out in the Gospel.

7.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter explored the phenomenon of ancestor worship in terms of its articulation with the Bible and has found that ancestor worship constitutes idolatry in spite of the justifications used by advocates of traditional religions. Similarly, African theologians who have attempted to justify the practices associated with ancestor veneration have attempted to use the Catholic doctrine of communion of saints as a touchstone. However, as discussed, even this reasoning is flawed because the Catholic doctrine of communion of saints is unscriptural.

This chapter has also shown that inculturation as an attempt to integrate the traditional religious practices (of ancestor worship) is inappropriate, since it is essentially based on Catholic sacramentalist understanding of incarnation. We have therefore shown that the only appropriate model to address these issues is contextualisation which penultimately leads to transformation. The problem with inculturation as mentioned here is that it easily leads to syncretism and ultimate religious pluralism.

Furthermore, rejecting the traditional practices outright is one element of dealing with the problem, but as Hiebert points out, one needs to understand the cultural needs of the people as entrenched in their worldview. Therefore when one removes a traditional ritual one must be aware of the void it leaves in its wake. This was particularly evident in Korea where the traditional funeral service was replaced with the Christian memorial service to fill the void and not compromise their allegiance to God.

We have explored the differences between the cosmology inherent in traditional religions and Christianity specifically in terms of their perspectives on sin and salvation. This is of crucial importance when interpreting ancestor rituals from a Christian perspective because it is directly related to their view of salvation and the redemption embodied in Christ. As discussed here, the intercessory role which African theologians have ascribed to the ancestors relegates the redemption of Christ to insignificance and appears to make his role redundant.

Furthermore, we have explained why contextualisation is the most appropriate missiological principle to be used in these contexts because as mentioned throughout this thesis, ancestor worship has a religious and social function. If we reject it on religious



grounds and remove it from the religious experience of the people we still need to be sensitive to the cultural needs which must also be addressed. This is why contextualisation is the preferred model to address this dilemma because it functions with an awareness of both.