Ancestor Worship and the Challenges it poses to the Christian Mission and Ministry

BY

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This thesis is dedicated first and foremost to God who in Christ opened His heart to me and my family, who allowed me to study in South Africa and who sustained me through his Spirit.

Secondly, this study is dedicated to my wife, Ho Sun Kang, my parents, Yo Han Bae and Soon Gil Lee, and my children, Ki Ju and Hee Ju, who supported me during all this time.

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Preface

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ABBREVIATIONS

There are numerous abbreviations used in this study, most notably the following:

ATR: African Traditional Religion

AIC: African Independent Churches

JEM: Japan Evangelical Mission

JIC: Japanese Independent Churches

RCC: Roman Catholic Church

KEY TERMS

Accommodation	Dead, The	Shamanism
Afterlife	Death	Shintoism
Ancestor	Idolatry	Spiritism
Ancestor Christology	Inculturation	Syncretism
Animism	Mediator	Veneration
Confucianism	Rituals	Worship
Contextualisation	Sacrifice	
Cult	Saints	

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SUMMARY

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Ancestor worship is conceived by some to be an outdated primitive custom with no relevance to modern society. However, this study shows that ancestor worship is still alive and well in numerous cultures and countries around the globe and that it is still practised in different forms today.

This study focuses on the phenomenon of ancestor worship in Africa, Japan and Korea and specifically deals with the challenges it has posed to Christian missionaries in these contexts. Furthermore, this study examines the strategies which the Roman Catholic Church, the Protestant Church and Independent Churches have adopted to deal with this problem and the apparent mismatch with Christian theology. Therefore, the analysis of the phenomenon of ancestor worship is situated in the socio-cultural and religious paradigms of each of these countries and is examined in theological, missiological and Biblical terms.

Most notably, the thesis attempts to determine whether or not ancestor worship can be considered to be a purely social and cultural phenomenon which carries certain ethical responsibilities in these cultures and whether or not it is congruent with Christian theology. This study has attempted to prove that in spite of the socio-cultural dimensions of ancestor worship and its rituals (with their ensuing ethical responsibilities in the cosmologies of these nations) it is still essentially worship. It is contended that ancestor worship is fundamentally a form of idolatry and contrary to the teachings of the Bible and is therefore does not articulate with Christian theology. The fundamental premise underlying the study is the ultimate authority of the Bible as the inspired word of God.

This is a qualitative study which attempts to explore the phenomenon and rituals of ancestor worship on numerous levels. In each case the theological contributions of scholars in the field are evaluated and explored and ultimately benchmarked against the Biblical evidence. In the African context it is necessary therefore to look at African Christology and the attempts of scholars to contextualise the gospel in African terms.

As such the continuity and discontinuity between traditional religion and the Bible is explored and the dangers of syncretism are addressed. The ultimate goal was to suggest a suitable approach for the Church to deal with the challenges which ancestor worship poses in these specific contexts. The study will motivate and argue for contextualisation as an appropriate mission principle in this regard. This takes into consideration the social responsibility which missionaries have towards the people to whom they introduce the gospel. The reason is that the close bond which exists between identity, culture and religion is acknowledged. If the religion or cultural practises are rejected because it does not comply with the Gospel's requirements, then missionaries need to be sensitive to the void which they may create in the identity of the people and take appropriate steps to ameliorate the problem and avoid syncretism.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE PROBLEM

Over centuries a relatively clear articulation developed between the Gospel and traditional Western thought and therefore conveying the Gospel to people who share this view is relatively simple. However, one of the greatest challenges facing the Church is to ensure that the Gospel is heard by people from diverse cultures without having their understanding blocked by the fact that they do not share Western cosmology and worldview.

A person's understanding of the world and universe is very closely linked to their identity, religious and cultural heritage. When individuals convert to the Christian faith which entails a different worldview and implies a different set of values, they embark on a journey during the course of which they are faced with an identity crisis of significant proportions. This is exacerbated by pressure from their communities to stay true to their roots and traditional value systems.

Missionaries who attempt to plant the Church in countries which traditionally subscribe to the practices of or associated with ancestor worship face an uphill battle. Cultures and communities influenced and formed by these traditions and rituals function according to a worldview different not only from the West but in many cases from the Christian worldview as such.

When one considers the phenomenon of ancestor worship it is clear that there is no comfortable fit with the Gospel. Protestant churches and the Roman Catholic Church have adopted different strategies to deal with this dilemma. Unfortunately, in some cases it has led to religious plurality and syncretism.

The phenomenon of ancestor worship in Africa, Japan and Korea will be explored in this study. The approaches which Protestant church groups have adopted in each of these countries to deal with this problem will be discussed in theoretical, theological, missiological and Biblical terms.

To simply denounce the practices associated with the ancestral cult is inappropriate and most of the time counter-productive. One has to bear in mind that these practices are outward manifestations of deep-seated beliefs and cultural values and constitute essential vectors of identity. If the ministry is to succeed in countries where people are bound by traditional religions which are essentially animistic, missionaries have to be sensitive to the needs of the people, yet at the same time remain true to the principles of the Gospel. This does not necessarily imply a compromise or accepting religious plu-

ralism but rather a sensitive awareness of the needs of the community in which the missionaries are ministering the Gospel or where the Church has been established.

In order to address these needs, missionaries and churches need to have a deep understanding of the nature and significance of ancestor beliefs and rituals or practices associated with it. This is necessary to gain a clear understanding of whether or not the practices are contrary to the Scriptures and which functions these practices serve in the respective communities. Understanding the cultural or ethical need of the community is important because unless preaching the Gospel is able to address these needs on a fundamental level, the Gospel will not find a people who are receptive to its message. In the past, missionaries have assumed a rather colonial mindset when they evaluated traditional cultural practices. In many cases this meant that they were unaware of the close relationship between cultural identity and religion. By rejecting all religious rituals out of hand they also rejected the cultural heritage and cultural identity of their flock. This left an existential void in the lives newly converted Christians.

What is required then is to examine the beliefs, practices and rituals of ancestor worship in its broadest terms to gain an understanding of their anthropological and socio-cultural significance. Once one has defined the practices in these terms, one can analyse and evaluate their acceptability in theological terms.

Examining these beliefs and practices in terms of theology includes hermeneutical and exegetical analyses of relevant Biblical scriptures. If only one of these facets are emphasised, for example hermeneutical analysis to the exclusion of exegesis, one runs the risk of inculturation and religious plurality as found in the hermeneutical crisis in African Christology today. If the hermeneutical aspect is neglected and only exegetical insights are taken into account, contextualisation will suffer.

Finally, the contention of this study is that only once the above-mentioned analyses have been done, is it possible to make a decision on which mission principle would best serve the needs of the Church and the people involved while at the same time ensuring that the Gospel is not compromised in any way.

Therefore, the problem in this study centres on the following questions:

- What is the theoretical and anthropological understanding of the phenomenon of ancestor worship particularly in terms of the prevalence of ancestor worship in Africa, Korea and Japan?
- What challenges does ancestor worship pose to the ministry of the Church today?
- What is the Biblical perspective on the premises underlying ancestor worship?
- How have Protestant churches, African Indigenous Churches and the Roman Catholic Church attempted to deal with this challenge respectively and how have they justified it in theological terms?
- What is the most effective strategy for missionaries in order to arrive at a praxis which addresses this multi-faceted problem?

1.2 THESIS OF THIS STUDY

This study is based on the presupposition that ancestor worship is incompatible with Christianity. This study also asserts that the Bible as the inspired Word of God is the ultimate authority and therefore uses the Bible as the ultimate benchmark.

Furthermore, the thesis of this study asserts that the Gospel is to be protected at all cost and that any contextualised interpretation of the Gospel that amounts to a compromise or which can possibly lead to syncretism is unacceptable. Therefore, when attempting to evaluate ancestor worship and its associated practices, the study will explore the deep structures of this phenomenon to determine not only its socio-cultural significance, but also to determine its religious and cultic aspects and evaluate all in light of the Scriptures.

There are numerous scholars who argue that ancestor worship is nothing more than a social (cf. Dzobo 1985; Becken 1993; Ro 1988) or cultural phenomenon and thus deny its intrinsic religiosity. Others have acknowledged the religious significance of the ancestors, while Mbiti (1969) pointed out their intermediary role. Although the actual rituals may differ somewhat in Africa, Korea and Japan, this study acknowledges and explores the common underlying religious-phenomenal characteristics and motivations of ancestor cults.

This study argues that ancestor rituals are inherently religious (cf. Berentson 1991, JY. Kim 1984, Shibata 1983) and therefore constitute a cultic alternative to Christian Biblical worship. For the same reason the phenomenon is termed ancestor *worship.*

This study finally supports Hiebert's notion of a contextualised mission principle aimed at transformation.

1.3 SCOPE OF THIS STUDY

This study will attempt to provide a solution for missions (and churches) which face challenges in their ministry as a result of ancestor worship. Africa, Korea and Japan were selected because the phenomenon of ancestor worship figures prominently in these societies.

An important part of the research this study was devoted to determining what role ancestral beliefs, rituals and/or cult plays in the cultures and contemporary life of these societies, notwithstanding different religious persuasions. From the start it was clear that at the roots of these cultures and communities lay the mores of ancestor worship and that its influence is more fundamental and encompassing than is generally known in the West. Even the considerable changes that globalisation and modernisation have brought to these countries did not succeed to uproot or displace it.

It would be pointless to attempt to understand ancestor worship theologically if the empirical realities we are to interpret were not correctly depicted. Therefore a limited phenomenological analysis of ancestor worship will be conducted in terms of its religious and social significance. This will be done in the light of methodologies particular to cultural anthropology and Science of Religion. Biblical exegesis and interpretation,

and identifying effective models of missiological strategy forms the next phase. The focus of this study is not so much on the history of ancestor worship or an exposition of the traditional customs involved, but the theological analysis and evaluation of published research conducted in the fields of Science of Religion, sociology and theology.

Chapter 2 focuses on a phenomenological and general understanding of ancestor worship. This chapter asserts that in order to glean a reliable understanding of the phenomenon, one needs to explore and understand the underlying cosmology involved. This is because these worldviews are primary constructs which underlie the worshippers' ways of thinking and believing.

There is an obvious danger in generalisation. Africa, South Korea and Japan harbour a great variety of ethnic groups, cultures and religions (or cults). On the other hand, there are enough similarities between them to accept certain commonalities and to allow us to risk some generalisations about ancestor worship. Thus, Chapter 2 will attempt to define ancestor worship, the notion of death within the paradigm of ancestor worship and the identity and purpose of the ancestors in these societies. This chapter will also attempt to find an explanation for the prevalence of ancestor worship in the modern world.

The great variety and richness of each area (Africa, South Korea and Japan) is examined in the subsequent chapters. Chapter 3 examines the phenomenon in the African context. There are few places in the world where one will find the unique fusion of traditional religions and Christianity as in Africa. There are considerable juxtaposed points of view in terms of doctrine between Christianity and traditional religions in African Churches and yet in some cases the tensions are less apparent because of the attitude of assimilation which some of these religions or churches have assumed.

Chapter 3 thus also explores and compares the manner in which African Churches have attempted to cope with ancestor veneration and the nature of ancestor worship. Ancestor worship in Africa will also be examined in terms of contemporary African Ancestral Theology in order to gain a clearer understanding of research of scholars in the field.

Chapter 4 focuses on ancestor worship in Korea. In spite of the fact that South Korea is considered a First World country (especially compared to African countries), the practice of ancestor worship is still prevalent and has proven to be a matter of ongoing interest for anthropologists and theologians alike. Ancestor worship in Korea is generally defined in terms of Confucian or Neo-Confucian ancestor worship (Ro 1988; Adams 1995). Therefore, Chapter 4 attempts to gain a clearer understanding of the nature of the religious background in Korea, how the ancestor rites are practised, and how Christianity has responded to ancestor worship in Korea.

This chapter will also attempt to determine which religious elements of recent memorial services ought to be banned from the Christian worship and which elements ought to be revived in the Church. These factors of ancestor worship in Korea are examined within the Christian paradigm in order to assess the implications of ancestor worship for the Church in Korea. As a result it may be possible to consider including the

practices at contemporary memorial services in the Christian paradigm without constituting a conflict with the kerygma. In order to achieve this it is necessary to gain an understanding of the state of affairs of contemporary Korean Christianity.

Chapter 5 attempts to provide a profile of the nature of ancestor worship in Japan and how it relates to the Japanese cosmology and the ensuing the religious implications of their beliefs. An attempt is also made to understand the reasons why ancestor worship has been able to maintain its pervasive influence in that country in the face of the vast numbers of missionaries who have been attempting to establish Christianity. This will establish the clear link between Japanese culture and religion and why outright rejection without acknowledging the socio-cultural needs and cosmology of the people offers no real solution to the problem. Chapter 5 will also look at the Japanese churches' attempts to deal with ancestor worship.

Chapter 6 concentrates on Biblical accounts of aspects of ancestor worship and attempts to identify Biblical guidelines in assessing the phenomenon and its cosmology. Ancestor worship hinges on the perceived relationship between the living and the dead. These beliefs are intrinsic to the cosmology of the Japanese, Koreans and Africans and thus in turn inform their ritual practices. This chapter shows that in all three cases, there is the underlying belief that the dead will benefit from the actions of the living descendants and that the living and the dead exist in an essentially symbiotic relationship.

Chapter 6 explores the synergy of the underlying beliefs about death and the afterlife. Therefore, the parallels between the beliefs of these three nations will be discussed in terms of the Biblical perspective on the relationship between the living and the dead and death and the afterlife. The answers to these questions will attempt to provide a clearer picture of what a Christian's attitude towards ancestors ought to be as dictated to by the Holy Bible.

Chapter 7 comprises a theological and missiological reflection on ancestor worship. The chapter considers the multi-faceted religious elements which have influenced ancestor worship and permeated the ethnic and traditional beliefs central to this study. These elements are assessed theologically and the question as to the co-existence of ancestor worship and Christianity is addressed.

Consequently, the chapter also considers the questions of whether or not ancestor worship constitutes a form of idolatry and whether it is at all possible to integrate ancestor worship into Christianity. The differences between the cosmologies of traditional religions and Christianity are outlined and the hermeneutical problems which emerge in contextualised theologies and which may or may not constitute irreconcilable differences are explored.

1.4   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research for this study consisted mainly of phenomenological, systemic and Biblical analyses, theological assessment and missiological strategy design. This is an essentially qualitative study and was based on an extensive literary survey.

In his book, *Studying religion*, Krüger (1982) effectively describes theology's two-tiered structure. According to Krüger (1982:12-13), the first level of theology can be labelled human-scientific, as theology has a lot in common with the discipline of Humanities. The procedure of the second phase entails normative criticism, evaluation and reflection, and may even include Christian dialogue and/or reflection, as the findings of the first phase are tested against evangelical norms. In this study, the Bible serves as primary source when critical norms are to be identified or formulated.

Strategy	
Theological level:	Theological foundation
Human-scientific level:	Theoretical understanding

Van Rheenen's Three Disciplines of Missiology model (1996:137-140) is similar:

Strategy
Theological foundation
Theoretical understanding

Level one – Theoretical Approach/Foundation

The first level (Krüger's first tier) represents the cognitive approach to and phenomenological understanding of ancestor worship, making use of an anthropological and Science of Religion perspectives. Looking at ancestor worship from this point of view illustrates the basic religious and social premises that underlie ancestral cults. Also ancestral beliefs and practices should be regarded as forming part of the religious consciousness and worldview of the peoples who preserve and practise it. With this consideration in mind, the concern of this thesis is primarily with the central religious elements of ancestor worship, while certain distinctive ethical codes relating to it are also considered.

Level two – Theological Foundation

At the second level, exegeses of relevant passages from the Bible were done to determine how Biblical authors viewed ancestor worship and related phenomena. Theological reflection attempts to formulate fundamental values and principles as basis for this study.

Level three – Missiological Strategy

The third level represents the theological and missiological approach, which suggests how missionaries and ministers of the Church should approach adherents of ancestor worship in order to minister the Word to them and facilitate its transformational effect on their worldview and religious perspective. Synoptical analyses of the missiological strategies that missionaries and ministers have made use of in the past to challenge ancestor worship were made.

By allowing levels 1 and 2 to interact (by way of missiological reflection) this study aims to highlight those elements of ancestral worship that are incompatible with the Gospel. It also explores the possibility of re-orientating converts' understanding of their

relationship with the ancestors, and of life and death as such, in order that they may realise the new life in Christ as their only Mediator and Saviour.

Chapter 2

ANCESTOR WORSHIP AS A MULTI-RELIGIOUS PHENOMENON

2.1 INITIAL DESCRIPTION OF ANCESTOR WORSHIP

The purpose of this chapter is to address the question of how to understand and describe ancestor worship as phenomenon. I will offer also a brief overview of the aspects of ancestor worship.

As I focus on these aspects (also with references to African, Japanese and Korean similarities), special attention will be given to the definition of ancestor worship, the concept of death within ancestor worship, the identity and function of ancestors, the worldview underlying these beliefs and practices and the reasons why ancestor worship is still surviving in the modern world.

The social anthropologist, Meyer Fortes, has studied various African cultures and in his 1960 paper *Some Reflections on Ancestor Worship in Africa* has made a comparison between the societies he was studying and the societies of China and Japan. He found many similarities (Ma 2004:55).

To be sure, there is an obvious danger in such generalisation. In Africa, South Korea and Japan there is a great variety of ethnic groups and cultures with many differences between them. On the other hand, I think there are enough similarities between them, to allow us to risk some generalisations about ancestor worship. It is thus possible, in my view, to make general observations and to outline certain commonalities. But we must also bear in mind the great variety and richness of each area (Africa, South Korea and Japan) which will be examined in chapters 3, 4 and 5. Even though this account is certainly not exhaustive, it will give us considerable information about ancestor worship.

A number of works on ancestor worship have been written in the last few years. The majority of these works are social anthropological studies, which have proven to be very informative and useful to our present theological exploration of the subject (Toorn 1996; Lindsay 1996; Lai 1997; Dinslage 2000; Oduyoye 2000; Johnson 2001; Ma 2003; Mullins 2004).[1] The main reason why this topic has been covered so extensively is that there are possibly more people practising ancestor worship or involved in ancestor wor-

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[1] Historically, ancestor worship has been one of the world's central institutions, regardless of temporal and geographic boundaries. It has also been a popular and fruitful area of investigation for anthropologists attempting to gain knowledge of different cultures and societies. For more information about the concept of ancestor worship as a social and ethical function, see Busia (1961:86-89), Welton (1971:1-18), Wolf (1999:131-182), Offner (1979:1-16), Shibata (1983:35-48), Smith (1989:27-38), Kim (1996:16-24).

ship than people who practise the Christian faith.[2] Moreover, the trend which emerges is that instead of dying out, ancestor worship is thriving in the modern world. Even a large number of Christians in the developing world practise ancestor worship periodically as a traditional custom. This means that all so-called "Third World" churches are faced with the question of ancestor worship.[3] On that note, I will begin with a description and discussion of ancestor worship.

2.1.1 Ancestor worship is widespread phenomenon

Ancestor worship can be regarded as one of the great phenomena of religion and as one of the most important religious expressions of humankind.[4] In fact, ancestor worship can be found wherever primal or traditional culture and beliefs have survived (notably in Asia, Africa, North and Latin Americas, Oceania and Australia). It is even practiced by people who participate in a modern technological economy and culture, pointing to deep existential and religious needs which drive them (Hwang 1977:340).[5] Here are some global examples of ancestor worship.

In Asia the Vietnamese Cult of the Ancestors is a clear example of a traditional animistic belief system. The persistent manner in which it is still followed today is surprising to outsiders (Reimer 1975:155).

Japanese folk religion has ancestor worship as its central feature. In Japan ancestors were originally seen as the founders of households and the originators of successive household heads. Morioka (1984:201) describes Japanese ancestor worship as the "belief in the superhuman power of the dead recognised as ancestors, and the many rituals based on this belief".

In Korea ancestor worship signifies the solidarity of agnatic (or patrilineal) groups and the fundamental morality of the participants (Lee 1987:56).[6]

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[2] According to Woodhead (2002:153), "Christianity is the largest of the world's religions and the most extensive across the globe. Estimates of the total Christian population of the world at the beginning of the twenty-first century put the figure at around 2 billion, or 32 per cent of world population." Nevertheless, ancestor worship is practiced within all major religions including Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and traditional religions. For the widespread belief in the ancestor cult, see Gehman (1999:28-31).

[3] In my article (Bae 2004:338) I argue that ancestor worship is a dilemma for Christian communities all over the world, especially where people have adapted Western theology to their Third World cultures. For the purposes of the scope of my article, I limited my study to Korea and Africa as examples of places in which ancestor worship is being practiced. Here I expand the scope to include Japan.

[4] Geană (2005:350) argues that one of the most elaborate responses to the human perception of being-in-time (as the essence of historicity) has been the cult of the ancestors. Consequently, the ancestor cult may be considered foundational for historicity.

[5] For the prevalence of the ancestor cult as a primitive religion in the world, see Beckwith (1970:2), Dupré (1975:92-93), Gill (1982:125-127), Hultkrantz (1979:206-231), Thorpe (1992:11-117). And for more recent information, see Amanze (2003:43-59), Fowler (2003:303-329), G. Johnson (2003:327-346), Hoare (2004:113-137), Komuro (2003:60-68), Sayyid & Tyrer (2002:57-75).

[6] It is well known that Vietnam, along with Korea and Japan, has been heavily influenced by China, especially in terms of its Confucian culture. This influence is most visible in ancestor worship. For the influence of Confucianism on Vietnam, see Phan (2002:421-430), Neil (1993:11-41).

Even in Indonesia the traditional religion of *Marapu* (the ancestors) is still widely practiced. The more traditionally minded believe that the *Marapu* are supernatural guardians of the forest who help the inhabitants keep their possessions (Fowler 2003:303).

In Africa ancestor worship is also at the centre of traditional religion and as such poses a formidable challenge to Christianity. One of the most contentious issues in missionary work in Africa has been the question of the veneration of the ancestors, as almost all African societies, even those with a substantial Christian segment, strongly believe in ancestors (Amanze 2003:43).[7] In addition, as a result of globalization and a great deal of migration, Africa's ancestral belief system has spread to diverse countries, including America, and has infiltrated other religions. For instance, The Feast of All Saints celebrated in New Orleans is a mixture of the Catholic remembrance of the dead and African American culture (Brown 1994:50). Even many African Christians accept ancestor worship as an integral part of their culture and daily life. It is not strange that many members of the church (including office bearers) are involved with traditional rituals on the side.

In Oceania, the generic name given to the islands of the Pacific Ocean, various ancestor worship practices characterise the colourful cultures of these remote islands.[8] New Guineans believe in ancestral spirits, as well as vaguely defined nature spirits. Their traditions include religious performances during which frightening masks and vivid body paintings are worn (Thorpe 1992:91-93).

Historical ancestors are given divine status amongst the Polynesians, remembering the ancestral migrations which brought them to the islands on which they now live. The names of the ancestors who came from the other side of the ocean are remembered and revered as gods (Guerreiro 1997:16).

Johnson (2001:40) describes the Hawaiian religious beliefs as follows:

For the Hawaiians, *'aumakua* means an ancestral god, guardian spirit, family god and ancestral spirit. Formal and informal rituals are present in Hawaiian culture and for Hawaiian families plants, animals, the earth itself, the ocean and the atmosphere invoke *'aumakua* associations every day of their lives. These associations also influence the Hawaiian peoples' names and the patterns of their religious practices and beliefs.

In North and South America the indigenous shaman or medicine man is at the centre of religious life. There is a clear link with nature meaning that in addition to being animistic these cultures can also be termed totemistic.[9] The shaman is believed to be able to travel above and below the earth, and to be in contact with the supernatural world in these places. Using meditation, his body remains in a trance and his spirit travels to these invisible realms to converse or seek counsel with the ancestral spirits (Dupré 1975:110-111). Even today these positions and abilities are celebrated. In Bra-

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[7] For a more detailed survey on ancestor worship in Africa, see Dinslage & Storch (2000:121-127), Kalu (2001:54-84), Kaplan (2000:114-151), Mafico (2000:481-489), Oduyoye (2000:73-82), Triebel (2002:187-197).

[8] This vast area is further divided, for geographical purposes, into Melanesia (New Guinea, New Hebrides, et al), Micronesia (Caroline, Marshall, Mariana Islands, et al), and Polynesia (New Zealand, Hawaii, Easter Island, et al).

[9] For the traditional religion of South America cf. Cole (1982:61).

zil for instance, an annual reunion of the Fraternity of American Descendants with their ancestral spirits takes place (Jack 1995:22).

Looking at the above examples, it is clear that ancestor worship is not restricted to people in "primitive" societies. Though the term may mean one thing to the educated and another thing to the uneducated, the core tenets are the same, being expressed in many different ways, varying from person to person and from group to group. Ancestor worship is found on every social and educational level within the same cultural milieu. Actually, the social anthropologists have done a superb job of providing us with both general works and specific case studies on the many ways in which ancestor worship is being practised amongst different peoples in various parts of the world.

2.2   DEFINITION OF ANCESTOR WORSHIP

Before commencing a discussion on ancestor worship, a preliminary clarification of terms and a definition of concepts will be offered.[10]

In the broad sense, ancestor worship comprises a variety of religious practices and beliefs focussing on the spirits of ancestors. It is most often persons who used to be important, such as the head of a family or clan and the chief of a tribe or state, who are revered in these rites. Ancestor worship in a narrow sense refers to the specific actions which are performed during the rites relating to the propitiation of deceased relatives and/or ministration to their needs. Ancestor worship here is an attempt to preserve good relations with the departed kin.[11] These actions, on the part of the living who are in a position to render help, try to pacify or oblige the spirits of the dead – by offering them what they may need in their new existence (Hwang 1977:343).

An important clarification needs to be made here, that is the distinction between ancestors and the dead. Although at times the line of division between the two may not be so strict[12], it follows logically that the category of "the dead" is larger than that of "the

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[10] Reimer (1975:156), in his article *The Religious Dimension of the Vietnamese Cult of the Ancestors* gives two reasons to explain the complication of analysis of the ancestor worship in Vietnam. First, no recognised systematised formulation of beliefs exists. Although the Cult of the Ancestors is the most universal and unified institution of Vietnamese animism, specific beliefs about it are not entirely standardised, even within a given area. Religious beliefs are highly individualised. Secondly, the Vietnamese tendency toward religious eclecticism and toward syncretism – that curious ability to hold conflicting beliefs at the same time – brings confusion. It is not uncommon to find people who profess adherence to modern scientific secularism which denies the existence of a soul, yet still hold to traditional ancestral beliefs.

[11] Following a similar line of thought, Helen Hardacre (1992:263) states: "The term ancestor worship designates rites and beliefs concerning deceased kinsmen. Rites of ancestor worship include personal devotions, domestic rites, the ancestral rites of a kinship group such as a lineage, periodic rites on the death day of the deceased and annual rites for the collected ancestors. Generally excluded from the category are rites for the dead having no specific reference to kinsmen, and beliefs about the dead in general that lack any special reference to kinship."

[12] Gluckman(1937:117-136), in his article *Bantu Studies*, disagrees with this statement, and shows clear differences between ancestor worship and the cult of the dead. "Ancestors represent positive moral forces who can cause or prevent misfortune and who require that their descendants observe a moral code. The cult of the dead, on the other hand, is not exclusively directed to deceased kinsmen, but to the spirits of the dead in general. Here spirits are prayed to for the achievement of amoral or antisocial ends, whereas ancestors can be petitioned only for ends that are in accord with basic social principles."

ancestors". The "dead" is an open category (which includes all people who have died, either recently or long ago), whereas the category of "ancestors" relates to (more narrowly) the founders of a kinship group, of a community and even of a nation (These two aspects of "the dead" and "the departed kin" will explored more extensively in following paragraphs).

2.2.1 Ancestor veneration, cult or worship?

For the purpose of this study it is necessary to make a clear distinction between the use of the terms ancestor cult, ancestor veneration and ancestor worship. Although some scholars like Nyirongo (1997:87), Anderson (1991:81), Kruger et al (2002:34) have argued that the term "veneration" is preferable to that of "worship" on the grounds that there is no evidence of an apotheosis of the ancestors, this study rejects this view. The reason for this is evident in the arguments proposed in the following chapters which clearly point out that not only do the ancestor rituals have a significant social function, but also do these practices display an undeniably religious or cultic character.

Khathide (2003:314) argues that although the notion that ancestor rituals are to be considered in the context of their social significance and therefore as a form of veneration rather than worship, there are some unresolved issues. Khathide refers to Triebel's (2002:192) assertion that this view does not take into account the fact that the ancestors are feared. Furthermore he contends that Zahan (2000:13) has pointed out that "veneration" cannot be the preferable term because there are many practices which constitute worship in themselves, for example the erection of altars upon which sacrifices are made to the ancestors. It points to religious acts and intentions. Furthermore, the prayers which are said during the ceremony are implicitly religious in nature, rather than a mere manifestation of reverence for the deceased ancestors.

Furthermore, this study supports Ro's assertion (1988:7) that "ancestor cult" is not an appropriate term to use in this context, mainly because of the pejorative connotations attached to the term "cult". Ro further acknowledges that some scholars have preferred to use the term "ritual" but as he rightfully argues, this does not take cognisance of the religious ideas and beliefs underlying the rituals.

Some anthropologists and Catholic scholars have asserted that the social and ethical dimensions of ancestor rituals can be separated from the religious connotations attached to it. The reason for this has to do with a specific missionary approach – that of assimilation and accommodation. However, for the purpose of this study, ancestor worship must be seen as a whole and therefore the social functions and ethical motivations intrinsic to these practices cannot be isolated from the religious elements. Consequently, this study will give preference to the notion of ancestor rituals as a form of worship and thus the term "ancestor worship" will be used throughout this study.

2.2.2 Who are the ancestors?

2.2.2.1 The identity of ancestors

In most societies where belief in ancestors is common, a record of people who have lived and have died is kept in the memory of the living members of the community. They have moved into the category of ancestors, or the living dead. The concept of ancestral involvement in everyday life is more than a story or a myth. It is lived by millions in many areas in the world. How would we begin to define this category?

"The living dead who hold influence over their living descendents" is a succinct and common way of defining ancestors. Their identity is further explained as transcendental beings representing the religious, ethical and institutional values of society in their community. Their abode and influence range from the physical to the spiritual world.

2.2.2.2 Ancestors are the dead

Ancestors have long held an important position in anthropology. For instance, the definitive mark of "primitive religion" according to Spencer, Tylor, and Frazer was considered to be "ancestor worship" (McCall 1995:256). Seen by these scholars from the perspective of anthropology, the concept of ancestors is closely linked to that of the departed kin. But what about the rest of the dead and their various forms? Also, what is the link between ancestors and totemism, shamanism, spiritism and theism?

Lehmann and Myers (2006:284) make the following observation: "A major problem with Spencer's argument that ancestor worship was the first religion is that many societies at the hunting-and-gathering level do not practise ancestor worship. The Arunta of Australia, for example, worshiped their totemic plants and animals, but not their human ancestors." One shortcoming in the study of ancestor worship has been the fact that the term "ancestor worship" is often reserved for those societies where the dead are specifically called by a term that is translated as ancestor. This is problematic as it excludes societies whose religious practices concern ghosts, shades, spirits, souls, totemic plants and animals, or merely the dead (Steadman & Palmer 1996:63).

The differences and links between ancestors and totemic plants and animals is a fine line. Totems (animal or plant) are clearly ancestral in that they link a person with a line of ancestors. Some scholars include it in ancestor worship. The Australian form of totemism is an example of this, seen by some as a form of diffused ancestor worship "... [because by] taking the name of an animal such as kangaroo ... people express a communal obligation to the founders of their kinship group" (Harris 1989:405).

The description and study also becomes problematic in the case of religions that based on more general, and therefore, supposedly non-ancestral, spirits or gods. The role of ancestors are overlooked. An example of this is the hunters and gatherers living in the Kalahari, who are often called the !Kung. Lee (1984:103) argues that the !Kung's "religious universe is inhabited by a high god, a lesser god, and a host of minor animal spirits", but he also notes that "the main actors in [the !Kung's religious world are the //gangwasi, the ghosts of recently deceased !Kung".

According to Steadman and Palmer (1994), another example of a religion which is initially described as shamanic, concerned with spirits and not ancestors, though could be regarded as performing ancestor worship, is the Yanomamo religion:

> Although the Yanomamo religion actually centres on shamans ingesting hallucinogenic drugs and controlling spirits, Chagnon (1983:92) reports that "when the original people [the *no badabo*] died, they turned into spirits: *hekura*." Because the *no badabo* were the original Yanomamo, this means that ancestors are actually central to Yanomamo religion.

This failure to recognise the connection between ancestors and spirits or gods often results in societies being excluded from the ancestor worship category.

Another complicating factor is that the deceased and ancestors cannot be taken as synonyms. In some cases a minimum requirement for ancestral status would entail to be remembered. "When the living dead are forgotten in the memory of their group and dropped from the genealogy as a result of the passing of time (four or five generations), they are believed to be transformed into "nameless spirits", non-ancestors ..." (Lehmann and Myers 2006:284).

Smith (1974:56-57) points to a seemingly opposite principle in Japanese ancestral worship. "Among the Japanese … the soul of a recent deceased person has to pass through a number of stages until reaching the condition of ancestor."

The examples show that in defining ancestors as "the dead" it is important to realise that, even if not evident at first, references to ghosts, spirits, and the dead in a society's religion, mean that ancestors are implied in one way or another.

2.2.2.3 Ancestors are the departed kin

Differing from the examples cited above, some scholars go for a narrower definition of ancestors, distinguishing the dead (or spirits) from ancestors. They view that all spirits can not be ancestors; there are conditions necessary for a deceased spirit to become an ancestor. To illustrate this, Hammond-Tooke (1981:23) refers to the Dahoenas of West Africa who distinguish clearly between the dead and the ancestors. They have complex ceremonies to transform some dead into ancestors, meaning that not everybody who died automatically becomes an ancestor. These conditions to be venerated as an ancestor are not the same for all the tribes, nations and areas in the world where ancestor worship is practised, and definitely not agreed upon by scholars. In general, however, the following are the most common conditions needed to be an ancestor:

2.2.2.3.1 To have lived, procreated and died

Whitley (2002:121) gives a minimal definition of an ancestor as "someone who has procreated, died, but has descendants who remember him/her." Fortes (1976:4) agrees with this base requirement by noting that "ancestors receive recognition insofar as their descendants exist and are designated as such." The notion of having children is self explanatory, to be invoked a person must have descendants to invoke him, therefore the need for having children (Shorter 1983a:15).

2.2.2.3.2 To be remembered by those left behind

A recent definition of ancestor, as used by Bloch (1996:43) states that "the term ancestor is used in anthropology to designate those forebears who are remembered". Of course, ancestors need not be invoked by their names and remembered as individuals, they may be conceived of as part of a "collective", but the important part is that they are remembered. The remembering starts, as noted by many ethnographers, with individuals before moving into collective anonymity (Whitley 2002:121). It does not necessarily imply a genealogy of named individuals. Present generations are linked to ancestors through descent. This is borne out by rituals which emphasise the idea of continuity. Once again, within this prerequisite, it follows that not all dead are ancestors, and not every monumental grave can be defined as "ancestral". Goody's (1962) research suggests that "human bodies buried in unusual places of subjected to unusual treatment are more likely to be those of social outcasts than those of ancestors" (Whitley 2002:122).

2.2.2.3.3 To have had a significant social status whilst alive

Ephirim-Donker (1997:129) explained ancestors as following:

> To be an ancestor the deceased must have been an elder, and upon his or her demise become one of the eternal beings. The ancestors are thus a distinct group of eternal saints apart from other spiritual personalities who are also endowed with immortality but are not ancestors.

Besides the rites of passage after death, to be admitted to ancestor status often depends upon certain pre-death prerequisites. These include, among others, to have had a long life, a certain social standing, self-control, morality and integrity. Ancestorhood quite often implies moral superiority, understandable, since it is mainly persons of character and moral who form the "electorate" when an ancestor is to be "elected" to the rank of an ancestor. Ancestors thus become role models to emulate (Amanze 2003:64-65).

Who is regarded as important will vary between particular societies, and according to patterns of kinship and property holding. Within societies with strong patrilineal principles of descent, those who are regarded as important, and attain ancestor status will be different from societies who have bilateral kinship patterns (Whitley 2002:122). Kopytoff (1971) notes how that in some African lineage-based societies, such as the Suku of the Congo, ancestors are simply the more elderly of the elders. In other societies, almost all dead people are considered ancestors, even if they have no descendants, or were of no significant status in life. The only exception to ancestorhood would be notorious people such as witches, who were considered evil (Amanze 2003:64-65).

2.2.2.3.4 To be revered in specific places and ceremonies

The final step in many societies for the dead to become "ancestors" is to go through a series of "rites of passage". Whitley (2002:122) notes the following examples of reverie and ceremony within the LoDagaba and Taiwanese cultures:

> Rites of burial and rites of "ancestor worship" are ritually and often spatially distinct. Ancestors are frequently revered in places which bear no obvious relation to the place of

burial. Among the LoDagaba, ancestors are venerated in ancestral shrines located in byres; in Taiwan, ancestor shrines venerating named ancestors are located in a variety of places (in the home and in ancestral halls), but rarely at the place of burial.

When we consider the various options for ancestorhood above, they all seem plausible and logical. The reason ancestors are distinguished from the dead might be due to veneration or reverence toward ancestors above that of the dead. When we look at it the other way though, ancestors can be placed in the category of the dead because they are dependent upon the living or their descendants to be ancestors.

A question that arises is how to explain rituals concerning distant ancestors that don't fit into these four categories? To explain sacrifices to ancestors who have no emotional ties with the ones offering them and who left no inheritance, Mbiti makes the distinction between the living dead and other spirits. This second group is the spirits of those who have disappeared in the world of the unknown. "The living do not know them anymore, they have ceased to be members of the family. Such spirits have no personal communication with human families" (Mbiti 1990:26).

Thus our only final conclusion can be to say that the ancestors are the deceased. Linked to Mbiti's "living dead" above, to further classify who and what ancestors are, we need to move to looking at their identity and function.

2.2.3 The function of ancestors

From the forgoing description, it is evident that the dead need to meet some prerequisites to be ancestors in general. Aside from the ancestors, there are whole groups of beings that are not ancestors, such as those who weren't born properly: "Dead or still-born children, miscarriages, and abortions are generally conceptually distinguished from ancestors" (Hardacre 1992:264). Added to this are the people who lived, yet did not meet the requirements outlined above. Gehman (1999:12-13) talks about this group, saying that women, children, unimportant men, unmarried men, those who died without children, as well as young adults less than eighteen years of age, are not likely to become ancestors.

Ancestors are those from whom the living can derive some benefit, and must be people of effect, means, importance or status. This is linked to the function and identity of ancestors. To reinforce this thought, Bediako (1990:38) says that "only those who lived exemplary lives and from whom the community derived some benefit" becomes ancestors. Why is benefit a key-concept in understanding the ancestors? What exactly is the role of these persons classified as ancestors in relation to the descendants who call upon them?

The role of ancestors is closely linked to that of their identity. As being a living part of the community, and often its head or elder, they play a role as the representatives of the social law and tradition, and are construed to be indispensable to uphold the harmony and order within their societies. This role allows them to be benefactors of welfare to obedient and harmonious societies, or wrath to those who create disharmony and imbalances. As seen in their identity, being linked to the Supreme Being, ancestors also play a role as intermediaries or mediators between God and their descendants.

2.2.3.1 *The living dead as members of the family and community*

The term "living dead" was originally used by JS Mbiti (1971:10) to describe ancestors in Africa. It has since has been adopted fairly generally by scholars and representatives of African Traditional Religion. Amanze (2003:44) explains the meaning behind it: "To many African people the dead people are not dead at all. Death is only a transitional state to a spiritual life free from material hindrances. The deceased are at once dead and alive, and because of their paradoxical nature they are known… as the living-dead."

Shorter (1983b:199) agrees that "living dead" is a better translation than "ancestor". In Mbiti's own words "the living dead is a person who is physically dead but alive in the memory of those who knew him in his life, as well as being alive in the world of the spirits. The living dead are still part of the extended family and as such has a close relationship with the living" (Mbiti 1990:25).

In the work that coined the term, Mbiti explains why the term is an apt reference for ancestors by giving insight into the African worldview. Africans understand human beings as being composed of both a physical and a non-physical part. By referring to the Akamba people of Kenya, the non-physical part is shown to comprise spirit (or breath), heart, life, and mind (or intellect). All of these non-physical parts rely on the body to exist. The spirit, as the "life-principle" is shown to exist through breathing. As long as the spirit is present life is present in the body. When a person dies, it is only the physical part that dies, the rest of the elements (spirit, heart, and mind – the life-principle) continue to live. These bear the personality of the person into the next dimension as his/her whole being (minus the physical part) moves into the spiritual world. Looking at the Akamba's beliefs, it is even thought that the person receives an identical body to that left in the physical realm (Mbiti 1971:131).

The "living dead" then refers to persons who continue to live on in the spiritual realm (i.e. minus physical bodies). This idea of the immortality of the soul is one that occurs often in Western and Eastern thinking, and is partly compatible with the Christian view of life-after-death. It is the belief in East Asia that the life after death parallels the life on earth, and the spirits still live in the same way we do, and have the same needs.[13]

In Africa the living dead are part of the reality of life. Their existence and reality is not questioned, and they are still seen to influence those on earth, either in good or bad ways. The ancestors are therefore still in some way part of the community of the living, and as such, living dead is a very apt term (Triebel 2002:188). Mbiti explains the term further by saying that the living dead have died and are buried, but they still live because they influence the lives of the living. "As long as they are still remembered, these living-dead are still people, and have not yet become 'things', 'spirits' or 'its.'" (Mbiti 1969a:25)

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[13] The Christian understanding is that the soul is not inherently immortal. Eternal life is the work of the cross and we believe that the body is included. In addition the deceased occupy a different realm to the living and no communication between the two is possible.

2.2.3.2 Intermediaries and mediators

In the African belief system, the notion of a Supreme Being exists, but often this Being is far removed from the actions and lives of the living. This God has no role in judging, or rewarding good or bad behaviour, and is "too big" to have any relationship with humankind. This aspect of an "impersonal God" is the reason in many cases why the ancestors have a high position, and it is a primary reason for the second identity of ancestors – that of intermediaries and mediators (This aspect will be explored in further detail together with the encompassing theological paradigms associated with this view of God. Therefore, this serves as a brief explanatory note about the function the ancestors are believed to have in terms of serving as intermediaries or intercessors with God).

Consequently, the common belief is held that the ancestors are "…the closest links that men have with the spirit world" (Mbiti 1969a:83). In the state in which ancestors exist as spirits, they are believed to be god-like and implicitly able to communicate with God. However, they are also essentially man-like, due to their origin and therefore believed to be able to communicate with humans. It is this status as well as their moral superiority that means that in most African societies ancestors serve as intermediaries to the Supreme Being, they are part of a long chain of "intercessors whose ultimate function is to intercede on behalf of humankind" (Amanze 2003:45).

It is this notion of the ancestors as intermediaries who are in such close contact with God that enables them to mediate power and service to the living (we will explore this further below). It is therefore important for the living relatives to ensure that they are constantly appeased. Donald M'timkulu, in his paper *Some aspects of Zulu religion*, observed among the Zulu that if people neglect the ancestors, it is believed that the ancestors no longer use their powers of mediation or position as intermediaries to ensure or bring well-being upon their family. He has also noted that, though they are revered and given power over the living, there are certain limitations to the ancestors. They are not in themselves either omnipotent or omnipresent but rather, in most cases, "bound by the relationships of consanguinity and propinquity to land" (M'timkulu 1977:21).

We have already noted Mbiti's words that indicate that ancestors are considered to be "…the closest links that men have with the spirit world" (1969a:83). Therefore, most of their functions are centered around the position they are believed to have as being the closest links to God. Hence, as they invoke wrath or blessing on God's behalf, so they are also believed to convey messages from God and therefore are instrumental to ensure that the gods are appeased.

Once again, as senior elders, they have direct access to the spirit world, and are often associated with God in prayer. Just as a chief is approached through an intermediary, so prayer may go to God through the ancestral spirits (Parrinder 1969:69).

During prayers, the living pray by reciting all the names of their ancestors. This list reaches as far back as the names can be remembered, and therefore, through a chain of ancestors, their prayer reaches God. Interestingly enough, Parsons (in Bosch 1974: 46) points out that many Africans are not familiar with this notion. According to Parsons

many Africans do not really experience the ancestors as mediators. A mediator implies another end party in the experience, but for many their religious experience ends with the ancestors, and not with God. They are then the focus of the worship and prayer, and not God. Only in exceptional cases, when they or their community are in serious trouble they may want to call upon God directly, "in desperation, after all other efforts have failed".

This may well be true in many communities, but the more common understanding of the role as mediators between the spirits and the people is represented by Smith's exposition (in his study of the ancestor cult in Swaziland) (1950:111):

> On earth it is against the law to approach a grandfather directly if the father is alive, or to appeal to the king without first speaking to his *induna* (minister, counsellor). In the spirit world the hierarchy of age and authority is similarly respected. Requests are made to the invisible father and he forwards the message to the next above him, unless a specific ancestor is demanding attention. Swazi believe in the unbroken continuity of kinship after death and vaguely assume that eventually the wishes of men reach *Umkhulumcadi* (the First Being).

2.2.3.3 The representatives of law

Once again, Mbiti (1969a:83) has the defining words concerning the identity of ancestors:

> They are the guardians of family affairs, traditions, ethics and activities. Offence in these matters is ultimately an offence against the forefathers who, in that capacity, act as the invisible police of the families and communities.

Being persons and examples of moral superiority, and mediating the desires of the Supreme Being, the ancestors are the representatives of law and order. Offences committed against their orders results in punishment, and often occurrences of misfortune, illness or death are read as coming from the anger of the ancestors. This anger is brought upon by misconduct by me or by my family, disobedience which is seen to be questioning their authority (Triebel 2002:189).

An interesting aspect that dictates behaviour toward ancestors is the notion of "balance" – similar to the Ancient Near East's concept of shame and honour, and the Eastern search for harmony. The ancestors are incorporated into a very sensitive network of relationships comprising a family and its ancestors, another family and their ancestors, the clan and its ancestors, and even another clan together with their ancestors. This network is, under ideal conditions, in balance.

If something is moved the balance is upset and the whole network is affected. The notion of community is important here, for if the balance is disturbed at one point, everyone will be affected. It is therefore the responsibility of all to re-establish the lost harmony, and to prevent further misfortune from the ancestors. This is done by the whole community appeasing the ancestors, through ceremonies and offerings. This re-establishes the law and harmony, for which the ancestors are believed to be responsible (Triebel 2002: 189).

2.2.3.4 Giving the living welfare as well as wrath

"Ancestors possess powers which can cause or prevent misfortune" (Uchendu 1976: 292). The main function of the ancestors as it relates to the community is that of the power they are believed to be able to wield. This power can be used to reward the obedient communities, and to bring wrath to those that are unbalanced. Although giving wrath may seem destructive, it is important to note that it is commonly believed that the ancestors are still alive, present in the life of the individual and community, and aware of what is going on. They are interested in the affairs of humans, and desire the well being of the community above all else. The exercise of their power in a wrathful way is to bring about well being. As Amanze (2003:44) says:

> The most significant element in their interaction with the world of the living is that they are ever concerned with the, well-being of their descendants, and any breach of traditional customs is viewed as an offence against them. They have the power of displaying their wrath upon those who break the laws of the family and neglect their ancestors.

This power causes fear and hope in the descendents. The practice of ancestor veneration is therefore to deal with the power, by appeasing or influencing the ancestors (Triebel 2002:188). This function is also present in Asian understandings of the ancestors. There too, it is believed that the soul of the dead may cause harm to the living. Actions are carried out, such as possessing charms and performing certain rituals, to protect the living (Tan 1985:84).

One final example about this important function of ancestors is given by Amanze (2003:47) where he relates the work of CR. Hopgood in his paper *Concepts of God amongst the Tonga of Northern Rhodesia* (1950). Observation of the Tonga people in Zambia confirmed this function. Ancestors are believed to be constantly involved in the life of the living, possessing considerable power both for good and ill. Most of the negative happenings, misfortune and disease are, by and large, attributed to the influence of an offended ancestral spirit. It is therefore important to make offerings quickly to appease the ancestors, and to remain on their good side in the future.

2.2.3.5 Ancestors as senior elders

A little excursion needs to be made here, to add the function of Senior Elder to the roles of ancestors. This is very closely linked to both their actions as giving welfare and wrath, and also to their position in the spiritual hierarchy between mankind and the gods. If the power and position of ancestors is given to them by their descendants, why then is it possible, and allowed for them to give well-being or harmful wrath to the living? What would cause the ancestors to do such things? This seems to be explained through the notion and function of senior elder.

My main reason for adding the function of senior elder comes from the work of Igor Kopytoff. In his 1971 article, *Ancestors as elders in Africa*, he argued that within the holistic worldview of Africans there was not a significant distinction between the ancestral elders and the elders still living. Using linguistic studies, he showed that the Bantu term for ancestors is the same term used for living elders. He classified the ritual sacrifices made to the ancestors as gift exchange, and said that there was no "supernatural"

element in the ancestor rites. The distinction between living and dead lawmakers and the supernatural elements were all additions brought into the discussion by Western thinking. The functions of the ancestors are therefore the same as that of elders. Being senior elders, they are responsible for the well-being of the community, "always watching to see that the living preserve what their forefathers established" (McCall 1998: 256).

Those who are practising ancestor worship or veneration believe that ancestors are the guarantee of a good life. Their receiving of offerings shows that they are remembered in order that they may protect life, happiness, and well-being. If misfortune, accidents, illness occur, they have to be called on and be given offerings in order to take away the troubles. The fear of ancestors, who being neglected, will bring misfortunes or even destroy life, is a mature point in traditional religion. So ancestor worship is really the heart of traditional religions.

2.2.4 The relationship between ancestors and others

As noted above, especially in the understanding of the function of ancestors, it clearly shows that most people who have ancestral beliefs think that ancestors are the guarantee of the continuation of life. Life and the force of life (or the "stream of life") is handed over to us by the ancestors. The relationships between the different parties therefore need to be good so that life may continue.

Breure (1999:63-66) looks at three interesting relationships involving ancestors. His reflections help us to understand the function and identity of ancestors.

2.2.4.1 The ancestors and the living

There is an ambivalent relationship between the living and the dead. Wherever you go, the spirit world is evident – pervading the whole of human life, pressing in to their folklore, social relations and vocabulary. It forms an integral part of the whole existence of African communities. This relationship is a mutually dependent one – the ancestors need the living to remember and worship them and the living need the ancestors as moral exemplaries and powerful benefactors. Communion occurs between the departed and the living relatives, yet it is not full communion. There is a sense of separation because death has come between them, though they are still alive and part of the community (seen specifically in the term "living dead").

This ambivalence emanates from the need for balance. The spirit world must not be allowed to get either too close to or too far from the human world. The ancestors are wanted and not wanted (Mbiti 1971:134). If they are too far away, forgotten or neglected, then the spirits are weak and unable to bring well-being. If they are too close, they begin meddling in the affairs of the community and disrupting the harmony. The whole of life is under the pressure of maintaining the balance with the spirit world.

Breure (1999:37-38) gives two quotes which highlight and explain the relationship between these two parties: (1) A tribesman: "I loved them because of their provision, and I also feared them because they might take their things"; (2) Taylor: [The relation-

ship is a] "strangely mingled sentiment of awe, anxiety and affection which the living feel towards the ancestors."

2.2.4.2 The ancestors and God

The relationship between humans and God in many African cultures is fascinating. At first glance God does not seem important at all. There is an idea of a Supreme Being, but it is very vague. Rituals and myths are few and far between. God is a "retired God" (Hammond-Tooke 1981:23). Yet, in this ambivalent relationship too, to exclude God is unthinkable. God's presence is indeed not very prominent, yet God is the one who is holding everything in place.

The African understanding holds that God is primarily the Creator-God. This is similar to the thinking of deists – God created, and then withdrew. There are memories and beings watching over creation, but the Creator-God has withdrawn. Today man cannot understand God. To say that one understands God is an expression of disrespect, as God is too big to be understood. The living cannot live with God. The ancestors therefore are needed to serve as intermediaries between the living and God.

2.2.4.3 A communicating relationship

These relationships are constituted through communication. The ancestors speak with the living through dreams, visions, nature and persons. At times they can be seen, particularly when they appear in dreams. At times only their presence is felt. Often the communication is facilitated by a mediator (diviner, witchdoctor, priest, shaman), and in many traditions this position is a very powerful one, enabling the living to consult with the ancestors.

Sacrifices are important tools of communication; at many occasions an animal is slaughtered. As a rule it goes with prayers and invocations. Communication takes place on set days, as well as spontaneously, especially in times of trouble. "There is in short no place and occasion when African peoples may not perform acts of worship or reaching into the spiritual realm, through offerings, sacrifices, prayers or invocations" (Mbiti 1971:93).

We have thus far in the description of ancestor worship and the ancestors examined their identity and function, and relationships between them and the living. This acknowledges that the ancestors play a very important role in their societies as a living part of the community, and yet also being given powers the same as the Supreme Being by the descendants. They regarded to be sources well-being as well as wrath, and are remembered through various rites. Here the considerable question arises: Why then is ancestor worship still prevalent in the world? Why too, is its occurrence flourishing rather than dying?

2.2.5 Their prevalent abodes

As seen in the discussion of the living dead, it is generally agreed that the spirits of those classified as "dead" are not confined to any locality. Being spiritual in nature, it

follows that they are not confined to the physical world, or to our understanding of space and movement. Their prevalent abodes can range from the grave, areas in nature, areas of human habitation, to even the bodies of human beings (what we call possession). They are also able to assume the shapes of animals and appear to humans. Snakes are believed to be the most common form taken (Amanze 2003:44).

Obviously this understanding of the abode of the spirits differs according to culture. The Ancient Near East had "שְׁאוֹל"(*Sheol*), the place of the dead where the spirits lived. It was a cavernous space under the flat earth. Spirits were also often associated with the sky, coming from God, hence the common image of angels (messengers, spirits) having wings – so they could fly to God. In East Asia, ancestral spirits are believed to reside in three areas: some ascend to heaven, others remain in the grave to receive the sacrifices, and yet others stay with the spirit of the ancestral shrine placed in the temple or the home (Tan 1985:79). It has been proposed that in African thought the living world of the ancestors is associated with the ideas of repose, tranquility, and peace, giving a notion of perfection. This idyllic place is so because of the nature of its inhabitants, the ancestors (Zahan 1979:49).

2.3   WHY ANCESTOR WORSHIP HAS NOT DISSIPATED?

The answers to this question are complicated and diverse. Ancestor worship is closely linked to the descendants' worldview. The worldview involved has been studied by scholars from various disciplines and described in various socio-anthropological and religious-phenomenological categories. It is not a set of ideas and beliefs that modernisation, cultural relativity or missions can easily change. This is because it is linked intricately to the afterlife, the soul, and to a society's governance, and regulation of inheritance and succession. The functions of ancestor worship include supporting social control, upholding the elder system and to foster conservative and traditionalist attitudes. It is not in competition with other worldviews, but it is involved with other religions through syncretism. In Japan ancestor worship is found to be combined with the practice of Buddhism, and ancestral rites compose a major part of the practice of Confucianism in Korea. As we have seen through the African thoughts above, it is linked there with traditional beliefs.

With these reasons and facts, one has to ask what the over-arching motivations of ancestor worship are that allow it to flourish even in plural and modernised societies? I have identified and highlighted three motivations.

2.3.1 Socio-anthropological motivation

As noted in the first point of this chapter, ancestor worship is widespread in the world today. There are still many areas in the world where ancestor worship is practised periodically for the good preservation of their societies, from modernised nations as well as developing ones. The primary reasons for this are socio-anthropological, linked not so much with religious or political perspectives, but having a social and cultural function.

The main function has to do with the relationship between the ancestors and the living family. This relationship will uphold the family, clan, tribe and even nation and this is a primary motivation for the continuance of ancestor worship. Various scholars have made the following observations:

> It is important to understand this interdependence, this mutual relationship of living people and ancestors. This is the only way to understand the subject of ancestor veneration or ancestor cult.
>
> (Triebel 2002:188)
>
> It is an intense relationship between the living and the dead, a mutual relationship where both are dependent on each other. In the traditional Shona view, "community" refers to both the living and the dead of all ages.
>
> (Gundani 1995:35)
>
> Among Africans the living and the living-dead live in a symbiotic relationship. There is no iron curtain that separates their existence. Consequently, they are interdependent and capable of communicating with one another. The well-being of the living is dependent on the goodwill of the living-dead and of those yet to be born.
>
> (Amanze 2003:46)

To see this motivation in practice, let us think of the case in Korea, Africa and Japan. In the case of Korea, the foundation of Korean society is the family, and "filial piety" is the principle of all actions in the family. This filial piety serves as the bond of unity, and for upholding conservative and traditional roles and views. Ancestor worship is of primary importance in that it nourishes filial piety and guarantees family unity and continuity. By encouraging and continuing ancestor worship in Korea, one is actually promoting harmony and unity, and providing a strong reinforcement of group solidarity. Various feast days, and annual celebrations (such as Chu'suk) involves trips to the shrines and graves, and end with meals in which all share the food and drink provided for the occasion. In these instances it is easy to see how ancestor cult is a wonderful means of bringing people together to experience togetherness, communion and fellowship. Looking at the Western world, it also serves as a check against excessive competition and exaggerated individualism.

The social anthropologist, Meyer Fortes made a simple comparison between the ancestor worship practised in pre-literate African societies, and the societies of China and Japan. In Africa, a primary motivation again is that of the importance of family in the greater social structure. This is shown in the South African understanding of Ubuntu, as well as captured in the famous sentence of John Mbiti (1969a:108): "I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am." Not the individual but the community is important. "Man is family" is an African saying. Without community no human being can exist, and it is the community that gives meaning and continuance to the individual.

Linked to this community view is the idea of the "stream of life". One has life by being connected to a greater stream – that of the family and community. This stream reaches back right through the elders, ancestors, to the Supreme Being. One has to take care that the stream of life will not be interrupted, an in many instances the teachings of the community highlight that fact that the ancestors as the earliest remembered people, are at the spring of the stream of life (Sundermeier 1988:23). To take care of this stream, one has to remember the ancestors; they are the foundation, the reason

for our being. This worldview, linked to the family structure again, allows one to understand the present time through the ancestors, and gives a very important socio-anthropological motivation to the continuance of ancestor worship.

In the third geographical area of my study, namely, Japan, the notion of family is again the primary motivation here. This is very similar to their neighbours in China as shown by Hwang (1975:50):

> The teaching of filial piety is the backbone of the Chinese ethical system and religious thinking. Consequently, ancestor cult is a very important tool of the Chinese educational system. It helps the Chinese to live the teaching of filial piety when they are alive, mourn for them when they die, and continue to honour them when they are gone.

In all these contexts, a primary motivation is that of the family, a socio-anthropological motivation. Even in the context of life in the real world, the practice of ancestor worship has the "family" as its core. We now move to the next motivation for the continuance of ancestor worship, that of religious phenomenal reasons.

2.3.2 Religious-phenomenal motivation

As mentioned already, certain people in societies where ancestor worship is flourishing might have practised ancestor cult for social interdependent relationship. But this reason surely falls short of explaining every form of the cult. We recognise the inadequacy of this as the only explanation because we have no way to explain ancestral sacrifices offered to more distant ancestors, ancestors who have no emotional ties with the one offering them and who left no inheritance to them either.

So, it is plausible to think that there is another reason to practise ancestor worship, that is to say religious-phenomenal motivation. One of the motivational factors here is that of fear. It will be interesting to study how fear is a motivating force for much of human behaviour, and especially how it is used in most religions, even Christianity. It is not surprising that it also enters into the practice of ancestor cult. The fear of death, the unknown, makes them dependent upon the spirits (Anderson 1993:27). Scholars who have studied the practices closely observe that rituals are maintained out of fear that if the living fails to perform the required duties and rituals, the deceased ancestors may inflict trouble and misfortune on their descendants.

Some writers would, however, argue solely for a sociological motivation for ancestor worship, saying that ancestor worship is not a religion. Pyun (1988) is of this thought, saying that it may not be called a religion, because according to them ancestor worship springs from ethical rather than religious considerations and Anh (1969: 25) has the same view of its religious status, because it does not have a founder, a written creed or a clergy. Others argue that it is not a religion because it obviously co-exists with other religions (I have often mentioned how in Korea it is linked to Confucianism, in Africa with traditional beliefs, and in Japan with Buddhism).

However, it is noticeable that ancestor worship co-exists with these other religions because of the syncretistic relation and link to things religious. From an anthropological point of view, ancestor worship is very much a religion. Coming back to the religious motivation of fear, Yamaguchi (1985:47-52) asserts that fear of the dead grounded on

religious background as at least one of the major motivations. He maintains that ancestor worship is used as an individual and communal tool to relieve personal anxiety about the misfortune of illness, death, infertility, and the like.

Wallace (1966:52-87) differs from Ahn, and meticulously points out that ancestor worship fits into the category of religious behaviour: it is linked to the supernatural, and spiritual world; it has a central place of worship (the home of the eldest son); has a leader/clergy (the oldest surviving male in the extended family); involves a congregational gathering (family gatherings on specific death anniversaries); uses prayers, ritual sacrifices and worship; and finally in its traditional forms, there is even a holy book – the genealogy book – used to guide the family in worship. For centuries in Asia, (and we may add Africa), while the fortunes of imported religions like Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism rose and fell, the Cult of the Ancestors was there to explain this life and the afterlife. It represents a religion in every way (Reimer 1975:165).

2.3.3 Socio-political interwoven motivation

As with much of life, often motivating factors are as a result of a combination of factors. Apart from a solely socio-anthropological basis in the link of the family, or a purely religious motivation fuelled by belief and faith duty, there is a third motivation, one that seems an interweaving of the two. I have called this the socio-political motivation.

Central to this motivation is the thought that most of culture and religion is a creation of society. We all have different cultures, and these cultures are created by us and our stories. Even our religious beliefs are highly influenced by our societies and stories. Bediako (1990:38), and as we shall see soon, Mbiti too, believes that the ancestors are "made" by the community. They belong to the category of myth, "ancestors being the product of the myth-making imagination of the community" (Bediako 1990:39). The influence and power of the ancestors we not from the ancestors themselves, but it is the influence and power of myth. After having their function as upholders of law and exemplary senior elders Bediako (1990:38) asks a telling question: "are not ancestors in effect a projection into the transcendent realm of the social values and spiritual expectations of the living community?"

If this is the case then ancestors have no independent existence from the community that produces them. However, they give the community the possibility to validate, and to place in the spiritual dimension source of authority and power in the community. As a spiritual source of authority and power, religious comparisons and beliefs are made, and this position is also important politically for the social harmony in which life and continuity of the community are believed to depend.

Probably the work that best shows this interwoven motivation is that of Fortes. In research on the Tallensi tribe of Ghana, Fortes says that it will be difficult to understand the religious beliefs without considering the social structure of the tribe. In his 1960 presentation *Some Reflections on Ancestor Worship in Africa,* he pointed out that ancestor worship is one of the prominent characteristics of religious systems in Africa, having broadly and deeply influenced the entire social life of the Tallensi tribe. He also

emphasised that in societies where ancestor worship flourishes; this belief is rooted in the religious systems as well as in the social relationships like the family, the clan, and adoption of heirs.

He proposed the following definition to show the interwoven motivation that links ancestor worship and social structure (Ma 2004:55):

> Ancestor worship consists of a system of religious beliefs and rituals, and these beliefs and rituals correspond to the behavioural norms of society … only when power and obligation complement each other can authority be maintained. In such societies authority and power are created through social relationships derived from kinship or adoptive relationships, and they are also put into practice through these relationships ... in this sense ancestors symbolize the unending continuity of social structure.

In conclusion, we found that in societies where ancestor worship flourishes, there are two main elements that prolong this growth and belief in ancestor worship: This is the social structural function (rooted in such social relationships as the family, clans and nation) and the religious phenomenon seen in individual religiosity. These motivations are interwoven closely in their circumstance and there is an inextricable relationship between the two positions examined above. Accordingly, the living's feeling towards the ancestors are ambivalent. They are loved and feared, respected and dreaded. In addition, at least Fortes' view that "ancestors symbolise the unending continuity of social structure" is particularly significant (Ma 2004:56).

To say it clearly, the idea of ancestors and the worship of ancestors as social function and religious phenomenon constitute an important base for the perpetuation of social structures through the clan in Africa, Korea and Japan. These are the main factors which explain the perpetuation of its practice in the modern world.

2.4   CONCLUSION

To conclude this initial description of ancestor worship, the most important attribute of the ancestors and their worship is the final point that is highlighted by the work of Mbiti and Bediako, and linked to the socio-political interwoven motivation. It is, as seen above, according to Bediako, that the ancestors are "made" by the community, "ancestors being the product of the myth-making imagination of the community" (Bediako 1990:38-39). Each of us has a peculiar culture. Culture is a man-made construct, and just as this is, so too are the ceremonies associated with the culture, and the beliefs therein. The influence and power of the ancestors are not inherent in themselves, but are accorded to them by the living descendents on earth.

When discussing ancestors Mbiti agrees with this: "Most, if not all, of these attributive deities are the creation of man's imagination" (1990:76). As with all study of non-verifiable subjects, the problem is that the ancestors cannot be examined and proven, but nevertheless, they are real for the cultures and people concerned. To the people concerned they are reality and need to be treated as such when asking why ancestor worship is still continuing in this modern time.

In the following chapters of my thesis I will therefore examine further how ancestor worship as a creation of man's imagination has been syncretised with other religions, and adapted to and informed the cultures in Africa, Korea and Japan.

Chapter 3

THE CHALLENGE OF ANCESTOR WORSHIP IN AFRICA

3.1 INTRODUCTION

There are few places in the world where one will find the unique fusion of traditional religions and Christianity as in Africa. There are considerable juxtaposed points of view in terms of doctrine between Christianity and traditional religions in African Churches and yet in some cases the tensions are less apparent because of the attitude of assimilation which some of these communities have assumed.

For at least three decades, the notion and culture of ancestor worship has been assimilated into Christianity in African Churches in South Africa, in both rural and urban areas. Studies such as Manona (1981:34) and Pauw (1974:104), which refer to a resurgence in ancestor worship among Xhosa Christians in South Africa, support this. This appears to be the case in most countries in Africa, irrespective of the effects of urbanisation and Westernisation of African culture (Coertze 2004:347). Interestingly enough, some African scholars themselves advocated the reinstatement of ancestor worship while others attempted to establish a form of Africanised Christianity by referring to Christ as the Supreme Ancestor in their churches.

This chapter will attempt to answer the following questions:

- How do African churches cope with ancestor veneration?
- What is the nature of ancestor worship in Africa?
- How is ancestor worship articulated within contemporary African Ancestral Theology?

Later, this will be compared to Biblical and theological viewpoints set out in Chapters 6 and 7.

3.2 THE CURRENT SOUTH AFRICAN SCENARIO

3.2.1 The current status of ancestor worship in South Africa

In order to gain a clearer understanding of the current status and nature of Christianity in South Africa, one needs to consider *inter alia* the status of ancestor worship in South Africa. The following section will attempt to provide a brief background of the nature of this phenomenon in modern South Africa.

3.2.1.1 Similarities in social structures in Black South African ethnic groups

Hammond-Tooke (1994:2-3) describes the constitution of the Black South African society as consisting of four major groups based on language and culture, namely the Nguni, the Sotho, the Venda and Tsonga. Hammond-Tooke further identifies sub-groupings within each of these four major groups, e.g. the Zulu, Pondo and Xhosa within the Nguni group and the Northern and Southern Sotho and Tswana within the Sotho group. It is interesting to note that although there are significant differences in terms of social organisation which have a bearing on the practise of ancestor worship between the different groups, there is also common ground in the general function and significance of ancestors. Also, the way these beliefs responded to the process of urbanisation and Christianisation is quite similar (Wanamaker 1997:284).

3.2.1.2 The effect of urbanisation on ancestor worship and the tribal structures of Black South Africans

Urbanisation had a significant influence on the social structure and culture of black South Africans. Urbanisation led to the destruction of the traditional patriarchal family and clan structures which were the norm in the rural areas. Young people left their clans and families behind in search of better wages in the cities. In Black South African culture a sense of identity is inextricably intertwined with the sense of community. When these structures collapsed with urbanisation, black South Africans in the cities were forced to find another way to establish that same sense of identity and community.

Chidester (1992:13) suggests that it is entirely possible that the ancestors provided that frame of reference in a strange and alien world which seemed to be particularly hostile to anything African. One can therefore argue that ancestor worship served a unifying function and in a sense constituted a form of defiance against white oppression which frowned upon the traditional practices and marginalised Black South Africans. Hence, Chidester (1992:13) points out that ancestor worship assumed a more urgent character in the nineteenth century and served as a spiritual anchor which seemed to secure the traditions and nation itself which appeared to be threatened and destabilised under European rule.

Mayer (1980) sees ancestor worship as a particular strategy of resistance to the displacement and white domination in South Africa.

As Wanamaker (1997:284) points out, the new circumstances in which many Black South Africans found themselves soon made it evident that the traditional practices around ancestor worship had to be adapted to meet the social and economic changes with which they were faced.

Hunter (1961:486-487) predicted an inevitable decline in the practise of ancestor worship in urban areas because it would be near impossible to adhere to the traditional practices like animal sacrifice associated with it. The fact that the people did not suffer retribution from the ancestors for not practising these rituals undermined the hold it had on the people because their fear appeared unfounded.

In reality, this has not happened. Ancestor worship and the practices associated with it have proven to be more resilient and adaptable than expected. This is similar to the scenario in Japan and Korea. In these countries the age of modernisation and the scientific worldview hardly seems to be a fertile ground for mystical beliefs such as ancestor worship. However, as will be discussed in Chapters 4 (Korea) and Chapter 5 (Japan) it is clear that ancestor worship is still practised by many, although in a more modernised form which is essentially an adaptation of the traditional beliefs and practices for the modern milieu.

3.2.2 The current status of Christianity in SA

3.2.2.1 Christianity as interloping missionary religion

Wanamaker (1997:281) points out that South Africa can be regarded as a unique cultural melting pot where fundamentally different religions such as African traditional religions and Christianity co-exist and compete to convert people to its beliefs, practices and behaviour patterns. Even among the various Christian denominations there is strong competition and proselytising.

The table below shows that almost 80% of the country is Christian.

Census 2001	South Africa Total	% Christians	% Total
Mainline Churches	14 259 664	39,9	31,8
Pentecostal/Charismatic	2 625 830	7,3	5,9
Other Churches	4 275 942	12,0	9,5
African Independent Churches	14 598 922	40,8	32,6
Total: SA Christians	35 760 358	100	79,8
Other Faiths	1 706 547		3,8
No religion/Not stated	7 352 875		16,4
Total: SA population	44 819 780		100

(Hendriks 2005:28)

Christianity has transformed the religious, political and cultural profile of the country in the last two hundred years. It is mainly as a result of this influence that there is now a Christian majority. However, this dominance is a fairly recent phenomenon. In this regard Chidester (1997:1) points out that in spite of the fact that South Africa was the most missionised region of the world in the 19th Century, conversions were relatively rare in those days. The current high profile of Christian religion is a radical departure from those days. Today, most Africans claim to be at least marginally Christian. This apparent dominance of Christianity over the traditional religions is false, according to Chidester. When one looks closely at the nature of Christianity in South Africa it becomes readily apparent that African Christians have achieved a synthesis of traditional religions and Christianity.

This is supported by Salala (1998:133) who argues that many African Christians are considered to be living a double life: one which is essentially Christian and the other

which is essentially traditional. Salala argues that the underlying reason for this duality can probably be ascribed to the fact that Christianity does not address the deepest needs and fears of the African people. This is probably one of the reasons why many African Christians revert to the traditional practices associated with the traditional African religions in times of crisis.

Various scholars (e.g. Anderson 1993:29; Hammond 1986:158; Nyirongo 1997:87) agree that in times of crisis, most African Christians revert to the practices associated with ancestor veneration. Clearly then, ancestor veneration is alive and well in South Africa, in spite of the fact that the country is regarded to be 80% Christian.

3.2.2.2 Revival of ancestor worship

When one considers the dominant position of Christianity in the country, it begs the question why the church has not had a much greater influence on its members with regard to ancestor worship. Interestingly enough, Manona (1981:36) points out that the church had a more pervasive influence in earlier years when most early converts lived a fairly sheltered existence in isolated mission stations. That is no longer the case today. Most church members associate freely with people of other religions and different moral convictions. Furthermore, the church seems to have shed its colonialist cloak of benefactor. The church is no longer able to provide as many material benefits as it did in the past. In addition to this, many black South Africans' perceptions of the church and the clergy were tainted by the church's perceived passivity during the Apartheid regime. As a result, many white clergymen lost credibility in the face of rising Black Theology in protest to the political unrest in the country (Manona 1981:37).

Together with the growing solidarity among black South Africans during the Apartheid regime, there emerged a new self-awareness and black identity which coincided with their antipathy towards Western missionaries. Nelson (1997:576) describes this as the emergence of pride in black culture and in being black. This revival of group identity and everything African was accompanied by a renewed interest and adherence to African culture – specifically ancestor veneration. Essentially then, this phenomenon signified a symbolic resistance to everything which represented Western (and white) culture. Resistance movements openly encouraged a return to African roots, both cultural and religious. It was essentially a desperate attempt to reclaim a sense of identity in an oppressive and alien Westernised cultural reality.

This development ran parallel with another interesting development, i.e. explosive growth of African Independent/Indigenous/Initiated Churches (AIC's). It is understandable that the AIC's benefited rather than the mainline churches.

The unprecedented growth in AIC's was predicted by Oosthuizen (1997:8) who stated that the AIC movement had grown into the most dynamic church movement in the country and that towards the start of the new century it is reasonable to expect that most black South African Christians will be members of AIC congregations. The picture has changed radically from the 1950's when most black South African Christians were active members of mainline churches. He points out that by 1980 mainline churches'

black membership had dropped a significant 52% while that of AIC's had increased to 27%. In 1991 the AIC membership figures had increased to 36% while mainline churches lost a further 41%. Statistics for 2001 are even more alarming. They indicate that AIC's now have a greater membership among Black South Africans (a whopping 40.8%) compared to the mainline churches who have a mere 39.9%.

It is clear then that the growth of AIC's cannot be attributed to political or economical factors, especially since 1994 with the advent of democracy which removed the political incentive for solidarity. It is therefore necessary to look more closely at the relationship between AIC's and traditional African cultural and religious values.

3.3   AIC'S AND AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

There is a veritable smorgasbord of denominations within the South African AIC movement, many of which consist of a single congregation. The theological tenets and doctrines are equally varied, from evangelical to syncretistic. In some groups Christian beliefs are blended with ancestor reverence while others tend to follow more animistic rituals. Interestingly enough Oosthuizen (1997) considers the distinguishing hallmark of all of these denominations to be the (Christian) sense of fellowship, sharing and brotherly love.

The places of worship range from gatherings in the open to shacks, homes and shelters made from boxes and corrugated iron. When one considers this variety one has to wonder what constitutes a denomination as an African Independent Church. In this regard Appian-Kubi (1979) defines the African Independent Church as a church which was founded by Africans for Africans in the unique African context. All of these churches have exclusively African membership and leadership.

> African Independent Churches were founded by Africans for Africans in our special African situations. They have all African membership as well as all African leadership. Some were founded by Africans in reaction to some feature of the Christianity of missionary societies; most were founded among those people who had known Christianity the longest.
>
> (Appian-Kubi 1979:117)

Oosthuizen (1999:158) on the other hand, distinguishes between "independent" and "indigenous" strands of the AIC movement of South Africa. Oosthuizen regards churches which broke away from Western mainline churches as "independent" and churches which were instituted by Africans with no ties to Western missions as essentially "indigenous". Furthermore, as Oosthuizen points out, these independent churches retained some elements of the original religion from which they broke away; the indigenous churches constitute a complete departure from anything Christian in favour of traditional African religions. For the purposes of this chapter, indigenous churches according to Oosthuizen's definition are included in the notion of what constitutes AIC's.

3.3.1   Three types of African Indigenous Churches

In his history of independent and indigenous churches in South Africa, Oosthuizen (1997:9) identifies three broad categories of AIC's, namely Ethiopian, Zionist and Apostolic in origin.

The Ethiopian cluster of churches was inspired by similar churches in the United States at the turn of the century, especially the African Methodist Episcopal Church. The South African Ethiopian churches took a stand against what they perceived as ecclesiastical colonialism. As a result, they made a significant contribution to the establishment of the African liberation movement in response to the political oppression at the time. The Ethiopian cluster is the smallest and has the closest links to the tenets of mainline religions.

Zionist churches on the other hand emerged from contact with the Christian Catholic Church which was based in Zion City, Illinois. John Alexander Dowie established Zion City as a Christian "restorationist" community where faith healing was practised.

Apostolic AIC's were established in South Africa by the efforts of John Lake and Thomas Hezmalhalch of the Apostolic Faith Church in the USA. When they arrived in South Africa in 1908 they brought with them the emphasis on glossolalia. The Pentecostal strand of Christianity was exemplified by the Azusa Street Mission of Los Angeles.

Some of the churches that resulted embraced the concept of a Zion City. This is evidenced by the fact that "Zion" appears in 80 per cent of AIC names; most of the churches influenced by the AFM added "Zion" and "of South Africa" to their names.

Both the Zionist and Apostolic movements, unlike the Ethiopian churches, have assimilated more of traditional African culture and religion. A few AIC's chose not to be identified by the Zionist label, because many Zionist churches have become Africanised to the extent that they bear no relation or resemblance to anything Christian in theological terms.

This is not unlike Olupona (2003)'s description of AIC's. According to him, those who convert to Christianity in Africa retain significant aspects of their indigenous culture. He likens this phenomenon to the churches in Latin America. In both cases, the first mission converts were marginalised members of the community. Colonialism became the catalyst which catapulted these individuals into elite status. The social dominance of these new Christian elites led the emergence of charismatic leaders who claimed that they had been called by God to establish authentically African churches. This is evident in AIC's in South Africa today, for example the Zion Christian Church (ZCC).

3.3.2 Rapid growing

One of the primary factors influencing the rapid development of AIC's in South Africa is the fact that these churches have an intrinsic kinship with African traditional religiosity and African self-awareness. For decades African religiosity have been regarded as been equivalent to irrational beliefs in magic, fetishes, spirits, ancestors and other indigenous values. In reality, the indigenous values and socio-moral precepts have been grossly misunderstood and underestimated. These churches do in fact have a very positive attitude towards traditional cultural values and religion as manifestations of a gestalt of the African persona (Oosthuizen 1997:9; Theron 1996:26).

These traditional customs and rites have been assimilated into the customs and rites of the AIC's. Theron (1996:26) points that following are considered manifestations of divine guidance: that the faithful possess the Holy Spirit, exorcism of demonic forces, healing practices and the ability to interpret dreams. Water baptism resembles traditional ritual cleansing rites and is considered to strengthen the bonds of fellowship among the congregation members. It is also regarded as a form of protection for faithful followers. These Africanised concepts, customs and rites have resulted in a Christianity with a distinctive African fingerprint (Daneel 1971:462).

The cultural notion of "*ubuntu*" which was the most defining feature of ATR is entrenched in the strong sense of fellowship, sharing and caring which is one of the essential characteristics of AIC's today. This sense of community and brotherhood is probably one of the main factors leading to the significant decline in numbers of the mainline churches in favour of AIC's (Beattie 1980:23). This sense of *ubuntu* and brotherhood within the AIC's is one of the reasons why ancestor veneration remains a significant element in these churches.

3.3.3 African Indigenous Churches and the ancestors[14]

It is imperative to consider the theological implications of the relative ease with which AIC's have managed to assimilate and Christianise beliefs and customs related to ancestor veneration.

The traditional notion of ancestor veneration has been remoulded by AIC's. An example of this development has been pointed out by various scholars (Pauw 1975:147; Taylor 1963:163; Nxumalo 1981:67; Staples 1981:314) namely that these churches have managed to overcome the fear and dread of ancestors by inculcating the notion of love. Today the ancestors are regarded with love and positive sentiments. Many consider them to be mediators between their descendants and God.

Daneel's study (1973:64-69) distinguishes between the Ethiopian and Spirit-type churches and points out that both groups officially oppose the ancestor cult but are accommodating towards members who practise the traditional rites. He points out that their approach to funeral rites is similar to that of the Dutch Reformed Church in that the deceased are not addressed (1973:64). In both cases, the sermon at the funeral is for the benefit of the living family members and is intended to comfort them and reassure them of God's love. The symbolic practices on the other hand bear a closer resemblance to those used in the Roman Catholic Church. Theron (1996:41) points out that the Spirit churches are more willing to introduce rites which replace traditional ones while the Ethiopian churches are tolerant towards members who adhere to the traditional practices.

The ZCC in South Africa accommodates ancestor worship. Lukhaimane (1991:227) points out that the ZCC does not impose restrictions on members when it comes to ma-

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[14] For the purpose of this study, it is not necessary to discuss other church denominations, such as African pentecostal, charismatic churches and mainline mission churches since they refrain from practices associated with the ancestor cult.

king sacrifices to ancestors. Interestingly enough, Daneel (according to Theron 1996: 41) did not find this to be the case with the ZCC in Zimbabwe.

This blended form of religion which underlies the theological paradigm of AIC's can be largely ascribed to the fact that the new African leaders considered indigenous traditions as the primary source of truth and authority. Olupona (2003:81) points out that fundamental traditional values became the touchstone for the development of the AIC worship and theology. They retained aspects of tradition and indigenous beliefs. Christian notions of divine leadership, the Holy Spirit, and faith healing are elements of Christianity which were integrated into the African customs and values related to community, ancestor worship and revelation. This synthesis between Christianity and traditional African beliefs led to a pluralist kind of religion which allows individuals to participate in their own way.

There are numerous examples of this syncretised form of religion. For example, African hymns contain traditional values and maxims. Special Africanised church services were created to supplement traditional European liturgies. This process was however, unstructured and unco-ordinated. As a result, the African Independent Church movement should not be thought of as being homogeneous. This was helped on by the relative isolation of the AIC's from other African Churches.

Theron's study (1996:42-43) provides a valuable insight into the manner in which AIC's have accommodated ancestral beliefs into Christianity. He mentions the traditional "bringing home" or induction ceremony (*kugadzira*) and says that it has been replaced with a condolence ceremony (*runyaradzo*) which is more Christian in nature. In many of these Christianised ceremonies the mediatory nature of the ancestors is acknowledged. Unlike the traditional ceremony which takes place after a protracted period since the death of the family member the Christianised ceremony takes place shortly after the death of the family member (Also Daneel 1974:119).

Daneel (1974) further argues that the significance or meaning of the ceremony has changed. In the traditional ceremony the purpose was to celebrate the incorporation of the deceased into the ancestral hierarchy, while the condolence ceremony is aimed at accompanying the deceased to heaven. The *runyaradzo* ceremony is believed to assist the spirit to complete its journey to heaven and accommodate it in the angelic hierarchy (Daneel 1974:118). This ceremony is believed to enable the spirit of the deceased to function as an intermediary and intercessor between the living and God.

Traditionally, the family was responsible for taking care of the deceased ancestor. This responsibility now falls to the relevant church group. Daneel (1973:66) points out that the church officials fulfil a priestly function in this regard. In the new Christianised ceremony, neither the deceased nor the ancestors are invoked. This is because this would be considered a form of veneration which would be unscriptural. During the ceremony, the life of the deceased is described as an example for his descendants to emulate. The Biblical perspective on this matter will be discussed later (Theron 1996:42).

Traditionally, ancestors were believed to be protectors of their descendants. Nowadays, the deceased are believed to be with God and their function is to intercede with

God on behalf of their descendants. Daneel (1974) argues that they do still retain an element of their original protective function. It is believed that they are able to cause afflictions by asking God to punish the disobedient descendants. The deceased are believed to have the function of preparing a place in heaven for the living. Daneel (1974: 119) points out that these functions of Christian ancestors are not restricted to the kinship group, but extend to all Christian relations in Christ, i.e. all members of the Christian congregation (The Biblical perspective on whether or not it is possible for the dead to contact the living and influence their lives will be discussed in Chapter 6).

Dreams are traditionally considered to be the medium of communication used by the ancestors to convey a message to the living. In his discussion Theron (1996:42) supports Daneel's argument that dreams continue to play an important role in AIC's. However, Daneel (1974:334-336) points out that one must distinguish between dreams which originate from the Holy Spirit, angels (*angerozi*), and the ancestral spirit (*midzimu*). Christians should not obey requests from ancestral spirits since they are evil spirits who have not acquired a place in heaven. The origin of the message is likely to be demonic. If the Holy Spirit or angels were to communicate a message in a dream it would be to persevere in their faith and to attend Church services for guidance from God (Daneel 1974:334).

These churches simply adapted the traditional belief in dreams as the means of communication to a Christian context. In reality though one has to question whether according to these beliefs the divine message which is so eloquently contained in the Bible says enough about salvation or not (Theron 1996:42).

It is evident that AIC's accommodate ancestor worship to a certain extent. The traditional rites and customs are still significant but the manifestations of these and the associated meanings have changed and continue to change. This differs from church to church as Kohlbrunner (1975:120) points out.

3.4   AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGIONS AND ANCESTOR WORSHIP[15]

In order to consider the influence of African Traditional Religion on ancestor worship studies of respected scholars in the field, notably those of PF Theron (1996), GC Oosthuizen (1999) and V Mulago (1991) have been consulted.

Theron (1996:11) argues that traditional religion and worldviews of Africa continue to influence the life of Africans in spite of modernisation and urbanisation. Even today African Christians are still influenced by the traditional worldview, even though this may be subtle and unconscious. He argues that although many African Christians do not offer sacrifices or pray to the ancestors, many of them still believe that the ancestors are able to influence their lives. From this it is evident that it is not necessarily the obvious

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[15] Wanamaker (1997:283) cautions against the tendency of generalising about ATR. He points out that the ethnic groups and cultures in sub-Saharan Africa are diverse and varied. There are however, some similarities and a measure of cultural uniformity in Africa which tends to lend itself to generalisations about African traditional worldviews and religions. This must, however be done with caution.

outward manifestation of a religion that makes a lasting impression but the essence of it. One then has to explore which factors in ATR have influenced ancestor veneration.

Therefore, instead of gathering information related to ancestor worship in South Africa, this study will attempt to extrapolate a penetrating understanding of ancestor worship in Africa and its articulation with the African worldview. This is crucial since it is cosmology that underlies the African way of thinking and living.

3.4.1 The nature of African cosmology: power and force

Theron points out that numerous scholars have attempted to define African cosmology in one word. The most apt descriptor of the African cosmology is likely in terms of power or force (*matla* in Sotho and *amandla* in Zulu), or more technically *dynamism* (from the Greek word *dynamis,* "power"). This is because the metaphysical or magical forces are considered to be behind everything. This impersonal force or "*mana*" as described by Codrington (Oosthuizen 1977:249) is considered to be useful to strengthen life. Therefore, if the power of this force decreases it can be detrimental. Van Rheenen (1991:208) and Gehman (1989:68) confirmed this notion and stated that this mystical power which permeates the universe is a common tenet in Africa.

As a result, Mbiti (1969b:167) acknowledges that "the whole psychic atmosphere of African village life is filled with belief in this magic power. African peoples know that the universe has a power, or force or whatever else one may call it." Gehman (2005:85) concurs that magic powers such as sorcery, magic and witchcraft affect everyone in African society.

When exploring the nature of such magic powers, Gehman (2005:87) defines magic as an essentially ritual act, performance or activity which is believed to manipulate natural phenomena or external and impersonal magic forces which are beyond the ordinary human sphere influence, but may influence the human fate nonetheless. Therefore the underlying assumption here is that the impersonal force may be utilised for the benefit or detriment of mankind. Gehman (2005:87) further asserts that it would be flawed reasoning to assume that the belief in such forces is as a result of ignorance of cause and effect. He argues that peoples who believe in this type of magical cause and effect relationship have a solid understanding of natural laws of cause and effect but have extended it to find plausible explanations for this. Therefore, they would seek to understand why one negative event will occur in the lives on some individuals while others escape relatively unscathed.

There are numerous facets to the belief in magic. Firstly, Gehman (2005:88) identifies the belief in the existence of magic powers. Secondly, he identifies the means by which these powers may be accessed i.e. by means of ceremonies, rites, spells, charms, etc. Thirdly, Gehman identifies the specialist who may have inherited his abilities from the ancestors or is believed to have purchased it for personal advantage.

In his exposition of the nature of magic, Gehman mentions the one big distinction between magic and religion. Religion, Gehman (2005: 88) argues, adopts a submissive attitude to supernatural beings, whereas magic seeks to exercise control over super-

natural forces for man's own purposes. This view concurs with that of Idowu (1973) who defined magic as an attempt by man to tap into and control the supernatural resources in the universe for his own advantage. Idowu further distinguishes this from religion which he says is essentially a reciprocal relationship in which man depends of the supernatural power (deity) for personal fulfilment with the intrinsic belief that the transcendental being in whom he depends is capable of fulfilling these needs. As a result, according to Idowu, religion implies a relationship of submission, trust and dependence.

In his exposition of magic, Gehman explores phenomena such as divination, sorcery, witchcraft, spells and omens. In terms of divination, Gehman (2005:92) argues that divination is based on the notion that the universe is essentially a system of interrelated parts in which a disruption or event in one aspect or sphere would have a concurrent reaction in another. This makes the notion of divination plausible. Gehman thus distinguishes between different accepted methods of divination in such cultures. He distinguishes between divination through interpretation which a specialist is believed to have the ability to interpret omens; and divination through inspiration which implies that divinatory ability is ascribed to the inspirations received from an external supernatural entity or force.

Witchraft and sorcery are closely related. The distinction between witchcraft and sorcery is very subtle and generally hinges on the methodology used but the penultimate outcome is generally the same. Gehman (2005:94) refers to Evans-Pritchard's distinction between a witch and a sorcerer which holds that a witch uses hereditary psychopsychical powers to attain their purposes while a sorcerer resorts to magic and derives power from medicine and spells. This implies that the witch relies on an innate inherent psychic ability as an individual and thus implies that witchcraft is a psychic act.

Sorcery on the other hand, is generally not a threat to society as a whole because their energies are usually directed against an individual; whereas a witch performs her work because of her very nature. Belief in the powers of witchcraft and sorcery is the source of deep-seated fears and superstitions and generally breed suspicion. Africans generally seek the counsel of specialists such as medicine men when this suspicion comes to the fore.

Medicine men and other traditional specialists are believed to be equipped to tackle the problems. They are believed to have the ability to help individuals to resist the attacks from witches. Numerous terms have been used to refer to these individuals such as witch doctor, medicine man or witchfinder. The term "witch doctor" is generally avoided because it has numerous negative connotations attached to it. Africans generally prefer to use the term "medicine man" to convey the notion that this is an individual who is more than a herbalist and is endowed with psychic powers from the ancestors to protect them from the effects of witchcraft.

Given these beliefs, it is understandable that many of the rituals were introduced specifically to control and increase this power as Parrinder (1962:21) argues. It is not always easy to decide whether certain symbolic acts are ritually or magically intended. Surely, even the actors would not know.

This is true for ancestor worship too since this supernatural force is believed to underlie all human existence and activity. Witchdoctors are instrumental in broking this spiritual power between the living and their ancestors. There is a clearly dynamistic (perhaps even pantheistic) undertone in these beliefs.

This is supported by Theron (1996:12) who mentions that most Africans believe that the whole cosmos is filled with spirits (i.e. animism, from the Latin *anima*). These spirits of nature are believed to reside in forests, rivers, mountains, hills etc. This belief offers a plausible explanation for natural phenomena. Africans believe that spirits of affliction are utilised by some persons to harm others. This does not mean that these spirits constitute a group of their own. It is believed that they may be ancestor spirits or spirits of nature. Given these precepts it may be accepted that this form of spiritualism underlies ancestor worship in Africa.

This is supported by Crafford (1996:6) who points out that ancestral spirits play a pivotal role in tribal culture in the sense that they preserve the cultural heritage and are able to bestow prosperity or mete out punishment to the living. He also points out that pestilential spirits are believed to be wandering ancestral or evil spirits which can be harnessed by sorcerers (or witchdoctors) to plague others. This permeates the dread and fear of sorcery and fear of the influence of evil spirits.

3.4.2 God as a Supreme Being

Theron (1996:3) describes the hierarchical structure of the African cosmos. In this hierarchy, God is the Supreme Being and Creator who stands at the apex. He is followed by lesser divinities, spirits and ancestor spirits. Humans are placed below these. This structure is then repeated in the kin structures where position and status in the kin structure is largely determined by age and seniority. In this hierarchy or order of the world, balance and harmony must be maintained.

Although most Africans believe in God as a Supreme Being this concept and identity of the Supreme Being is fairly nebulous. He is not worshipped directly or addressed directly in prayer. Instead prayers are addressed to the ancestors who are considered the intercessors with the Supreme Being. Theron (1996:6-7) points out that he is addressed through the ancestral spirits because most Africans believe that he cannot be addressed directly.

This is supported by Oosthuizen (1991:40) who likens the approach of the Divine Being to that of approaching a supreme chief. It would be as difficult to make contact with the Divine as it is for an ordinary person to contact a chief. Africans believe that that the Divine presence is too much for the human to bear. This is why Africans approach the Divine through the intercession of the ancestors. This is also in line with traditional hierarchical structures.

3.4.2.1 *Humanity and involvement in communal life*

The sense of community and unity is a critical concept in African cosmology. This underlies the African worldview. Mulago (1991:120-121) considers this "vital unity" to be

relatedness in being and life which is fundamental to the life of each person with descendants and family in the clan. He further points out that this relatedness extends to a unity and harmony with God.

Life is therefore only meaningful if it is participative and part of this vital unity. This unity does not only consist of only living members but extends to the deceased ancestors and God. This union is believed to bond everyone living and dead vertically and horizontally with God and each other (Mulago 1991:120).

This notion of belonging to a community is a prerequisite for the individual identity. The individual is believed to exist not only for himself/ herself but for the community. This is supported by Van Niekerk (1999:396) who points out that the cosmic totality is expressed in human community. Therefore in ATR humanity is analogous to family and community. In the traditional religious context a person's actions from birth to death serve to bind him or her as a communal being to everyone around him/her. Therefore the sacrificial meals are a symbolic manifestation of this unity between the family/community and ancestors. It is believed that those who die enter a state of collective immortality. Oosthuizen (1991:41) thus argues that the ontology of classical Africa is therefore anthropocentric. Crafford (1996:9) mentions that anything which threatens this harmony is considered to be evil.

Life in the African view is believed to continue beyond the grave. The here and now and life after death are considered to be inseparable and interdependent. This interdependency and the belief in the immortality of the soul are the cornerstones of ancestor worship in Africa.

Life is considered to be centered on the community. The individual is dependent on the community for survival. Mulago (1991:120) points out that Africans believe that life essentially participates in the lives of the ancestors and that preservation and enhancement of their lives is important to the lives of the living.

Africans believe that the life of the individual is intended to ensure the perpetuation of the family and community. There is therefore continuity of the family, clan and tribe after death. The deceased family members are considered to form the invisible element of the family and therefore constitute the most important part. This is evident in all significant ceremonies such as births, deaths, marriages, investiture, etc. where it is believed that the ancestors are the ones who preside and will only yield to the Creator (Mulago 1991:120).

Kuckertz (1981:86-87) supports this statement and describes it as a communalistic morality which aims to ensure the wellbeing and ordered existence of the community. Furthermore, it strives to maintain the relationships in the clan and between man, nature and the ancestral spirits.

3.4.2.2 The African concept of cyclic time

In any cosmology one has to consider the notion of time and how it is understood. Western cosmology considers time to be linear with an indefinite past, present and an indefinite future.

In African terms time is viewed in terms of events. This is why many Africans do not consider it important to be punctual for an event. For the traditional African the event is important, not the time. Oosthuizen (1991:42) states that for the traditional African it is more important to be part of the event, even if it is not the entire event rather than to be present at the start.

This description of the traditional African's view of time is supported by Mbiti (1971: 24) who state that time is considered to be two-dimensional with a long past and a dynamic present. The future does not feature at all since future events have not taken place and therefore cannot constitute time. However, if future events are certain to occur or if they follow the natural rhythm of nature, they only constitute a potential time at most.

Therefore in the African worldview, actual time is regarded to be what is present and what is past. It therefore moves backwards rather than forward and people set their minds not on future things, but chiefly on what has taken place (Mbiti 1969a:17).

If this holds true, then it appears that the African concept of time is essentially cyclic in nature.[16] The implication of this view of time is that it may perpetuate a sense of passivity and fatalism which further enhances their dependence on ancestor worship in an attempt to free participants from bondage to the past. Mbiti (1971:24) points out that the future and the focus on the future has little value in this notion of time. Events merely come and go and the past is where man finds his roots and his sense of security. There is no emphasis on final fulfilment or the "end of the world" (Oosthuizen 1991:34)

This differs vastly from the modern linear concept of time in which human beings are considered to control time in the sense that they plan for the future and base their present actions thereupon (Oosthuizen 1991:42).

African traditional religions clearly have shamanistic and animistic aspects. This obviously has a bearing on the practice of ancestor worship. Ancestor worship is also believed to ensure that harmony and balance is maintained in the community. The ancestors as the intermediaries between the living and God play an important role in maintaining the community and its wellbeing.

3.5   VENERATION OR WORSHIP

When one considers the modern reality and the effects of modernisation and urbanisation on Southern Africa one has to wonder why it is that ancestor related beliefs and practices continue in spite of opposition from Christianity.

This gives rise to the question as to which elements of ancestor worship have made it possible for it to be assimilated into AIC's with relative ease and in spite of opposition?

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[16] Ideas related to reincarnation which have been noted in Southern Africa specifically relate to this African cyclical view of time. It should however not be confused with the Indian notion of reincarnation. According to Idowu (1973: 188) reincarnation is accepted among certain West African groups. In other words, ancestors reincarnate in one or several children in the family. Interestingly enough, although they have reincarnated, they are believed to retain their status and ancestral qualities.

3.5.1 Antithetical interpretations of the ancestor cult

I previously pointed out that there has been some controversy in the last few decades about the nature of the relationship between the ancestors and the African people (Bae 2004:342). Scholars such as West (1975:185-187), Kuckerts (1981:10-11), Triebel (2002:192-194) have divergent views. Some consider it ancestor *worship* while others consider it to be ancestor *veneration*. Most Christians reject ancestor worship on religious grounds as Anderson (1993) argues. As a result, African Christians are classified into three types of Pentecostal Churches with regard to their position on the practices of the ancestor cult.

According to Anderson (1993:37) these studies indicate that the majority of Pentecostal churches reject ancestor worship. Even if they do believe that ancestors may appear to their (Christian) descendants, their general response is to reject such visitations as of demonic spirits which need to be exorcised and spurned to avoid further misery.

Other scholars such as Smith (1966:39) regard ancestor worship in a different light. He believes that the term itself is misleading and easily misunderstood. Implicit in the term, according to Smith, is a reference to an existence which is different to that of man on earth and therefore immediately diverts from the African view. Mbiti (1969a:26) concurs and states that "there is nothing here about the so-called ancestor worship". This is further supported by Setiloane (1986:18), an African theologian, who argues that most Africans "strongly resent the suggestion that they 'worship' Badimo [ancestors]." According to him, worship does not adequately describe the nature of the service rendered to the ancestors which has a similar quality to the service one renders to one's living parents.

Numerous African scholars such as Mbiti (1969a:108), Dzobo (1985:340) and Becken (1993:338) are in agreement on this matter. They believe that the term ancestor worship should be accepted in spite of its religious connotations. I (Bae 2004:342) agreed that "worship" is the better term, arguing from the fundamental principle that African kin-groups are in fact communities which include living and deceased members. Ancestors therefore continue to play a role in the social structure of the living, especially in the life of the clan. They are called upon to intercede on behalf of the living. Clearly this is more than veneration.

The question arises as to whether or not ancestor worship should be considered a social phenomenon as part of the cultural fibre of the community or whether it should be treated as a religious phenomenon. The following section will explore ancestor worship as a social function.

3.5.2 Ancestor worship as a social function

Ancestor worship is built on the African concept of the family or clan. Triebel (2002:192) agrees that ancestors continue to be part of the living family and that there is a sustained interdependence inherent in the relationship. In this paradigm the forefather de-

pends on the children's respect for his position which is manifest in veneration and an adherence to traditional customs and orders.

Therefore, Africans believe that the living ought to revere the ancestors inter alia by bringing them offerings in order to ensure that they absolve their descendants from punishment and to remedy misfortune. Sundermeier (1973:146) argues that this phenomenon arises from the reality of the family structure and serves to strengthen ties within the community. It is deeply rooted in social structure and serves a social and stabilising purpose. In an earlier article (Bae 2004:345) I argued that ancestor worship should be seen as a social function which emphasises and strengthens kinship and communal identity. When one considers it from this perspective, it is clear that ancestor worship emanates from the family which serves to solidify the communal aspect inherent in the family.

According to Triebel (2002) this is supported by numerous social anthropologists and African theologians. They even concur that ancestor veneration should not be construed as a religious phenomenon but primarily as a manifestation of social behaviour. The honour and respect which is due to parents and grandparents during their lifetime continues after they have passed away. Therefore, ancestor veneration serves to ensure the continuation of family relationships and therefore constitutes an honourable remembrance which can be construed as an adherence to the fourth commandment which requires one to respect your parents.

Consequently, Becken (1993:336) holds the opinion that ancestor veneration is to be considered essentially a social phenomenon. The adherence to ancestor cultic practices emanate from the communal identity of the African people. The crux of the matter is that the ancestor cult is practiced not as a form of worship for salvation or absolution in the hereafter, but rather to provide a social cortex for the clan and members of the clan. Becken does point out that one must not get the impression that the individual is nothing without the community, but rather that the community and the individual share a reciprocal relationship and an interdependence. This relationship is not diminished by death. This interdependence is manifest in rituals such as the ritual killing of an ox. Becken states that this strengthens community bonds between the living and the dead. The deceased family members are considered to participate in the feast while the living partake in the feast.

This notion that ancestor veneration serves an essentially social rather than religious function is supported by Idowu (1973:186), the Nigerian theologian, who states that ancestor cults are essentially a means of communication and communion between the living and the dead. Vilakazi (1986:76) on the other hand, asserts that ancestor cults are founded on the principle that the kinship circle encompasses both the living and the invisible deceased members of the family. Furthermore, theologians like Jean-Marc Ela (1987:33) points out that offerings made to ancestors are essentially a display of respect and a symbol of the perpetuation of the family line and should therefore be considered an expression of the command to children to love and respect their parents. When one considers these points of view, ancestor cults ought to be considered a

purely anthropological phenomenon rather than a religion but these views do not take cognisance of the fear of the ancestors which is intrinsic to the cult.

Dzobo (1985) ascribes the misconceptions about the nature of ancestor worship to the fact that few people truly comprehend what the concept of "ancestor" actually denotes. According to Dzobo (1985) an "ancestor" is not a god or demigod, but rather considered a moral example. Furthermore, he asserts that the Akan and Ewe terms for "ancestor", namely *nananom* or*togbuiwo*, are titles which denote exemplary morality (1985:334).

I support this, especially considering the fact that these titles are earned during one's lifetime and remain after death (also Bae 2004:344). Therefore, this notion of "ancestor" does not necessarily denote a supernatural being. God is regarded to be a supreme moral example or "grand ancestor" to emulate.

When one considers the nature of African identity, the understanding Africans have of the clan and the role ascribed to parents, it is clear that ancestor veneration or more precisely honouring ancestors is essentially a social phenomenon. However, it is important to bear in mind that although the primary function of ancestor veneration may be social in nature, it does have religious aspects and fulfils an undeniably religious function.

3.5.3 Ancestor worship as religious phenomenon

I earlier (2004:344-345) stated that when one attempts to understand the religious nature of ancestor worship, it is essential to know the meaning of the term "religious". In this context "religious" would denote any belief or act that suggests that the believers or acting persons consider themselves existentially dependent upon the transcendent power or spiritual personality towards which or whom such belief or acts are directed (Anderson 1993). What I have already described suffices as illustration that ancestor veneration is more than a social or cultural-ethical phenomenon. It should be understood as ancestor worship.

Hence, Gehman (1999:48-49) refers to the testimony of *Akamba* which makes it clear that they confessed to the living dead and that in essence there is little difference between the honour given to God and that given to the ancestral spirits. Furthermore, there was little difference between the way sacrifices were offered to God and how they were offered to the ancestral spirits. Also, prayers offered in the home were essentially a blend of the Creator and ancestral spirits.

Mbiti (1969a:83) explores the religious functions of ancestor worship by offering an explanation for the roles of the ancestors. He said that the ancestors are believed to possess the power to prevent or inflict misfortune. Crafford (1996:15; Pauw 1975:151) supports this argument and points out that the afflictions which the ancestors may cause include drought, famine, sickness, barrenness and even death. They may cause it directly or by influencing the Supreme Being to do it, or even by not interceding when such events are imminent. Consequently, the belief in their power gives rise to either a

dread or feelings of expectancy in the African people. This faith in the power and authority of the ancestors points toward worship rather than veneration.

This is supported by Pauw (1975:151) who maintains that Christians believe that the ancestors manifest their benevolence in their everyday lives by keeping them safe, free of disease and misfortune and other dangers, healing them in times of illness and granting economic success in their business ventures. Therefore, the ancestors ensure that the balance and harmony in the kinship structure is maintained.

Aside from an understanding of what constitutes an ancestor, one has to examine the attitude and approach of the living who call upon the ancestors. In this regard Treibel (2002) postulates that the worshippers' invocation has an implicit sense of anticipation and expectation that the ancestor will ensure a fullness of life. This implies the extent of the perceived power which the ancestors are believed to possess. They are believed to have the power to either cause misery and ruin or ensure a quality of life. Therefore, it stands to reason that the ancestors assume a position comparable to that of God in terms of provision and help. Consequently, Sundermeier (1988:143, 159) asserts that they fulfil a central role in African religion. It therefore follows that ancestor worship does in fact have a significant religious function.

Anderson's study (1993) yields three further motivations for ascribing religious functions to ancestor worship. The first emanates from the different definitions of scholars such as Anderson and Mbiti of what constitutes an ancestor. Mbiti (1969a:334) asserts that the ancestors are still considered to be part of the living community ("the living dead") whereas Anderson's definition implies a definite distinction between the dead and the living, Notably, Anderson describes the ancestors as existing in some "undefined and unknown place to which the living have no access" (1993:27). Furthermore, the fact that the living have no access to this place until they too have passed away implies that the ancestors acquire some godlike status after death in order to influence the lives of the living. Thus the implicit belief is that the ancestral spirits are apotheosised as deities.

Hence Nxumalo (1981:67) argues that the ancestors are no longer in this world after experiencing death but have been elevated to a new status. After death they acquire power to pray to God and be heard which implies that they are closer to God than the living. It is believed that it is from this unique relationship with God that they derive their power.

Secondly, I will argue that the manner in which the ancestors are believed to reveal themselves to the living in the form of dreams and also in the form of day visions and diviners (Anderson 1993:27; McAllister 1986:67) implies a religious element (See also Bae 2004:346). Crafford (1996:15) states that ancestral spirits usually reveal themselves in dreams or in special places like the graveside or cattle kraal or by means of mediums or diviners. There is a marked similarity between the way in which the ancestors reveal themselves and the manner in which God or gods are believed to reveal themselves. It is important to note that Becken (1993:338) points out that in spite of the fact that the diviner appears to assume the role of an indigenous psychotherapist, one

cannot avoid the fact that living attempt to reach the ancestors via the diviner to receive a revelation and guidance of some sort.[17] The purpose of such revelations as Crafford (1996) asserts is to bind the community and the ancestors together and to ensure harmony and balance in their everyday lives.

Finally, I would like to argue that the demands which the ancestors make on the living to ensure this balance and harmony imply a form of atonement (See also Bae 2004:346). The living are expected to make sacrifices to atone for any wrongdoing. These sacrifices are intended to appease the ancestors. It may take the form of gifts or the ritual killing of a cow, goat or chicken, a dish of porridge or the pouring out of a libation of sorghum beer (Anderson 1993:28). In this regard, Crafford (1996:15) cites the example of the installation ceremony which is known in Zulu as the *ukubuyisa ekhaya* (literally translated as "the calling home" ceremony). This ceremony takes place a few months after the funeral and is often considered more important than the funeral itself. During this ceremony, family members gather and slaughter a beast to welcome the ancestor back. Gifts are given and food and drink is served. A special place is set aside in the home for the new ancestor.

Should the descendants not meet these demands, it is believed that the ancestors will withdraw their protection from their descendants and this will result in affliction. When one considers the fact that the living attempt to atone for wrongdoing or attempt to appease the ancestors it is evident that ancestor worship cannot be considered merely in terms of its social function.

From the aforementioned divergent opinions on the nature of ancestor worship it is evident that the social and religious functions of ancestor worship are not necessarily mutually incompatible. However, Hastings (1989:24) is of the opinion that there is no separation between the religious and social functions in ancestor cult.

This study emphasises the religious function of ancestor worship but does not negate the social function. This is because both elements (religious and social) can be perceived to be important in traditional communities of Africa, Korea and Japan. In the preceding sections the argument for the fact that ancestor worship is both social and religious has in fact been made. However, for the purpose of this study more focus is directed towards the religious aspect.

3.6 ANCESTOR RITUALS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Arriving at a general description of ancestor rituals in South Africa is fairly complex since the practices vary from cultural group, area and traditional customs. The four major cultural groups, namely the Nguni, Sotho, Venda and Tsonga have different rituals and practices but Traditional African beliefs underlie them all.[18] Therefore, it is feasible

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[17] According to EB Tylor (in Gehman 1999:44) religion originated from primitive man's reflections on his dreams. In their dreams primitive man began to believe that everyone has a spirit and physical body. Primitive man conceived that the spirit survived after death and believed that objects such as trees and animals also have inherent spirits.

[18] Shabangu (2005) lists the main types of ancestor rituals in South Africa as personal rituals, agricultural rituals and festivals.

to consider a description of a Xhosa ancestral ritual as an example to glean an understanding of the African cosmology and then examine it critically from a theological point of view.

Hammond-Tooke (1981:24) in his study which focused on the Nguni-speaking peoples' ancestral rituals wrote that the Nguni traditionally resided in the lush area between the Drakensberg and the sea, from Swaziland down to Port Elizabeth. The Nguni people generally live in scattered homesteads which include extended family members. In some cases the families are polygamous. Consequently, such homesteads were historically the residence of a large number of people.

The Nguni people are very much clan-oriented with clearly distinctive descent groups. This is the basis of their social structure. In anthropological terms, a "lineage" can be described as a group of people who are able to trace their descent from a common ancestor. In the Nguni people this descent is traced in the male line and is therefore described as patrilineal. This is also the case in Korea and Japan where family groups are structured around the patrilineal line.

In his description of the Nguni people's ancestor rituals, Hammond-Tooke (1981:25), indicates that the rituals are usually performed when a member of the lineage falls ill, In such cases where the diviner identifies the illness as sent by the ancestors, or when a particular ancestor appears to a lineage member in a dream, it is considered to be proof that the ancestor is displeased, annoyed or worried and therefore requires a ritual to be performed. Hammond-Tooke states that it is not clear whether nor not the diviner is able to identify which ancestor is responsible (unless he/she appears in a dream vision) but it is considered to be indicative that a ritual is required to appease the ancestor concerned.

For the purpose of this study, it is sufficient to focus on one example of ancestor worship from the Xhosa people. This study acknowledges that there are numerous other tribes with different ritual practices. However we will look at a case study described by Kuckertz (1983: 124-131) and Chidester (1992:9-13) in order to illustrate our argument.

3.6.1 Case study: Xhosa ancestral ritual[19]

Chidester's case study deals with the practices of ancestor rituals among the Xhosa speaking people in the Eastern Cape. He refers to Kuckertz's account of a young woman in a in a Xhosa-speaking homestead who fell ill. A diviner was consulted to determine the cause of the illness. He ascribed it to an ancestral spirit and as a result a lineage ritual was performed in an attempt to restore harmony between the homestead and the ancestors. This ritual was intended not only to honour and appease the ancestors, but to communicate with the ancestors and thereby restore the young woman to health.

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[19] Theron (1996:97-116) provides more detailed descriptions. According to Pauw (1975:207-209) important ancestor rituals commonly take five forms for Xhosa Christians. (1) Birth rituals; (2) Ritual of the "necklace", *intambo*; (3) "Drinking of milk", *ukudlisa amasi*; (4) Occasional beer drinks; (5) Mortuary rituals.

The ritual took place at the cattle enclosure where a cow had been selected for the sacrifice. The animal is thrown to the ground, consecrated and speared by the second eldest man in the lineage group. It is believed that the bellowing of the sacrificial animal is crucial since it is believed to open up communication with the ancestors. In this regard, it is believed that the animal's cry carries the words of the ritual elder to the ancestors as he calls on them to intercede on behalf of the young woman.

Chidester points out that although in this specific instance the cry of the dying animal is believed to invoke the ancestors, the same effect can be achieved by offering beer which is shared by the participants and poured out in the cattle enclosure for the ancestors. Thus in both cases, the offering of the beer or the sacrifice of the animal is considered to be a means of establishing communication with the ancestors. It is important to note that the Nguni people generally believe that an ox is the ideal sacrificial beast but will sometimes substitute it with a goat. They do not accept sheep as sacrificial animals because sheep do not let out a cry and therefore are unable to invoke the ancestor spirit.

After the ancestor's spirit was invoked, the ritual moved to the main residence of the homestead. This house was considered to be more than a residence of the living members of the clan. It was also a sacred place in which the dead members of the clan resided. Chichester indicates that the rondavel was kept dark and cool to ensure that the ancestor was comfortable. Furthermore, in this account of ancestor rituals, certain parts of the home for example the back of the house, the fireplace and the thatched overhang above the single door were considered to be places where the presence of the ancestor could be sensed more intensely.

At this point, the ritual elder, the sick young woman and all the women of the lineage gathered inside. The elder placed a piece of fat which he had cut from the slaughtered animal was placed on the fire for the ancestors. After this, a smaller cut of meat was placed on the fire as a personal sacrifice to the ancestor spirit who had been communicating with the clan. While the meat burned, the members of the family who had gathered in the house were silent.

During the slaughtering process, while the animal was being skinned, prepared and cooked by the men in the cattle enclosure, they cut a muscle from below the shoulder of the animal's foreleg and took it to the main house. This meat was referred to as the *intsonyama* and was used in a ritual of healing. In this ritual, the elder removed a long thin strip and roasted it on the fire. The smoke from this filled the house and was believed to consecrate the house and the people inside. While the smoke filled the house, the ritual elder offered the meat to the young woman (Chidester 1992:10).

The young woman received the meat on the back of her hands, tasted it with her tongue and then threw it towards the back of the house. This was symbolic of her discarding the affliction or misfortune. She then received the second piece. While she held the piece on the back of her right hand, she openly criticised the disrespect she had shown towards the living and the dead. At last, she was instructed to eat the meat by the ritual elder. As she ate the *intsonyama*, the rest of the gathering cheered and con-

gratulated her for having "eaten the ancestor". It was in this celebratory spirit that the ritual elder, the young woman and the rest of the gathering returned to the cattle enclosure where the remaining portions of the *intsonyama* and the rest of the meat of the sacrificial animal were shared in a festive communal meal. At this meal, no other food or beer was served. The meat of the sacrificial animal was eaten. The ritual concluded with the burning of the animal's bones.

3.6.2   The symbolic significance of ancestral rituals

The significance of ancestor rituals can be understood when one considers the cosmology underlying it. Ancestor worship provided a matrix which offered plausible explanations for cases of misfortune or illness. According to this worldview, such unfortunate events can be ascribed to the acts of the high god or to evil harmful acts perpetrated by witches or sorcerers, or to some impersonal pollution, darkness or hotness which a person may unknowingly inflict on himself by violating some ritual rule of conduct. Chidester (1992:11) thus argues that ancestor religion thus provides a symbolic system which reinforced the authority and rights of elders in the homestead. The third element which explains the significance of such rituals is that fact that ancestor religion acknowledges the existence of a spiritual dimension to the physical reality which effectively invalidates the permanence of death. Therefore, as Chidester (1992:11) argues in ancestor religion death is not considered to be a barrier between the living and the dead who continue to interact with the living descendants.

However, this does not mean that these notions were accepted without controversy. Instead, the role of ancestors in traditional African religion has spawned a hotbed of controversy. The crux of this controversy is centered on the question of whether or not the ancestors are worshipped. The answer to this pertinent question hinges on what the notion of "worship" actually denotes. Some scholars (Anderson 1991:81; Ela 1987: 33; Fasholé-Luke 1974:211; Idowu 1973:186; Krüger et al 2002:34; Ma 2002:203) have argued that ancestors are not worshipped but that the rituals are merely an extension of the type of care and respect they would have paid to living members of the clan. This argument holds that the ancestors are treated with respect and deference but not the type of worship which would be directed towards a supreme or divine being.

This is supported by Becken (1993:336) who considers the ritual sacrifice of animals to be purely anthropological or sociological manifestations. He argues that simply in the anthropological and/or sociological perspective. He compares the ritual killing of animals in the black community to the traditional "*braai*" (barbecue) among white South Africans which serve as occasions for reinforcing the fellowship and sense of community. He further argues that this sharing of meat which is not part of the daily staple of the black community as a particularly significant act. The fact that the invitation is extended to include the ancestors is partly due to the fact that in their cosmology the ancestors are still very much a part of the community and therefore should be included.

Chidester (1992:12) on the other hand argues that ancestor rituals represent sustained and focused interaction with supernatural presences or forces. Although some of the rituals are considered to be driven by a display of respect and honour, others like

healing rituals are clearly intended to invoke the presence of the ancestors to partici-pate in a meal which has all the hallmarks of an act of worship. At these ritual events the ancestors clearly represent lineage elders, judicial authority, and superhuman forces and are manifestation of the spirit realm. Kuckertz (1984:11-16) also maintains that they do represent unknown supernatural dimensions beyond death in the religious beliefs and practices which constitute the basis of the African worldview.

3.7   THE ASSIMILATION OF ANCESTOR WORSHIP INTO AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY

The last three decades have seen numerous scholars attempt to develop a central an-cestral theology in the African context particularly in relation to Christology. Du Toit (1998:56) maintains that African ancestor theology has assumed a remarkably uniform structure insofar as Christology is concerned.

In this section the Roman Catholic and Protestant Church's views on whether or not it is acceptable to assimilate ancestor rituals into the Christian religion will be explored. I will provide an outline of the extent to which ancestor beliefs have been integrated with African theology. I will also discuss three prominent African theologians who made significant contributions to the development of a Christology of ancestor worship.

3.7.1   The assimilation of ancestor worship: Roman Catholic and Protes-tant perspectives

According to Theron (1996:33-35) ancestor theology has been readily adapted by the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) in Africa. He argues that Roman Catholic Church's view may be described as a synthesis between indigenous beliefs and Christian truths. Daneel's study (1971:272-274) appears to support this because he states that the de-ceased are not incorporated into the hierarchy of the ancestors but are included in the heavenly community of saints. He also claims that communication with the dead and ancestral spirits still occurs in the RCC.

It is because of this that Theron (1996:35) concludes that the Roman Catholic per-spective is one which accommodates the practices of the ancestor cult. Many Catholic theologians believe that the ancestor cult should be accommodated and consider the Christianisation of ancestor veneration entirely plausible and acceptable (Kiernan 1995: 22; Maimela 1985:66; Teffo & Roux 2003:141; Triebel 2002:188). In some cases, some Catholic theologians put it in the same category as the veneration of the saints. They do not find the veneration of ancestral spirits nor the invocation of these spirits in prayer problematic. According to them it may be justified by the doctrine of the communion of the faithful (*communio sanctum*).

Afeke & Verster (2004:50) in their discussion of the Protestant perspective on this matter point out that the points of view vary from extreme rejection to positions of im-partial neutrality and even accommodation. The official Protestant perspective is that these practices are not to be assimilated into the faith but it does not attempt to find a viable alternative or middle ground.

Interestingly enough, Gehman (1999:95) points out that many African Christians revert to traditional ancestral beliefs in times of affliction or death. Certain African Protestant theologians also tend to look at solutions quite similar to Roman Catholic theology, with a liberal accent of universalism.

3.7.2 Ancestral beliefs within ecclesiology

Kukertz (1981:84) points out that for approximately four decades leading African Christians have considered the ancestor worship to be separate from religion and view it in cultural and social terms. Since then they have started to consider the ancestor cult in terms of a theology of the family and as such extend it to be part of ecclesiology. The fact that the family is believed to include living members as well as deceased ancestors, provides a suitable frame of reference for an African theology because it synthesises physical and metaphysical dimensions. The question which arises is whether or not this community with the ancestors included constitutes an element of an African ecclesiology.

Numerous scholars such as Mulago (1969), Mosothoane (1973) and Mbili (1969b) have explored to what extent this is true. Mulago (1969) attempted to integrate the notion of family in ancestor religion with that of community in Christianity. Mosothoane (1973) focused on the communion of saints while Mbili (1969b and 1971) focused on corporate eschatology.

Mulago's study postulated that the vital co-existence between the living and the dead is to be considered the cohesive principle of both the Bantu community and the Church. He argues that the vital union of people and the vital unity of the church both have "Life" as its central theme (1969:157). He considers this life-relationship in the case of the Church to be a manifestation of the Church of Christ which is essentially a sharing in the Life of the Trinity.

It stands to reason that Mulago thus proposes a theology of symbolism. He considers a symbol to consist of two halves which are dependent upon each other for meaning – therefore a vital whole. The cohesive principle is life and vital participation. This principle of life which underlies all is not only the essence of the community but also the dynamic force so that "the life of the individual is grasped as it is shared" (Mulago 1969:139). He therefore concludes (1969:157) that this Bantu notion of vital participation can be construed to form the basis of a specifically African theological structure. Therefore, communion which is essentially a participation in the same life and the same means of life is therefore the cornerstone of this ecclesiological theology.

This was further developed by Mosothoane (1973). His theological work found an alternative theology for the ecclesiology of "communion as participation" which focused on the "communion of saints." In other words, Mosothoane (1973:86) uses the notion of Christ to provide an explanation for the relation of the living dead to the church. He argues that the living and the dead are members of the body of Christ and the church. Therefore, the communion of the living and dead is found in Christ. This notion of communion in Christ provides the key to Christianising the ancestor cult. Thus, Mo-

sothoane attempts to use Christ as a bridge over the chasm of death. For Africans this bridge extends to the belief in the ancestors. It follows then that he argues that the communion between the living family members and the dead is not disrupted by death (Afeke & Verster 2004:52).

Kuckertz (1981:85) argues that this theological reduction allows Mosothoane to integrate the follower of Christ into a dual fellowship: with Christ through baptism and the eucharist and with the dead through birth and the ancestor cult. Both cultic expressions have death as its common denominator. Christ's death and resurrection gives rise to the need for the sacraments of baptism and eucharist because they ensure that the communion of the saints in Christ is maintained. Similarly, he argues that the mortuary rites and the practices of the ancestor cult in general terms have a similar effect in that they provide a means to overcome the separation brought about by death and create fellowship with the dead. This therefore results in two simultaneous fellowships, each of which is based in a faith-confidence ... on the baptismal faith-experience of the saviour's death and resurrection (Mosothoane 1973:92).

Consequently, Mosothoane (1973:87) argues that the eucharist as means of communion had to be a rite into which ancestor veneration should be incorporated since the eucharist does not only imply fellowship with Christ, but with all Christians, living and dead. He therefore argues that African Christians should be encouraged to communicate with their ancestors within the context of the eucharist. Obviously, his view propagates a total integration of ancestor beliefs with Christian life and church worship. Afeke & Verster (2004:52) are of opinion that the eucharist can make provision for mentioning ancestors by name in prayer.

3.7.3 Ancestral beliefs within eschatology

When considering Mbiti's perspective one has to view it from an eschatological perspective. Mbiti (1969b) considers man and God to be living in a single world. God's creation is also the spiritual realm where spirits such as the living dead sojourn. The living dead are believed to experience two planes of immortality. The first "personal" one is understood to continue as long as they are remembered by name and the "collective" immortality which occurs when no living descendant remembers them by name. Mbiti believes that any living person consists of a material body which decays after death and a spiritual body which lives on after death and retains the person's identity. This duality of man ensures that some kind of "communion" is maintained between the living and the living-dead.

In Mbiti's study (1969b:183) the notion of "Christ's cosmic victory" is particularly fascinating. He argues that Christ's cosmic victory on Calvary has meaning and implications for the relationship between the deceased and living Christians, both of whom are now included in Christ's cosmic body. He emphasises that redemption is not reserved for the living but that it extends to those in the spirit realms and those who are asleep in death.

Kuckertz (1981:85) points out that it is clearly as a result of this "cosmic victory of the Cross" which extends to the living, the living-dead and the spirit realm which led Mbiti to his notion of a "corporate eschatology" and a "corporate resurrection" in which we are going to "surrender" our individual personalities (1971:177). Thus, Mbiti (1971: 143) argues that the New Testament does not elaborate on the spirits of the departed, apart from those who are in Christ. Mbiti argues that those who are in Christ are able to live simultaneously in both worlds. Mbiti therefore holds the opinion that Christian fellowship includes fellowship with the departed saints.

It therefore stands to reason that since our communication with God and with one another is grounded in Jesus Christ and the redemption He has brought it follows that death can neither dissolve nor weaken it. Christ has therefore conquered death through his own resurrection. As a result death is not able to impact on the relationship between members of the Body of Christ who have died and those who are still alive. In this regard Mbiti speaks of the Communion of Saints, where fellowship between the living and the departed Christians may rightly be encouraged and cultivated (Mbiti 1971:147).

Kuckertz (1981:85) points out that Mbiti acknowledges that the New Testament does not really discuss the subject of communion with the dead saints with perhaps the only exception being Hebrews 12:22. Christ is the interface between the living and dead saints since they are all "in Christ" and therefore share a common life in Christ. This notion of a common life in Christ is similar to the African notion of collective immortality. It does however surpass the African notion because corporate resurrection denotes "newness in Christ".

3.7.4 Ancestor beliefs within Christology

Theologians such as Akrong (1992), Bediako (1995), Bujo (1992), Kabasélé (1991), Muzorewa (1988), Nkwoka (1991) and Nyamiti (1990) have argued that reflecting upon ancestral belief from a Christological perspective has contributed to the development of a Christology which articulates with the rich diversity of the African socio-cultural background. This is undoubtedly one of the most controversial topics in African Theology today. The challenge is to portray an image of Christ which resounds in the African cosmology. As a result, modern African theologians have attempted to find a resonance in the identity of Christ in response to the African realities (Taylor 1963:16).

Wanamaker (1997:291) elaborates on this search for resonance within the African realities when he points out that Christianity considers Christ to be the intercessor between God and man where the ancestors fulfil this role in the African context. It is this commonality which leads Bediako (1992:226) to accept the possibility of integrating ancestor theology into Christianity. He (1992:228) further argues that a theology of ancestors articulates with an Ancestor-Christology in which Christ is considered to be the Lord among the ancestors. Thus, the continued significance of the ancestors within African Christianity is distilled by Christology which reveals the multi-faceted role which the ancestors have fulfilled in the establishment of Christian Africa.

It must be noted as Olsen (1997:259) points out that the manner in which scholars have treated the subject of the significance of Christ with regard to African religious life has been rather divergent. Interestingly enough, each of these studies (Akrong 1992; Bujo 1992; Nyamiti 1990) discuss the doctrine of Christ under the notion of him being an ancestor figure. This is indicative of a trend. Therefore, the studies of three African theologians who have made significant contributions to the Christology of ancestorship will be explored.

3.7.4.1 Akrong's notion of African Ancestor Christology [20]

Akrong (1992:119-129) attempts to situate his Christology in the Akan people of Ghana's cosmology. Akrong refers to the fact that ancestors are addressed as *Nana-nom* (singular for *Nana*) which is the term used for grandparents and grandchildren as well as to denote respect when addressing chiefs and God (*Nana Nyame*).

Akrong (1992:127) argues that the ancestral model is the surface structure which supports the underlying structures of Akan culture and religion. He contends that the ancestor belief system entails a theological model which is deeply rooted in the social and religious world of the African. He then uses this model to portray Jesus as an ancestor who is dead but still present with us and who brings life and offers protection from evil.

Akrong (1992:123) situates his portrayal of Christ firmly in the Akan worldview and therefore identifies him as the chief warrior and hero ancestor who has a mediatory and sacred role. In this regard, he is the chief agent in God's salvation of man and the mediator of God's power of salvation.

As a hero warrior rescues his people, so Akrong considers Christ to have rescued humanity from the bondages of evil forces and sin. As the hero-Ancestor Christ becomes the mediator between God and human beings and can therefore also be the subject of worship owing to his unique relationship with God. This notion of Christ as a warrior is similar to Mbiti's notion. However, Mbiti (1972:51) does not integrate this with the ancestor model.

3.7.4.2 Bujo's notion of the proto-ancestor

Bujo's (1982:143; 1986:67; 1992:93) Christology aims to integrate a Biblical Christology with the contemporary social problems of Africa. Consequently, Bujo tries to transpose the Biblical context onto the African context. He suggests that Christ is the "proto-ancestor", a concept more meaningful for Africans. This implies that Christ is the primary ancestor and the one who personifies the ultimate ancestor to emulate. Similarly, he refers to Hebrews 1:1-2 which seems to indicate that God previously communicated with our African Fathers through the ancestors but now communicates through Christ (1992:83). This draws an analogy between the Hebrew prophets and African ancestors

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[20] We follow Lundström's (1996) exposition of Akrong and Bujo's notions.

(which is problematic because the Hebrew prophets pointed unreservedly to Yahweh, while the ancestors are not understood to point to God as clearly).

Furthermore, one of the key concepts in Bujo's theology is the notion of a "life force". According to Bujo (1986:68), God is the ultimate Supreme Origin of life. This life force is transmitted through the mediation of the ancestors to filter down to humanity. Therefore, the ancestor rituals are an attempt to secure life and abundance from the ancestors.

He also extends this notion of life force to Christ. In Christ, Bujo (1992:93) contends, this life force is available in its abundance. This resonates with the African notion that this life force is transmitted through the eldest son by various means. Bujo (1986:78) goes on to state that Christ shares his life force with believers in the eucharist. The bread and wine serves to reinforce the life and vitality among believers who partake in it.

Lundström (1996:74) describes Bujo essentially as a moral theologian who regards Christ as a model and life-giving ancestor to emulate. He thus urges the Christian community and clergy to emulate this example and has a strong commitment to the social situation in Africa. He urges clergy members to identify with the poor and become servants of the oppressed communities.

Bujo's notion of Christ as the proto-ancestor is problematic. He uses the term to emphasise the uniqueness of Christ's ancestorship. However, the denotation of the term "proto" implies "first" of many as Adam was the first of all men.

3.7.4.3 Nyamiti's paradigm of African Christology and Ancestor Kinship

Charles Nyamiti (Vahakangas 1998:251-263), a prominent Tanzanian Catholic theologian, provides a significant and extensive exposition of the ancestor analogy with regard to Christ which is firmly rooted in the Trinity. In his study, Nyamiti (1984:23) uses the beliefs and practices of many African traditional societies as his point of departure. These beliefs underscore the primacy of the ancestral relationship between the living and the dead and at times also the relationship between the Supreme Being and humanity. These relationships are seen to comprise of a brother ancestor and humanity with whom the ancestor shares a common parent (God). The ancestor acts as an intercessor between God and the living (Nyamiti 1984:30). This ancestor who has acquired his supernatural status after death is entitled to regular sacred communion. The crux of the matter though is that Nyamiti's definition of brother-ancestorship can be extended to apply to Christ and his relationship with the believers as well as to the African ancestor-brother (Lundström 1996:66; Oslen 1997:261).

This fundamental understanding of the ancestral relationship, leads Nyamiti to examine the inner life of God (Trinity) and discover that there exists an ancestral kinship among the divine persons: the Father is the Ancestor of the Son, the Son is the Descendant of the Father (Nyamiti 1985:32; 1990:139). These two persons perpetuate their ancestral kinship through the Spirit with whom they communicate with as their ancestral oblation and eucharist. In the Trinitarian notion of God there is a true doxologi-

cal and eucharist ritual. This Trinitarian ritual is considered to be the ultimate basis and model of all other rituals. The intended outcome of this Trinitarian ceremony is to achieve the intimate unification of the Father (Ancestor) and the Son (Descendant) in the Holy Spirit (pneumatic perichoresis). Olsen (1997:261) points out that in God the notions of Ancestor and Descendant are essentially doxological, eucharist, pneumatic (therefore inseparably intertwined with the Holy Spirit) and ritual categories.

Nyamiti contends that Christ's ancestorship is rooted in the Trinity. And primarily because of his divine-human status and redemptive function, Christ can be considered our ultimate brother-ancestor (Oslen 1997:261).

Nyamiti postulates the incarnation and redemptive ministry of Christ which culminates in the paschal mystery to be extensions of the Trinitarian ancestral communication to the man Jesus and thus extending through him to the rest of creation. Thus Christ functions ancestrally towards humanity by means of the Holy Spirit by means of the salvation mission he received from the Father. Therefore, God the Father through Christ becomes our Ancestor. According to Nyamiti, His ancestorship grows and reaches maturity at the Parousia. Consequently, the Mass is essentially a true ancestral ritual and the tabernacle is the Christian shrine in which Christ the Ancestor's presence is felt and is therefore available for ancestral communication. Similarly, our bodies constitute sacred living shrines or temples which are inhabited by our divine ancestors (God the Father and Christ in the divine Spirit) (Oslen 1997:262).

Scholars have criticised Nyamiti for his notion of the Ancestor Christ for numerous reasons. Olsen (1997:262) points out that Nyamiti's analogical inculturation method causes key religious concepts from traditional belief systems to be pushed to the point where they obfuscate the uncompromising Christology of the Scriptures.

3.8 CONCLUSION

Based on the foregoing conclusion, it is clear that ancestor worship in the African context is a complex and diverse phenomenon.

This chapter has attempted to answer the question on how African Churches cope with ancestor veneration. ATR in Africa have assimilated ancestor worship in an attempt to meet the needs of African people who attempted to cling to their identity in the face of colonisation and urbanisation. Christian churches have assimilated ancestor rituals in varying degrees. Whereas Roman Catholicism assimilated it readily, Protestant churches rejected it out of hand as unscriptural.

Furthermore, the complex nature of ancestor worship has been explored. The important fact is that ancestor worship cannot be separated from the African cosmology. The African worldview and the African sense of community are powerful cornerstones of ancestor worship in Africa. As the foregoing discussion points out, ATR resulted from the fact that Africans felt that the Church did not meet the needs of the African people in terms of their culture and identity. This led to the Christianisation of numerous ancestor rituals.

The manner in which ancestor worship articulates with contemporary African Ancestral Theology has shown that the most problematic factor in African theology is that the African theologian has to contend with the essentially non-Christian nature of their traditional beliefs. Therefore, this study supports Hastings' view (1976:50) which concludes that African theology constitutes a dialogue between the African scholar and the perennial religions and spiritualities particular to Africa and the African context.

The essence of African religion is non-Christian and therefore poses challenges to African theology. In order to avoid the trap of developing a theology which deviates from the Scriptural truths, one has to strive to pursue a Biblical theology as the primary focus. It is very difficult to equate African traditional religion with Christ's message and transpose it in the African idiom.

Chapter 4

THE CHALLENGE OF ANCESTOR WORSHIP IN KOREA

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In spite of the fact that Korea is considered a First World country (especially compared to African countries), the practice of ancestor worship is still prevalent and has proven to be a matter of ongoing interest for anthropologists and theologians alike. Ancestor worship in Korea is generally defined in terms of Confucian or Neo-Confucian tradition (Ro 1988; Adams 1995).

Hence, the purpose of this chapter is to gain an understanding of:

- The nature of the religious background in Korea.
- How ancestral rites are practised in general.
- How Christianity has dealt with ancestor worship in the Korean context.

4.2 THE PRESENT SITUATION IN KOREAN CHRISTIANITY

Protestant Christianity has grown to become the dominant religion in Korea after Buddhism. Since its introduction 1884, the membership of the Korean Protestant churches has grown to a staggering number of close to ten million members which in effect constitutes 20% of the entire population of South Korea. At present, Korea has 60 000 Protestant churches, 100 000 ministers and 12 000 overseas missionaries, second only to the USA. As Kim (2004:132) rightfully points out, Korea has also earned a reputation as a missionary country.

Christianity in Korea is a remarkable success story, especially when one considers that Protestant Christians constitute a mere 2% of the Asian population. Christianity in Korea has yielded a growth unparalleled in church history. This is even more so, when one considers that Christianity, both Catholic and Protestant, has failed to perform equally well in Japan, a neighbouring country with a similar social structure and shared cultural traditions, where less than 1% population has converted to Christianity (Kim 2000:117).

4.2.1 Principles of growth in Korean Christianity

The explosive growth of Christianity in Korea happened mainly during the second half of the 20th century. However, Christianity was already firmly established during the fifties of the previous century. The early history of the Korean church tells of much suffering and sacrifice (e.g. Pack 1973, Park 1975). Therefore it is rather ironic that the re-

cent growth of Christianity in Korea can be partly ascribed to the fact that the Korean Church provided the basic tools of modernisation and assumed a central role in the economic, political, and social modernisation of South Korea. Thus, many Koreans regarded the acceptance of the Gospel as a means of entry into modern society and access to what they believed to be a more advanced civilisation (Park 1975; JY. Kim 1984). The "Christianity-modernisation nexus" has been solidified and enhanced further by the number of Christians who have held prominent leadership positions within the country's political, social, academic and financial sectors. This is supported by Kim (2000:115) who notes that "from the leaders of the independence movement to the current political leadership, Christians have always been conspicuously salient in the nation's politics."

This begs the question as to why Korean Christianity took off in this way but not in neighbouring Japan, which is also a highly modernised country. Why did neighbouring countries such as China and Japan not embrace Christianity and achieve the same growth and revival as Korea did? Are there other underlying factors which have impeded the establishment of Christianity in these countries? Are there other reasons besides the apparent need for modernisation which have influenced the establishment of Christianity in these countries? Kim (2004:132) ascribes the success of Christianity in Korea to the dynamics of Korean Christianity. Kim (2004) argues that this is because it has adapted to traditional religions and culture (without being mixed with traditional culture), and has been transformed through moderation and adaptation while retaining certain essential differences.

One factor which exemplifies this transformation is the issue of ancestor worship. Elements of ancestor worship in Korea have been successfully transformed in Korean Christianity without constituting a conflict in theological principles. We will therefore explore the nature of ancestor worship in modern Korea in order to gain a clearer understanding of how this has impacted on the establishment of Korean Christianity.

4.2.2 Ancestor worship in Modern Korea

The advent of modernisation in Korea brought with it the expectation that there would be a decline in the prevalence of ancestral sacrifice especially since the traditional view of spirits and life peculiar to ancestor worship are foreign to most modern countries. Son (1988:61-71), in his essay, "Ancestor Worship: From the Perspective of Modernisation", lists five factors which indicate that ancestor worship in Korea will not be revived strongly, namely the weakened status of Confucianism, secularisation of the traditional worldview, disintegration of traditional family and social structures, sense of estrangement toward the rites and Christian influence on society.

Nevertheless, ancestor worship is still practised by many Korean people. This is evident from the large number of families that make regular visits to their ancestral graves and perform many rites associated with their ancestors. Koreans who still practice ancestor worship generally observe these rites every January 1 (*Sul*) and August 15 (*Chusuk*, of the lunar calendar) when ancestral homes and tombs are visited and on *Hansik* Day in March, when sacrificial food is offered at the ancestral tomb (Ryoo 1985:

52). The large numbers of people involved mean that many Korean people visit their ancestral grave sites to offer ancestral services for their ancestors, which is clear evidence that ancestor worship is still alive and well in South Korea.

How has Korean Christianity coped with ancestor worship? The Korean Protestant Church resisted being syncretised with shamanistic ancestor worship. As a result many Christians were martyred. In an attempt to accommodate the social and traditional elements required by Korean culture, the Korean Christian Church instituted the memorial service as an alternative. This meant that the Korean Protestant Church was able to meet the moral and social functions previously fulfilled by ancestor worship while eliminating the religious elements of ancestor worship without compromising the principles of the Gospel. In other words, ancestor worship in the Korean Church was transformed into the Koreanised memorial service which served the indigenous culture. However, Kim (2004:150) points out that it still has the shamanistic ritual elements reminiscent of ancestor worship:

> In today's Christian memorial ritual, elements of Confucian worship have been intermingled. Not a few Korean Christians have been conducting memorial services mixed with Confucian ritual. They look, for example, to the picture of the deceased, make a bow, burn candles and put them in front of the grave (Ryoo 1987:200). The cause of this is the fact that the Confucian ritual has not yet been transformed into a Christian one. Korean Christianity needs, on the one hand, to revive the filial spirit towards the ancestors, on the other hand, to criticise the filial spirit that has the ritual form of Shamanistic adoration of souls and spirits, and to baptise it in the Christian form.

Of course, the filial piety in current memorial services has influenced many people, Christian as well as non-Christian. It is however crucial for the Korean Protestant Church to filter out the basic shamanistic ritual elements in order to transform the Confucian ancestor worship into an essentially Christian ritual.

In order to fully grasp the scope and implications of this phenomenon one needs to explore and distinguish the moral and social functions of ancestor worship from the religious elements implicit in ancestor worship and how other religions have influenced ancestor worship. It is impossible to understand the Koreanised ancestor worship without grasping the religious background where Korean ancestor worship has its roots.

4.3   RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND OF ANCESTOR WORSHIP

Before exploring the religious background and influence of other religions on ancestor worship in Korea, we need to focus on the origins of ancestor worship in Korea.

4.3.1 The origin of Korean ancestor worship

Ancestor worship is inherent to most civilisations and is a universal phenomenon which is not peculiar to Korea. Ryoo (1985:53) points out that the custom of ancestor worship has been at the core of religion since early times. People generally think that an ancestor' spirit is a protector against a variety of enemies. The notion that the ancestor's spirit is able to distinguish good from bad has been prevalent among generations of worshippers. Ryoo dates the formalised rituals of ancestor worship to the reign of King of Silla (during the time of the Three Kingdoms).

Ro (1988:10) also traces the origin of formalised ancestor worship in Korea to the period of the Three Kingdoms where it was limited to the royal families and took on various forms. For example the kingdom of *Pack-che* had a form of ancestor worship for venerating the founding father, known as O*n-cho*. *Silla* and *Koguryo* had a similar form for venerating their founding fathers. These worship rituals were conducted four times a year following the change of seasons.

It was not until the end of the *Koryo* dynasty and the beginning of the *Yi* dynasty (15th century) that a definitive form of ancestor worship became established. At this time Korean Neo-Confucian scholars such as *Paek Yi-chung* and *Chong Mong-Ju* introduced the *Han* and *T'ang* systems of ancestor worship.

Confucianism had a tremendous influence on the religious practices in the Three Kingdoms although Buddhism was already the dominant religion. The establishment of Confucianism as the dominant ideology for the Yi dynasty led to the popularisation of ancestor worship among Korean families. This included the establishment of a family lineage shrine in each household. Although Buddhism was the official of the *Koryo* dynasty ancestor worship, including the three-year mourning ritual, was continued to be practised.

4.3.2 Influence of other religions on the development and establishment of Korean ancestor worship

To what extent have other religions accelerated or influenced contemporary Confucian ancestor worship? South Korea is one of the most religiously cosmopolitan countries in the world. Korea has no "official" or dominant religion. Shamanism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Christianity, and numerous new religious movements all manage to co-exist peacefully in this complex society (Kim 2000:112). It stands to reason the presence of so many religions over such a long period of time in Korea must have had an influence in the development of ancestor worship in Korea. Certain religious beliefs in Korean Traditional Religion must also have permeated into the core of Korean ancestor worship.

We will therefore explore the influence of beliefs such as the Animistic and Shamanistic concepts of the supernatural world, the Buddhist concepts of reincarnation and Nirvana, and the Confucian ethical and social ideal (especially filial piety). These concepts were assimilated into Confucian ancestor worship which became the cornerstone of modern Korean ancestor worship. Aside from these major religions, one also needs to consider which religious elements from traditional religions in the country have influenced ancestor worship in Korea.

4.3.2.1 *Animism*

Animism is the oldest religion of Korea and as such was the only religion up to the 4th Century AD Confucianism and Buddhism entered Korean civilisation from China much later.

Chae (2002:46) defines animism as a primitive religion in which nature and spirits are the main objects of worship. At the core of animistic dogma is the belief that spirits inhabit everything. In this regard Nida (1954:136) describes it in the following terms:

> By "animistic" we mean believing in spirits, not only in the spirits of dead persons, but also in spirits which dwell in natural objects, such as trees, streams, mountains, a gnarled root, a perforated stone, or a meteorite. Such objects are sometimes called fetishes and regarded as immortal. It is often possible when speaking of the religious aspects of many primitive cultures to assign Animism a dominant role, but Animism is rarely, if ever, the exclusive religious feature. Animistic beliefs are usually travelling companions with many other religious concepts and practices.

Scholars such as Brandon (1970:82) and Chae (2002:48) highlight the belief in the existence of the soul as one of the defining characteristics of Animism and by implication a pivotal notion fundamental to ancestor worship (Brandon, 1970). Therefore, animists believe that ghosts and spirits dwell in natural objects, animals and corpses of human beings. The connection between this ideological concept and the practise of ancestor worship is fairly simple. In this religion, ancestors are considered to be living members of the family, who take care of their descendants by providing protection and blessings. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. Ancestors are also believed to curse their descendants if they neglect to offer sacrifices on their memorial day.

This long-standing belief in the immortality of the soul in Korea has solidified the practice of ancestor worship over time. As a result, Korean people have been worshipping the spirits of dead for generations in an attempt to maintain a harmonious relationship with their ancestors.

Bang (2002:9) describes the cult of deceased spirits as an attempt to maintain a harmonious relationship with the spiritual deceased, as a practice of reverence. Such a form of reverence is considered as the highest venerable expression of human beings and is fundamental to Korean ethic. At any rate, this constant struggle to maintain a proper relationship with the spiritual deceased ancestors has formalised and systemised ancestral sacrifices in Korean traditional religions.

4.3.2.2 Shamanism

Ro (1988:11) regards Shamanism as the most influential religious tradition in Korea. This notion is supported by scholars such as Kim (2000:118) (1999:28) and Moon (1982:17) who describe Shamanism as the most fundamental and influential religious custom of the Korean people. They also link Shamanism to the enduring core of Korean and religious thought which in turn has had a profound influence on the development of Korean attitudes, behaviours and cultural practices. The influence of Shamanism is so significant that newly introduced religions such as Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism and Christianity had to compromise with and absorb elements of Shamanism in order to be accepted by the Korean populace.

The term "shaman" was taken directly from the *Tungus* language of Siberia (Cox 1995:225; Kim 1999:24). Although the full spectrum of Shamanism is too diverse to explore here, it can be said to refer to a religious reality that is so basic and universal that similar beliefs, customs and practices can be found almost everywhere, especially

in primal societies (e.g. Asia, Australia, Native Americans and Eskimos on the North American continent, and natives of the African continent and Southern Pacific areas). In other words, we would be hard pressed to find a part of the world that did not have some form of Shamanism (Kim 1999:27).

Shamanistic spirituality attempts to find resolution for the conflicts caused by physical and social disorders or cosmic disharmony. These conflicts are often manifested in the form of disease, a loss of life, immature death, calamities by unknown reasons, etc. These conflicts can be resolved by a shaman who is supposed to possess the power of relating the world of man to the world of the "spirit" and "gods," the living to the dead. In doing so, a shaman is able to go beyond the boundaries of the duality and to strike a harmonious relationship between the conflicting two worlds. Thus, a shaman is able to communicate with the dead, the sick, appease the malice of evil spirits, and invoke the protection of the benevolent ones (Yu 1978:151-152).

Chae (2002:52) highlights the significant role of the belief in a multiplicity of spirits and in the continued existence or immortality of the soul after death. In that sense, Shamanism is also inseparable from ancestor worship. This traditional and spontaneous phenomenon in which the shaman uses his specific ability to make contact with the supernatural world does however have a distinguishing feature which Chun (1999:18) defines as an attempt to "help us realise all the desires and necessities required by humans, such as fortune-omen-mishap-blessing etc. by the use of this transcendental power."

In this regard Shamans perform three basic functions in Korea namely, that of divine healer, diviner/prophet and manipulator of events. Divination is considered a form of prophecy in which the shaman is able to predict various events in life such as a successful journey, business affairs, finding the appropriate spouse and choosing a grave site. According to Chae (2002:52) the shaman is able to do this by means of different forms of divination. Chae (2002:52) highlights the difference between Korean shamans (*mudang*) and shamans in Siberia. Korean shamans have lost the ability of becoming spirits of natural objects themselves (Chun 1999:25).

Exorcism is considered to be a form of shamanistic healing. Shamans cast out the spirits with helpers which are the *obang changgun* or the "god-generals of the five directions." Each of these gods is believed to control one of the four directions and the centre of heaven (Shearer 1968:64). The *Kut* (dance with drum for exorcism and healing) highlights the role of the shaman in the process of exorcism and healing involving sacrifices to the water spirits, ceremonies to obtain blessings and to recall of the souls of the dead by means of songs, dance, drum beating, and cymbal clanging.

Therefore, the primary focus of Shamanism is an attempt to solve difficulties and problems in daily life and to evoke a blessing through resorting to the power of the dead. Its purpose is partly similar to that of ancestral sacrifice which strives to maintain a harmonious relationship with deceased ancestors in the hope of retaining their protection in the here and now.

Clearly then, Shamanism and ancestor worship both rely on the belief in the intervention of the dead in the lives of the living and the implicit relationship between life and death. It points to the mutual interdependence existing between the living and the dead members of the community. Therefore, the living and the dead are believed to be linked together in a way that makes the ancestral rites a vehicle for the living to intervene in the life of the dead in order to further their salvation or protection (Berentsen 1985:86).

4.3.2.3 Buddhism

Buddhism has had a significant influence on Korean culture and religion for more than a thousand years. Buddhist philosophy still influences Korean thought today especially since Buddhist teachings acknowledge the importance of the living and the dead. With regard to ancestor worship in Korea, the influence of Buddhism is less significant than the influence it has had on ancestor worship in Japan where ancestor worship has become syncretised with Buddhism into a form of Japanised Buddhism. Japanised Buddhism will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 5.

Buddhism has been part of the Korean civilisation since the time when Korea was divided into three kingdoms: the *Silla* kingdom (57 B.C-935 AD), the *Paekjae* kingdom (18 B.C. - 660 AD), and the *Koguryo* kingdom (37 B.C-668 AD). Chae (2002:56) states that Buddhism was introduced to *Koguryo* in 372 AD by Sundo, a priest from China. Twelve years later a famous priest, *Maranda*, brought Buddhism into the kingdom of *Paekjae* which passed it on to Japan in 552 AD. In 424 AD *Mukocha*, also a priest, shared Buddhism with the people of the *Silla* kingdom (Rhodes 1934:50).

Aum (2001:31) in his description of Korean Buddhism points out that Buddhism and Shamanism in its current forms share common traits because they have similar origins. This is possibly the reason why many Koreans are comfortable with both. This blend of Korean Buddhism and Shamanism is evident in Korean Buddhist documents such as *Daejang Sacred*. In these documents the syncretisation of Shamanist elements with Buddhism is presented in a rather systematised way. Ancestor worship is included.

It is important to note that in the Korean context Shamanism and Confucianism have had a greater influence on ancestor worship than Buddhism (Bae 2004:347). There are, however, two conspicuous elements in Buddhism which have been absorbed into ancestral sacrifice namely the concept of Nirvana and the concept of a cyclical life (Samsara).

Ryu (1965:40) describes nirvana as "a state of being far removed from all human sufferings." It is also the state of complete annihilation, nothingness or final death. Samsara has come to an end.

The attainment of "Nirvana" is considered the ultimate salvation in Buddhism. Buddhists aim to follow the example of Siddharta Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, who reached "Nirvana". However, in Korean and Japanese Buddhism, due to syncretisation with indigenous religion such as shamanism and ancestor worship, it is believed that

the dead spirit can be helped to reach Nirvana by means of sacrifices or rituals performed by the living (Chae 2002:57).

Nida (1954:172) describes the Buddhist cyclical understanding of life as "the constant succession of morning, noonday, evening and night - the endless repetition of spring, summer, fall and winter - the ever-present transition from birth through puberty and adulthood to old age and death – all this has given rise to the concept of the cycle of existence and the wheel of destiny and where there is no such thing as actual progress, for soon the cycle will move on around and all will be the same again." This concept of the cyclical nature of life articulates well with ancestor worship. In principle, a dead spirit can be saved if he/she is not astray in the nine celestial bodies. In order to prevent the spirit from going astray and ensure that he/she will be reborn into the present world, ancestor worship has become entrenched and systematised in various rituals and festivals which Buddhism provides.

4.3.2.4 Confucianism

Confucianism has had a significant and pervasive influence on religion in Korea. Confucianism vies with Shamanism in terms of its long-range influence on Korean religious life and has had an overwhelming effect on the social and political aspects of Korean culture. Confucianism was already popular in the days of the three kingdoms in Korea. Kim (1984:67) describes Confucianism as optimistic humanism which has established the frame of Korean lifestyle, social structure and political philosophy. It was only later that Confucianism evolved into a religion rather than a philosophy, and eventually became more pervasive than in China.

Various scholars (Kim 1988; Grayson 1989; Bae 2004) consider Confucianism to be the basis of the ethos of the Korean people and a powerful means of upholding ancestor worship. In this regard Grayson (1989:215-6) maintains that Confucianism's influence on the social and cognitive structures of Korean society has outlived the Confucian system of government. He also points out that although many people tend to think of Confucianism as a part of history, its influence on Korean thought and social life is still significant to this day. This is mainly because of the relevance of Confucian concepts such as filial piety, loyalty and family propriety which still dominate Koreans' perspective on life to this day.

This view of the relevance and continuing influence of Confucianism in modern Korean society is supported by Kim (1988:80) who acknowledges that the convictions and ethos of Korean Christians to be essentially Confucian. Therefore, having taken cognisance of the essentially Confucianist nature of the Korean mindset, it is crucial to consider the dominant tenets of Confucianism, specifically filial piety and how it relates to ancestor worship.

Filial piety is one of the core tenets of Confucianism. Central to this notion is the idea of the solidarity of the family structure. Ryoo (1985:54) therefore argues that this Confucianist paradigm, in which the importance of family and filial piety is paramount, is

evident in *Sarye Pyunram*, which continues to influence the customs and conventions of decorum and family issues.

Kang (1988:74) supports this view and points out that Koreans who did not conform to the customs and philosophy rooted in Confucianism, faced ostracism and would never be accepted as legitimate members of society. It is my contention that the Yi government exploited this for political gain and continued to build many Confucian schools throughout the country and overtly promulgated the virtues of filial piety and the proper rites of ancestor worship in an attempt to solidify their own position of sovereignty and family solidarity.

This influence from the education system permeated individual clans and families who rigorously observed the rites of ancestor worship which consequently ensured that the Yi family remained in power from the 14th to the early 20th centuries. The integrating influence of ancestor worship left an indelible print on Korean society as a whole. Even today, ancestor worship remains a sacred symbol in which Koreans find meaning and purpose for their lives and is closely intertwined with the Korean sense of identity. Over the centuries the observance of these rituals which are essentially a manifestation of the tenets of filial piety and loyalty served to strengthen family ties and solidified the fabric of Korean society.

It is important to note that ancestor worship always formed part of officially recognised religion – in this case Confucianism. As a result filial piety as taught by Confucianism became an established aspect of the moral and social structure of ancestor worship. At the core of both ancestor worship and Confucianism is the notion of filial piety.

4.4   TWO FACTORS IN ANCESTOR WORSHIP

The diverse views on the moral and social nature of ancestor worship among Korean Christians suggest that there is more than one approach. There are actually two levels of participation namely moral and social. Furthermore, the Confucianist and Shamanistic conceptions of ancestor worship are essentially different and need to be explored.

4.4.1   Moral and social aspects of ancestor worship

The moral aspect was an important factor in the preservation and development of ancestor worship in most East Asian countries. Ro (1988:12-13) argues that the Confucian tradition has been most influential in developing a moral foundation for ancestor worship in Korea. The inextricable interweaving of Confucian morality with ancestor worship is exemplified in the notion of "filial piety".

The notion of filial piety has to do with the kinship system in Korea. Filial piety, as the crux of the Confucian moral system extends beyond serving one's own parents whether they are alive or dead. Ancestor worship has become the most effective ritual expressing filial piety for dead relatives. Aum (2001:34) points out that filial duty according to Confucius extended also to the king, teacher, master, and elderly people.

The Confucianist philosophy maintains that all men are inherently good, irrespective of their status at birth. The belief is that all persons emanate from heaven and have been blessed with heaven's virtues and divine order when we are born into this world. The essential question here is not what constitutes "humanness" but rather what a person can do to fulfil his/her inherent nature and/ or potential. Chan (1963:36) states that Confucius believed that man can fulfil this divine potential by practising benevolence. Benevolence is practised by showing brotherly love and filial piety. In fact, Confucius considered filial piety to be the foundation of virtue and believed that all lessons stemmed from it.

Ch'oe (1988:36) notes that the fundamental spirit of filial piety can be summarised in two acts:

1) The act of rewarding the origin from which one has received life. It stands to reason then that one cannot but reward your parents as the origins of your life, body and spirit.

2) The act of repaying the affection and favours that your parents have given you. Choe (1988) continues to give three forms within which these two acts can be expressed:

- Firstly, preserving one's own body.
- Secondly, filial piety is shown in serving and respecting one's parents.
- Thirdly, it expresses itself in upholding the teachings of one's parents and advancing in society.

These factors are crucial to understand the nature of Korean ancestor worship because filial piety does not end when one's parents die but the duty of rewarding and repaying them continues after their death. This usually takes shape in the funeral and regular memorial rites which involve food and drink gifts which are enjoyed by the family after the rite. The purpose of a memorial service is not to invoke blessings upon one self. The true importance and significance of the Confucian ancestral rituals is essentially that it constitutes a fulfilment of the prescribed filial duties by recognising the contributions of your ancestors and rewarding the source of your life, and returning the favours and blessings you received from your own parents.

Hence, Ryoo (1985:54) argues that the basic idea of a sacrificial ritual is firmly rooted in the notion of filial piety. In Confucianist thought, filial piety is considered the foundation of goodness and the uppermost virtue. Moreover, Mencius (a disciple of Confucius and famous Confucianist scholar in his own right) taught that reverence for parents is the most important value. Clearly then, filial piety should not be considered just one of many virtues advocated by Confucianism, but rather as the quintessential cornerstone of Confucian ethical values. Confucius placed strong emphasis upon filial piety to enhance the family relationship which is considered to be the basis of the so-called rule of virtue. He equated reverence for one's parents with reverence for the so-called universal law and maintained that parents should be revered as Cheonju (天主) or the Confucian notion of heaven) is to be revered, (Joo 1978:263). Man as a moral being ought to respect and venerate his ancestors and thereby return to the roots of his

existence. The idea of "returning to the origin" and the feeling of "gratitude" comprise the foundation of the Confucian notion of filial piety (Ro 1998:12).

According to the Confucianist philosophy, filial piety is unaffected by life and death essentially. Furthermore, personal moral development starts with the practise of filial piety and does not cease when one's parents die. Joo (1978:21) points out that Mencius argued that offering rite for the dead is more important than taking care of the living because the dead are unable to do something for themselves to prolong their otherworldly life. As a result, they are dependent upon the living to ensure posterity (Joo 1978:21).

It stands to reason that ancestor worship is essentially a ritualised manifestation of filial piety. Of course one cannot divorce the moral dimension from the ritual dimension of filial piety. They are inextricably linked.

The Confucian idea of "li" (禮 propriety) is a good example of the inextricable nature of the relationship between morality and ritual. "Li" represents the synthesis of the inner moral awareness and the outward expression of it – not merely communication of one's moral integrity but also being part of self-cultivation. *Li* is not only a form of expressing one's moral quality, but more importantly, a means of enhancing it. In this respect, one can safely say that the Confucian notion of morality (and by implication, the notion of filial piety) starts and ends with *li*. This is evident in the following extract from the Analects which clearly shows the significance of propriety and how it articulates with the rituals of ancestor worship: "When parents are alive, serve them according to the rules of propriety. When they die, bury them according to rules of propriety and sacrifice to them according to the rules of propriety" (The Analects. 2:5, Wing-tsit Chan's translation, Chan 1963:23).

The extract from The Analects, cited above also clearly indicates that this adherence to propriety in terms of filial piety is applicable in life, death and the hereafter. The notion of Li is a golden thread which is evident in all of these stages of life.

The question remains to what extent ancestor worship can be considered moral rather than religious? And further, are religious elements evident in ancestor worship in Korea today? In this regard, Aum (2001:32) acknowledges that although Confucianist thought is considered mainly a system of morality, it has an undeniably religious dimension. We will now take a closer look at ancestor worship in order to determine which aspects of it can be considered essentially religious in nature.

4.4.2 Religious elements in ancestor worship

It is my contention that it is impossible to negate the religious elements of ancestor worship in favour of the ethical elements. These two dimensions are inextricably intertwined. This view is supported by Kim (1988:21-22) who argues that aside from the general ethical duty to express gratitude and to adhere to the Mandate of Heaven, there are unquestionably religious elements intrinsic to the rites of ancestor worship.

For example, the concept of the immortality of the soul is fundamental to ancestor worship. Confucius never overtly taught the immortality of the soul, but Confucian tradi-

tion teaches that when a man dies his soul ascends to heaven and his form goes down to earth, and that the two are united in the ancestor worship ceremony (Choi 1979: 128). Clearly then, the ancestor worship ritual is essentially religious in nature since it has a significant religious doctrine at its foundation.

This is also supported by Yi Yulgok, a saintly Korean Confucian scholar (1536-1583), who stressed the necessity of ancestor worship. He believed that when a man dies, the immortality of his soul depends entirely on whether or not he receives sincere devotion. In essence then, descendants remember their ancestors and are devoted to them to ensure that they remain for posterity (Choi 1979:129).

Another undeniably religious element of the ancestor worship ceremony is the notion that ancestors are able to bestow heavenly blessings. Faithful practise of filial piety and devoted care to ancestor worship ceremonies would enable the ancestors to bless their descendants. Blessings do not come anonymously from Heaven. Thus, the ancestors assumed the role of deities. They became objects of worship.

Confucius and his contemporaries had a healthy respect for invisible entities like spirits and ghosts. At the time, his contemporaries worshipped ancestors because they believed that the souls of the ancestors which continue to exist after death continue to influence the lives of their descendants. It was believed that if they suffered misfortune it was because they had not revered their ancestors or neglected them. Therefore, ancestor worship became a very important custom. Confucianism, on the other hand, was more concerned with the living and aimed at teaching men how to attain the ultimate state of perfection – i.e. full of virtue. Confucianism did not overtly promote the notion of heaven after death but rather strove for trustfulness, whole-heartedness, and its perfection.

Aum (2001:32) points out that in Confucianist terms man is considered to be the most rational and respectable being between heaven and earth and therefore acts as a mediator between them. This is entrenched in the Confucian Document (*Yukgyoung*) which describes the Confucian belief in the principles of Yin and Yang (the dual cosmic forces) and the blueprint of the religious features of Confucianism which encompass respect of the heaven, worshipping ancestors and self-discipline.

Clearly then, ancestor worship has a social and religious dimension. What is the nature of the relationship between these dimensions? Janelli (1982:163) distinguishes between ancestor worship and the shamanistic treatment of the dead. They represent two ways of achieving different but not necessarily incompatible objectives. The main difference lies in the beliefs about ancestors.

In Shamanism ancestors are dependent upon their descendants. The latter are punished if they do not honour and serve the ancestors. The ancestors are therefore regarded as being threatening and vindictive. It is essentially their dependence on their closest relatives which causes them to afflict their descendants (Janelli 1982:154). Ancestor worship, on the other hand, focuses on the well-being of the society and idealises ancestors. The relationship between the ancestors and their closest surviving rela-

tives is essentially a symbiotic one of mutual dependency (Hicks 1976:19; Yoder 1974: 7-8).

Ro (1988:16) points out that ancestor worship lacked the cosmological dimension of Shamanism. He argues that this was probably a significant factor which contributed to the fusion of the Confucian tradition and Shamanism. Confucianists were not particularly interested in defining or exploring man's relationship to the universe (cosmology) or their origins (ontology) and the hereafter and therefore did not provide a paradigm for cosmological perspective. Shamanism filled this void and provided an adequate worldview or cosmological matrix for ancestor worship.

Confucius and his contemporaries were preoccupied with the here and the now. Although they acknowledged spiritual beings, they did not attempt to explore and speculate on the existence or nature of these beings. Choi (1974:429) supports this view and points out that Confucius believed that the first priority should be to take care of man before one can consider attempting to serve or understand beings which we do not know or understand. Confucianism's focus was therefore mainly on the morality of human nature rather than attempting to define or describe the cosmological or an ontological significance of human beings. As mentioned before, filial piety was the cornerstone of Confucian morality, but in no sense did it pertain to the cosmological or ontological aspects of human nature.

Shamanism, on the other hand, provided a useful way of relating life and death, as well as the spiritual and the physical realm. By acquiring a cosmological paradigm ancestor worship became more than moral or social customs. During the Yi dynasty it developed into a form of worship. As a result, ancestor worship was no longer a ritual which was exclusively practised by Confucianists, but became a popular and entrenched family ritual irrespective of religious affiliation.

Thus, ancestor worship did not continue in its original pure Confucianist form as a manifestation of filial piety and a means of attaining virtue. It became a blended with elements of Shamanism, Animism and Buddhism. This added to its religious nature. With these issues in mind, we will now take a look at ancestral rituals in Korea and how these factors are reflected in ancestral rituals in that context.

4.5   ANCESTRAL RITUAL

Most non-Christian Koreans observe annual festivals and ritual services directed at the ancestors. These festivals and rituals take place within the family context or at home. The most popular ones are the *ch'arye*, only twice a year, on New Year's Day (*Sul*) and August 15 (*Chusuk*, of the lunar calendar).

4.5.1 Worshippers

Ancestor worship in Korea has a long and detailed tradition of ritual and protocol. The worshipper and the ancestors are both important. According to tradition, the ritual heir (descendant who is to maintain the tradition) has to be a direct and legitimate descendant of the ancestor. In most cases this is the *chongia*, or eldest son.

Lee (1987) says that the legitimate successor would normally be the eldest son. He also forms the direct line of succession. Tradition dictates that even if the eldest son were to die while his own eldest son is young, the child becomes the new ritual heir and is therefore able to claim precedence over his more mature uncles. If the eldest son dies in his youth, his younger brother becomes the legally designated heir (Lee 1987: 57). Thus succession and inheritance are inextricably linked with ancestor worship in Korea.

Unfortunately, the constraints of modern life do not always make this tradition practicable. The tradition dictates that the eldest son becomes the ritual heir and after the death of his father, assumes the primary responsibility for performing the rituals for all his direct ancestors up to the fourth generation (Lee 1987:58).

Nowadays most Koreans practise ancestor worship twice a year. This is due to the influence of urbanisation since many people who rent accommodation are unable to celebrate ancestor worship and perform rituals regularly. A further factor which complicated matters is the fact that since most Koreans are employed in the cities, they are limited in the number of days' leave they can take to visit their parents in the countryside to celebrate ancestor worship. As a result, most Koreans are only able to get leave to visit their native places on national holidays such as lunar New Year and Harvest Moon (lunar August 15) when tea ceremonies are held (Lee 1989:175).

Lee (1989:173-174) describes the sacrificial rites which a family observes for their ancestors as *chesa*. He distinguishes between three main types, namely:

- *Charye*: These are tea rites which are held 4 times a year during the day on significant holidays like the lunar New Year (*Sul*) or the Autumn Harvest Festival on lunar August 15th (*Chusuk*).
- *Kije*: These are household rites which are held at home at midnight on the night before the death day of ancestors (*Ki-il*). These rites are intended to commemorate four generations of ancestors.
- *Sije*: These are seasonal rites which are held for ancestors who are five or more generations removed. They are the only rites which are performed once a year in the tenth lunar month at the tomb of each ancestor.

In Korea it is traditional for the eldest son to live with his parents for the rest of his life. Younger sons live with their parents for an indefinite period of time but after marriage form their own households. It is this tradition of succession and inheritance which perpetuated the tradition of ancestor worship and entrenched it in Korean culture. It is also a traditional requirement for the surviving heir to bear the same surname as the ancestors. Lee (1997:37 and 1973:37) notes that the Korean preoccupation with the transmission of ritual headship outweighs even similar considerations in Chinese and Japanese succession.

In spite of logistical difficulties and daily practical complications in modern Korean lifestyles ancestor worship has survived. Modern Koreans have adapted and have continued to celebrate household ancestor worship in spite of the conflict in their circumstances with the prescriptions of tradition. Many of these are young Koreans who have

inherited the responsibility to perform the rituals of ancestor worship. In many instances, when the parents have died and the eldest son celebrates ancestor worship in the parents' home, then the younger siblings are expected to travel there to attend the sacrifice. It has become accepted practice for younger sons to go to the home of the eldest son (if he no longer lives in his deceased parents' home) to celebrate ancestor worship for their parents and grandparents.

It is possible that one of the reasons for the continued adherence to ancestor worship by young urbanised Koreans is the lack of a family structure in the urban jungle. In traditional Korean society, clans were close-knit and lived in relatively close proximity to one another which meant that there was frequent contact and interaction between siblings, cousins and other members of the clan. The constraints of modern living and employment conditions, has dissolved the clan structure in the cities in the sense that families no longer live in close proximity to one another and in some cases are only able to get together over Christmas. Continuing with the ancestor worship rituals in urban environments is thus a means of retaining the family structure and provides opportunities for family members to get together and interact.

4.5.2 Ancestors

The previous section outlined what the Korean tradition dictates in terms of the worshippers and now one needs to ask: who are the ancestors? Furthermore: what are the religious tenets underlying this belief?

In this regard, Lee (1987:65) explains that Koreans traditionally believe that living human beings have three souls called *hon*, and seven spirits, called *paek* which occupy the eyes, ears, nostrils and mouth. The commonly held belief is that at death, one soul departs for the afterlife, another remains in the mortal remains and the other is taken back to the familial home in a *honbaek* box which is a specially prepared case for this purpose. The soul which is believed to be housed in this box, is the one which is worshipped during *chesa* (sacrificial rites which a family observes for their ancestors).

In the case of dead souls whose families do not perform *chesa*, they are condemned to wander the world as hungry ghosts and therefore leave their descendants behind untended and unprotected. So-called bad spirits are the souls of persons who died an abnormal or untimely death. These souls are believed to have died with a wounded heart (*han*). In these cases Shamanistic or Buddhist requiems were to be performed.

Good spirits, in other words ancestors who died of natural causes in their homes and whose families honour and worship them according to tradition are believed to have a guardian-like role – to protect their descendants from calamity and disappointments and therefore exert a powerful influence on the lives of the living. However, this ancestral presence is believed to disappear after four generations. It is at this point where the descendants bury the ancestor's tablet at the grave site.

What does tradition state about children who die before their parents? According to the Confucian tradition unmarried children who die before their parents are considered unfilial and are therefore not entitled to receive *chesa*. However, if the death of an un-

married son effectively means the extinction of his father's line, tradition dictates that he may be married posthumously to a dead virgin. A living "son" will then be adopted to perform *chesa* for the couple and for the other ancestors of the house. Cases of posthumous marriage and adoption have been recorded in Kwangsan-gun, South Kyungsang Province, and on Cheju Island (Lee 1987:66).

4.5.3 The procedure of ancestral ritual

Oak (2002:328) points out that there are two essential dimensions to ancestral ritual: the motive which is essentially Confucianist and the beliefs which are Shamanistic or religious. These two dimensions are evident in the procedures and symbolic meanings of the ancestral ritual itself.

Traditionally the ancestral ritual is conducted by the eldest son, the Master of Rites and the Keeper of the Tablets. The ritual procedure entails that he stands up and bows deeply to an ancestral tablet when it is removed from the shrine. This is similar to the bow of respect the ancestor would have received if he/she were alive. The tablet is more than a mere memorial. It is believed to be a symbol, even the residence of the ancestral soul. Therefore the bowing down before the tablet (and the ancestral soul) is not far removed from worshiping.

He then recreates the meeting of heaven and earth by tossing three cups of wine into a bowl of rice or sand. This signifies the ancestors' descent from heaven to the presence of his descendants at the offering table (Lee 1987:68).

Once this has happened, the Master of Rites invokes the soul by lighting incense and pouring a libation. The first cup of wine is dedicated after rotating it three times in the incense. This dedication of the first cup of wine is the primary right of the heir. Another family member will uncover the rice bowl and place a spoon and chopsticks on an empty bowl. At this point all the descendants bow twice touching the floor with their heads. A commemorative address is chanted which pays a respectful tribute to the memory of the deceased. The second cup of wine is dedicated by the second son or the Ritual Master's wife in a repeat of the Ritual Master's dedication. Another relative follows suit and dedicates the third cup of wine. The spoon is then placed in the rice bowl.

These dedications are an expression of the descendants' desire for the ancestor's presence. When the Master of Rites senses the presence of the ancestral soul, he offers liquor and food in a symbolic gesture of respect and sincerity. After this a ritual prayer is read which calls upon the ancestor's soul to enjoy these sacrifices as a tangible expression of the descendants' affection. This is significant and indicative of worship rather than mere reverence. The descendants pray directly to the ancestor and not to God in the presence of the ancestor. This constitutes a form of worship by according divine characteristics to the ancestor.

All the worshippers then leave the room to allow the soul to enjoy the sacrifices. This ritual leads the descendants to believe that the ancestral soul is present and attentive and therefore responsive.

After the soul "has enjoyed the sacrifices", the descendants re-enter the room and serve tea before bowing deeply and bidding the soul farewell. Once this has happened, the Master of Rites, returns the tablet to the shrine and burns a tablet of paper.

After completion the ritual food and beverages are shared by the family members in a symbolic sharing of identity and harmony. The soul is believed to promote unity and harmony in the family. In theological terms, one can liken this to a holy communion between the dead and the living. The religious connotations are obvious and incontrovertible.

It is important to bear in mind that even though Confucian ancestral rites aim primarily at fulfilling one's moral and social filial duties by remembering the ancestors, rewarding the origin, and repaying favours given by ancestors, it is essentially still a religious ritual in which one cannot divorce the religious tenets from the social aspect of ancestor worship.

The ritual contact with the ancestral soul alludes to the stages of life. Janelli and Janelli (1975:153) compared it to the care children take of an elderly parent who is served three meals a day. During the mourning period he receives one meal a day. For four generations after his death he is served quarterly on an annual basis. After that he receives food annually at his grave. It is believed that death is one of numerous transitions in the life of the ancestor. The ancestor is believed to be present in the lives of the living and slowly fades over a period of time.

This perpetuation of the family structure and filial piety was the basis of the Confucianist ideal. Ancestor worship was equated with filial piety which was believed to be the foundation of all other virtues. Therefore, a lack of filial piety and neglecting one's ancestors was considered sacrilegious. Individuals who did not subscribe to this tradition and the notion of filial piety were ostracised from the remaining family and the society at large (Gale 1893:660). This is because not adhering to these traditions meant negating the family identity and sense of community. Ancestor worship in essence, can then be described as an attempt to preserve the prosperity of the living (Oak (2002: 329).

4.6   EARLY KOREAN CHRISTIANITY AND ANCESTOR WORSHIP

In this section we will explore how South Korean Christians attempted to deal with the issue of ancestor worship in their churches and how ancestor worship is regarded in terms of its theological constructs. In order to gain an understanding of these issues one needs to understand the complex relationship between ancestors, folk religion, and Korean Christianity in both its Catholic and Protestant forms. This will be discussed in order to provide a contextual view of how ancestor worship is practised in Christian communities in Korea.

The early Christian communities in Korea had disparate views on the acceptability of ancestor worship. The early Roman Catholic community initially rejected ancestor worship out of hand as pagan. Later it became accepted and was integrated into the Roman Catholic Church practices in Korea. Protestants on the other hand, have consis-

tently refused to accept ancestor worship on theological grounds. The next section provides a brief historical background of each and will explore both points of view in an attempt to arrive at an explanation for the difference.

4.6.1 Roman Catholic Christianity

Roman Catholicism was not introduced by foreign missionaries into Korea. Kim, MH (1988:22) points out that Catholic Christianity was introduced by Korean scholars as a result of their contact with Christian literature which they obtained in Peking. One of the earliest known Jesuits in China, Matteo Ricci, lived in Peking in 1601 where he propagated Jesuit Christianity by introducing Western science and publishing Christian literature. Interestingly enough, in his *True Doctrine of the Lord of Heaven* (天主實義), which appeared in 1601, Ricci described Confucianism and its traditions as a preparation for Christianity. This was possibly the means of least resistance and therefore his mission policy can be considered to be accommodationist (Choi 1974:422).

The Korean emperor frequently sent envoys to Peking to pay homage to the Chinese Emperor. It was during these envoys that Koreans were introduced to Matteo Ricci and consequently Catholicism.

In 1631, Jung doo-Won (鄭斗源), a member of the royal envoy, brought some of Ricci's books back to Korea, including Ricci's *True Doctrine* (Kim 1988:22).

It was towards the end of the 18th Century that Catholicism became established in Korea. In 1777, a few respected scholars, such as Chong Yak Chon (丁若銓) and Kwon Chyol Sin (權哲身), took an interest in the new doctrines. They openly discussed and propagated them and began to apply the Christian principles outlined in the books. It was only in 1783, when Yi Sung Hun (李承薰) went to China, converted and baptised in Peking that he was given the name of Peter in the hope that he would become the cornerstone of the church in Korea. He, in turn, baptised Lee Byuk and Kwon Il-shin who were both well read in Western thought. After this, the Catholic Church grew in leaps and bounds and the central figures were mainly from among the Namin Scholars, especially young members like Lee Byuk, Lee Sung-hun, and Jung Yak-yong. Through their vigorous work, the number of converted souls increased dramatically. It is for this reason that 1784 is generally regarded as the founding date of the Roman Catholic Church in Korea (Choi 1974:426).

What makes the establishment of Catholicism in Korea unique compared to other parts of the world, is that it was established by Koreans pioneers who were respected intellectuals and esteemed members of the society. It is very likely that it is because it was introduced to the Korean populace by known and respected locals rather than foreigners, who are usually regarded with suspicion, that the church grew exponentially in Korea. These respected members of the society decided on a Sabbath day and kept it. Later Kwon Il was ordained as a bishop while Lee Sung-hun, Lee Sowon, Choi Chang-hyun and Yoo ilwan-kom were ordained as priests (Ryu 1979:120).

It was in this time that the issue of the acceptability of ancestor worship became a hotly debated issue. This was contrary to the teachings of Matteo Ricci and his Jesuit mission which accepted the Confucianist tradition as a preparation for Christianity. They adopted an accommodationist mission policy because they regarded ancestor worship as a civil rather than religious ceremony.

Both Franciscan and Dominican missions, however, regarded Confucian ancestor worship as religious and superstitious. Accordingly, the two missions sent a petition to Rome and convinced Pope Benedict XIV, who made it clear in 1742 that the Confucian ceremony of ancestor worship was not permissible in the Catholic Church. The Chinese Church followed the new instruction as well and as a result met with great difficulties and even persecution in 1784 (Choi 1974:428). Catholics in Korea were also told to stop practising ancestor worship (Ryoo 1985:97).

This stance had disastrous effects. Korean Catholics were faced were terrible opposition, ostracism and eventually, Thomas Kim Pum Wu (金範寓) became the first to be martyred for burning his ancestral tablets. Zealous Christian converts destroyed their ancestral tablets and set them on fire. This let to systematic and organised persecution and many Christians were martyred as a result (Paik 1970: 32).

4.6.1.1 Conflicting ideologies and the first Christian martyrs in Korea

This was to be expected when one looks at the long history of ancestor worship in Korea. In very ancient times and in primitive Shamanism, the shaman would make sacrifices to console the souls of the dead. In the *Shilla* and *Koryo* eras Buddhist ceremonies in honour of ancestors were performed. From the time of the *Chosun* (Yı) Dynasty down to the time of the Sadae Dynasty, persons of both noble and humble origins followed the regulations set out by Chu-Tzu and kept ancestral tablets and sacrifices on behalf of their ancestors.

Thus for some 300 years, any behaviour that ran counter to the teaching of Chu-Tzu and Confucianist ethics was considered treasonous and heretic. Persons who made themselves guilty of this were subjected to severe punishment and ostracism. So it stands to reason that when the Roman Catholic Church in Korea prohibited ancestor worship and in effect then rejected the teachings of Chu-Tzu, there would be a severe backlash (Ryu 1975:98).

In a knee-jerk reaction to the persecution one Catholic Christian in Korea wrote to the Bishop of Peking pleading for the assistance of Christian nations in Europe. When this letter was discovered it led to intensified persecutions and as a result Catholic Christianity became regarded as a perverse religion opposing filial piety and patriotic loyalty. The desperate plea in this letter suggested that the church had revolutionary political intentions. Thus, the Korean Catholic Church suffered persecution at the hands of the government in the years 1815, 1819, 1827, and 1839, and finally again in 1866 (Kim 1988:25). Many years later the Catholic Church reviewed its stance and changed its views on ancestor worship.

4.6.1.2 Roman Catholic Church's assumes a different approach

It was Pope Pius XII who declared that the Chinese custom of ancestor worship should be considered a civil rite as a means of expressing filial affection towards their ancestors. He did this in a "spirit of tolerance" which he believed was justified since traditional customs had changed significantly in modern times. As a result, in 1940 the Korean Catholic Church adopted a rather tolerant attitude toward traditional ancestor worship and declared bowing to a corpse, a tomb, or a picture of the deceased; burning incense in front of a corpse or at the ancestral tomb; and preparing and offering foods in memory of the deceased as permissible and therefore acceptable (Kang 1975:3).

This tolerant stance was endorsed when the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) stated that the Church had no desire to impose a rigid uniformity on matters which did not involve the faith or the good of the whole community. The council wanted to convey the idea that the Church respects and fosters the uniqueness of communities and their spiritual gifts as long as they are not overtly superstitious or erroneous. In such cases the Church would include such differences in the liturgy as long as it did not conflict with its true and authentic spirit (Abbott 1966:151).

One of the reasons for this more tolerant attitude towards ancestor worship is based on the Catholic tenet of purgatory where the dead who did not make it into heaven immediately wait till their sins are purged. The living believers are taught to pray for the dead in purgatory (Bullough 1963:141). Living members of the Church could previously buy indulgences to facilitate the purging of the dead's sins. The Church has even set a day, the 2nd of November, as a time of memorial and visiting ancestral graves.

4.6.2 Protestant Christianity

The decision of the Roman Catholic Church in Korea represents the more expedient route than the stance taken by the Protestant Church in Korea. The Protestants have consistently rejected ancestor worship as unbiblical and as a pagan tradition with strong religious elements.

The following section will be a brief exposition of the history of the Protestant Church in Korea with an explanation on why they have chosen to reject ancestor worship and how they have attempted to bridge the gap and meet the people's needs without compromising their faith.

Some scholars (Oak 2002:337; Ryoo 1985:102) attribute the religious persecution Protestants suffered to the fact that early missionaries misunderstood the nature of ancestor worship. They believe that it was this misconception of the essential nature of ancestor worship which prompted them to reject it out of hand as a pagan ritual.

Interestingly enough, Protestant Christianity similar to Catholicism was not introduced to Korea by foreign missionaries. In the case of Protestantism, it was introduced by Korean merchants who were exposed to Protestant Christianity in their travels to Manchuria. During 1878 the So brothers, Sang Yun and San U (also known as Kyong Jo) travelled to Manchuria to peddle merchandise and came to contact with John Ross and John MacIntyre, the well-known Scottish Presbyterian missionaries. As a result,

they were converted and the elder brother San Yun was baptised by John Ross in 1879. Together with John Ross, Sang Yun travelled to Mukden to assist with Bible translation and printing. Sang Yun later returned to Korea as a colporteur and smuggled the translated portion of the New Testament to his home village in Uiju and settled in Sorae in Hwanghae Province in 1883 a hundred years ago. So Sang Yun spread the Gospel and converted some of his neighbours and scattered the seed of the Gospel in the northwest of Korea. When American missionaries entered the country in 1884 and in 1885 there were already a few Protestant Christians (Paik 1970:51-54).

During the early years of the Korean Protestant Church, the dilemma of ancestor worship arose as it had with the Catholic Church years before. It was a troublesome time and the Church had to make a decision on whether or not ancestor worship would be accepted in the Church. The missionaries rejected the notion of ancestor worship as being contrary to Christian teachings and declared it a pagan ritual (Paik 1970:157).

In an attempt to make a decision on this matter, the early missionaries compiled a questionnaire to gauge the opinions of the Christian congregation. During this democratic procedure the Christians were required to write down their personal views on the custom. The unanimous opinion was that ancestor worship was contrary to the teachings expounded in the New Testament and that offering sacrifice was unscriptural and unacceptable (Paik 1970:220).

This rejection of ancestor worship became entrenched over time and it became a prerequisite when entering the Protestant Church in Korea. On account of this, those who became Protestants could not offer sacrifices to ancestors. The Korean Protestant Church required catechumens to take an oath against ancestral practices in order to be accepted for baptism. The first of these precepts (used during the period of 1891-97) read as follows: "Since the most High God hates the glorifying and worshipping of spirits, follow not the custom of the honouring of ancestral spirits, but worship and obey God alone." (Paik 1970:225)

Oak (2002:330) regards this consistent rejection of ancestor worship as a fairly intolerant policy. This policy was the same as the one followed by Chinese Protestant missions which was adopted at the General Missionary Conferences in Shanghai in 1877 and 1890 respectively. During these conferences they defined ancestor worship as idolatrous sacrifice and consequently required all candidates for baptism to reject ancestor worship (Appenzeller 1892:230-231).

My contention is that the missionaries' policy on ancestor worship was not so much intolerant as it was righteous and consistent with Christian principles. It was this unfailing belief in the Gospel and the application of Christian principles which caused the early missionaries to suffer severe persecution at the hands of the government. This outright rejection of ancestor worship was published in a tract by John Ross in 1879, entitled *Yesu syonggyo mundap*. John Ross rejected ancestor worship on the grounds of monotheism and idolatry. He points out that although we should revere the life and death of righteous individuals it would be unacceptable to worship them or pray to them for guidance. That is reserved for God alone.

Methodist and Presbyterian missionaries also published tracts which condemned ancestor worship as a form of idolatry. At the time, Nevius' *Errors of Ancestor Worship* was a prescribed text on this issue at theological training classes. Nevius rejected the practice of ancestor worship, Nevius acknowledges that although filial piety to the parents and ancestors are perfectly acceptable, it should be expanded to God and perfected in the worship of God. Instead of using ancestor worship to display filial piety, Nevius made alternative suggestions to express this. He suggested practical ways of doing this, e.g. being dutiful to living parents and relatives and performing proper funeral services. Other Chinese tracts repeated these arguments.

This is significant because Nevius acknowledges the need for expressing filial piety but attempts to find an alternative which would not conflict with Christian teachings. Nevius explained that as all traditions and customs are not all good, one needs to extract the good and adapt the distorted elements to align them with a more acceptable practice (Oak 2002:331).

The Protestant missions rejected ancestor worship for five main reasons. The first was that they felt that it constituted a religious sacrifice to the spirit of the dead ancestor and therefore was in conflict with the first and second Commandments. They rejected ancestor worship as a form of polytheism and idolatry.

Secondly, although ancestor worship supported the tenet of the immortality of the soul, missionaries rejected the notion that the soul could reside in a tablet in a shrine, eat sacrificial food, and bless his/her descendants and an unscriptural belief. The traditional belief that the soul is present for four generations and gradually fades away is contrary to the Christian teaching that the soul is invisible and spiritual and never vanishes for ten thousand years. Christianity teaches that there are only two destinations for the soul, namely heaven or hell.(Oak 2002:331)

The last two reasons are mainly based on anti-Roman Catholic sentiments. Evangelical missionaries considered the Korean view of the interdependence between the living and the dead as reminiscent of the Roman Catholic idea of saints and the theory of purgatory.

The Protestant missionaries were not too concerned about preserving the clan structure of traditional communities based on Confucianist traditions but were rather concerned about establishing a community of believers in Christ. They rejected a number of Catholic notions. They rejected Catholic Mass as unscriptural, disagreed with the church's theory of transubstantiation and regarded it as superstitious folly. As a result, when they saw similarities between Confucian ancestor worship and the Roman Catholic mass, they could not permit the former (Oak 2002:332)

The last reason was the belief that ancestor worship was the primary source of unacceptable customs such as early marriage in an attempt to ensure a male heir to continue the line, taking concubines, degrading women, poverty due to the costly nature of the funeral rites and mourning ceremonies and national stagnation (Oak 2002:333).

Aside from rejecting ancestral sacrifices, the early missionaries also prohibited Christian members of the congregation to touch or eat food offered during sacrificial

rites. This was because of the warnings in I Corinthians 10:21, Acts 15:29, and Revelation 2:14, 20 which state that eating sacrificial food is as bad as worshipping the idol (Oak 2002:333).

This stance opened the Protestant Church to a lot of public criticism. This escalated after an incident which was reported in the *Dongah Daily* on September 1, 1920. The article recounted how a Christian man, Mr Kwon Song-Hwa refused to allow his wife to perform the ritual expressions of filial piety for his late mother. His wife was a very pious woman and when she was prevented from practising filial piety, she committed suicide. The floodgates of criticism were opened and as a result the Christian dilemma of ancestral sacrifice escalated into a social problem and subjected Korean Christians to severe criticism.

The early missionaries considered any bow from the waist as displaying a worshipping attitude and therefore bowing to an ancestor's picture or tablet constituted a form of idol worship. Since then believers have been forbidden to perform ancestral sacrifices. Instead memorial services commemorating the day of death of departed members were organised annually (Ryoo 1985:104).

Although funeral ceremonies and memorial services did not seem to conflict with Christian theology, believers were left feeling guilty because they were not expressing their loyalty or affection for their deceased ancestors. In addition to leaving feelings of inadequacy, it did not solve the problem these believers faced when they were confronted by non-believers and family members who did not agree with their Christian views. Christian converts' rejection of ancestor worship provoked severe reproach and persecution from family members and friends alike. This caused considerable family discord, misunderstanding, friction, and alienation. However, most believers maintained their faith and refused to revert to the old customs.

Besides ridicule, insults, physical beatings, and financial damage, a convert suffered ostracism from the clan and society at large. His name was erased from the clan's genealogy, which was an eternal anathema for his apostasy (Oak 2002:338).

4.7 MEMORIAL SERVICE, *CHUDOHOE*

Ryoo (1985:103) believes that it is essentially harmless for the family to gather and share food, hang up a picture of their deceased parents without abusing this practice.

In an attempt to address the social need for displaying affection, loyalty and gratitude to ancestors, the Protestant church instituted the memorial service or *Chudohoe*. This is a Protestant alternative to ancestral rites and should be considered to be commemorative rather than venerative in nature.

According to Oak (2002:347-348) Christian memorial services were adapted rituals corresponding to traditional ancestor worship rituals. Chudohoe retained the cultural and ethical heritage of ancestor worship but eliminated the religious dimension and changed its idolatrous character. These culturally assimilated memorial services soon became a model for other Christians, and gradually a more standardised liturgy developed. For instance, in May, 1903, when Son U-jong of Chemulpo observed the first

anniversary of his mother's death, he invited dozens of Christian brothers and sisters to a night service. They sang hymns, prayed, read the Scriptures, and reflected on her faith and deeds. After the service they shared food that she had loved. About this diluted form of the ancestral rite, a member of the church wrote: "This would be a better filial piety to the parents than preparing the ancestral table and weeping the whole night with a hoarse voice" (Oak 2002:348). From Oak's description, it is obvious that the memorial service is commemorative rather than worshipful. No prayers are said to the departed soul and no-one prostrates him- or herself in an expression of worshipful humility.

The nature of the memorial service is encoded in the term itself. As the term suggests, it is intended as an opportunity to cherish the memory of a dead ancestor and to reflect on the affection he/she had for his/her descendants while he was alive. It is not sacrificial in nature (Park 1984:182).

Clearly then, the Christian memorial service offers a viable alternative to ancestor worship. It does however need to be carefully structured to ensure that it remains essentially Christian and not a watered-down version of ancestor worship. Each element must be scrutinised to determine whether or not it is an acceptable practice.

(1) Preparation

The participant prepares a photograph of the deceased or if there is no photograph available, the name of the deceased may be written on a piece of paper. The photograph or sheet with the name of the deceased is placed in a high place which allows everyone in the room to see it. Ryoo (1985:103) finds it acceptable to light candles or decorate it with flowers. A family member may draft a short biography of the deceased or recount an anecdotal story about the deceased. The family of the deceased and those who attend the memorial service must wear simple clothes. This is a radical departure from the ostentation of the ancestral sacrifice.

Although Ryoo's suggestion is insightful and provides an opportunity to preach the Gospel to non-believers, I have some reservations about the appropriateness of lighting candles or decorating with flowers since it can be construed as a religious element which harkens back to invoking the ancestor's spirit.

(2) Time and Place

The family member's home, a cemetery or a churchyard is an appropriate venue and the time may be selected which would be convenient for all those who would like to attend.

(3) Arrangement of the Seats

The seating arrangement is usually done according to the degree of kinship. In other words, those who were closely related to the deceased will be placed towards the front together with any persons who perform parts of the programme such as the prayer.

(4) Procedure of a Service

The following programme outline is the suggested structure of a Christian memorial service.

a. Opening Address: We will now offer a service to cherish the memory of the late Mr (or Mrs).

b. Confession of Faith.

c. Chanting of Hymns: Some proper hymns should he chosen.

d. Prayer: the presiding person.

c. Reading of Scriptures: the presiding person.

e. Sermon: the preacher.

f. Prayer: the preacher or someone else.

g. Reading of a Memorial Writing: The person who presides at the service reports to the congregation on the career and the last injunction of the deceased. An order of silent tribute can follow.

h. Chanting of Hymns: If the deceased was a Christian, all the participants sing a favourite hymn of the deceased. If otherwise, they can sing any other appropriate hymn.

i. Benediction: the pastor.

If there is no pastor, the service is finished with the Lord's Prayer. All the participants share the food which has been prepared by the family and partake of fraternal communion in the name of God.

Kim (2004:150) points out that numerous Korean Christians have been conducting memorial services which are essentially a blend of Confucian ritual and Christian customs. For example, they look to the picture of the deceased, make a bow, burn candles and put them in front of the grave. The main reason for this is that the Confucian ritual has not yet been completely transformed into a Christian ritual.

There are still elements in the Christian memorial service which are too reminiscent of the Confucianist rituals. For example, Kim (2004) points out that the lighting of candles is similar to the incense used to invoke the spirit of the soul, displaying the picture of the deceased is similar to the tablet which is displayed in Confucian rituals, and bowing to the deceased can be construed as a worshipful gesture. It is my contention that although the Christian memorial service is a useful alternative to the ancestor worship rituals, it still has traces of Confucianism and elements of idolatry which ought to be removed. We have to transform the Confucian ritual into a Christian ritual. The memorial service is an important instrument enabling the Christian Church to meet people's need to express filial piety to their deceased parents (Oak 2002:348).

4.8 CONCLUSION

From the foregoing discussion it is clear that ancestor worship is not a phenomenon which is unique to Korea. It has however developed over a long period of time and blended with various indigenous religions like Shamanism and Confucianism to become an entrenched aspect of Korean culture. It is also clear that ancestor worship is a multi-faceted phenomenon, with a social and religious dimension.

The introduction of Christianity, first in terms of Roman Catholicism and later the Protestant Church in Korea, kindled a hotbed of discussion on the dilemma of ancestor worship. The initial rejection of ancestor worship on the grounds of idolatry sparked a vicious persecution campaign and many Christians were martyred for refusing to compromise and revert to ancestor worship. The Catholic Church later reversed its decision on ancestor worship and chose a more tolerant stance. The reason for this was that it appeared to be similar to the teaching of purgatory where Catholics are encouraged to pray for their deceased loved ones and the Catholic notion of saints.

The Protestant Church on the other hand, has remained steadfast and consistent in its rejection of ancestor worship as a form of idolatry and therefore an unscriptural practise. It is mainly because of this faithful devotion to the Gospel's teachings, that the Protestant Church has retained purity in its doctrines and its devotion to the Scriptures.

Chapter 5

THE CHALLENGE OF ANCESTOR WORSHIP IN JAPAN

5.1   INTRODUCTION

Ancestor worship in Japan has a long and illustrious history and is firmly rooted in the traditional religions of Shintoism and Buddhism. This together with the Japanese cosmology has had a significant influence in ensuring that the rituals associated with ancestor worship are firmly entrenched in the religion and culture of the Japanese people. The socio-cultural components of ancestor ritual have ensured that these practices are inextricably intertwined with Japanese identity and consciousness. As a result, Japanese Christians face an existential crisis when faced with conversion to Christianity. This tension will be explored in detail in this chapter with specific reference to the significance of these practices in terms of the social and moral functions ascribed to them and the religious implications for Japanese Christians.

The following questions need to be addressed:
- How has ancestor worship in Japan been affected by traditional indigenous religions?
- What is understood in terms of the Japanese concept of what constitutes ancestors?
- What rites are performed for ancestors as individuals and as collectives?
- What are the religious implications of the Japanese conceptions of the living and the dead and the Japanese distinction between human beings and divinities?
- How have the early Protestant churches dealt with the problems faced by missionaries in Japan and how does it differ from the Roman Catholic solution to the dilemma?

This chapter will attempt to provide a profile of the nature of ancestor worship in Japan and how it relates to Japanese cosmology with the ensuing implications for the Protestant and Catholic religions. It will also attempt to provide an appropriate Biblical perspective on the matter.

5.2   THE CORNERSTONE OF JAPANESE CULTURE

The Japanese people are a deeply religious nation. This is evident from the JEM statistics which indicate that many Japanese appear to belong to more than one religion. Kisala et al (2002:108) states that most Japanese have a relatively eclectic religiosity which means that they may belong to more than one of the major religions in different

periods of their lives. He also points out that nearly 90% of Japanese observe the custom of annual visits to ancestral graves and 75% have either a Buddhist or Shinto altar in their homes. This implies that the Japanese religiosity is essentially polytheistic. This leads one to ask how Christians in Japan deal with this multi-layered religious society and how ancestor worship is viewed in modern Japan.

In spite of Christianity having a 450 year-old history in Japan, the number of Christians in the country still constitutes only 1% of the Japanese population. Shibata (1991: 247) and Park (2002:1) both point out that although Japan is one of the most developed countries in the modern world and that it has received approximately 3 500 missionaries, there are still very few converts. This is borne out by the statistics of Japan Evangelical Mission (JEM) which indicate that the number of people who claim to be part of an organised religion exceeds the Japanese population.[21] Of the 127 million people in Japan 220 million indicated that they belong to a religious group (i.e. clearly a case of many Japanese belonging to more than one religion). Of the 220 million people, 205 million indicated that they belong to Buddhism and Shintoism (a staggering 90%), while 1.5 million (a mere 1%) have claimed to be Christian.

The logical question which arises is why is it that in spite of such a long history and numerous missionaries has Christianity not been able to secure a stronger foothold in Japan? In an attempt to provide an explanation for this phenomenon Mullins (2004:61) states that missionaries in Japan faced a fundamental clash with the indigenous religiosity and values of the Japanese nation, more pertinently the beliefs and practices concerning ancestors and spirits of the dead.

As discussed in other chapters, we know that this is not unique to Japan. Missionaries in Korea and Africa have had to grapple with basically the same problem. In all these countries ancestor worship constituted a significant barrier to the church's mission.

In spite of the fact that Japan, like Korea, is a modernised and urbanised country and that the family structure has been modified extensively, ancestor rites and the appropriate care of the dead remains a dominant factor in contemporary Japanese society. When it became clear that Japan was intent on modernising its economy and society, many visitors to these islands thought that ancestral beliefs and practices would soon become obsolete. Yet, today we know that the grip of ancestral beliefs has not loosened. Scholars like Earhart (1989:133), Hoshino and Takeda (1993:174-75) agree that the significance of the ancestors has not diminished and that it will probably remain at the core of Japanese religion for the foreseeable future. Ancestor worship constitutes the cornerstone of emotional and psychological stability in Japan.

This represented a significant barrier to Christian missions in Japan. As a result, missionaries had to reassess and revise their mission strategies.

Lee, HG (2002:3) pointed out that the poor results of missionaries in Japan can more than likely be ascribed to the lack of understanding missionaries had of Japanese

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[21] http://www.kjem.com/index.php?view=B&C=29&id=5225&menu=m2&sid_t=1154416732&bmode=view 5/23/2006

culture. He argues that unless missionaries take cognisance of the Japanese socio-cultural identity and approach their missionary work among the Japanese people according to that paradigm they are doomed to fail.

As already stated ancestor worship forms one of the fundamental principles of Japanese culture and identity. It is important to know that this phenomenon appears to have remained intact in spite of changes in environment and socio-economic circumstances, e.g. urbanisation and modernisation. Thus Kato (1977:41) states that ancestor rituals in modern Japan have all but lost their psychological influence but continues to play a significant role in the Japanese identity. Most Japanese will revert to ancestor worship in times of crisis – perhaps as a means of staying in touch with the roots of their socio-cultural identity as a people.

One of the reasons for this may be that ancestor worship has not been peculiar to a particular organised religion. Shibata (1979:62) argues that for most Japanese ancestor worship is a fundamental element of any organised religion to which they may affiliate themselves. Although it is not recognised as a religion in itself, when the Japanese people think of "ancestor veneration" (*sosen suhai*) they hear "religion". In essence then, ancestor worship can be regarded as the traditional fundamental religion of the Japanese people and any religion which does not incorporate this element would not be accepted in their daily life.

Japanese conciousness is firmly rooted in the notion of ancestor worship. This is evidenced by a well-known NHK survey of Japanese religious consciousness (Yoron 1999) which was conducted in May 1998. The results of the survey indicated that 76% of the people who responded to the survey, 35% indicated that they had a religion as a basis for their faith, whereas 56% indicated that they did not have a definite religion on which their faith was based. Furthermore, 90% of the respondents indicated that they kept *hatsmode* (the visit to Shinto shrines on New Year's Day) or *Bosan* (annual visits to the graves). They also indicated that they memorialised their deceased loved ones on Buddhist holidays like *bon, higan, hoji*.

The survey also enquired whether they had altars (*kamidana*[22]) and/or memorial tablets (*butsudan*) in their homes which are associated with ancestor rituals. 55% Of the respondents indicated that they have altars (exclusively: 9%) and tablets (exclusively: 16%) in their homes. 20% Of the respondents indicated that they have neither in their homes. That was irrespective of religious affiliation.

Traditionally, memorial tablets of their departed family members are kept in the Buddhist altar in the family home. In addition to this, they generally visit the graves of their ancestors at certain times of the year. What makes the phenomenon of ancestor worship unique in Japan is that it is devoid of an organised religious structure and has become an integral part of the moral, cultural and social fibre of the people over centuries, which explains why these rituals have survived. Even atheists have no qualms about

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[22] *Kamidana*: Shinto family altar in memory of remote ancestors and other *kami.*
    Butsudan: Buddhist family altar in memory of more recently deceased family members and other deceased kin.

worshipping their ancestors. From this, it appears that ancestor worship is essentially a significant facet of the Japanese cultural identity rather than a religious phenomenon.

5.2.1 Ancestor worship and Japanese Christians

In his analysis of the above-mentioned survey Kumoro (2003:66) says that it reflects the position of mainly non-Christian Japanese. He also claims that the majority of Christians do not subscribe to the practices and rituals associated with ancestor worship. He asserts that the Protestant Church in Japan holds a very negative view of ancestral rites.

However, Reid's study (1991) indicates that approximately 25% of all Protestant Japanese Christians have Buddhist altars in their homes. He found that Japanese Christians attend church, read the Bible and pray irrespective of whether they have ancestral ancestors in their homes. Reid found that among some Christians, the Christian and Buddhist beliefs appear to exist parallel to each other and are not necessarily juxtaposed. The extent to which some Christians adhere to the rituals (e.g. thinking about the dead (*bon* and *higan*), maintain a *kami* (altar), keep Buddhist mortuary tablets, sutras, memorial photographs, visits to ancestral graves, etc) varies and sets them apart as two distinct groups. Christians who have remnants and features of ancestor rituals in their homes tend to participate more readily in the rituals associated with ancestor worship than Christians who do not keep altars and other accoutrements of ancestor worship in their homes.

Reid (1989:259-283) questions whether or not Protestant Christianity has been changed as a result of its contact with Japanese culture. In his exposition of the history of Protestant Christianity in Japan, he postulates that the form of Christianity which was introduced to Japan was essentially puritanical and initially fenced itself off against anything associated with ancestor rites aside from the funeral. Mainline Protestantism in Japan however changed as times passed. Although the Protestant Church still holds a negative view of ancestor worship, there is a tacit acknowledgement of the deeply seated spiritual longing of the people. The church was therefore forced to come to a renewed understanding of the phenomenon of ancestor worship.

5.2.2 Theories on the origins of Japanese ancestor worship

Berentsen (1985:10-11) points out that there are divergent views among scholars on the origins of ancestor worship in Japan and whether or not it can be construed as a unique Japanese phenomenon. Some scholars believe that it may have filtered through to Japan from China together with Buddhism in the seventh century AD while others believe that it may be a synthesis of indigenous, Buddhist and Confucian beliefs, while yet others believe that it is a phenomenon indigenous to Japan (Revon 2001:455-457).

Hall (1915:153) argues that Japanese ancestor worship is essentially a Chinese import. He asserts that it was evident in Teijo's reverence for the ancestors and states that the practice slowly spread through the upper classes. He also argues that it is likely to be of Chinese origin because there is little evidence that Japanese people

practiced ancestor worship in the early centuries of their history as a people. Aston (2005:45-47) appears to be in agreement and he argues that primitive Shinto (the old native religion of Japan) had no cult of ancestor worship.

There are however other scholars whose views directly oppose that of Hall and Aston. For example, Hearn (2006) believes that ancestor worship is indigenous to Japan and an intrinsic part of Shinto. According to Hearn (2006:28-29) the family cult is to be considered the first in evolutional order and therefore the real religion of Japan is essentially ancestor worship. Strong supporters of this view were evident in the Shinto revivalists of the Kokugaku School in the 18th and 19th centuries (Revon 2001:456).

Revon (2001) on the other hand tends to straddle these two extremes. His theory appears to be borne out by modern Japanology and Japanese folklore. He points out that after the significant influence of Chinese culture in the seventh century, ancestor worship in Japan appeared to be essentially Buddhist in nature and was therefore conceptualised in Buddhist terms. The fact that Buddhist ancestor worship spread rapidly and was adopted universally also made it the perfect vehicle for basic elements in indigenous Japanese thought. This is evident in the research of Japanese folklorists after the war (Yanagida 1970:4). Buddhism was assimilated in terms of ancestor worship but eventually became a Buddhist mock-up of Japanese indigenous beliefs (Takeda 1975: 214-215).

Berentsen (1985:11) have asserted that although ancestor worship has been affected by some other traditional religions in Japan, it was indigenous to Japan in the first place.

The origins of ancestor worship pose some pertinent questions which influence the views of Japanese churches.

5.3 THE RELIGIOUS PHASES OF ANCESTOR WORSHIP

The Japanese are essentially a religious people. Ryu (1992:17) points out that there are more that 800 millions of gods in Japan and historically Japanese religions emanated from animism and naturalism.

In Japan, ancestor worship and the practices associated with the ancestors and the dead are commonly considered to be folk religion, as Hori (1994:18) points out. Hori considers folk religion to be the relatively stable substructure of Japanese religion. Miyake (In Mullins 1998:130) further argues that the frame of reference which folk religion has provided constituted the paradigm which enabled other religions to make inroads in Japanese society. The significant point here is that only those religions which accepted the paradigm of the folk religion was readily accepted and were able to exert an influence on the people in their daily lives.

If ancestor worship is an integral part of folk religion one needs to explore the origins of these practices and how ancestor worship has been influenced by other religions in Japan.

Buddhism and Shintoism are generally believed to be the major traditional religions in Japan. Some scholars tend to include Confucianism and even New Religions under the umbrella of traditional religions in Japan.

Fukada (1984:2) argues that the notion of death and ancestor worship in Japan is essentially rooted in Buddhist thought and facilitated by the mystical elements of Shinto tradition. Similarly, Shibata (1991:247) points out that ancestor worship in Japan is closely associated with Buddhism and Shintoism which explains why it was a significant obstacle to Christian missions. The question which arises is how ancestor worship became syncretised with other religions to arrive at the unique Japanese variation.

5.3.1 Ancestor worship affected by indigenous folk beliefs

Berentsen's study (1985:11) states that ancestor worship became the primary vehicle for the acceptance of Buddhism in Japan, due to a combination of the basic features of Japanese thought and the fundamentals of Buddhism. The current form of ancestor worship in Japan is essentially a Buddhist version of indigenous Japanese thought (Takeda 1975:214-21; Watanabe 1975:119-120).

Prior to the introduction of Buddhism in Japan, it is very difficult to establish the nature and content of ancestor worship mainly because of the lack written records (Smith 1974:6). The Kojiki (Record of Ancient Matters) of 712 A.D and the Nihon-shoki (Chronicles of Japan) of 720 A.D does not refer to ancestor worship directly. Takeda Choshu (1975:137) does argue that although it is not mentioned directly, it is at the epicenter of the chronicles. He argues that it is evident from the cosmology which can be derived from the texts. In these texts, the sovereignty of the emperor is derived from the sovereignty of his ancestor. This is further evidenced by the fact that the position of the emperor (and by implication the ruling family) is represented in the form of the sun goddess (the primordial ancestor) which clearly denotes the centrality of ancestor worship at the time.

According to Berentsen (1985:12) the ancient Japanese people understood the spirit to survive the death of the body and to continue a separate existence. This spirit of the dead was to be feared, cared for, and worshipped with utmost attention and courteousness. If this is done, they believe that it is possible to develop into an ancestral spirit which is known as a *kami* (minor deity) (Smith 1974:6-7; Watanabe 1964:62-63). Similar to the Korean thought, these ancestral spirits are believed to assume a protective role and continue to interact with the living family members for this purpose (Yanagida 1970:50-69).

During its early stage ancestor worship was inextricably linked to the institutions of the household (the *Ie*) and the clan (the *uji*). Hori (1962:133) argues that these two concepts, the ancestor and the household may be considered the two fundamental elements in Japanese religion and consciousness. Takeda (1975:134) remarks that the principles of the *Ie*-structure have been a fundamental part of Japanese cosmology in each period of its history. By implication, ancestor worship which is closely linked to the *Ie*-structure has been a part of Japanese culture since time immemorial. This intimate

relationship between the clan and ancestor worship is further evident in the pre-Buddhist era in the synthesis of ancestral deities and tutelary clan gods (*ujigami*) (Smith 1974:7-12). Clearly then, the fundamentals of ancestor worship pre-existed the Buddhist era and Buddhist thought in Japan.

The traditional Japanese belief in the immortality of the soul which gradually develops into an ancestral spirit, interaction between the dead and the living members of the family, and the close relationship between these religious practices and the structure of the household and clan makes it understandable that Buddhism found fertile ground in Japan. The Buddhist notion of memorial rites and ancestor worship was therefore attractive and understandable to the Japanese (Takeda 1975:145).

5.3.2 Ancestor worship in Japanese Shintoism

Fumie (1996:4) considers original Shinto (literally meaning "the way of God") to be the earliest and only indigenous religion in Japan. Some scholars (Piryns 1985:30; Reischauer 1988:207-208) points out that primal Shinto was based on the animistic veneration of natural phenomena (e.g. the sun, mountains, trees, water, etc). Primal Shinto was not really concerned about afterlife and rather focused on the veneration of nature spirits and worship, purity and everyday family life. To this day Japanese follow Shinto rituals to celebrate significant events in their lives such as weddings, baptisms, the well-being of children, the construction of houses and buildings, etc. (Breen 2003:250).

Reid (1991:7-16) also refers to the influence Shinto had on Japanese history. He argues that there are two points of view when considering Japanese culture. The first considers Shintoism as an entity which unified the Japanese ideals with that of the Shinto divinities (*kami*) and attained oneness and unity in society. The second view acknowledges that there are different classes of divinities, for example clan kami (associated with rites for the ancestors) (also Enns 2001:57) and charismatic kami (associated with local shrines). Reid therefore postulates that the Japanese history falls into four distinct periods, namely: (a) Shinto Period (pre-6th century), (b) Shinto-Buddhist Period (538-1549), (c) Shinto-Buddhist-Christian Period I (1549-1802), and (d) Shinto-Buddhist-Christian Period II (1802-present). From this classification it is evident that Shinto is considered to be the foundation of Japanese culture and religion.

According to Komuro (2003:63-64), in his article "Christianity and ancestor worship in Japan", indigenous religion of Japan was formalised and named Shinto in the 6th Century, i.e. after the other religions had been introduced into the country. Komuro therefore considers Shinto to be a set of indigenous, loosely organised religious practices, creeds, and attitudes at a communal level. He also points out that it only became the official state religion of Japan in 1868 (till 1945).

The typical ancestral divinity according to traditional Shintoism (Ma 2003:172) was called *Uji gami.* Uji gami was both the representative of all the ancestral spirits and the collection of them. Once an ancestors dies his or her spirit loses its individuality and joins Uji gami. Today the emperor is *the* Uji gami, representing and uniting all ancestral spirits.

During the Kofun period (300-710 CE), numerous small kingdoms were unified by the Yamato clan. The imperial lineage descended from this clan. The emperor played an important role during this period in establishing Shintoism as national cult. He acted as chief Shinto priest in all court rituals (including the annual rice planting and harvesting ceremonies). This formalised form of Shintoism expanded and each local clan had its own shrine or shrines. From the 10th century onwards, Shintoism developed into a coherent religious system of myths, rituals, priests, and shrines.

The Edo period (1603-1868) saw the emergence of a nationalistic movement which yearned for the return to the roots of Japanese identity, imperial rule and Shintoism as the only religion in Japan. This led to the Meiji Restoration in 1868 which toppled the military shogunate and reinstated the emperor. Once the Meiji imperial rule had been instated, Shinto was proclaimed as the state religion and the emperor proclaimed a god. During this time, Shinto shrines received governmental support and Shinto tenets were taught in schools throughout Japan until the end of World War II (Francis & Nakajima 1991:16-17). After the war, the emperor denied his divinity but this had little effect on the Japanese populace who lacked an appreciation for the difference between God and kami. The emperor is still a figure of veritably divine authority (Komuro 2003: 64).

5.3.3 The process of Japanised Buddhism

Mahayana Buddhist missionaries travelled from India to China from where it spread to Korea and Japan. The Buddhism that arrived in Japan in 538 was already syncretised with Confucianism. In Japan it played much the same role as that of Christianity in Northern Europe. In the process of becoming Japanised, it syncretised with indigenous concepts and ideals (including Shinto elements). It became the vehicle which transmitted a whole new culture and cosmology (Reischauer 1988:206; Enns 2001:60).

Mahayana Buddhism concerns itself with what happens after death and the salvation of the individual. As a result of these religious tenets, the Japanese people came to see ancestor worship in a new light and accepted many of the rituals associated with Buddhism. Many rituals celebrated today are concerned with ancestor worship and afterlife (e.g. at the time of the vernal and the autumnal equinox and the *obon* festival in the summer). Obon (the Festival of Souls) is of particular significance for the Japanese people during which a variety of foods are offered to the spirits of ancestors, and their repose is prayed for. People who have moved to the cities return home on these occasions. People in *yukata* (light cotton kimono) gather for outdoor dances known as bon-odori. For many Japanese, summer would not be summer without a bon-odori (Fumie 1996:5).

5.3.3.1 The Taika reform

As Berentsen (1985:13) describes, the Taika reform of 645 AD can be considered the ultimate point of Buddhist and Confucian influence (from China) upon Japan. Hori (1968:86) states that after the Taika reform Japanese Buddhism became the spiritual principle of the imperial system and the foundation of the great family system of the time. As a result, ancestor worship became one of its most significant functions (Hori

1994:86). The Taika reform instituted standard burial rituals and practices. Masses for the dead were introduced (Tamamuro 1974:94-95; Hori 1994: 182-183).

It is interesting to note that the introduction of the family altar, or *butsudan*, was also a result of the Buddhist slant in the religious activities of the people. Its original function was that of a temporary dedication to the recently deceased (Takatori & Hashimoto 1975:150-151). There were other elements of Buddhism as well which permeated ancestor worship, such as the construction of Buddhist images, erection of temples, copying of sutras etc., with the expressed purpose of serving the well-being of the dead (Piryns 1985:31; Takeda 1975:594).

Clans and families erected their own clan-temples (ujidera) in service of their ancestors. This custom proved to be extremely important for the development of Buddhism in Japan, and consequently became a symbol of the synthesis of ancestor worship and Japanese Buddhism. The *ujidera* became the Buddhist equivalent of the indigenous *ujigami* (Berentson 1985:13).

Berentsen (1985:14) states that the Bon festival (or Festival of the Dead) points to another early association of Buddhism with ancestor worship. This festival (*Nihon-shoki*) is entirely focused on ancestor worship built upon a sutra known in Japanese as the *Urabon-kyo*, which provides the basis for the necessity of caring for the ancestors through prayers and offerings refers to the festival (also Smith 1974:15). In 606 the Empress Suiko (554-628) ordered that it be observed in all the temples in Japan.

The Bon festival was at that time already an eclectic mix of Central Asian Buddhist, Hindu, Taoist and Confucian elements. The Japanese merely added their indigenous beliefs and practices. The festival spread among the common people and by the end of the 12th Century was universally observed and replaced the native mid-summer festival (Smith 1974:17).

5.3.3.2 The Kamakura era (1185-1333)

According to Berentsen (1985:14) during the Kamakura era (1185-1333) ancestor worship in the form of funeral services and masses for the dead became intrinsically linked to the clan temple. The funeral services and masses for the dead which were marked by *nenbutsu*[23] spread rapidly with the Jodo sect of Honen. According to Tamamuro (1974:113-120) funerals for commoners were mostly like this.

The founders of True Pure Land Buddhism (Jodo-shinshu or only Shinshu) rejected the common practice of offering food and chanting of *nenbutsu* for the salvation of the dead as having a sullying influence on Buddhism. However, during this period all Buddhist sects flourished to the extent to which they accommodated these basic elements of the old popular folk beliefs which centred on funerals and masses for the dead – with the clear affiliation to ancestor worship (Tamamuro 1974:129).

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[23] *Nenbutsu*: Chant in praise of the bodhisatva Amida.

5.3.3.3 The Tokugawa shogunate

During the Tokugawa era (1603-1868) the government banned Christian religion from Japan. Tokugawa Ieyasu issued an edict on January 27, 1614 which stated that Japan was the land of Shinto gods and Buddha. He claimed that the *Kirishitan* (Christians) have not only come to trade but have also been disseminating an evil law in an effort to overthrow right doctrine and to bring about a change of government in Japan. Thus Christianity was banned (Berentsen 1985:15).

The only way to counter the influence of the Christian missionaries was to introduce a form of totalitarian control. The Tokugawa regime required effective supervision to ensure its religious orthodoxy. For this purpose they decided to use the numerous Buddhist temples and priests. This was known as the Danka system. Ieyasu's edict was accompanied by a set of 15 rules (*Danka seido*) to guide the priests in their supervisory role. Buddhist temples received state patronage in return for administering the Danka seido. Funerals and burial masses could not take place without involving the temples and the priests. It also required all residents of an area to notify the local temple of births, marriages, and deaths. Persons who fail to attend and observe the various ancestral rites were to be investigated and reported. Mullins (1998a:7-8) points out that priests issued certificates annually to certify that the bearer was not a member of the Christian religion but an active member and regular attendee of the temple.

This system required households to register as parishioners and supporters of the local temple. This ensured that the Tokugawa was able to enforce by law a formal and compulsory relationship between the household and the Buddhist temple.

As a result, each citizen was considered to be a Buddhist, even though for some it was not of their own volition. As Buddhists, they were expected to defer all functions relating to ancestor worship to the temple, for example funerals, memorial services for the dead and maintenance of burial places. A failure to comply was considered to be an act of treason (Smith 1974:22-23).

The system was met with resistance. The *Kirishitans* were effectively silenced, but the abuse of the system as a means to intimidate the people elicited severe criticism from Confucianists and scholars of the School of National Learning. As a result, many of these individuals severed their ties with Buddhism entirely (Smith 1974:24-25; Tamamuro 1974:274).

As a result of this protest against the enforcement of Buddhism, Confucianists and Shintoists developed their own burial practices and structures (Tamamuro 1974:283). It is important to note that resistance was not directed against ancestor worship but against the Buddhist religion taking over what were considered to be Confucian and Shinto. Under the scholars of the *Kokugaku* School, Shinto and Confucian ideas merged to constitute a powerful religious and political anti-Buddhist and anti-Tokugawa movement.

5.3.4 Influence of Confucianism

As noted in Chapter 4, Confucianism is not so much a religion as it is an ethical code and even ideology. However, it exerted a powerful influence on Japanese cosmology and religion. Fumie (1996:5) says that Confucianism contributed greatly to Japanese moral code which emphasises personal virtue, justice, and devotion to the family including the ancestral spirits. The tenets of filial piety and submission to the emperor or superiors reflect Confucian influence as well.

Kisala et al (2002:111) refers to certain Confucian and neo-Confucian texts as sources which expound the element of ancestor worship in Japanese religion. Confucianism entered Japan via Korea in the 5th Century. The neo-Confucian revival reached Japan in the 13th and 14th Centuries ironically primarily through Zen monks who upon their return from studies in China began to make their monasteries centres for Chinese studies.

Confucian and neo-Confucian teachings were popularised in the early modern period through the efforts of travelling teachers. This movement had a considerable influence on religious thought in the modern period.

Komuro (2003) argues that Confucianism nonetheless played a significant role in shoring up the Tokugawa shogunate. Confucius had developed a philosophical, ethical, and political system of thought which also contained religious elements. Confucius believed that the ideal, harmonious, hierarchical society could be achieved through the moral example set by the leaders, adherence to proper rituals, and appropriate individual behaviour rather than by law enforcement.

Another virtue which Confucianism expounded was that of loyalty. This loyalty is particularly evident in a 14th Century heroic tale of a warrior's loyalty to his lord which was more important that the virtue of filial piety. This loyalty became a dominant theme of Japanese Confucianism and later became adopted into the value system of the Japanese samurai (warrior) class. In Tokugawa's time, intellectual leaders attempted to pattern society on the Confucian ideal of attaining social harmony through a hierarchical social system which spanned four levels: samurai, peasant, artisan, and merchant (Komuro 2003:63).

Francis & Nakajima (1991:18-19) state that Confucian loyalty was partly instrumental in effecting the Meiji restoration of 1868. It further contributed to nationalistic unity by means of a synthesis of Confucianism, Shinto and the imperial ideology. A practical example of this synthesis was the Imperial Rescript on Education of 1890 which was implemented in Japan and its Asian colonies of Taiwan, Korea, Manchuria and China. The Rescript emphasised the Shinto tradition of the Imperial lineage and the Confucian notion of a subject's loyalty to the emperor.

In this regard, some scholars (Hendry 2003:33; Komuro 2003:63; Ma 2003:172; Smith 1974:31; Takeda 1975:201-208) argue that ancestor worship played a crucial role in the development of Japanese imperial ideology in that it amplified the notion that the emperor was a descendant of the original ancestors of the Japanese people. Berentsen (1985:17) argues that the Imperial Rescript on Education of 1890 in the Meiji

era formalised these notions and ensured that it reached the Japanese populace. This is borne out by Maxey (1985:21) who states that by placing emphasis on loyalty, harmony, and lines of obedience in the family it provided a rational matrix for Japanese ancestral rites and its meaning within the national framework.

Although there exists some controversy about the origins of ancestor worship in Japan, it is credible that major influences came from China since the Japanese engage in ancestor worship with much the same fervour as the Chinese. It is also credible that it may have originated from the worship of guardian gods who were not only ancestors but also considered to be manifest in nature. These guardian gods are fundamental tenet of Shintoism. Therefore, Takashi Maeda (1975:3-13) argues that the fear of the dead which is prevalent in uncivilised regions eventually weakens and is replaced by a yearning for the dead as the culture of these people evolves.

5.3.5 Influence of new religious sects

Mullins (1998a:132) claims that ancestor worship was further influenced by new religious sects which developed in the post-war period. Traditional practices declined as a result of urbanisation which removed family members from the rural community. This contributed to the rapid growth of "new religions" after the war. Although these so-called new religions claimed to have new gods, revelations and rituals, they were essentially just revitalised forms of the traditional folk religions. Berentsen (1985:21) refers to Rissho and Seicho (Rissho 1972:20-24) as typical examples of this. Risshō Kōseikai for instance made deliberate changes to ancestor worship in order to make it more relevant to the new society and culture, especially with regard to modern individualism and equality of the sexes.

Rissho (1972:23) points out that the traditional *le* setting of ancestor worship gave it a slant in favour of the paternalistic and feudal structures of the household. It centered around the patrilineal ancestors and negated the ancestors of the wife, Risshō Kōseikai extended worship to both the paternal and maternal families.

Hardacre's research (1984) revealed that both Reiyūkai and Kurozumikyō stress ancestor worship in some form. Earhart's study (1989:172-190) of Gedatsu-Kai on the other hand, revealed that they had provided new and innovative means of restoring and maintaining harmonious relations with the dead, such as the *amacha* memorial ritual and the mediumistic technique of *gohō shugyō.*

This is probably the main reason why these religions were successful in Japan: the fact that they took cognisance of the ancestors and the spirits of the dead while adapting to the needs and realities of the modern Japanese population. These religions address their members' concerns about the ancestors and turn malevolent spirits into protective ones. Thus Hardacre (1984:106) argues that by changing the focus of ancestor cult, i.e. from patrilineal ancestors only to both sides of the family, it became more congruent and relevant to the modern nuclear family. Young (1989:31) recounts another example of how the new religions have adapted the traditions to meet the needs of the

modern Japanese family: some Buddhist sects have made provision for the spirits of *mizuko* (aborted and stillborn children).

Thus we may conclude that Japanese ancestor worship originated from traditional religion and was formalised under the tenets of Shintoism. The syncretistic fusion of Shintoism and Buddhism consolidated ancestor worship even further. Ancestor worship started as folk belief and developed into a basic frame for the socio-cultural and political structure of Japanese society.

5.4   JAPANESE ANCESTRAL RITES

We will now explore the nature of Japanese ancestral rites in terms of the individual and the community.

Mullins (1998a:168) states that most Japanese participate in annual religious events and rituals which are associated with Buddhist and Shinto traditions. Therefore, Mullins argues that Japanese pluralism should be considered a syncretistic system of layered obligations which tends to stand in conflict with Christianity because of its claim to be the only true religion. As a result, Mullins asserts that the fact that most Japanese have been integrated into the system of a household (Buddhist) and communal (Shinto) religious obligations, makes it exceedingly difficult for them to make a personal commitment to the Christian religion.

Sugata (1992:365) mentions that most Japanese homes have two altars, one for Buddhism and the other for Shinto rituals. He does acknowledge that this appears to be on the decline in urban areas as a result in the change of circumstances as a result of the urbanisation process.

Mullins (1998a:137) provides a valuable description of the ancestral rites practiced by most Japanese. He states that the appropriate care and respect for the dead involves not only participating in a number of rituals during the funeral but also the performance of annual festivals and memorial rites during a period of many years. Cyclical rites such as those performed at the spring and autumn equinoxes (*higan* and *obon*) which involves the return of the spirit to the home, is also required. During these times the family celebrates the welcoming and send-off of the ancestral spirits which involves visiting the household grave.

Cyclical rites are generally conducted over a 33 year period which includes services on the 7th and 14th day following a death, and the first anniversary of the death and subsequent years in line with the Buddhist tradition. Such anniversaries are often observed by means of rituals before the family altar.

For the purpose of this study, we will focus on some of the actual ritual practices. Although this study acknowledges the fact that these practices vary significantly, the scope of the study does not require an account of all of these. Instead, we will be focusing on the individual and collective rites once we have ascertained what constitutes the Japanese notion of an "ancestor".

5.4.1 The concept of ancestors

The logical question which arises is what an ancestor is in the Japanese context? The definitions which have been attached to the term are varied but as Ooms (1967:242-243) states, the term is used rather loosely and it is generally accepted that ancestor worship involves more than the mere worship of ancestors.

Hirai's definition (1968:43) states that an ancestor denotes the one who is the founder of *Ie* ("household" understood in its broadest meaning) or the parents to successive generations of *Ie*, particularly the parents of the current generation. Berentsen (1985:24) remarks that the difference which Hirai draws between the strictest meaning of the term and the looser understanding of the term reflects the Japanese conception and use of the term. This is similar to Ariga (1969:357-381) (and Smith 1974:8) who distinguishes between lineal ancestors (ancestor I) and ancestor of origin (ancestor II). In his explanation of the term Ariga defines ancestor as the founder of *Ie* and his descendants who have carried *Ie* from one generation to the next. Ancestor II on the other hand denotes the person from whom the founder is believed to have originated. Interestingly enough, as Ariga (1969:361) points out, ancestor II served essentially as basis and guarantor for the founder of *Ie* while ancestor II need not necessarily have been geneaologically related to ancestor I. In many instances ancestor II was in fact fictitious and served to enhance the position of the *Ie* founder.

Takeda (1975:87) states that the importance of the founder of the *Ie* cannot be over-emphasised since the basis of ancestor worship resides in the value of the *Ie* founder. Therefore, Takeda points out that the real meaning of *sosen/senzo* (ancestor) does not lie in the person but in his status as being worthy of worship as an *Ie* founder. This appears to be borne out by Smith's study (1974:163) which found that ancestors of the house were reckoned from the founder and therefore each branch house considered the original founder of the *Ie* to be the senior ancestor.

Clearly then, as Berentsen (1985:25) argues, the identity of the ancestors is not to be defined merely on the basis of social structures and relationships but also has a particular qualitative implication. The actual status of ancestor is not reached at death but involves a process of development which proceeds in three stages from a spirit of the dead (*shrei*) to that of an ancestral spirit (*sorei*).

Smith (1974:41) describes these periods. The first period in the process spans the 49 days following the death of the family member. This is understood to be a period of uncertainty for the dead and at this time the tablet for the deceased person is placed separately in front of the *butsudan*. Only on the 49th day is the tablet raised to the family altar which symbolises an elevation in the status of the dead. Once this happens, the soul is believed to enter the second stage and may be referred to as *niisenzo* (new ancestor). At this stage, the soul is believed to be subject to change and growth over the years and the final stage is not reached before *tomuraiage* (the 33rd anniversary after death).

Once it reaches this stage, the spirit loses its individuality and joins the supra-individual, collective, anonymous group of ancestors of preceding generations. It then be-

comes a fully-fledged *sorei* (ancestral spirit), and is not subject to further growth. It is believed to be part of a transcendent, ultimate, holy and protective being. At this stage, the individual tablet is removed from the altar, brought to the temple, and replaced at the *butsudan* with a tablet symbolising the collective group of the household's ancestors through generations (Takeda 1975:100-105).

Takeda (1975:232-235) argues that the term "ancestor" should not be used indiscriminately to include all the dead. There does exist a term which denotes all the dead, namely *hotoke* which is the Japanese equivalent for "buddha". This term more than likely originated from the popular misinterpretation of the Buddhist doctrine, the expression to become *hotoke* in the minds of the people simply came to mean to die (Takeda 1975:232-235). Therefore, when people refer to their hotoke, they include all spirits enshrined in their family altar irrespective of their actual position and progress toward ancestor-hood. It is important to note, as Smith (1974:41) points out, that one should distinguish between *hotoke* and *muen-botoke*, buddhas without attachment or affiliation. Within the *muen-botoke* there may be different categories, but none of them will follow the normal course to ancestorhood because they are not remembered or cared for by their offspring (either because they have none or because they are neglected) (Ooms 1967:254).

5.4.2 Ancestral rites

The ancestral rites for individuals are rather elaborate and start with the funeral and subsequent masses aimed at helping the soul to come to rest. Berentson (1985:33) describes the typical rituals which follow the death of a family member. At the end of the funeral, incense is offered by family members and all who are present at the funeral service.

Once the service has been completed, the coffin is taken to the crematorium from which the family will collect the ashes in an urn the following morning. The remains are not interred immediately, but taken home and placed in the temporary altar for the purpose of the imminent ceremonies. As Beardsley et al (1959:342) points out, once the ceremonies have taken place, the ashes are interred and the burial may or may not involve a religious ceremony.

The burial represents the end of the funeral, but the funeral is the first in a series of many rites for the deceased individual. The funeral is succeeded by memorial services or masses known as *hoji hoyo* or *butsuji* -ceremonies which may be considered periodic repetitions of the funeral ceremonies according to Dore (1999:429).

Ooms (1967:233) describes the ceremonies which follow the funeral as divided into two stages which correspond with the stages in the development of the spirit of the dead, namely those performed up to the 49th day after the death (*imiake*) and those performed until the 33rd or 50th anniversary (*tomuratage* or *nenki*). According to Ooms (1967) ceremonies are performed daily for the first 49 days in certain areas. However, the 7th, 14th and subsequent intervals are more commonly observed as the so-called 7x7 *hoji* rites after which the frequency of the rites are drastically reduced. Aside from

the 7x7 pattern of rites, periodic rites on the 100th day after the death are sometimes added on the 1st, 3rd, 7th, and 13th anniversaries which eventually culminates in the *to-muratage* on the 33rd anniversary. Therefore, it comprises a set of 13 *hoji* or *butsuji* masses for the deceased individual (often referred to as the "13-masses pattern").

Berentson (1985:34) points out that this is not universal custom. In fact Smith (1974: 95) states that it varies from family to family. Irrespective of the pattern of the rites, the ceremonies are of great significance for the family.

Families usually invite close friends and kin for the ceremony. In the case of the first 7x7 it is performed in front of the temporary altar. Nenki may later be performed in front of the *butsudan*, or a separate altar may again be set up in the *tokonoma* for this purpose. If a separate altar in the tokonama is used, the tablet for the person in question will be taken from the butsudan together with food offerings, incense, and other paraphernalia and placed at the separate altar.

During these ceremonies, a priest of the family temple leads the ceremony and may delivers a sermon. The ceremony usually ends with a meal prepared for all relatives and friends in attendance. A visit to the cemetery may be included during which sutras are read and offerings are left at the grave.

Once the nenki end at the tomuraiage, it is believed to mark a turning point in the process of the individual spirit of the dead. This is usually symbolised by removing the tablet of the individual from the butsudan and disposing of it in some or other way (Smith 1974:97-98).

Berentson (1985:35) points out that there is a difference between the hoji-ceremonies which are performed for the individual ancestors and those which are performed for the collective ancestors, namely the fact that the latter are supposed to be performed on a daily basis. Of course these ancestors are not addressed individually.

Daily rituals are purely domestic matters and there is no priest or temple required. Daily rituals or offerings at the butsudan are generally made in the mornings and evenings, but some families offer them once daily. These rituals are usually performed before the family sits down to a meal. According to Smith (1974:118) incense sticks are lit and offerings of rice and tea or water are made. Ooms (1967:241) says that praying, talking, reporting and giving thanks are all part of these daily rituals. Any member of the family may at any time go before the butsudan for this purpose. He also states that the most common form of an individual partaking in daily ancestor worship is a brief formal bow with palms together. The actual situation and the circumstances of the family and the individual will dictate which form of address is to be used when addressing the ancestors.

5.4.3 Ancestral rites and festivals

Berentson (1985:36) mentions annual and semi-annual rites and festivals during which domestic rites and temple festivals are interwoven with ancestor worship. The Bon festival, New Year Festival and Higan festivals which are held at the spring and autumn

equinoxes, are good examples of this. Of these seasonal holidays, Bon is undoubtedly the most significant in terms of ancestor worship.

The *Bon festival* is an intricate blend of different traditions and therefore has some rather conflicting elements. In this regard Inoguchi (1965:217-218) theorises that the dual nature of the Bon is partly ascribed to the fact that Buddhism married an old Japanese ancestor festival which previously focused on the joyous rendezvous of the living with their ancestors, with the Buddhist Bon festival with the salvation of souls as its primary focus[24]. This duality is still very evident in the festivals today. In most places it is celebrated from 13 – 15 August.

In his discussion of Bon, Hendry (2003:32) argues that preparations for the festival are made prior to the 13th, for example the family grave is cleaned, flowers are left at the grave and incense may be burned. In some cases a path may be cleared and lights or torches may be lit to guide the ancestors home. At the family home the *butsudan* is cleaned, decorated and special Bon lanterns are hung around the altar and at the entrance. In some cases a special altar /*shorodana* may be set up in the *tokonoma* in preparation for the Bon rites.

On the day of the 13th, flowers, incense, and food offerings are brought to the collective ancestral tablets which may be placed on the *shorodana*. The Bon lanterns are lit and a welcome fire is lit at the entrance. In many instances, family members go to the grave in the afternoon to meet the ancestors. During the evening the family gather in the home and the ancestors are addressed as if they are present (Berentson 1985:37).

The next day marks the climax of the Bon festival. On this day, the family will visit the grave and temple again. In the evening they gather in front of the tablets to make offerings and chant sutras.

On the 15th the ancestors are believed to return to their resting place and the farewell is celebrated in different ways. In some cases a farewell fire is lit at the entrance, similar to the welcoming fire which greeted the ancestors at their arrival and the family may visit the grave again to see the ancestors off. This farewell is marked by the reading of sutras and formal greetings which may be translated: "Come back again next year."

During the Bon festival some spirits are given special attention, for example the spirit of a family member who died since the previous Bon festival and who is now supposedly celebrating its first Bon as an ancestral spirit. Smith (1974:102-103) also points out that in some cases rites are conducted for this *shirei* at a special altar in which the priest may play a more prominent role than the others. At the following Bon festival, the shirei will not be treated separately but will be considered part of the group of ancestors

Another group of spirits which Berentson (1985:38) mentions as receiving special attention are the *Muenbotoke* who are believed to be spirits who have no descendants or

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[24] According to Yamaguchi (1985:45) some of the ancestors are suffering in hell by hanging upside down. The Bon festival and rituals is also aimed at their consolation and/or salvation.

who are neglected. A special altar is erected outside the family home for these "hungry spirits".

The *New Year festival* (Shogatsu) is not generally accepted as an ancestral festival as Yanagida (1970:50-69) points out. Nevertheless, the ancestral tablets are removed from the butsudan and taken to the tokonoma for the New Year's ceremonies. Smith (1974:98-99) argues that the ancestors are included in the New Year celebrations, in fact that Shogatsu was originally an ancestor festival. Hendry (2003:32) however states that the New Year festival is done to renew the family ties that imply ties with the ancestors.

On the other hand, the *Higan ceremonies* which are celebrated at the equinoxes are undeniably focused on the ancestors. The term *higan* denotes the action of leaving the circle of transmigration and reaching the shores of Nirvana which therefore points to the main purpose of the festival: To effect the birth of the dead in Amida's Western Paradise (Tamamuro 1974:205).

There is some controversy and difference of opinion on who is actually included in the Higan celebrations. Ooms' study (1967:240) showed that in Nagasawa Higan is considered to be primarily aimed at reuniting the family members and an opportunity for the family to visit the grave. During this time the grave is cleaned but not decorated and no rites are performed at the family altar. Beardsley's study (1959:455) found the opposite to be true in Nijike where memorial tablets of the ancestors are removed from the butsudan and taken to the tokonoma and honoured in a ceremony not unlike the *hoji.* Once again, the emphasis is placed on Higan as a family ancestral festival.

5.5   *IE* SYSTEM

The influence of ancestor worship in the family structure is evident. This chapter has shown that it is crucial to the social and religious consciousness of the clan and has been a catalyst in the fostering of national unity and morality. The question now arises whether or not ancestor worship has played a significant role in the wider social context.

In this respect Hendry (2003:34) argues that the *Ie* system is a fundamental part of ancestor worship and that it plays a crucial role in the cosmology, ethics and morality of the Japanese people. We therefore need to gain an understanding of the social and ethical features of ancestor worship as Hirai (1968:43) suggests. This is borne out by Takeda's statement (1975:126) that one cannot fully comprehend the significance of ancestor worship in the Japanese context without taking cognisance of the social and religious significance of the *Ie* lineage concept. Understanding the *Ie* system is also crucial in order to understand Japanese culture in general.

5.5.1 *Ie* system as the incessant entity

Fumie (1996:5) defines the concept of *Ie* as the "stem family" which Lebra (1984:20) defines as "a vertically composite form of nuclear families, one from each generation"

and Johnson considers it to be "a series of first sons, their wives and minor children" (Johnson 1964: 839).

It is important the note that the term *Ie* also denotes the household which includes all the residents who each have their own role in ensuring that it is maintained. According to Funie, this co-residential and functional dimension of *Ie* is what sets it apart from the notion of a family. In this respect, Lebra highlights the duality of the *Ie* concept where neither the genealogical nor the functional view of the *Ie* can be negated. Therefore, the genealogical principle focuses on the legitimacy of succession (in other words the patrilineal order) where the functional notion considers mainly the economic or occupational continuity and day-to-day operation of the *Ie* unit (Lebra 1984:21).

There appears to be no English equivalent which accurately denotes the meaning of the term *Ie*. In some respects the term "family" loosely denotes the notion of the household. In some contexts, "family" can denote a genealogical succession of generations as in European aristocracy, but as Berentsen (1985:22) states, the word "family" has several other shades of meaning. Hendry (2003:26) considers "house" to be a better translation, because *Ie* may also signify a building, and the English term does again have a connotation of continuity, as in the expression, "House of Windsor".

The notion of the "family system" was described in an attempt to explain the Japanese behaviour and cosmology in a comparative context. In truth, the notion of a "family" does not reflect the Japanese understanding of the term. As Hendry (2003:26) argues, that in terms of Japanese ideology it is better to use the indigenous term *Ie*.

Takeda (1975:14-15) refers to another Japanese term for the family namely: *Kazoku*. He points out that there is a significant difference between the two notions. Kazoku is a general concept used for the ultimate unit of social life for which most peoples have their equivalents. He points out that *Ie*, on the other hand, is a peculiar Japanese concept, which denotes kazoku in a fixed system. According to Takeda Kazoku is a nuclear family of one generation (starting with a marriage and ending with a death) while *Ie* is a multigeneration, everlasting entity, established by the ancestors and transmitted through the generations. He therefore concludes that *Ie* is essentially a fixed system and an everlasting entity which is of the greatest significance in terms of ancestor worship.

5.5.2 Ethic characteristic of *Ie*

Berentsen (1991:252-253) and Henry (2003:27) agree that Japanese ancestor cult does not have its own moral code but it nevertheless has significant ethical implications. Over many centuries it has been closely linked with Confucianism which provided practical ethical principles which included filial piety. Therefore, the ancestor cult has intrinsic ethical implications which extend to the *Ie* and the social significance of moral conduct.

In the Japanese cosmology, the family's harmony as a unit supersedes that of the individual. Therefore, whether or not the interests of the family are served or not (including the living and the dead) is the touchstone on which moral and immoral conduct

is gauged. Considering that the ancestors are considered to be living members of the family unit, maintaining harmony with the ancestral spirits is of penultimate significance.

Furthermore, intrinsic to ancestor notion is the notion of expressing gratitude to the ancestors for acts of benevolence towards the family and the obligation lies heavily on the individual to repay this by his/her conduct.

5.5.3 Religious constitution of *Ie*

Henry (2003:26) argues that the living members of *Ie* includes the individual members of a particular house whether they are present or not. In other words, the membership encompasses all those who went before – the ancestors who as individuals have now faded from the memory of the current generation and the descendants who are yet to be born.

The butsudan where the memory of the ancestors is preserved serves as the charter for the continuity of *Ie* in the house. As soon as a member of a house dies, a tablet is made which carries the name which is given to him/her posthumously by the Buddhist priest who officiates at the funeral. The tablet is kept in the butsudan. These altars are still found in most houses which are accorded the responsibility to care for the departed ancestors and by implication the family grave. Offerings are made on a regular basis and special memorial services are held for the care of the soul as discussed previously. These continue until the soul is said to become part of the general or collective group of ancestors. Hendry (2003:31) points out that some believe that the senzo becomes a Shinto diety once all the Buddhist rites have been completed. There is another notion that these ancestors merge into a single spiritual entity from which the souls of young babies are drawn upon birth.

It stands to reason then that the Buddhist altar represents the continuity and existence of *Ie*. In some cases visiting members of the house will greet the ancestors first before they acknowledge their living relatives.

5.5.4 The relevance of *Ie* in modern Japan

Modernisation and urbanisation has brought about significant changes in Japanese community. As a result, families who reside in cities are no longer directly subjected to the physical *Ie* system which has been handed down from one generation to the next. Hendry (2003:34) points out that it is not unusual for an elderly parent to move in with a son or daughter in modern Japan (instead of the latter living with the parents in the familial home). Thus the concept of the familial home and structures of authority are subverted.

Hendry (2003:25) states that the post-war era and the age of industrialisation and urbanisation has changed the Japanese family structure significantly. As a result of urbanisation individuals have left their traditional ancestral homes for the cities. Their ties with the traditional temple have been severed. Modern Japanese live as smaller nuclear family units. Therefore, Morioka (1975:105) states that in many cases contact

with the family temple has become virtually non-existent. Urban priests are not effective in locating and reaching out to newcomers.

Hendry (2003:26) highlights the difference in the post-war period to that of the traditional *Ie*-structure in the pre-war era as being a definite move to smaller nuclear family units.

This New Civil Code which was drafted during the Allied occupation of Japan played an important part in this development. According to this policy *Ie* was abolished as a legal unit and was to be replaced by a nuclear family. A new nuclear family was to be registered at the marriage. According to this system, all the children have equal rights to inheritance and are to share the responsibility of taking care of their parents. Henry (2003:26) quotes the laws which were drafted according to the Constitution of 1947 which clearly state that "'With regard to choice of spouse, property rights, inheritance, choice of domicile, divorce and other matters pertaining to marriage and the family, laws shall be enacted from the standpoint of individual dignity and the essential equality of the sexes" (Article 24).

This was obviously a radical departure from the traditional *Ie* system and therefore the vestiges of *Ie* system would not disappear overnight. The notion of *Ie* is still very much alive in Japanese cosmology in spite of urbanisation and modernisation. The question arises, why is this so?

One of the main reasons for the persistence of the tenets of the *Ie* system in spite of it having been abolished by law lies in the values which it propagated. According to anthropologist Takami Kuwayama (2001:24) the ideas and philosophy of the *Ie* system has not lost its appeal because it still addresses the principles and virtues central to the Japanese morality and cosmology.

Another reason for this may be found in Berentsen's discussion of Article 730. This article in the new law appears to contain a tentative approval for the old customs and traditions of ancestor worship. Article 897 which is mentioned above, indicated that the customs and practices of ancestor worship were no longer mandatory but optional. Article 730 on the other hand points out that family members should help one another which could imply that the practices are still desirable.

Hendry (2003:30) suggests that the fact that the NCC appears to extol Western values rather than traditionally Japanese values, may be another reason why the *Ie* system has survived in modern Japan. Some Japanese consider these values to be contradictory to traditional Japanese values and as a result many Japanese have attained a form of compromise to cope with these discrepancies. This appears to be supported by Fumie's research (1996:5) which pointed out that notwithstanding the change in family structures to the nuclear family (as opposed to the three generation families of the past) the majority of Japanese still practice a co-residency living arrangement with their elderly parents.

5.6   ANCESTRAL RITES: RELIGIOUS IMPLICATIONS

When one considers the religious implications of ancestral rites it is important to bear in mind that Japanese ancestor worship does not constitute a consistent religious system per se. The religious implications of ancestor worship particularly pertaining to death and the afterlife tends to present us with seemingly contradictory ideas. These contradictions and inconsistencies can be ascribed to the fact that these rituals have their roots in numerous different religions. In the Japanese context some of the beliefs which originated from indigenous folk religion continue to exist although they are in direct opposition to some of the Buddhist tenets because of the synthesis the Japanese have achieved. These beliefs are more ideological and traditional than inherently religious. In this regard Bollinger (2000:94) notes that in Buddhism ancestral tablets were not used and the spirit of the dead was not believed to reside in them. Considering the complex nature of ancestor worship in Japan, one needs to explore the religious implications of ancestor worship in respect of life and death in general.

5.6.1   The living and the dead

When one considers the religious implications of ancestor worship it is evident that death is not considered to be an ending in itself but rather a portal to a new form of being in the afterlife. Berentsen(1983:9) in his exploration of the missiological aspects of ancestor worship points out that the various aspects of ancestor rituals reflect a significant feeling of closeness and continuity which Hori (1962:136) describes as an unbreakable spiritual bond which provides a plausible answer for the Japanese people's quest for permanence and eternity.

Clearly then the major premise of ancestor worship is that the spirit survives the body after death as Dore (1999:325) points out. The notion of the spirit's progress and growth is of particular interest to us. In this regard Tsuboi (1970:13-20) likens the process to that of a child who develops from birth to adulthood. Similarly, the spirit is believed to develop through similar stages from a dead spirit (*shirei*) to mature ancestorhood (*sorei*). He highlights the *imiake* (the so-called main change) on the 49th day after death – when the soul has completed its stay in purgatory (*chūin*), and the final memorial rite (*tomuraiage*) at the 33rd or 50th anniversary, which marks the decisive turning point between the period of growth towards ancestorhood and the state of ancestorhood itself as the most important stages. Once the soul reaches this stage it is conceived of as a supra-individual, unlimited, abstract being which may easily be identified with a specific *kami* or Buddha (Takeda 1975:105). Berentsen (1983:9) argues one can consider it to have been integrated with the popular interpretation of nirvana and the attainment of buddhahood (*jōbutsu*), also the point where the status of *hotoke* (good spirit) as accorded to the dead. At the same time the soul is believed to be on its way to ancestorhood.

Berentsen argues that the concept of rebirth appears to be primarily related to this process of growth which the soul is believed to undergo after death. Watanabe (1975: 119) points out that one also needs to consider the notion of the transfer of merits (*ekō*, *tsuizen ekō*) from the living to the dead. The process presupposes that the living will

perform the appropriate rites for the dead which will enable the soul to complete the process. Therefore, as Takeda (1975) points out the masses for the dead (*tsuizen kuyō*) are a means to gain merits on behalf of the *jōbutsu* of the departed. The corollary is therefore that if the family neglects these rites and masses, the shirei will not only not attain *sorei* status but it will be doomed to a miserable existence and may bring harm to the living (Watanabe 1975:119). It stands to reason then, that ancestor worship is further based on the premise that the dead are dependent upon the living for their well-being in the afterlife.

A further premise which underlies ancestor worship is the notion that the dead possess supernatural powers which enable them to exert an influence on the lives of the living. Therefore the dead may turn into vengeful and malevolent spirits or protective benefactors (Maeda 1965:56-69). The option of which role the ancestor spirit will assume depends heavily on the extent to which the living observe ancestral rituals and pay their respects to the spirits of the dead. Thus the daily prayer for protection and guidance are offered before the butsudan. This lends credibility to Berentsen's argument (1983:11) that the ancestral rites provide a vehicle for the living to intervene in the fate of the dead to further their salvation and the corollary is that if this is done, the dead will intervene in the fate of the living – therefore creating a circle of interdependence.

5.6.2 Human beings and divinities

The fact that the ancestral spirits are worshipped and petitioned for guidance and protection implies that they are endowed with supra-human powers and therefore their protective powers may be considered to parallel those of the kami who are worshipped at the kamidana. The kami are worshipped as tutelary gods of the house – similar to the role of the ancestors. According to Ariga (1969:375-377) they are in command and in many respects resemble what other religions would conceive of as deities (also Berentsen 1983:11).

Smith (1974:97-98) argues that the ritual that has to do with the transfer of the ancestral tablet from the bustudan to the shrine of the tutelary gods (kamidana) at *tomuraiage* and the removal of the name it was given posthumously, makes it clear. In this regard, Ariga (1969:361) draws a parallel in reverse between the growth of the dead to full equality in the world of kami to the traditional practice of conceiving of a kami as the ultimate ancestral spirit of the house. From the one perspective kami is seen in terms of origin, from the other, in terms of destination (Berentsen 1983:11-12).

It stands to reason that a clear understanding of the ancestral rites cannot be achieved without taking cognisance of the wider religious context. One of the basic principles of traditional Japanese religiosity is that there is a fundamental continuity between the human and divine. When seen in such a context, it is evident that these rites are embedded in a cosmic-monistic setting. The notion of continuity of and progress from the human to the divine is a major tenet of the universal notion of cosmic oneness.

Berentsen (1983) argues that the circle of interdependence between the living and the dead adds to the notion of cosmic continuity and apparently accounts for the notion that the ancestors are entitled to be worshipped. The element of religious homage is undeniable. Therefore, Berentsen (1985:261) argues that although ancestor worship is considered to have been thoroughly integrated into the life of the Japanese people in historical, religious and sociological terms, the practices exceed any sociological category. Consequently, this study holds the opinion that irrespective of how social structures may change, ancestor rituals and related beliefs will remain, unless these fundamental existential beliefs change.

5.7 ANCESTOR WORSHIP AND JAPANESE CHRISTIANITY

5.7.1 The response of early Protestant missionaries

Komuro (2003:60) mentions that Francis Xavier, who was the first missionary to reach Japan from the West, recognised that ancestor worship was the cornerstone of faith and the cement which held blood ties together in Japan. He realised that the penultimate concern of the Japanese was to ensure the salvation of the dead and more pertinently to save relatives from condemnation to hell. Consequently, missionaries were faced with the problem of how to deal with the issue of the salvation of the already dead. Xavier realised that he could not reconcile it with the theology of Christianity, but the fact that he acknowledged this need and concern was his contribution to Western attempts to understand Japanese religiosity.

The Japanese responded to Christianity in the 16th century much as they do today. Japanese who wish to convert to Christianity still find it very complex and problematic since they wish to be entombed eventually in the family grave which is usually Buddhist in nature. The Japanese people have a deep-seated desire to be buried with their kin in the hope that they will be together and reconciled after death.

According to Mullins (1998a:135-137) early Protestant missionaries tended to emphasise the disparity between the Christian faith and Japanese beliefs and practices regarding the dead. Most early missionaries held the view that these traditional beliefs had to make way for the Gospel and the true religion of Christianity. They further expounded the teaching that there is no hope for salvation for those who do not believe in Christ. Thus Kazuo Yagi (1988:30) outlines the "normative" missionary view as one in which human destiny is sealed after death – the soul is either sent to heaven or hell. It is too late to pray for the dead since their destiny has been determined for eternity. The second implication is the implicit alienation of the heaven-bound Japanese Christian from his non-Christian kinsmen who are inevitably doomed to hell. Given the fact that the individual is not given the same prominence as the well-being of the clan or house, this proved to be a major existential crisis for the Japanese who wished to accept Christ. As a result, Christianity was perceived to provide no comfort or hope for the larger extended family and to isolate the Japanese Christian from his or her kinsmen.

This was further emphasised by the demand for purity and abstinence from rituals. The first generation of Christians in Japan were under enormous pressure to comply with the iconoclastic policies of the missionaries. As a result many individuals who had converted to Christianity found themselves ostracised because of their abstinence from rituals.

5.7.2 Japanese Indigenous Churches' memorialism

5.7.2.1 Christianity and the existential crisis it held for Japanese Christians

Mullins (1998a:138) concluded that the Christian religion which held out no hope for salvation of the ancestors and which prohibited descendants from showing respect for the ancestors was no religion at all in the eyes of most Japanese. It broke the circle of continuity and posed a significant cosmological crisis because it appeared to entail eternal separation and alienation between the living and their dead. As a result, many Japanese Christians still perceive a gap in Protestant theology as far as the ancestors and relations between the living and the dead are concerned (Ohara 1992:257). In other words, the Christian faith did not appear to address these fundamental issues which are pertinent to the Japanese worldview.

In response to this, a number of indigenous movements which developed in the 1930s and 1940s attempted to bridge the gap between the Bible and Japanese folk religious concerns. Some of these groups such as the Glorious Gospel Christian Church, the Spirit of Jesus Church, the Original Gospel, and the Holy Ecclesia of Jesus were considered to be unfortunate examples of syncretism and to constitute a deviation from normative Christianity. These indigenous leaders, nevertheless, regard their views as Biblical and an extension of the Christian faith.

Ikegami (1991:66-67) points out that although they have sought to find a synthesis between their Christian faith and traditional practices, these churches did not disagree fundamentally with the missionary teachings on the native ancestor worship (as nothing more than idol worship). In fact, the Spirit of Jesus Church actively assists members in disposing of the altars, tablets and amulets. They consider the ancestor worship to be in violation of the second commandment which cautions against worshipping false gods. In spite of this symbolic rejection of traditional practices, the Spirit of Jesus Church does not neglect the ancestors.

5.7.2.2 Memorial services within Japanese churches

According to Mullins (1998a:143) memorial services are common in the churches and non-church movement. There appears to be no set rituals for these memorial services and the practices vary significantly. While some individuals opt for family services in the home, others participate in the memorial services of the church or non-church group to which they belong.

Many indigenous church movements permit their members to maintain a traditional Buddhist altar in the home. An example of this is the Christ Heart Church which per-

ceives no conflict between the Christian faith and ancestor worship. On the contrary, they encourage their members to show respect for traditional customs. Participation in Buddhist ancestor rituals with non-Christian family members are not perceived as acts of lapsing or apostasy. The Holy Ecclesia of Jesus, on the other hand, encourages its members to maintain a Christian family altar as an alternative to the traditional Buddhist altar for prayer and worship. They have replaced memorial tablets with small wooden crosses which have the spiritual names of the deceased family members inscribed on them. This is clearly an attempt to Christianise the Buddhist convention of giving a Buddhist name posthumously to the deceased. By doing this, the Holy Ecclesia of Jesus believe that they are providing concrete and visible means for members to show non-Christian relatives that they still have respect for the dead (Mullins 1998a:144).

However, it is important to note that not only indigenous movements adapted Christian practices to ancestral rituals. Mullins (1998a:144) refers to the findings and conclusions of David Reid, Nishiyama Shigeru, David Doerner and Berentsen in this regard:

David Reid found that the United Church of Christ in Japan has adapted Christian practices to indigenous ancestral rituals. Similarly, Nishiyama Shigeru's study of the Anglican Church indicated that the ancestor worship served to transform the practice of Christianity. David Doerner's survey of a Roman Catholic parish also showed that they had made numerous accommodations for the indigenous beliefs and practices for the dead. Berentsen argued that the Roman Catholic Church has a more natural inclination to assimilate elements of the ancestor worship than other Protestant denominations, mainly because of its tradition and practice of offering liturgical prayers and Holy Mass for the dead.

The point is that in spite of the churches having made numerous accommodations for these rituals, they have failed to address the underlying theological questions relating to ancestors and the dead.

5.7.3 Indigenous churches' concern for the dead

Mullins (2004:71) argues that the Japanese indigenous Christian movements' interpretation of the New Testament must be considered against the backdrop of their spiritualistic worldview which is similar in nature to the cosmology of traditional Japanese folk religion. Their main concern is spiritual salvation and the interdependence between this physical reality and the spirit realm.

As a result Sugita (1961:53-55), the founder of the Glorious Gospel Christian Church, encouraged his followers to pray on behalf of the ancestors because he stated that the Gospel of Christ could reach them in the afterlife. There is no foundation for this belief in Scripture that those whom we pray for will be saved, neither does the Bible instruct Christians to pray for the dead.

In attempt to answer this Sugita (1961:53-55) claims that God expressed his paternal concern for mankind when he sent his Son to die for the sins of the world. He believes that it is inconceivable that this redemption only applies to those who have had the opportunity to encounter the Gospel over the past two thousand years. He cites

Peter's claim that Christ descended into hell and preached to the imprisoned spirits as a clear indication that God cares for the dead as well as the living. He therefore concludes that Christians ought to pray for the spirits of the dead, but should not automatically assume that each person prayed for will necessarily be saved.

Mullins (1998b:55-56) further mentions the concept of communal salvation and the notion of familial solidarity which give form to the Japanese conception of the salvation of the dead. When one considers Paul and Silas' words to the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:31) from a Japanese cultural perspective and take the words, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household," at their literal meaning it appears to provide grounds to include present and past members of the household. It also appears to underscore the notion of interdependence. This is further supported by the notion that the actions of one will be to the credit of the other. Some Japanese Christians have attempted to illustrate this by referring to the fact that Abraham was called by God and became a source of blessing to all the families of the earth (Genesis. 12: 1-2). Thus an individual's salvation in Christ can become the source of blessing to others, both the living and the dead.

Mullins (2004:72) further relates the concern many Japanese Christians have about the salvation of their ancestors and a fear of possible misfortune which they may suffer at the hands of malevolent spirits. These concerns are deeply entrenched in the Japanese psyche and firmly rooted in Japanese history as Hori (1994:72-73) states. Given these issues, Mullins feels that missionary theology provided little solace for the troubled Japanese who found themselves in an existential crisis. This highlights the need for pastoral care in the Japanese context which is seriously lacking in the Practical Theology curricula of Japanese seminaries.

5.8 CONCLUSION

From the discussion it is evident that in spite of the controversy regarding the origins of ancestor worship, it remains a significant part of the Japanese consciousness and cosmology. Although ancestor worship does not constitute a religion in itself it has become entrenched in the Japanese socio-cultural mindset. It was also strengthened by syncretising with principles espoused by Confucianism and Buddhism. This is similar to the way in which it has permeated the Korean cosmology and how the traditions manifest themselves in organised religion.

The religious aspect of ancestor worship is undeniable. As mentioned in the exposition on ancestor worship in Korea where it also manifested socially and culturally, it is intrinsically religious in that it implies a form of worship and divine appellation for protection and guidance.

As with Korea and Africa, ancestor worship in Japan proved to be a significant obstacle for the Christian church – more pertinently the Protestant churches. The Roman Catholic Church displayed a more accommodating attitude and has readily assimilated the traditions and Christianised them in an attempt to make the religion more accessible to the Japanese people.

What has been obvious from this chapter is that it would be foolish to ignore the issues and the implications it has for the Japanese people and their notion of salvation. Instead of negating the needs of the Japanese, one should take cognisance of it and use pastoral support to address their needs and help them realign their cosmology with the theology of the Gospel.

Consequently, we need to now turn to the Biblical view of ancestor worship in order to formulate an appropriate response to these phenomena. Chapter 6 will explore the Biblical issues related to ancestor beliefs.

Chapter 6

BIBLICAL EVIDENCE AND GUIDELINES

6.1   INTRODUCTION

There are some common threads in the practices of ancestor worship in Korea, Japan and Africa. From the previous chapters, it is evident that ancestor worship is essentially based on the relationship between the living and the dead. This belief is intrinsic to the cosmology of the Japanese, Koreans and Africans and thus in turn informs their ritual practices. In all three cases, there is the underlying belief that the dead will benefit from the actions of the living descendants. This is essentially a symbiotic relationship, since the living descendants are believed to gain protection and blessings in return for their veneration of the ancestors.

This synergy is also based on the underlying beliefs about death and the afterlife. In all three cases, death is not considered to be a barrier between the living and the dead. In Japanese, Korean and African culture, the dead are believed to interact and communicate with the living members of the family. For example, in African culture, all deceased members of the family are believed to become part of the collective ancestor group and have the ability to influence the lives of their descendants for the better or to the detriment of the family. Interestingly enough, the actual physical location of the ancestors is unspecified. It is not clear whether they are considered to be living under the earth, in the sky, beyond the horizon or in the homestead (Nxumalo 1981:66-67; Amanze 2003:44; Chidester 1992:11; Mbiti 1971:133).

There are clear parallels to be drawn between the beliefs of these three groups. We now have to ask what the Biblical perspective is on these issues. More pertinently:

- What does the Bible say about the relationship between the living and the dead?
- What does the Bible say about death and the afterlife?
- Which passages in the Bible are the cause of dogmatic controversy?

The answers to these questions will provide a clearer picture of what a Christian's attitude towards ancestors ought to be.

The fundamental point of departure of this study is *sola Scriptura.* Therefore, the perspective espoused by the Bible should fundamentally determine the Christian answer to ancestor worship. In this chapter we will endeavour to identify and interpret scriptural evidence that may help us to formulate such answers.

6.2   THE LIVING AND THE DEAD

The most prominent issue to discuss in the light of the Scriptures is the relationship between the living and the dead. As said before, the relationship between the living and the dead is the cornerstone of the ancestor worship. In many countries which practise ancestor worship, notably Japan, Korea and Africa, it is believed that the relationship between the living and the dead is one of inter-dependent synergy. There is an intimate and interdependent association in which the dead and the living are believed to communicate and interact. The question arises as to what the Bible says about the condition of the dead and the relationship of the living with the dead. Is it possible for the dead to exert an influence on the lives of the living? Is it possible for the living to exert an influence on the salvation of the dead?

6.2.1   Communicating with the dead (spiritism)

Spiritism is founded on the idea that the living can communicate with the spirits of the dead by means of mediums (individuals who act as intermediaries between the material and physical world). It is the contention of this study that such practices are neither "spiritual" nor approved of by God.

The Bible has a negative view of necromancy or attempts to communicate with the dead. In fact all contact with the spirit world is expressly forbidden irrespective of the nature of the spirits concerned (Leviticus 19:26-31; Deuteronomy 18:10-11; Job 7:7-10; Isaiah 8:18-20; Luke 16:19-31).

Kim (1999:86; 1996:76) points out that those individuals who practice ancestor worship have an essentially pragmatic belief system which is primarily concerned with ensuring good fortune and avoiding misfortune. Shamanism is inextricably intertwined with the ancestor cult (Eliade 1964:461). Shamans are supposed to be experts in communication with the spirits of the dead. They also use divination to ascertain the best ways of doing things as well as the most opportune moment to act. Kim (1999:87) and O'Donovan (1996:242) point out that it is by this means that the Korean and African people attempt to find guidance and solace.

What is the Biblical view on divination and conjuring spirits? This section will attempt to find a Biblical perspective on these issues and how it can be applied to the African, Korean and Japanese contexts.

6.2.1.1   *Leviticus*

Leviticus 19:26

Leviticus 19:26 commands: "Do not eat meat with the blood still in it. Do not practise divination or sorcery." (NIV)

This scripture has particular relevance. Grintz (1972:85) argues that the meaning of slaughtering practices similar to kosher slaughtering, was ritual and sacrificial: draining the blood onto the ground would nourish chthonic deities or spirits. If it was performed as part of a divination ritual it involved sacrificing the animal on the ground rather than

on a stone, draining the blood into a deep trench and allowing the blood to soak in before the meat of the sacrificial beast could be consumed. The significance of this blood rite was that it was believed to draw the spirits to the surface and that it enhanced their powers of foretelling future events.

So Leviticus 19:26 specifically prohibited a chthonic interpretation of kosher slaughtering.

The prohibition on divination covers augury and necromancy. Ronald (1980:685) suggests that נחשׁ may denote "augury," which involves predicting the future by looking at the movement of animals, smoke or metals. An example of this can be found in Genesis 44:2 where the account describes how Joseph used a goblet (גביע) for divination (נחשׁ; Gen 44:25,15). The other interpretation is that this term may be related to עָנָן, "cloud," a word with the same consonants. Hartley (1992:321) argues that if this proves to be correct, it could mean that it includes predicting the future by looking at the movements of the clouds. The other interpretation is that the term is an onomatopoeic word for the sounds which a necromancer makes when he/she is communicating with a spirit.

Kaufmann (1960:21–24, 32–33) state that Scriptures consistently reject divination because it is founded on the notion that there is an intangible force (fate) which exerts an influence on the destiny of all things. It negates the omnipotence of God and the Sovereign creator. This is evident in Deuteronomy 18:9–12.

Leviticus 19:31 prohibits the Israelites from interacting with אבת, "ghosts," and ידענים, "departed spirits" for guidance and/or divination. Hartley (1992:321) further asserts that this was necessary since many nations in the ancient Near East sought spiritual guidance from the dead through mediums and spiritists. In Scriptures the word פנה, "turn," is used to denote turning to God but more often refers to turning to other gods in worship (v4; Deut 31:18, 20; Hos 3:1). The second term, בקשׁ, "seek," in a religious context denotes making a significant effort in the worship of God (2 Sam 21:1; Hos 5:6, 15; Zech 8:21–22; but in Isa 8:19; 19:3 with אבות and ידענים). In this regard, Wagner (1975:238) states that it is only used to refer to spirits of the dead.

The exegetical analysis therefore implies that these individuals who approached mediums are seeking divine guidance through contact with dead spirits. The Biblical account of Saul's visit to the witch of Endor is an example of this. He sought out Samuel's dead spirit for guidance. The Bible strongly condemns such practices (1 Samuel 28). Yahweh abhors such practices because it denies Him as the Sovereign Creator and Living God.

One of the major premises underlying the justification of ancestor worship is respect for the elder members of the community and family. Some have used Leviticus 19:26b-32 to justify the veneration of ancestor spirits. It reads: "*Rise in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the LORD.*" (NIV)

However, it is important though that these texts do not state that the deceased elderly members of the community are included. It refers clearly to the living members of the family. This is particularly important since immediately before Leviticus 19:32 the

Bible exhorts Christians not to consult the dead. There is nothing inappropriate about a fitting burial to honour those who have died. Note also the admonition of Leviticus 19:31 which states "*Do not turn to mediums or seek out spiritists, for you will be defiled by them. I am the LORD your God" (NIV)*

The Bible expressly forbids consulting mediums or spirits of the dead and also forbids certain practices which were associated with the dead. Notably the command in Leviticus 19:28 which warns "*Do not cut your bodies for the dead or put tattoo marks on yourselves. I am the LORD" (NIV).* This warning relates to the ancient practices of the living who scratched themselves or made markings on their bodies associated with sacrifices to the dead. Gehman (1999:150) thus argues that some of these traditions which were Babylonian (e.g. cutting of the hair and beards as a sign of mourning) were forbidden, although some Jews continued to practice it (cf Jeremiah 16:5f, 41:4).

The Bible expressly forbids any practices which have a remote connection with any form of idolatry. Ancestor worship which has the notion of divine appellation intrinsic to it is therefore clearly forbidden by the Scriptures.

Leviticus 20:6, 27

Hartley (1992:338) argues that Leviticus points out that God turns his back upon any person who זנה אחרי, "prostitutes himself" (cf. v5) by pursuing communication with אבת, "ghosts," and ידענים, "departed spirits" (Lev 19:31). Hartley (1992:340) asserts that the penalty the Scriptures prescribes for such behaviour is ostracism from the people (Lev 7:21). Furthermore, the Bible prescribes the death penalty for a necromancer and spiritist.

6.2.1.2 Isaiah 8:19

This text is very clear about God's view on spiritism: "When men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living?" (NIV)

Gehman (1999:151) mentions that this text uses the word *darash* in two ways namely, an acceptable and an unacceptable way of asking God for guidance. At Mount Sinai they were formed into a nation with a special relationship with God, their Redeemer. Israel was chosen by the Lord, who said, "…out of all nations you will be my treasured possession" (Exodus 19:5). Any "seeking" or "enquiry" by Israel was to be directed to Him alone. This exclusive relationship between God and His people was for the glory of God and the good of Israel.

According to Watts (1985:126) the scripture is translated as "*Seek out the fathers*". This is a clear reference to the ancestor worship in which the living believe that the dead ancestors have a bearing on their current earthly existence. This is a clear condemnation of ancestor worship.

Watts (1985:126) says that this scripture also contains a fairly derogatory reference to the practices of necromancy when it describes the diviners/mediums/spiritist who

"chirp and mutter"(הַמְצַפְצְפִים וְהַמַּהְגִּים). This implies a garbled gibberish which the necro-mancer utters in his/her trancelike state.

The text explicitly refers to people who consult the dead and therefore to the belief that the dead have the ability to help the living. This was necessary since the Ancient Near East (including Israel) was drawn to divination as much as any other group of nations in the history of mankind. The context here suggests that Isaiah had to defend his prophetic calling and role against diviners and spiritualists.

Gehman (1999:152) refers to Gesenius who defined a medium as someone with "a familiar spirit". The Hebrew word *ob* denotes in its simplest terms, "a leather bottle" which was typically used for water or wine. It later also denoted a "necromancer, sor-cerer, conjurer who professes to call up the dead by means of incantations [magic words] and magic formulas, in order that they may give response as to doubtful or fu-ture things". This clearly compares the medium to a leather bottle, filled with a spirit. From the belly of the medium come the gurgling, bubbling sounds of the spirit which possessed him/her.

The Greek word ἐγγαστρίμυθος ("ventriloquist") was used by the Septuagint to trans-late the Hebrew term אוֹב (Leviticus 19:31; 1 Samuel 28:3-9). Today the term "ventrilo-quist" denotes a person who has the ability to project his/her voice so that it appears to be coming from another person or puppet. However, among the Greeks it denoted someone who had a distinct involvement with spirits. Therefore, Langton (1942:178) argues that in the ancient world a ventriloquist implied a person who was virtually "pregnant" with a god or spirit.

6.2.1.3   Job 7:7-10

"As a cloud vanishes and is gone, so he who goes down to the grave does not return. He will never come to his house again; his place will know him no more." (NIV)

These words must be interpreted against the context in which it was originally used. Clines (1989:186) mentions that in chapter 7 Job reflects on the fleeting nature of life and appeals to God not to forget about him. He implies respectfully that God may have temporarily overlooked him, comparing his life to the insubstantial being of a dead per-son, like air (רוח), whether as breath or as wind.

Clines (1989:186) further argues that the fleeting nature of life is sometimes com-pared to the exhaled breath (הבל; cf. v16; Ps 78:33; 39:6, 12 [5, 11]; 62:10 [9]; 144:4). In other cases it is compared to a "wind" (usually רוח), more pertinently, "a wind that passes and returns not again" (Ps 78:39; cf. Eccl 1:14). Clines (1989:186) points out that there is a particularly close parallel with Ps 78:39 which states ("He remembered [זכר] that they were… a wind [רוח]"), but either sense is appropriate here. The crux of the matter here is that Job is aware that his life is bound to end at any moment and is aware that he has a very tenuous and tentative grasp on life. The only certainty he has is that he will never return to his former happy state: he will never again "see" (cf. Ps 4:7 [6]; 34:13 [12]) "happiness"(NIV), "good days"(NEB) (elsewhere in Job in this sense at 9:25; 21:13; 36:11 and cf. 17:15).

Job is very aware that his fortune will never return and that he is destined to die. He anticipates that he is soon to die and that his friends and family are expecting his death.

Job further describes this state of "nonexistence" (אינני, v8) as the dissolution of his being (כלה, "be at an end, be spent, vanish"), a departure (הלך), a descent (ירד) from which there can be no ascent (עלה) or return. Thus the regular daily routine in which one returns home at the end of the day to be welcomed by members of the household will no longer apply to him. This description of his death is metaphorically likened to the way in which clouds disperse and disappear into the ether – he will sink into שְׁאוֹל in a weakness that does not allow him to rise again to go home.

Job's views of the underworld which are evident from these verses are typical of the Old Testament and indeed of much of the ancient Near East.

When Job speaks of his own imminent death, he mentions that the dead do not return from the grave. Elsewhere, he speaks of death as the "place of no return" (Job 10:21; Samuel 12:23; Genesis 37:35). From these verses it is evident that death is an ending in itself. There is no return to this life once you have died. It implies that life is finite.

The view of the underworld which is evident from Job's words is typical of the Old Testament. Clines (1989:187) states that death is essentially a place of rest and signifies the end of earthly distinctions. There is no suggestion of any contact or communication between the living and the dead.

From these verses it is evident that the Bible teaches that the dead are not able to return and influence the lives of the living or interact with the living.

6.2.1.4 Deuteronomy 18:10-14

Deuteronomy 18:9-14 provides extensive guidelines on God's view on practices associated with ancestor worship and divination.

"When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving to you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. Let no-one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practises divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft or casts spells, or who is a medium of spiritist who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord and because of these detestable practices the Lord your God will drive out those nations before you. You must be blameless before the Lord your God. The nations you will dispossess listen to those who practise sorcery or divination. But as for you, the Lord your God has not permitted you to do so." (NIV)

The Hebrew word for wizard or spiritist used in this passage, יִדְּעֹנִי denotes a wise and knowing person who is supposedly familiar with the secrets and mysteries of the unseen world. The King James Version translates this term as "the knowing one." The female counterpart of the wizard is the witch. Both practise divination by the same means. Gehman (1999:155) points out that the Hebrew word actually denotes a "familiar spirit." This points to the connection the wizard or spiritist had with the spirit realm

(cf. Leviticus 19:3 1; 1 Samuel 28:3,9; Isaiah 8:19). This is not different from the role the shaman plays in primal religions and the role of the priest in ancestor rituals in Japan and Korea.

From the exegetical analysis of these scriptures it is evident that a variety of terms have been used to denote anyone who has any contact with spirits. Christensen (2001: 408) provides a fairly exhaustive analysis of the scope of the practices associated with necromancy to which the prohibition applies. Notably, he mentions that "one who practises divination" (קֹסֵם קְסָמִ֔ים) would further include practices such as hepatoscopy (the "art" of reading the liver from a sacrificial animal), belomancy (use of arrows from a quiver), necromancy consulting spirits of the dead), and also false prophecy (Ezek 21: 29; Jeremaih 14:14).

Christensen (2001:408) further points out that the meaning of the term "soothsayer" (מעוֹנֵן) cannot be delimited with absolute certainty mainly because all interpretations are essentially founded on etymology. To support this statement, Christensen (2001:408) refers to Ibn Ezra who derived the term from *'anan*, "cloud," and asserted that it should be understood to denote "those who draw omens from the appearance and movements of clouds" (Tigay 1996:173).

Furthermore, the term "omen reader" (מנחֵשׁ) appears to refer to oleomancy which is essentially divination based on mixing liquids, such as oil and water. This could refer to the manner in which Joseph's silver goblet was used in matters of divination (Genesis 44:5). On the other hand, Christensen (2001:408) mentions that a "sorcerer" מְכַשֵּׁף could denote a practitioner of black magic as it is used in Exod 22:17, where it is described as a capital offence.

Christensen (2001:408) further mentions the phrase חֹבֵר חָבֶר (a "caster of magic spells") (v11) as it is used in Psalm 58:5. In this scripture it is understood to refer to magic of some sort used against venomous snakes. However, Finkelstein (1956:328-31) suggests the meaning "muttering" a spell and compares it to Akkadian *habaru* ("be noisy"). He also refers to "one who asks of a ghost" (שֹׁאֵל אוֹב) as a reference to the practice of necromancy (v11).

Christensen (2001) describes the common interpretation of the term אוֹב as that of a hole in the ground where offerings and requests for information were made to the dead. He mentions that "medium" (יִדְּעֹנִי) may be translated as a "familiar spirit". He points out that it always appears with the term אוֹב and therefore may simply have an adjectival function to the term שֹׁאֵל אוֹב to describe a spirit or ghost functioning as a medium. This appears to be congruent with the account of King Saul and the "witch of Endor" in which the ghost of the dead (Samuel) ascended from the depths of the earth and is seen by the medium. Consequently, Christensen (2001:408) argues that the phrase "one who inquires from the dead" (דֹרֵשׁ אֶל־הַמֵּתִים) more than likely means one who performs necromancy by any other means than the two previous terms mentioned (Tigay 1996:173).

As Wright (1953:446) states, every possible term available is used to ensure that the prohibition extended to all practices, customs and persons who had any affiliation with the spirit realm. This ensures that the prohibition is fairly exhaustive.

6.2.1.5 Luke 16:19-31

Jesus' account of the rich man and Lazarus, recorded in Luke 16, provides further insight into the condition of the dead and what happens after death. O'Donovan (1996: 220) points out that this passage clearly indicates that it is impossible for the living to communicate with the dead.

Luke 16:25-28 clearly shows that the rich man wanted Lazarus to warn his brothers against making the same mistakes he had made. Nolland (1993: 831) indicates that the usage of ἐν πᾶσι τούτοις which translates as "besides all this" in this verse appears to be consistent with Lukan usage. It further confirms the fixed determination of the will of God and the topology of Hades which objectifies the will and purpose of God. It is also emphatic that no momentary surge of sympathy can change this will and purpose of God.

Nolland (1993:830) further mentions that only ἐρωτῶ… ἵνα in verse 26 appears to be Lukan diction. This is translated as "I ask … that" used in a petitionary manner which indicates that although he acknowledges that his fate is sealed and unchangeable, something may yet be done for those for whom he harbours affection. As Nolland (1993:831) points out, the plea for a personal warning indicates that the rich man is aware of his moral accountability for his own actions and that he realises too late that he could have acted differently.

However, as verses 19 to 31 shows, this request was not granted. From this account it is evident that there is a clear divide between the righteous and the unrighteous dead and that the dead do not have freedom of movement as suggested by the underlying beliefs of ancestor worship. Clearly then, the dead are not able to exert an influence on the lives of the living. From this passage it is clear that the dead cannot communicate with the living on any matter. The response to the rich man's request was that his brothers needed to believe what God had said to save themselves from torment. Yamaguchi (1985:46) argues that the belief that the ancestors are able to communicate with the living members of the family is meaningless.

Clearly then, the Bible does not encourage or support a relationship between the living and the dead. Furthermore, these scriptures indicate that the fear of the ancestors is unfounded.

6.2.2 What is the Biblical view of powers and spirits?

6.2.2.1 Magic powers

The Biblical perspective on witchcraft is clear and unambiguous. Gehman (2005:159) points out that the Scriptures clearly indicate that any form of witchcraft is strongly condemned by God. In the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 18:9-14 is clear in its admonition

to guard against witchcraft and encompasses all known forms of occultist practices with which the Israelites were familiar at the time. The admonition to abstain from all practices related to witchcraft, magic and sorcery is related to the context of God giving Israel the land of Canaan on the condition that Israel would remain unblemished and untainted by false religion and remain loyal to God. The New Testament continues the condemnation of magic practices as manifestations of rebellion against God and is clear in its rejection of such practices as found in Galatians 5:20; Acts 8:9-24; Revelation 21:8; 22:15; Acts 13:6-12.

6.2.2.2 Ancestral spirits

Very little reference is made in the Bible to ancestral spirits or ancestor worship, although indirect inferences or suggestions could be teased from the etymology of words, as above, or perhaps from behind or between the lines.

Gehman (1999:178) points out that the righteous dead cannot return and communicate with the living as 2 Samuel 12:23 and Job 19:27 clearly state that when a person dies the relationship between the living and the dead is irrevocably broken. The righteous dead are in the presence of God and therefore cannot be called back to earth. The only scripture which could possibly suggest that it would be possible for a person to return to communicate with the living is the passage at 1 Samuel 28. He also argues that Mosaic Law equated communication with the dead as a form of idolatry, which is in essence a sin of spiritual prostitution (1999:180).

However, the mere fact that a prohibition on necromancy or communicating with the dead was considered necessary suggests that the phenomenon could be more of a problem and widespread than described.

6.2.2.3 King Saul at Endor (1 Samuel 28:3-19)

The encounter between King Saul and the Witch of Endor is often cited to indicate that the living can communicate with the dead. From the foregoing scriptures it is evident that God condemns any attempt to contact the dead. However, 1 Samuel 28:3-19 appears to suggest that it is possible for the living to contact the dead.

This passage is open to numerous interpretations but does not prove conclusively that the dead are able to communicate with the living. Even if Samuel were able to speak with Saul, this was an unusual instance of the special power of God and needs to be examined closely.

6.2.2.3.1 Context

The incident with King Saul at Endor needs to be understood in the historical context in which it occurred. Fischer (2001:28) points out that before the imminent battle against the Philistines, Saul's loneliness and desperation is evident as recorded in 1 Samuel 28:3-6 and Saul's sense of alienation is reinforced by the recollection of Samuel's death at 1 Samuel 28:3. After Samuel's death, Saul no longer had the advantage of Samuel's prophetic revelations to guide him. As a result, Saul prayed to God but God

did not speak to him in the conventional ways – i.e in his dreams, Urim or prophets. Instead, Saul's questions were met with silence. In desperation, Saul turned to the woman at Endor. Previously, Saul had acted morally by expelling mediums and wizards from the land, but ironically at this point he regresses and seeks a medium's counsel.

Because of his previous actions, Saul disguises himself and seeks the counsel of a necromancer or spiritist who conducts a séance to communicate with the late Samuel.

The scriptures describe Samuel coming out of the ground and speaking with Saul, The late Samuel tells Saul that the next day his sons will be "with" him.

6.2.2.3.2 אֹבְוֹת and יִדְּעֹנִים

When one considers an exegetical analysis of the account it is significant that the scriptures' description that Samuel appeared to rise from the ground is supported by the Hebrew term for medium (אוֹב) which Hoffner (1974:133) relates to the Akkadian "pit" (*ab*) which denotes the ritual hole in the ground where spirits of the dead were believed to reside and exit from when they were invoked.

However, Lust (1974:134) argues that אוֹב is often used in the plural which etymologically connects the spirits of the deceased ancestors or the instruments of the ancestral ghosts which are used to represent them. Kim (1996b:26) concurs and argues that Lust's proposal appears to be convincing because in some passages these two terms are closely related to the necromancer and spirits of the dead (cf Deuteronomy18:10-11; Isaiah.8:19; Isaiah.19:3). This will be explored in more detail in the next section.

Arnold (2004:201) argues that the use of the word is often linked with the term used to denote "spiritists" (יִדְּעֹנִים) which suggests the necromantic practices involved in communicating with the dead and by implication the phenomena associated with the ancestor cult in general (cf Milgrom 2000:1768-85; Albright 1990:141-42).

Lewis (1989:114) argues that the terminology used in 1 Samuel 28:8 may indicate that Saul's night visit may have been a military necessity but night time may also have been the preferred time for such séances since the darkness of night was considered to be the most appropriate time to communicate with the dead. Horsnell (1997:45-51) further mentions that Saul's explicit instruction to the woman to "consult a spirit for me" is essentially a *terminus technicus* for divination. Furthermore, the necromantic ritual concerned here is also indicated by the recurring use of words which means to "bring up" (אַעֲלֶה־לָּךְ) a spirit. Therefore, the terminology is not peculiar to necromancy alone but extends to all forms of divination.

6.2.2.3.3 Representative interpretations

This account of Saul's visit to the woman at Endor sparked controversy among scholars for centuries. Some questions have still not been answered satisfactorily and scholars have not reached consensus on the interpretation of this passage. Did anything or anyone actually appear to Saul? What is the appropriate interpretation of this incident? There are three different interpretations of this scriptural account.

6.2.2.3.3.1 Psychological interpretation

Figart (1970:20) proposes a psychological interpretation and uses ecstasy as the means of producing the illusion of Samuel (cf Fokkelman 1986:606; Figart 1970:20; Erdmann 1960:332). Therefore, according to this interpretation, the medium would have allowed herself to become emotionally involved and psychologically identified with Samuel that the vision was produced. Narcotics may not necessarily have been used here. This is not an uncommon experience of modern day mediums who claim to have had visions of people. Fokkelman (1986:606) on the other hand approaches the text from an ontological perspective and denies the existence of a spiritual world and assumes that Saul saw nothing. This points to the possibility that the medium was just particularly adept at guessing and used her general knowledge and psychological insights to convey Samuel's message.

Gehman (1999:145) points out that the medium herself appeared to be frightened of what she saw (1 Samuel 28:12). At the outset, the meeting with Saul appeared to be nothing out of the ordinary and she asked Saul the same questions she would have asked any other person who sought her services. She asked Saul: "Whom shall I bring up for you?" (28:11) This implies that she believed to have power over the dead (Gehman 1999:145). Figart (1970:20) further argues that this is contrary to the plain statement of the text, which when read without presuppositions of a narcotic trance on the part of the woman, resembles a normal conversation between Saul and Samuel.

6.2.2.3.3.2 A deliberate deception

Some scholars (Buswell 1962:310; Davies 1955:186) argue that the work of the medium was a case of "a mere deception". Their argument is based on the fact that the medium of Endor was in fact a law breaker and adept at deception. Since mediums were expelled from the land, she would have had no alternative but to practise deception. Therefore, she was the only one who saw the vision of "Samuel" and Saul saw nothing. To indicate that it was definitely Samuel because it was an old man in a robe could refer to any elderly male. However, Saul immediately decided that this was Samuel.

The words of Samuel to Saul may be interpreted as generic statements an experienced fortune-teller could use to deceive many people. She may also have used ventriloquism to project her voice to resemble the voice of Samuel. Although the prediction proved to be true this may be ascribed to Saul's emotionally depressed state and because of his emotional state the prophecy's fulfilment was unavoidable (Gehman 1999: 144).

Figart (1970:23) points out that the scriptures to not indicate that the woman reported Samuel's words but that Samuel and Saul communicated without an interloper. Furthermore Figart (1970:23) argues that it would have been difficult to guess the outcome of the battle and the penultimate fate of Saul and his sons.

6.2.2.3.3.3 A Satanic impersonation

The third group of scholars (Fischer 2001:35; Gehman 1999:148; Roberts & Donaldson 1963:234) believe that it was not Samuel who appeared to Saul but Satan. Most of the early church fathers believed that this was another manifestation of the battle against demonic powers and that the apparition of Samuel was none other than demonic trickery.

Fischer (2001:35) points out that according to Augustine the apparition of Samuel was formed by some phantom or mock apparition from the Devil (Ad Simplic. ii, 3, quoted in Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologica*, vol 3.95.4.2).

This notion was historically taught during the 16th and 17th centuries by the church fathers who believed that by divine ordering Saul saw under the form of Samuel a ghost, an illusion produced by demonic devilish powers" (Erdmann 1960:335). Thus, Luther referred to the appearance of Samuel as "a devil's ghost," and Calvin said it was not the real Samuel but a spectre (awesome looking ghost) (cf. Gehman 1999:148).

The Bible indicates that demons do have the ability to assume any form and be visible to people (2 Corinthians 11:14; Revelations 16:13). They therefore also have the ability to assume the form of someone who has died and would therefore be recognisable to the person to whom they are appearing. Although this interpretation of Saul's encounter with the woman of Endor has been endorsed by many scholars there are some illogicalities.

Erdmann (1960:335) refers to 1 Chronicles 10:13 to prove that the LXX actually teaches that Samuel appeared to Saul. Erdmann argues that there is no indication in the text that an evil spirit assumed the form of Samuel. This is supported by Beuken (1978:10) who suggests that Samuel "had come up as a prophet of the living God before she could conjure up a dead ghost". See the references below:

> So Saul died for his transgressions, wherein he transgressed against God, against the word of the Lord, forasmuch as he kept it not, because Saul enquired of a wizard to seek counsel, **and Samuel the prophet answered him** (LXX 1 Chronicles 10:13).

> So Saul died for his unfaithfulness; he was unfaithful to the LORD in that he did not keep the command of the LORD, and also consulted a medium, seeking guidance (RSV 1 Chronicles 10:13).

Moreover, Eaton (1995:112) and Klein (1983:269) contended that the spirit of Samuel was clearly not familiar to the woman because she cried out with a loud voice as soon as she recognised the deceased Samuel. In other words, she was afraid of an apparition which she had not anticipated (Keil 1956:262). Pigott (1998:438) argues that the situation was not in her control.

Whether or not the woman recognised Saul after the appearance of Samuel is not clear. Fischer (2001:32) and Fokkelman (1986:606) argue that the reason why the woman was afraid is not so much because of the appearance of the spirit of Samuel but because she recognised Saul as the king who prosecuted mediums. She had not expected him or recognised him and was afraid that he would expel or kill her (Brueggemann 1990:193). It may be that she made the mental connection after she saw Samuel's apparition and then only recognised her visitor as Saul.

Keil and Delitzsch (1963:263) argue that the fact that the medium used the term אֱלֹהִים (28:13) to describe Samuel: "I see a divine being coming up out of the ground" is significant. The term can be translated as a "divine being" or simply a "godlike being". More pertinently, in respect of ancestor worship, the dead are sometimes referred to as "god" in an attempt to denote a form of transcendental character which exists beyond the here and now (Lewis 1989:112-16; Johnston 1994:417).

Arnold (2004:203) points out that אֱלֹהִים may also denote the sense of "ancestral" pre-ternatural being, rather than simply the "shades of the dead". This is even more evident if one relates the Hebrew term for "medium" (אוֹב) etymologically to אב ('āb), "father, ancestor" as Lust (1974:135-139) proposes. The parallel use in Isaiah 8 appears to confirm that the use of אֱלֹהִים in such contexts can be understood to denote the ancestral dead, and not simply ghosts or the spirits of the dead.

Therefore, it stands to reason that it is plausible that it was Samuel and not Satan who appeared. This can be construed to be as a result of God who allowed a special working of His power similar to the fates of Enoch and Elijah who never actually died.

6.2.2.3.4 Contemporary interpretations

The more contemporary interpretation is that it was in fact the spirit of Samuel who appeared to Saul. Scriptures clearly state that Samuel appeared to Saul and does not indicate anything to the contrary. Therefore, Fischer (2001:35) concludes that Samuel appeared as an ancestor and therefore follows a literal interpretation of the text. Gehman (1999:145) states that most Biblical scholars since the 18th Century have supported the belief that it was Samuel himself who appeared to Saul. However, there are some scholars who believe that this can occur at any time under normal circumstances and those who are of the opinion that this is only possibly by a special working of the power of God.

Some scholars (Anold 2004:201; Fischer 2001:32; Manyeli 1995:108; Robinson 1993a:143; Setiloane 1986:18) believe that necromancy is prevalent today and that some mediums do have the ability to communicate with the dead on behalf of the living. This is clearly the view held by people in Africa and elsewhere.[25] In other words, they believe that the world of the living and the dead are not so far apart and that it is possible for the living to communicate with the dead. Oleka (1998:127) and Gehman (1999: 145) believe that they can appear to the living in dreams and vision or via mediums.

On the other hand, some evangelicals (Pigott 1998:438; Eaton 1995:112; Klein 1983:271; Beuken 1978:10) find this difficult to believe because they state that it is not plausible to believe that any medium has the ability to command a righteous spirit to leave their rest and appear before the unrighteous. They contend that mediums who are not complying with God's prohibition on necromancy do not have sovereign power

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[25] Fischer (2001:27) commented on this passage in the African perspective which is legitimate because of its animistic background not shaped by Western post-enlightenment rationalism. According to his opinion, that is to say, the belief systems of African societies are comparable to those of ancient Israel and can provide similar insight into texts and practices of the Israelites.

over the lives of the saints. Therefore, Klein suggests that Samuel himself did appear but through the special working of God's power.

There are numerous instances in the Bible which indicates that it is impossible for the dead to communicate with the living. The incident with Saul and the woman of Endor is an exception and the ultimate interpretation must be logical and aligned with the scriptures as a whole. The fact that Samuel appeared to Saul should be seen as an exceptional manifestation of God's power in which God chose to rouse Samuel for His divine purpose. Nevertheless, it is important to note that this text has been used to substantiate African exegesis. Thus, some scholars consider the deceased Samuel as an ancestor in this text (Arnold 2004:203; Fischer 2001:203; Lust 1974:139).

The pertinent question which needs to be answered now, is what happens to those who die? What implications does death have for non-Christians and Christians?

6.2.2.3.5 Own interpretation

It is important to bear in mind that Saul never actually saw Samuel himself but experienced him as it were through the woman's eyes. Pigott (1998:438) rightly points out that the situation was not in medium's control. He argues that God used her séance as a tool to convey a message to Saul. From Saul's perspective and that of his commanders it may have appeared to be Samuel's message of what the future held for Saul but in reality it was God's judgement.

Consequently, one must bear in mind that the woman was used as a vehicle for God's expression as evident from the following points. Firstly, the medium was the only one who saw Samuel. The fact that she was alarmed when she saw the apparition indicates that she realised that she was not in control and may have recognised "Samuel" as God's messenger. Secondly, she did not anticipate what would happen next. She was chastened and realised that something had happened much larger and far outside the normal scope of her experiences.

6.3   DEATH AND AFTERLIFE

One of the most significant differences between the Christian view and that of ancestor worship relates directly to the different views on death and afterlife.

The traditional African view is that death constitutes a transition which is followed by a mode of existence which differs only marginally from one's earthly existence (cf Bae 2004:352). The Christian perspective of death is very different from this. In the Biblical context, death marks a complete break with earthly existence. Schwarz (1979:172) argues that the new form of existence is a radical departure from the tempero-spatial realities of natural existence and facilitates a closer union with God. Therefore, although both Christian and African traditional religions acknowledge the existence of life after death, it is imperative to take a closer look at what the Scriptures say about death and life after death.

6.3.1 Predestined death

Human beings are synthesis of body and spirit. It is suggested in Scriptures that when the body decomposes after death the spiritual element survives (e.g. Psalm 16:10; 17: 15; Hebrews 12:23). Death appears to be inevitable when one considers the way in which the human body has been created. Physical demise and ultimate dissolution are an inescapable part of God's punishment of human sin. A common understanding of death in the Bible is that is signifies a separation from God. The unbeliever who dies, is eternally separated from God, i.e. suffers a second death.

6.3.1.1 Physical death as the first death

Gulley (1992:111) points out that the Old Testament connects death to sin (Psalm 90:7-10) where God said to Adam, "on the day that you eat of it you will die" (Genesis. 2:17). The New Testament develops this connection between death and sin and Paul clearly states that "sin came into the world through one man and death through sin" (Romans 5:12), and that "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23), and again that "Death came through a man" (1 Corinthians 15:21). John speaks of that "Death is linked with God's judgment" (Revelations 2:11; 20:6; 21:8).

However, the Bible teaches that physical death is not the fait accompli of God's punishment. When one examines the matter closely it is clear that Adam did not die immediately on the day that he committed sin. Similarly, in Romans 5 and 6 Paul contrasts death as a result of Adam's sin and the life that Christ brings to mankind. Morris (1982: 273) argues that the possession of eternal life does not nullify physical death. It is opposed to a spiritual state rather than a physical event. Therefore, death which is a result of sin extends beyond a physical death of the body.

Gehman (1999:218) argues that physical death is a result of spiritual death and is the separation of the body from the spirit. Spiritual death on the other hand is as a result of the separation of man's soul from God. This relationship was severed when Adam and Eve chose to sin. Therefore, death involves more than the dissolution of the physical body. Man dies as a spiritual and physical being.

6.3.1.2 Eternal death as the second death

The New Testament underscores the serious consequences and repercussions of sin when it refers to the second death (Jude 12; Revelations 2:11, etc). The second death signifies eternal damnation and perdition. These references must be understood together with passages in which God speaks of "eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels", into which the wicked will be cast (Matthew 25:41), "eternal punishment" (set in contrast to "eternal life", Matthew 25:46), and such. Jesus repeatedly warned the people to take care to avoid being cast "into hell, where the fire never goes out" (Mark 9:43). Morris (1982:273) indicates that the final state of impenitent man is described as death, punishment and being lost.

The instances where the second death is mentioned as such in the NT is in Revelations 2:11; 20:6, 14; and 21:8. These scriptures speak of it as "lake of fire" (20:14; 21:8)

and is juxtaposed with receiving a crown of life (2:10) and life lived in the presence of God (21:3–7; 22:3–5). The second death constitutes a final destruction of anything which belongs to the realm of evil. It therefore includes those individuals who do not have their names written in the Book of Life (20:15), the unrighteous (21:8), the false prophet and the beast (19:20), the devil (20:10), and Death and ᾅδης (*Hades*) (20:14). In Jude 12 the second death is also alluded to.

Watson (1992:111) thus argues that Jesus also warned against the second death, "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28; Luke 12:4–5; RSV).

From these points, it is evident that the Bible's portrayal of death is not positive, but rather as a result of God's judgement, as a result of sin. The second death and eternal torment follows eternal severance with God in Christ.

6.3.1.3 *Death as a thorough severance*

Mbiti (1970:264) states that African peoples believe that death does not annihilate life and that the departed continue to exist in the hereafter. Kim (1999:61) concurs when he argues that in terms of ancestor worship death is considered to be a summons to the hereafter and death is accompanied by a death messenger from the hereafter. In other words, the deceased person is believed to continue to exist just as he or she did in this world. Lim (1984:230) thus states that in terms of the ancestor worship, this constitutes the belief that the living are able to have communion with the living spirit of the dead.

Thus, death is considered to be a transition, or a threshold into a new world. Gehman (1989:54) points out that for followers of the ancestor cult it means that the dead person becomes part of the living-dead which entitles him/her to funerary rites and rituals. Death is not viewed in a positive light but on the other hand not as a catastrophe either (except in case of the untimely death of a most important or strategic person).

The question is whether or not the Bible opposes this view? Ecclesiastes 9:4-10 clearly rejects the notion of communion or interaction between the living and the dead when it states that "the dead do not know anything, nor have they any longer a reward, for their memory is forgotten. Indeed their love, their hate, and their zeal have already perished, and they will no longer have a share in all that is done under the sun... There is no activity or planning or wisdom in שְׁאוֹל where you are going."

Beyerhaus (1966:137-145) further contends that Jewish and Christian scholars agree that it is dangerous to pursue communication with the dead. This perceived danger lies in fears that the spiritual forces at work in such activities are "not the souls of the departed but the power of the fallen angels or demons who are masters of disguise." (Bae 2004:352)

Therefore, it stands to reason, that the state of the dead does not constitute a continuation of life on earth or a parallel reality to live on earth in which individuals have the same physical needs for food, shelter, clothes (Bae 2004:352). Thus, the ancestor cult's notion that the ancestors are able to influence and help their living descendants are unscriptural and irreconcilable with the Christian view of God and death. The an-

cestors clearly do not have any supernatural powers which enable them to bestow benevolence or inflict suffering upon their descendents.

What does the Bible teach about the state and place of the dead once they have died a physical death? What is the Biblical view of the afterlife? Where do the dead live? Do they have a physical abode?

6.3.2 Where are the dead?

The Hereafter has been a central theme in the Christian faith. Death constitutes the beginning of torment for the unrighteous and a blessing for the righteous. Thus as Dabney (1972:820) points out, death marks the irrevocable destiny for those who have died. When an unbeliever dies, he or she is removed from the presence of God and any blessings which emanated from God's grace. (Psalms 6:5; 30:9; 31:18; Isaiah 14:11; 38:18–19 and Job 3:13–19).

It is important to bear in mind, that in the Old Testament the dead are believed to enter the underworld known as שְׁאוֹל. The Old Testament closely relates the afterlife to שְׁאוֹל. Thus, one cannot conceive of where the dead live without considering what שְׁאוֹל meant.

6.3.2.1 Two beliefs about the dead

When one discusses שְׁאוֹל, one needs to look at the pervasive beliefs about the dead. There are generally two beliefs related to beliefs about the dead in the Bible. The first belief is that people are judged immediately after death, and the spirit of the person will be present with Christ and joins those who are saved or those who have been condemned (Hebrews 9:27; 2 Corinthians 5:1-9; Revelations 20:14-15; Luke 23:43 Philippians 1:21-23). For those who agree with this view שְׁאוֹל was to become the abode for the condemned (Penelhum 1997:36). This appears to be supported by Philippians 1:21-23 in which Paul states that there is an instant transition of his spirit from this world to the presence of Christ. This interpretation appears to corroborate Christ's statement to the criminal on the cross (Luke 23:43).

The second view is concerned with the expectation of personal resurrection. The Hebrew Scriptures contain only a few number of scriptures which appear to substantiate this view, namely Isaiah 26:19 and Daniel 12:2 ("Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt"). In these two texts personal resurrection is mentioned and envisaged for those long dead and has become a pervasive concept in Judaism.

6.3.2.2 The abode of the dead

There are numerous terms which are used in the Old Testament to denote the abode of the dead. The most common of these is שְׁאוֹל which occurs approximately 66 times. Lewis (1992:105) points out that. Several terms are used to describe the abode of the dead in the New Testament as well. The word ᾅδης most commonly translates שְׁאוֹל in the LXX and is used ten times in the New Testament. It shares many of the physical

characteristics of שְׁאוֹל, and it too can designate either the underworld or the personified lord of the underworld.

6.3.2.2.1 Various depictions of שְׁאוֹל

There are different understandings of what the word שְׁאוֹל denotes. Rosenburg (1980: 12) and Oppenheim (1956:221) indicate that שְׁאוֹל is usually translated as the underworld. Although there is not much consistency in the translation of the term, Morris (1982:273) and Lewis (1992:107) agree that it is generally depicted as a place to which one "goes down" (Numeri 16:30; Job 7:9; Isaiah 57:9; Isaiah 29:4; Psalm 88:3–4) and therefore appears to represent the lowest place possible (Deuteronomy 32:22; Isaiah 7:11) in contrast with the highest heavens (Amos 9:2; Psalm 139:8; Job 11:8). Furthermore, Job 17:16 describes it as a place of dust, darkness (Jb 10:21), silence (Psalm. 94:17) and forgetfulness (Psalm 88: 12). Thus שְׁאוֹל indicates a realm of sleepy, shadowy existence in the depths of the earth.

However, some scholars (Gehman 1999:231; Tan 1985:82; Otto 1990:147) have suggested that שְׁאוֹל should be interpreted semantically to convey the grave as the destination for all who die (Genesis 42:38; Hosea 13:14), both the wicked (Numeri 16:30; Psalm 9:17) and the righteous (Genesis 37:35). There is a close connection between שְׁאוֹל and the grave, although there has been some debate about the nature of the connection. Harris (1986:71) for instance believes that שְׁאוֹל always denotes simply "grave" and never "underworld" (as quoted in Lewis 1992:108).

This appears to be consistent with the scripture which states that Samuel came up from the earth when the woman of Endor summoned him (1 Sam 28:8,11,13). It was generally accepted that Samuel came up from שְׁאוֹל (as Arnold (2004:202) and Fischer (2001:35) asserted). If so, it follows that שְׁאוֹל at that stage was not understood to be a place of punishment. Thus, Payne (1962:528) asserts that this explains passages in which the righteous are described as going down into שְׁאוֹל.

The question arises as to how one should interpret the expression of the phrase "to be gathered to one's people" which generally occurs with notices of death and burial and appears to imply that one joins one's ancestors in the afterlife. This phrase occurs ten times in the Scriptures and only in reference to Israel's ancestors and leaders (Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron). Elsewhere there are a few similar, probably derivative phrases (Judges 2:10; 2 Kings 22:20; Psalm 49:19). Another phrase, "To sleep with one's fathers", also occurs and is used restrictively in reference to the kings of Israel and Judah who died peacefully, irrespective of whether they were considered good or evil and irrespective of their place of burial.

Johnston (2001:cd) therefore argues that regardless the origins of the phrase, the usage and context suggest a type of death rather than a reunification in the afterlife as suggested by the tenets of ancestor worship.

6.3.2.2.2 Who are the denizens of שְׁאוֹל?

Penelhum (1997:35), Lewis (1989:5;1992:107) indicate that the *rephaim*, or inhabitants of שְׁאוֹל can be referred to as "shades." They further describe their state of existence as being "dim, lethargic, and unenviable; they are cut off from the fullness of life as it is known to those still in the body." However, Lewis (1992:107) points out that dimness and lethargy are not the same as non-existence.

There has been a lot of controversy around who it is that resides in שְׁאוֹל. Johnston (1995:213-222) states that is a commonly held thought that שְׁאוֹל in the Hebrew Scriptures is the place where all the dead (righteous and wicked) reside. Gehman (1999: 302) on the other hand contends שְׁאוֹל to be the residence of the wicked only.

Aside from the nature of those who reside in שְׁאוֹל, one has to ask whether or not it is possible to communicate with them. Deuteronomy 18:11 expressly forbids necromancy and similar practices, hence Lewis (1992:106) argues that it is entirely understandable that there was no cult of the dead in ancient Israel. Job 10:21 further describes שְׁאוֹל as the place of no return, the land of gloom, deep shadow and disorder. It also describes the dead as being conscious of nothing at all (Job 7:9; 14:21). There is no possibility that the dead can return to the living on earth from שְׁאוֹל. There is no parallel with the beliefs in African and East Asian contexts that the honourable ancestors return from the grave to the living.

Psalm 16:10 and Psalm 103:4 are famous texts in the Old Testament for suggesting that God will not allow the righteous to perish in שְׁאוֹל and were later used to argue a resurrection of the righteous dead. These texts however do not imply that the sharp divide between the living and the dead would be bridged or that the resurrected would return to this side of the grave (even in spiritual form).

6.3.2.2.3 ᾅδης (*Hades*) in the New Testament

The Greek equivalent for שְׁאוֹל which is used in the New Testament, is ᾅδης. Gehmann (1999:289) argues that שְׁאוֹל was to the Old Testament saints what ᾅδης was to the Greek speaking New Testament church.

In this regard, Lewis (1992:107) points out that as is the case with שְׁאוֹל, ᾅδης is understood to mean a place to which one goes down (Matthew 11:23; Luke 10:15). Sometimes ᾅδης is used to denote the abode of righteous and the wicked (Luke 16:23; Acts 2:27), a temporary holding place for the dead until the resurrection when ᾅδης will give up its dead as recorded in Revelations 20:13. However, ᾅδης is used with a definite connotation of judgement and punishment as conveyed in the account of the rich man and the Lazarus (Luke 16:23). There is a further distinction to be drawn between ᾅδης and Gehenna which is understood as the eschatological fiery hell in which the ungodly will be punished after death (Matthew 5:22).

6.3.2.3 Afterlife: what happened to Christians who die?

As discussed שְׁאוֹל and ᾅδης have been interpreted to denote (1) the underworld as the place of the dead, or (2) the grave which indicates the state of the dead. This study is

aligned with the latter view. The reason for this is because there is not sufficient evidence to suggest that the Bible strongly supports an intermediate state as the place where all died lie and await the final judgement. On the contrary, the New Testament indicates that the believer will be united with Christ immediately after death. This denotes a blissful state beyond our present understanding and expectations.

6.3.2.3.1 Intermediate state

Kreitzer (1987:107-112) contends that the "intermediate state" is understood to indicate the state in which the believer is between physical death and consummation of the recreated order at the *parousia* of Christ, at which point in time a new bodily existence will begin.

The notion of an intermediate state is essentially an attempt to find a compromise between two seemingly contradictory theological viewpoints which postulate either an immediate reunion and consciousness of being in Christ's presence or a waiting stage of souls between death and Parousia (which will also be the time of resurrection). Therefore, the question of what exactly happens to believers after death is a problematic one.

The Westminster Larger Cathechism (Q. 86) summarises the position of the Reformed Churches on the intermediate or disembodied state as follows:

> The communion in glory with Christ, which the members of the invisible church enjoy immediately after death, is in that their souls are then made perfect in holiness, and received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God in light and glory; waiting for the full redemption of their bodies, which even in death continue united to Christ, and rest in their graves as in their beds, till at the last day they be again united to their souls. Whereas the souls of the wicked are at their death cast into hell, where they remain in torment and utter darkness; and their bodies kept in their graves, as in their prisons, until the resurrection and judgment of the great day.

When one considers this extract it appears to indicate that the Reformed perspective rejects the notion of a realm outside of heaven and hell where dead spirits go and exist in a disembodied state until the appointed time for the resurrection. The Reformed view asserts that the righteous souls immediately ascend into heaven to be in the presence of Christ while the wicked are condemned to hell.[26]

Gehman (1999:223) argues that the intermediate state of the believer should be understood to be a conscious existence in heaven without a body, and the intermediate state of the unbeliever is a conscious existence in hell without a body. The state of the believer culminates in a conscious existence in heaven with his or her body which he or she will receive at the Second Coming of Christ, while the final state of the unbeliever will be a conscious existence in hell with his body received at the last judgement (Revelations 20:4-15).

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[26] Cf. also the Scots Confession (Chap. 17): "… the chosen departed are in peace,… not that they sleep and are lost in oblivion"; the Heidelberg Cathechism (Q. 57): "… after this life my soul shall be immediately taken up to Christ"; and the Second Helvetic Confession (Chap. 26): "… the faithful, after bodily death, go directly to Christ" and "unbelievers are immediately cast into hell".

Gehman's view (1999:223) is supported by the words of Jesus to the dying criminal (Luke 23:41-43), and according to Paul's words (2 Corinthians 5:1-8) which both indicate that Christians are immediately transported into the presence of Christ in Paradise (heaven) at their physical death. O'Donovan (1996:221) claims that the Bible suggests that in this intermediate state before the resurrection of all the dead, believers have a heavenly identity which allow them to communicate and relate to one another (2 Corinthians 5:1-4).

O'Donovan (1996:221) points out that this (Protestant) view is different from the Catholic perspective which indicates that very few, if any, Christians will be with the Lord directly at death. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that Christians are first sent to purgatory (a place of purging or cleansing by fire) for their earthly sins and only later ascend to heaven. The notion of purgatory is however contrary to numerous statements in the New Testament.

Firstly, Jesus' words to the criminal at Calgary recorded in Luke 23:43 indicates that he would be in Christ's presence that same day because the dying man had repented and pleaded with Jesus to remember him when He came to his kingdom (23:42). Gehman (1999:226) interprets this plea was a declaration of faith. Jesus' response to the criminal's plea was: "Today you will be with me in paradise."

Nolland (1993:152) asserts that the intermediate state for the blessed is heaven itself because this criminal who pleaded for mercy and grace was told that he would be with Jesus in paradise. Gehman (1999:226) describes it as a place of joy and delight – heaven itself.

Secondly, 2 Corinthians 5:1-10 is probably one of the most important passages on the intermediate state in the New Testament. In this scripture, Paul stated that he desired, "to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8). Paul understood that "if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands." (2 Corinthians 5:1). In this scripture Paul metaphorically compares two houses. Smith (1996:18) interprets that the earthly tent constitutes a metaphorical reference to the physical body which is destroyed at death, and the eternal house in heaven is a metaphor for the eternal resurrection body that will be received at Parousia. The obvious implication of this interpretation is that if Paul were to die before Parousia, he would enter into a bodiless state. Others (Gundry 1987:150; Harris 1974:324; Hodge 1972:112) support Smith's viewpoint and assert that we dwell now in an earthly tabernacle and after death we shall dwell in a heavenly house. This is all that the figure conveys. Gehman (1999:230) thus argues that when the soul loses its body at physical death, it will not wander in a lost and disembodied state without a resting place. Rather the soul has a lodging place in the presence of Christ.

Gehman (1999:230) continues and states that Paul extends the metaphor to one of clothing in 2 Corinthians 5:2-4. The meaning is essentially the same. He states that to be "found naked" (5:3) is to be without a house or to be without clothing. In other words, while we have our present physical body, living in this "tent", we groan with many diffi-

culties. In spite of the fact that this body is mortal and imperfect, it does serve as a form of dwelling for our soul. Paul yearns for heavenly clothing which can be construed to be "a heavenly house" which is immortal and eternal in heaven itself.

Gehman (1999:231) further argues that Paul simply indicates that he would prefer to be absent from the body to enter his heavenly home immediately after death to be with Christ. Gehman argues that there is no indication of an intermediate state or reference to purgatory.

Thirdly, Phillippians 1:21-23 contains Paul's testimony about an attitude towards death:

> For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labour for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far.

Although most people fear death, Paul indicates that it represents immediate gain in the sense that when he "departs" he will be with Christ. Thus death represented a release to be with Christ and the reference to "paradise" can only be understood to indicate heaven. This is clearly a contradiction to the teaching of purgatory or an intermediate state in the underworld (1 Thessalonians 5:10; Revelations 14:13).

Therefore, it is clear that the Bible teaches that the believer is immediately reunited with Christ in heaven (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11; Philippians 1:21-25; 2 Corinthians 5:1-10; John 11:25; Luke 23:43; Luke 16:19-3; Luke 20:27-38; Mark 12:18-27; Matthew 27:52-53; Revelations 14:13). The believer exists in Christ's presence as a disembodied being while the physical body returns to the ground and becomes dust again. Therefore, this contradicts the premise of ancestor worship which implies that the righteous dead will return and communicate with the living.

Therefore, the spirit of the dead cannot be recalled by a medium who is acting contrary to the will of God (Hebrews 9:27; Revelations 20:13-15; Romans 2:6-8; Genesis 18:25). Furthermore, the dead ancestors do not remain on earth to interact with the living.

This brings one to the problematic question of the references to Christ's descent into φυλακη. How should one interpret 1 Peter 3:18-22 in the light of this? The fact that the scripture states that "He went and preached to the spirits in prison" has influenced some African, Korean and Japanese Christians' understanding of the possibility of salvation of ancestors (Oak 2002:346; Mullins 1998:153; Mosothoane 1973:92).

The flawed interpretations of this scripture has given rise to questions such as: Could it be that Christ is giving a second chance to people who have died? What does it mean that these beings are in prison? Could there be some type of purgatory after death where people are given a second chance?

6.3.2.3.2 The descent of Christ into Hell

Gehman (1999:307) and Otto (1990:143-144) agree that one of the main supporting struts of the notion of an intermediate state is the Descent Clause in the Apostles' Creed ("He descended into hell"). Interestingly enough, Leith (1963:25-36) points out

that none of the early orthodox creeds made any reference to Christ's "descent into hell" until about AD 700. Hence, the idea that Christ descended into hell came relatively late in the history of the Christian church.

Generally, there are two interpretations of this. Some commentators (Hanson 1980: 122; Reicke 1964:109; Scaer 1992:92) assert that the term is derived from the clause in the Apostle's creed, *descendit ad inferna* which is translated as "Christ descended into hell', Hell is understood to refer to the realm of the dead (ᾅδης or שְׁאוֹל) rather than the hell of eternal punishment. As a result, modern translations of the Creed read: "He descended to the dead."

Dixon (1999:177) on the other hand, believes that Christ bore our hell on the cross and that John 19:30's declaration ("It is finished") indicates the completion of his atoning work. Grudem (1986:6-7) argues that Jesus Christ needed to suffer hell to complete the work of salvation rather than a literal descent to the place of the departed dead.

Grudem (1986:23) points out that the Bible does not hold out hope of conversion after death. He cites Hebrews 9:27 which clearly states that "man is destined to die once and after that to face judgement". Furthermore, Grudem (1986:23) argues that Luke 16 is emphatic that there is no possible return from hell once one has gone there.

6.3.2.3.2.1 1 Peter 3:18-20

According to Mullins (1998:148), in understanding of this passage, not a few Japanese Christians tend to consider Christ's descent into ᾅδης as a last proclamation of the Gospel, either "to all the pious dead of the old dispensation, who there believed on Him and shared in Christian salvation," or to the wicked dead who are thus given another opportunity to repent. This explains why many Japanese Indigenous churches believe that it is acceptable for their congregation members to pray on behalf of their ancestors to ensure that the Gospel may reach them in the underworld.

Dixon (1999:177) interprets 1 Peter 3:18-20 to mean that Christ preached through Noah to the people of the time. The preaching to the spirits in prison does not refer to something that happened between the death and resurrection of Jesus but to something that happened during the time of Noah to those individuals who are now (when Peter was writing) "spirits in prison". He (1999:178) on the other hand supports the interpretation that Jesus was resurrected by the Spirit of God and after that went (in the Spirit) to proclaim triumph over the fallen spirits.

The following three dominant interpretations of this text have been the most commonly held:

1. Jesus preached to the dead in ᾅδης between his death and resurrection in the realm of the dead (Best 1971:140-147; Hanson 1980:122-156; Pinnock 1992: 171).
2. Before or after his resurrection Jesus travelled to hell and proclaimed his triumph over the fallen angels who had sinned by marrying human women before the flood (Blum 1981:241-243; France 1977:264-281; Kelly 1967:151-158).

3. Christ preached repentance and righteousness via Noah to unbelievers who lived in Noah's day but who were "spirits in prison" in Jesus' time (Dixon 1999: 177; Erickson 1995:131-144; Grudem 1991:103-113; Guthrie 1981:842; Kaizer et al 1996:714).

The first perspective of this text means that Christ went to Hell and preached to the spirits who were there, either proclaiming the Gospel or offering a second chance to repent or proclaim that he had triumphed over them and that they were condemned for eternity. But, as Erickson (1995:140-143) points out, this interpretation does not fit the context or the passage itself. He continues to say that Peter does not say that Christ preached to spirits in general but to those who did not obey during the building of the ark. The context of 1 Peter 3 also makes a preaching in hell highly unlikely. In this chapter, Peter encourages his audience to witness to unbelievers without fear or restraint. He concludes by telling them "to always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you." (1 Peter 3:15). Even more difficult, as have seen above, is the fact that this view is contrary to the Scriptures which clearly indicate that there is judgement after death (Hebrews 9:27) and that the wicked are condemned without reprieve as suggested by the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). Also if Christ proclaimed his triumph, if he offered a second chance for salvation, why only to these sinners and not to all? (Grudem 1991:109).

The second view which has become entrenched in the West implies that the descent of Christ implied a conquest of Death and Satan (cf. Grudem 1986:4; Pannenberg 1972:94). France (1977:264-281) has postulated that "spirits in prison" could be understood to denote demonic spirits or fallen angels and that Christ condemned these demons. The Lutherans are particularly disposed to this interpretation. Luther considered the descent of Christ into ᾅδης as a triumph over Satan, In his famous sermon at the Castle of Torgau, which is cited in article 9 of the Formula of Concord, he says: "That is the power and usefulness of this article, the reason for its happening, being preached and believed, namely, that Christ destroyed the power of hell and took away all power from the devil" (Bauckham 1988:194). In this text, however, Peter emphasises hostile persons who hear the message rather than demons or fallen angels in the context of the passage.

The third interpretation implies that this passage is aimed at the Christians in Asia Minor who were facing severe persecution and martyrdom in hermeneutical terms. Kaizer et al (1996:714) states that Peter encourages them to look at Jesus' example who was killed (from the human perspective) but rose to a renewed physical and transformed life in the spiritual world. In doing so, He proclaimed his victory to the fallen angels who were disobedient in Noah's day. Kaizer et al (1996:714) thus argues that this may have occurred at this ascension and that the text does not point to the exact location of this prison. Some Jews located it in the "second heaven" and therefore in between earthly existence and heaven where God dwells. Thus, Kaizer et al (1996:714) concludes that 1 Peter 3:18-22 does not support the notion that Jesus descended into ᾅδης.

The most acceptable handling for this passage is to acknowledge that it represents "perhaps the most difficult to understand in all of the New Testament" (Mounce 1982: 54, as cited by Erikson 1995:144). In fact it is nearly impossible to arrive at an acceptable interpretation and therefore cannot be used by any of the three interpretations mentioned above. Likewise a doctrine of purgatory cannot be supported by it.

6.3.2.3.2.2 Ephesians 4:9

In this scripture, Paul writes "In saying, "He ascended", what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth?" (RSV)

What exactly "τὰ κατώτερα [μέρη] τῆς γῆς" (the lower parts of the earth) denotes is unclear. It is not clear whether or not it means that Christ descended into hell. This text indicates "lower regions of the earth" to denote "lower regions that are the earth". However, Hoehner (2002:531) points out that the traditional interpretation has been that the descent means Christ's descent from heaven to earth at the time of his incarnation (coming to the earth as a baby) and that the ascent means Christ's ascent from earth to heaven after the resurrection. According to Grudem (1991:108) Paul, in this scripture, is saying that Christ who ascended into heaven is the same one who descended from heaven (verse 10). The "descent" from heaven occurred when Christ incarnated as a man and does not refer to a descent into hell.[27]

6.3.2.3.2.3 Acts 2:27

The NIV translates this text as "Because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay." The context of this scripture is Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost during which he quoted Psalm 16:10 (cf also p 141). According to Grudem (1991:107) it does not mean that Christ descended into ἅδης (or שְׁאוֹל as in Psalm 16:10). Ἅδης (as well as שְׁאוֹל) denotes in this context simply the grave or death. The context emphasises the fact that Christ's body rose from the grave whereas David's body remained interred in the grave. Paul's intention here is that Christ's body did not decay.

How, then, can we interpret passages tied into the dogmatic controversy in the New Testament, such as 2 Timothy 1:18 and 1 Corinthians 15:29? These verses seem to support that prayers and baptising for the dead is in order. In the next section we will examine these and other affected passages.

6.4 PASSAGES OF DOGMATIC CONTROVERSY

As discussed in previous chapters, followers of the ancestor worship believe that the actions of the living ancestors can influence the destiny of the ancestral spirit in that the ancestor can earn merit from the actions of his/her descendants. Thus, the belief is that if the ancestral rites are adhered to faithfully they will have protection from bad luck,

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[27] Another view is proposed by scholars such as Caird (1976:74-75), Harris (1994:204-214) and Lincoln (1990:246-247). They suggest that the descent refers not to Christ's descent at the incarnation but to Christ's descent at Pentecost to give his spiritual gifts to the church.

adversity and danger. If they are faithful in carrying out the required ancestral rites, they will be protected from ill luck, adversity and danger and gain blessings, fortune and good health. Furthermore, the shaman is believed to have the ability to communicate with spirits including those who are able to bring about disaster and misfortune on the living

As we have shown in the previous section, this is contrary to the teachings of the Bible since the Bible clearly teaches that the dead are conscious of nothing at all and do not have the power to influence the living. Furthermore, the Bible prohibits necromancy and idolatry. There are however, two passages in the Bible which are problematic which have influenced the doctrines of AIC and JIC as discussed in Chapters 3 and 5 respectively.

6.4.1 Praying for the dead

6.4.1.1 2 Timothy 1:16, 18

"May the Lord show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains" (2 Timothy 1:16) - NIV

"May the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that day! You know very well in how many ways he helped me in Ephesus" (2 Timothy 1:18) - NIV

According to Grudem (1994:817) 2 Timothy 1:18 may constitute the only precedent in the New Testament which Roman Catholics use to support their notion that it is acceptable to pray for the dead. This is based on the assumption that Onesiphorus had already died when this letter was written and thus informed the establishment of the Roman Catholics' doctrines of prayers for the dead and purgatory theologically. Berkhof (1960:686-687) and Mounce (2000:497) state that rituals such as prayers for the dead, mass and indulgences thus became a means for Catholics to ensure that the duration and intensity of the suffering in purgatory can be diminished while the soul is purified through suffering in preparation for heaven.

This is problematic, since it is not clear that Onesiphorus had actually died and therefore as Mounce (2000:494) points out it would be a mistake to base a theology of prayers for the dead on this passage (Also Hendriksen 1957:238-39; Knight 1979:386). Furthermore, Mounce asserts that verses 16 and 18 do not imply intercessionary or petitionary prayer. He argues that the passage does not contain a clear petition to God (e.g. "Lord, grant them mercy") but is rather to be construed as Paul's general wish for Onesiphorus and his family's welfare (similar to Romans 15:5 and 2 Thessalonians 3:16) (Wiles 1974:45-155; Fee 1991:237; Knight 1979:386).

The question which arises is whether or not this constitutes sufficient evidence to conclude that Onesiphorus was still alive at the time of this letter? Scholars such as Hendriksen (1957:238-39) and Knight (1979:386) argue that Onesiphorus was alive at the time. They assert this for numerous reasons:

Firstly, verse 16 speaks of Onesiphorus' household in the present tense and thus implies that Onesiphorus may have been part of the household at the time and not

necessarily deceased as some would like to believe. The possibility that Onesiphorus could still have been alive is evident from 1 Corinthians 1:16.

Secondly, the fact that the wish is addressed directly to Onesiphorus in the future tense in the time frame of the Day of Judgement suggests that Onesiphorus had died and would next face judgement. However, Paul could have pronounced an eschatological blessing on a church while the people were still alive as evidenced by 1 Thessalonians 5:23. Furthermore, he could have spoken in general about "that day" without requiring the person to have actually died already (1:12; 4:8). It is also possible that Onesiphorus was absent from his family because he had just left Paul and Paul could therefore have been thinking of his family as they were currently without him.

Thirdly, the use of past-tense verbs throughout this passage is used by some scholars to suggest that Onesiphorus had since died. However, each event which is recounted in the epistle was written in the past tense and therefore these verbs need not signify anything specific.

Fourthly, some scholars reason that Onesiphorus had died because in the final greeting in which Paul names each individual, he does not mention Onesiphorus' name. Instead, Paul greets his household. Considering the nature of their relationship it is peculiar that he does not greet Onesiphorus by name. This is used by some to suggest that he had already died. However, another possibility must be considered. Onesiphorus did not return home immediately and the letter would have arrived at Ephesus before him. Thus, it is plausible that Paul would greet the household instead. Mounce (2000:495) cautions against arguing on the basis of consistency of style when one considers that Paul's writing may not necessarily have conformed to the modern notions of consistency and style. Thus, from these points it is clear that there is insufficient concrete evidence to conclude that Onesiphorus had died (Mounce 2000:495).

6.4.1.2 Maccabees 12:39-45

The Apocryphal books have often been used to justify prayers for the dead. 2 Maccabees 12:39-45 is one of those scriptures which are often used to justify this doctrine. Kelly (1960:171) argues that prayers for the dead were essentially part of Pharisaism following the events of 2 Maccabees 12:43-45. Bernard (1980:114) further points out that an inscription in Rome clearly indicates that this practice was accepted by Christians. Let's consider it closely.

A synopsis of the account is necessary for clarification. Gehman (1999:122) summarises it by saying that Judas Maccabeus, after the victory over Gorgias who was governor of Idumea in 163 BC, returned to claim the bodies of a "few of the Jews" who had been mortally wounded in battle. During this process, they discovered that some of these slain Jews were wearing "sacred tokens of the idols of Jamnia, which the law forbids the Jew to wear" under the coats on the bodies. They then came to the conclusion that these Jews had perished because they had committed idolatry. As a result of their discovery they collected 2 000 drachmas of silver to send to Jerusalem for "a sin offering." Gehman (1999:122) refers to the conclusion in verse 45 which states that

they attempted to atone for the sins of the dead in the hope that they might be delivered from their sin.

Consequently, Metzger (1965:287) observes that "this is the first known statement of the doctrine that a sin offering and prayer made atonement for the sins of the dead (v 45)."

This passage is problematic because it teaches more than the doctrine espoused by the Roman Catholic Church. Although it is one of the few passages which theologians cite to support the belief in prayers for the dead, it is not orthodox teaching.

In this case, the prayers and offering to atone for their sins was made for individuals who had committed idolatry. The Catholic Church teaches that idolatry is a mortal sin. Bartlett (1973:319) consequently suggests that the "idols" may actually have been amulets which were worn as a protective charm. These amulets more than likely, bore a representation of the Dagon of Azotus" (Bartlett 1973:319). In spite of the fact that these Jews had committed idolatry, the Jews made a sin offering on their behalf because they had died for the cause of the Maccabees. Maccabean Jews believed that those who fought for their cause would be resurrected to share in the kingdom which would succeed the Syrian domination over them. Thus, Gehman (1999:122) argues that the sin offering was made in the hope that they would be forgiven for their idolatry and may share in the kingdom for which they had fought.

In spite of this, this is contrary to Catholic doctrine. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that it is wrong to pray for those who die in mortal sin. However, Catholics believe that it is honourable to pray for those in purgatory but wholly inappropriate to pray for those who have been condemned to hell. Gehman (1999:122) thus supports Goldstein (1983:450) who states that this was also contrary to rabbinic laws of the time and that Catholic doctrine merely followed.

It is important to bear in mind that evangelical Protestants reject the Old Testament Apocrypha as being non-canonical or not authoritative and by implication therefore also reject the doctrines which are based on the teachings espoused by these texts. The rejection of these Aprocryphal books are also based on the fact that Jesus never indicated in his teachings that they were acceptable – He never cited them, while He often mentioned the Old Testament canon of the Jews and frequently quoted from the three parts of the Jewish Scriptures, namely, "the Law of Moses, the Prophets and Psalms" (Luke 24:44). Furthermore, The Apocrypha, and especially 2 Maccabees, contains historical and doctrinal errors which are not consistent with the Bible (Gehman 1999:123).

6.4.2   Vicarious baptism for the dead?

The notion of vicarious baptism for the dead emanates from the controversial interpretations of 1 Corinthians 15:29. In this scripture Paul writes: "Ἐπεὶ τί ποιήσουσιν οἱ βαπτιζόμενοι ὑπὲρ τῶν νεκρῶν; εἰ ὅλως νεκροὶ οὐκ ἐγείρονται, τί καὶ βαπτίζονται ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν."

Numerous scholars have proposed interpretations and Reaume (1995) provides a useful synopsis of the most widely accepted theories on this matter. Reaume (1995: 495) classifies the theories into three broad categories namely:

1. Vicarious baptism which is a water baptism undertaken by a living person for the benefit of an unbaptised deceased person;
2. Metaphorical baptism which could refer to Paul's suffering or martyrdom for the Gospel; and
3. Christian baptism which is a water baptism of new believers.

The first of these, vicarious baptism is generally supported by most commentators (i.e. Fee 1987:767; Walvoord & Zuck 1983:544; Meyer 1980:365). The notion of vicarious baptism is founded on the premise that those who were involved in this practice held that baptism was a prerequisite for entry into the eschatological kingdom and/or a requirement for salvation (Orr & Walther 1976:337). Beasley-Murray (1974:187) points out that the crux of this interpretation is derived from the plain reading of the verse because the words βαπτίζω, νεκρός, ὑπέρ are understood to denote their most fundamental meanings. However, Reaume (1995:459) rightly argues that the greatest challenge for this interpretation is the fact that there is no historical or Biblical evidence which suggests that this was the practice in Corinth or the ancient near East during the first century. He further argues that it is highly unlikely that Paul would have openly supported a practice which was upheld by marginal heretical groups and which was contrary to his theology without commenting on it.

The second group of theories tend to assert that it can be construed to refer to metaphorical baptism. Godet (1977:818) points out that in this paradigm it is thought to refer metaphorically to martyrdom or to Paul's suffering for the Gospel. He indicates that Paul referred to those who had been "baptised by blood" (martyred) with the hope of the resurrection to support his argument about the certainty about the resurrection. Reaume (1995:461) refers to Godet's argument which cites Mark 10:38 and Luke 12:50 in support of the former hypothesis. In these scriptures Jesus mentions the baptism He had to endure which appears to be a metaphorical reference to his death and martyrdom. He (1995:461) acknowledges that this appears to suit the context because Paul refers to his suffering until his death for the sake of the Gospel as recorded in 1 Corinthians 15:30 – 32.

Yet according to Bruce (1982:140) and Cairns (1982:90), the fact that there were no apparent martyrdoms in Corinth at that time invalidates the notion. Murphy-O'Connor (1981:534) logically considers that Godet's use of ὑπέρ to mean "for entering" does not appear elsewhere in Greek literature. Furthermore, although Jesus clearly used βαπτίζω to allude to "suffering or martyrdom" in metaphorical terms, Paul does not.

Simultaneously Reaume (1995:462) further discusses the notion that it could be understood to refer to Paul's sufferings. He refers to Murphy-O'Connor's assertion that "baptism for the dead" could be construed to be a slogan used by agitators in Corinth in an attempt to denounce the resurrection and Paul's efforts for those who were spiritually dead. He (1995:462) argues that the metaphorical understanding of βαπτίζω refers

to Paul's trials and tribulations for the Gospel while νεκρός refers to the "spiritually dead" or "spiritually unenlightened". Therefore, as Reaume (1995:462) states, the verse would then read as "Why are they (Paul and other apostles) being destroyed while working for the sake of the lost? If dead believers are not raised, then why are they suffering for the lost?"

This interpretation avoids the theological problems which accompany the notion of vicarious baptism and that it further neatly fits into the context since Paul refers to his tribulations in the verses which follow this one (15:30–31).

However Reaume (1995:462) acknowledges that it does have some difficulties. The first problem emerges in the exegetical analysis of the text. Different nuances of νεκρός could denote not only "the spiritually dead" but also the "physically dead". He further argues that it is highly unlikely for the writer to use such subtle nuances without commenting on it. Moreover he (1995:462) argues that the effect such a slogan would have had on Paul's case for the certainty of the resurrection is dubious at best. Reaume continues that if this were the case it is unlikely that Paul would have included the slogan in a context where his struggles for the spiritually dead are given as evidence for the certainty of the resurrection. The notion that the phrase "baptised for the dead" is to be understood as a slogan is problematic because it lacks the key characteristics of slogans which include brevity, sustained qualification and an unambiguous response (Cf. Carson 1987b:55).

The third interpretation of the verse is that it could indicate Christian baptism with water in the normal ritual sense. This category of interpretations does however encompass a variety of interpretations which Reaume (1995) clusters into six subviews. These include:

i Baptism because of dead believers

This group interpret the phrase "baptism for the dead" to mean unbelievers who are being baptised because of believers who have died. Therefore, these unbelievers are baptised because of the influence of Christians who have died recently (MacArthur 1984:425). Reaume (1995:462) points out that the exegetical analysis reveals that Paul used νεκρός with and without the definite article with some consistency. It is thus proposed that τῶν νεκρῶν refers to dead Christians. Furthermore, the use of the preposition ὑπέρ with the genitive can have the causal sense of "because of". And finally, this interpretation is consistent with the context in which Paul returns to his previous argument on the absurdity of denying the believers' resurrection.

ii To be reunited with the dead at the resurrection

This presents a slight variation on the previous notion. Some scholars suggest that the preposition ὑπέρ functions with the final sense of "for." Reaume (1995:463) refers to Schnackenburg (1964), who asserted that verse 29 is a reference to "pagans who take baptism upon themselves." Therefore ὑπέρ τῶν νεκρῶν is understood to denote "with the purpose of becoming united with their deceased Christian relatives at the resurrection." Reaume (1995:463) acknowledges that this preposition may have a final sense but the usage of it is rare in the New Testament. He further points out that this interpretation

requires filling a significant ellipsis to convey this message, as Meyer (1980:367) cited as "baptised in order to be united with their deceased Christian relatives at the resurrection."

iii To take the place of dead believers

Reaume (1995:464) cites another interpretation which holds that Paul was probably referring to individuals who converted and were baptised to take the place of deceased believers. The problem with this interpretation is that the notion of new believers who replace believers who had died is not readily evident from the context.

iv With reference to the resurrection of the dead

Reaume (1995:464) cites a fourth interpretation of the scripture which states that "baptism for the dead" could be referring to the general baptism of all believers in which they are baptised with reference to the resurrection of the dead. This interpretation is dependent upon an ellipsis of "resurrection" to refer to "baptism with reference to the resurrection of the dead." (Cf. Barnes 1962:793)

Some who subscribe to this interpretation state that Paul used the preposition ὑπέρ elsewhere to convey the meaning of "with reference to" as used in 2 Corinthians 1:7 and 8:23. Others however object to the implied ellipsis of "resurrection". Reaume adds by saying that Paul would have included the term "resurrection" if that is what he had wanted to convey. However, as Paul used the expression ἀνάστασις νεκρῶν in verse 12 and verse 13, it is not far-fetched that he presupposed the same expression here.

Kaiser et al (1996:616) contended that in 1 Corinthians 15 Paul develops an elaborate apologetic argument for both the resurrection of Christ and the future resurrection of the dead. It seems that among the Corinthian Christians were some who denied the very concept of resurrection. Such a denial seems to have emerged out of a view of reality which denigrated physical life and held that only the human spirit or soul (the immaterial aspect) was the object of redemption. Thus among the superspiritualists in Corinth there were the "libertines" for whom concrete, bodily realities, including sexual relations, had no ultimate significance. Paul's discussion of the resurrection responds to questions raised in the congregation by the views of these hyperspiritualists.

Paul's apologetic argument is expressed in a series of "if/then" arguments: If there is no resurrection, then Christ has not been raised (1 Corinthians 15:13). If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching and your faith are futile (1 Corinthians 15:14, 17) and those Christians who have already died are lost (1 Corinthians 15:18). If the dead are not raised, then "let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" and that's the end of it (1 Corinthians 15:32).

Our text is part of this series of arguments. Though the Greek of the first part of 1 Corinthians 15:29 does not contain the phrase "no resurrection" (as in NIV; compare NASB, RSV), the preposition *epei* ("now if" or "otherwise") clearly carries this sense from the previous "if/then" series, as well as from the latter part of verse 29, "If the dead are not raised, why then …?" (Kaiser et al 1996:616)

From all the explanations proposed this is the most acceptable.

v For their dying bodies

Some early Church Fathers (including Tertullian and Chrysostom) and the Humanist theologian, Erasmus, believe that 1 Corinthians 15:29 refers to Christian baptism in which an individual is baptised for the benefit of his own "dying" body.

Reaume (1995:465) points out that Calvin (1979:38) suggested a more specific nuance of unbelievers who repented and were baptised on their death beds. This view understands βαπτίζω ὑπέρ in accordance with common Pauline usage. However, the major difficulty of this interpretation is that viewing νεκρός to denote "dying bodies" has no parallel with the New Testament.

vi Christian baptism based on alternative punctuation

The last subview which Reaume (1995:466) cites proposes that some scholars list differences in punctuation. According to Reaume (1995:466) Foschini argues that verse 29 consists of four rhetorical questions, namely:

- Ἐπεὶ τί ποιήσουσιν οἱ βαπτιζόμενοι, "If there is no resurrection, what is the point of being baptised?"
- ὑπὲρ τῶν νεκρῶν, "Is it only to be united with the dead?"
- εἰ ὅλως νεκροὶ οὐκ ἐγείρονται, "If the dead do not rise again, why are they baptised?"
- τί καὶ βαπτίζονται ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν, "Is it only to be united with them (i.e., with the dead who will never rise)?"

Reaume (1995:466) asserts that the crux of the matter lies in understanding the usage of ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν. He argues that verse 29 appears to resume Paul's previous argument in which he demonstrated the absurdity of denying the resurrection of dead believers and in which he concluded by referring to deceased believers specifically (cf verses 18 and 19). He continues that when one considers Paul's apparent distinction between "dead believers" and the "dead in general", it appears that the object of the preposition is more than likely a reference to dead believers.

Furthermore, when one considers that the normal practice of the early church was that baptism took place immediately after conversion as reflected in Acts 10:47–48; 16:31–34; 18:8; 19:5, then it is not plausible to conclude that a believer could have died before being baptised. Reaume (1995:466) further argues that baptism generally involved more than one person and it would have been exceptional for a convert to have died before he/she had the opportunity to be baptised. Thus, the use of the prepositional phrase, ὑπὲρ, generally has the genitive use which generally translates as "on behalf of," which conveys the notion of representation as used in Ephesians 5:2, 25; 1 Thessalonians 5:10; Titus 2:14. Alternatively, it is used as "instead of" which further emphasises the concept of substitution as in John 11:50; 2 Corinthians 5:14–15; Galatians 3:13; Philemon 13. In these texts the person is used as the object of the preposition. This also occurs in other scriptures such as Romans 5:6, 8; 8:32; Galatians 2:20.

Here the preposition is used to denote favour or advantage particular to a person. Reaume (1995:469) points out that as a result contemporary scholars consider the phrase ὑπὲρ τῶν νεκρῶν to denote a rather esoteric practice of vicarious baptism in which an individual was baptised in place of another deceased individual.

Although this interpretation may be plausible in exegetical terms, it is entirely rejected on the lack of historical evidence and the theological issue of Paul appealing to a practice which implies that baptism has redemptive qualities. Furthermore, Reaume (1995:469) asserts that considering that the object of the preposition τῶν νεκρῶν is more than likely a reference to dead believers, the notion of vicarious baptism is implausible because these dead believers had more than likely been baptised before their death, immediately upon their conversion as was customary at the time.

Reaume (1995:472) further argues that another suggestion which maintains the substitutionary denotation of ὑπὲρ indicates that Paul was likely referring to individuals who had been converted and baptised in the place of deceased believers. He asserts that scholars who subscribe to this view consider this interpretation to be parallel to the usage in Philemon 13, in which Paul refers to Onesimus as "ministering in the place of Philemon." However, Reaume (1995:472) points out that the emphasis is on substitution rather than any benefit to Philemon (cf. Col 1:7).

Furthermore, Reaume (1995:472) argues that the usage of the preposition ὑπὲρ can indicate a causal action as in "for," "because of," or "on account of" (cf Romans 15:9 ; 2 Corinthians 12:8). He further argues that the New Testament usage of this preposition generally occurs in the sense of denoting the cause of suffering of slander (cf Acts 9:16; 21:13; 1 Corinthians 10:30; 2 Corinthians 12:10; Phillipians 1:29; 2 Thessalonians 1:5) or the cause of praise and thanksgiving as used in Romans 15:9; or to denote the reason for prayer as used in 2 Corinthians 12:8. He (19995:473) thus indicates that in this context it would more than likely denote new believers being baptised as a result of the permeating influence of dead believers.

Reaume (1995:473) does however acknowledge that the main criticism which theologians have against this interpretation lies with consistency of Pauline usage of the preposition in which the object of the preposition is a person whereas "because of" or "on behalf of" or "on account of" is preferred when the object of the preposition is an inanimate noun. However, as he (1995:4732) rightly points out, the causal sense of ὑπὲρ is consistently used by Paul with a person as the object whether it is implicitly or explicitly on a few occasions. Examples of this can be found in Acts 9:16; 21:13; Romans 15:9; Philippians 1:29.

Another usage of the phrase ὑπὲρ which is closely related to this understanding of the phrase, is the notion that this preposition function in the final sense of "for" as in 1 Corinthians 15:29. Here it could be construed to denote being baptised to be reunited with their deceased Christian relatives at the resurrection. This is evident from the context of Paul's sufferings for the Corinthians' comfort as in 2 Corinthians 1:6. The biggest problem with this usage is that the phrase ὑπὲρ τῶν νεκρῶν would imply a significant ellipsis or require additional explanation to arrive at a plausible and coherent interpreta-

tion. However, other passages utilizing the final sense of ὑπὲρ similarly have to be filled out by the exegesis of the text.

Other scholars (Luther 1973, Grosheide 1974) have suggested that this usage of the preposition denotes the local sense of "over" as used in "over the graves of the dead." This interpretation is dubious because there is no historical evidence for this practice in the first century. Reaume (1995:274) further mentions that some scholars have construed this to denote the sense of "concerning" or "with reference to" which means that believers were baptised with reference to the resurrection of the dead. Again, this interpretation is implausible because it also requires a significant ellipsis ("baptised with reference to the resurrection of the dead").

Consequently, after the analysis of 1 Corinthians 15:29, a few conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, Reaume (1995:474) asserts that the baptism referred to is more than likely a literal water baptism of Christians. He also concludes that the phrase "the ones who are baptised" is more than likely a reference to a small group of individuals rather than the church as a whole. Reaume (1995:474) further concludes that the "dead" for whom these individuals are baptised were more than likely deceased believers. Finally, he (1995:474) asserts that these deceased believers must have been baptised before they died when one considers the practice of baptism immediately upon conversion. If these assumptions are believed to be true, it is highly unlikely that the preposition preposition ὑπὲρ denotes vicarious baptism for the benefit of the dead. There would have been no value in this practice because the dead in question would already have been "saved" and more than likely baptised. Thus, the notion of vicarious baptism is implausible on the grounds of its incompatibility with Pauline theology.

Finally Reaume (1995:475) supports the notion that ὑπὲρ translates as "because of" which denotes that new believers are baptised because of the pervasive influence of deceased Christians. He concludes that this is the most plausible interpretation because it makes sense without a significant ellipsis and it is plausible that many individuals in the early church were influenced by the testimonies of deceased and/or martyred believers. Paul is a prime example of this when one considers that he may have been influenced by Stephens's testimony when he was arrested and stoned (cf Acts 7).

Reaume (1995) also points out that proposed punctuation changes may have some validity when one considers that accents, breathing marks and punctuation were not used in the New Testament times. He does point out that there is one insurmountable problem with these interpretations namely that they still are based on Foschini and Thompson's interpretation of the preposition ὑπὲρ and the noun νεκρός.

Therefore, based on the exegetical and hermeneutical analysis of this passage it is reasonable to conclude that the dead cannot be saved by prayers and rituals, or any other action, of living relatives. In addition, the Bible clearly does not support the fact that the dead have the ability to contact the living or that they can exist in an interdependent relationship. This clearly puts to rest the theological precepts which underpin the theology of ancestor worship in the countries we have discussed.

6.5 CONCLUSION

The practices associated with ancestor ritual are heavily reliant on the premise that the dead are able to return to the living and have an influence on the lives of the living; that it is acceptable for the living to communicate with the dead and lastly that the living are able to exert an influence on the destiny of the deceased ancestor.

In fact the preceding sections have made it clear that the Bible condemns necromancy and associated practices, and therefore it is not in alignment with the Bible's principles. Secondly, the discussion has pointed out that although some individuals do experience what appears to be the spirits of deceased ancestors, the Biblical evidence which has been presented makes it clear that these experiences or apparitions should not be taken "at face value".

Furthermore, the Bible makes it clear that once a person has died it is impossible for him or her to return to communicate with the living. It is clear from Romans 6:23 that all men die and that death is the wages of sin – an inevitable consequence. The only incident in the Scriptures which has been the source of dogmatic controversy is the incident where Samuel "appeared" to the witch of Endor (1 Samuel 28). The explanations which have been put forward have made it clear that what was "seen", was a result of the special working of God's power, and by His permission for His purposes. As the Bible clearly admonishes, those who dapple in necromancy or spiritism commit what is considered to be spiritual prostitution.

The abode of the dead which is expounded in the Scriptures is known as ᾅδης or שְׁאוֹל. The aforementioned sections have conclusively shown that ᾅδης and שְׁאוֹל refer to the common grave of mankind where all souls are destined to go once they have died a physical death. The final destination of the righteous souls is heaven and therefore the analogy of Lazarus and the rich man cannot be construed to prove that the living can communicate with the dead or that the living can have a bearing on the destiny of the dead. It was not possible for the rich man to communicate with his living relatives to warn them of their imminent fate if they did not mend their ways.

The Scriptures clearly indicate that the righteous who die, are immediately reunited with Christ (cf. Luke 23:43, Philippians 1:23). At the resurrection those who have died will be changed and resurrected with a spiritual body to allow them to enter into a fuller state of fellowship with God. The notion of the immortality of the soul is a major precept of the ancestor cult. However, the New Testament's promise of a resurrection refers to the resurrection of the whole body. The notion of the soul existing in an intermediate state or a deep sleep which is fundamental to the ancestral rites is contradictory to the teachings of the New Testament. Passages in the Bible which deal with death as a sleeping state such as Matthew 9:24 and 1 Corinthians 15:51 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13 could be construed as a metaphorical description to ensure that mankind do not fear death rather than a description of an intermediate state.

Some scholars have tried to prove that Christ descended into ᾅδης after his death to minister to the dead or to proclaim his victory over them. It became clear however that

scriptural proof of such doctrine is contentious and that the meaning of 1 Peter 3:18-20, the classical scriptural reference, is obscure.

The living are not able to effect a change for the good of the dead. The salvation of mankind is based on Christ's ransom sacrifice on the cross and therefore sacrifices which are made for the dead are of no value. The notion of vicarious baptism which has been suggested by some scholars does not have sufficient evidence in exegetical or hermeneutical terms to make it a credible argument. Paul denies the interpretation of vicarious baptism when he says in 2 Corinthians 5:10: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body."

Therefore, it is clear that the final destination of each individual is dependent on their own faith and actions while they were alive. Each individual is accountable to God and once a sinner has died the wages of his or her sins cannot be paid by the living. In other words, the central premise which underpins the theology of ancestor rituals is flawed. It is impossible for the dead to communicate with the living and it is impossible for the living to improve the destiny of the deceased ancestor. The New Testament is clear that there is no way for the dead to change their fate.

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 EVALUATION[28]

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

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[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 dieties represented by the idol or object cpmcerned.

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 Isreal 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 sacrifceces 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

- אָוֶן 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.

- שִׁקּוּץ 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).

- גִּלּוּל as used in Ezekiel 6:4-6; 9; 13 means "droppings of dung".

- אֱלִיל 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 *eidōlolatria* ("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 prac-
tised, the main function is to strengthen the bonds between the ancestors and their de-
scendants. Olowola (1993:50), however, states that the main purpose of these sacri-
fices 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 be-
tween 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 par-
cel of the greater picture of devotion, worship and religion.

Phenomenological similarities between sacrifices in the Old Testament and those of-
fered 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 ani-
mals 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 to 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 an-
cient Israelites acted similarly it is plausible that they have learnt the practice from sur-
rounding 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 or 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 over-coming 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 de-void 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; Collossians 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*

Nürnberger (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.

Nürnberger (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. Nürnberger 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). Nürnberger 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 Nürnberger, 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 afterlife 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 (Collossians 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, Nyamiti'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 Akrong 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 Schreiter (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 accede 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 an 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.

Nürnberger (2007:68) also indicates that the Protestant reformers rejected the redemptive role of the saints manly 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).

Nürnberger (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, Nürnberger (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), Nürnberger (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 family[29]

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

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[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.

Nürnberger (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. Nürnberger 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.

Nürnberger 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

Nürnberger (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 in 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 Nürnberger (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.

Nürnberger (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.

Nürnberger (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 transsignification (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.

Nürnberger (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, Nürnberger (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). Nürnberger 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 (Nürnberger 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 world-view 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, *Ie* 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.

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[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 scientist 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 ground-breakingly 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 hearkens 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.

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[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

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[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 sullying 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.

Chapter 8

CONCLUSION

This study has attempted to provide a broad analysis of the phenomenon of ancestor worship which encapsulates an analysis of the beliefs and rituals, an anthropological understanding of the socio-cultural significance which these practices play in the cosmologies of these nations, a theological analysis of the underlying tenets of ancestor worship and its inherent religious aspects from a Biblical perspective (in exegetical and hermeneutical terms) to arrive at an appropriate mission principle for missionaries and churches who face this problem.

THE INITIAL UNDERSTANDING OF ANCESTOR WORSHIP

It is clear that culture, religion and ancestor worship are inextricably linked. Thus, Mbiti and Bediako's work highlighted the socio-political cortex underpinning and the motivation for continuing with the practices of ancestor worship. It is reasonable to conclude that the ancestors are conceived in terms of the community. Bediako (1990:39-39) mentions that the ancestors are 'made' by the community, 'ancestors being the product of the myth-making imagination of the community'. They are essentially powerful because of the power ascribed to them by their descendants.

As such, Mbiti concedes that "most, if not all, of these attributive deities are the creation of man's imagination" (1990:76). Given the fact that the existence of the ancestors cannot be examined or proven empirically, their existence is very real in the cultural mindset and cosmologies of the people who venerate them in fear and dread.

ANCESTOR WORSHIP IN THE AFRICAN CONTEXT

Given the complexity of African society and clan structures, ancestor worship is an extremely complex construct and the practices are fairly diverse. The analysis of the phenomenon in the African context highlighted the syncretistic approach which African Churches have opted for to deal with the challenges which ancestor worship poses to Christianity. The core of resurgent ATR is ancestor worship as reaction to the needs of African people who attempted to cling to their identity in the face of colonisation and urbanisation. Christian churches have assimilated ancestor rituals in varying degrees. Whereas Roman Catholicism assimilated it readily, Protestant churches rejected it out of hand as unscriptural.

The complexity of the phenomenon in African terms highlighted once again that ancestor worship is inseparable from African cosmology in which the African sense of community is probably the most important cornerstone. This sense of community is markedly absent from the Western mindset and as a result the Gospel as brought to

them by Western missionaries did not resonate fully with the African collective spirit. Consequently, the Church did not meet the socio-cultural needs which were left in the wake of the rejection of ancestor worship and contributed to the African's sense of alienation. This was one of the reasons for the resurgence of ATR because the Church did not meet the needs of the African people in terms of their socio-cultural identity. In an attempt to bridge the gap, some theologians and churches attempted to Christianise some of the ancestor beliefs and rituals and in some cases compromised the Gospel. Most notably is the intermediary role of the ancestors which some African theologians have attempted to liken to the role of Christ. However, if the intermediary role of the ancestors is legitimised it would imply that Christ's intermediary role is not unique and may be redundant.

In addition, the manner in which ancestor worship articulates with contemporary African Ancestral Theology has shown that the most problematic factor in African theology is that the African theologian has to contend with the essentially non-Christian nature of their traditional beliefs. Therefore, this study supports Hastings' view (1976:50) which concludes that African theology constitutes a dialogue between the African scholar and the perennial religions and spiritualities particular to Africa and the African context.

From the exposition on the phenomenon in Africa, the conclusion can be drawn that African religion is inherently non-Christian and therefore poses challenges to African theology. In order to avoid the trap of developing a theology which deviates from the Scriptural truths, one has to strive to pursue a Biblical theology as the primary focus. It is very difficult to equate African traditional religion with Christ's message and transpose it in the African idiom.

ANCESTOR WORSHIP IN THE KOREAN CONTEXT

The study of ancestor worship in the Korean context highlighted the long and illustrious history of the cult and established it to be rooted firmly in Shamanism and Confucianism. Once again, this highlighted the close relationship between the socio-cultural paradigm and identity of the Korean people and the religious practices which are considered to be outward manifestations of this.

The multi-faceted nature of ancestor worship posed significant challenges to Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. There is a marked difference in the stances of the Roman Catholic Church and that of the Protestant churches in Korea. Firstly, the Roman Catholic Church initially rejected the practices of ancestor worship on the grounds that it constituted idolatry but later reversed their position to assume a more tolerant perspective. This was based on the analogous nature of the Catholic doctrine of purgatory in which believers pray for the deceased and the belief in ancestors in which prayers are also made for the departed loved ones. The Protestant churches on the other hand, has remained steadfast and consistent in their rejection of ancestor worship as a form of idolatry and therefore an unscriptural practice. It is mainly because of this faithful

devotion to the Gospel's teachings, that the Protestant churches have retained purity in doctrine and their devotion to the Scriptures.

The research also highlighted the need for sensitivity and cultural awareness. The study highlighted that because of the close relationship that exists between religion and culture, when newly converted Christians adopted the Gospel and rejected their traditional beliefs, they found themselves in an existential crisis and essentially socioculturally ostracised from the collective identity of their people. The Protestant churches in Korea rejected the traditional funeral service because of its inherent religious connotations but became increasingly aware of the duality which hamstrung the development of Christianity in Korea. As a result, many churches sought an alternative and transformed the traditional funeral service or replaced it with a Christian memorial service which does not contain ritualistic elements which may compromise the faith of those who adhere to it. By doing this, the Church was able to address the needs of the people and therefore acknowledged their cultural and socio-ethical needs based on their cosmology. The Korean cosmology in socio-ethical terms is still governed by the tenets espoused in Confucianism and therefore needed to be acknowledged and accepted. The notion of filial piety and respect for the elders had to be transformed and placed in the appropriate context to ensure that it articulates with the principles of the Gospel.

ANCESTOR WORSHIP IN JAPAN

The Japanese notion of ancestor worship does not differ vastly from that of Korea. It too is an integral part of Japanese consciousness and cosmology. Just as in Korea, ancestor worship is not a distinct religion but rather a manifestation of the principles of Confucianism which is the foundation of the Japanese socio-cultural mindset. This is similar to the way in which it has permeated the Korean and African cosmology and how the traditions manifest themselves in organised religion.

From the analysis of the rituals practised in Japan it is undeniable that ancestor worship in Japan is inherently religious. Especially because it implies a form of worship and appellation for protection and guidance. As such, ancestor worship has represented a significant dilemma for the Christian Church. As in Korea, the Protestant Church has shown itself to have an intolerant disposition towards the practices whereas the Roman Catholic Church has assumed a much more tolerant stance on the matter. Therefore, the Roman Catholic Church has readily assimilated the traditions associated with ancestor worship and Christianised them in an attempt to make the religion more accessible to the Japanese people. The important point which one cannot lose sight of though is that it remains contrary to the Scriptures and that as such it should not be accommodated. Once again, it became evident that one cannot simply reject the notions out of hand without taking cognisance of the needs of the people. As a result, the study has suggested the use of pastoral support to address their needs and help them realign their cosmology with the theology of the Gospel.

A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE ON ANCESTOR WORSHIP

The practices associated with ancestor ritual are heavily reliant on the premise that the dead are able to return to the living and have an influence on the lives of the living; that it is acceptable for the living to communicate with the dead and lastly that the living are able to exert an influence on the destiny of the deceased ancestor.

However, the exegetical and hermeneutical analyses of key passages in the Bible make it evident that the Bible strongly condemns necromancy and associated practices. Secondly, the research has pointed out that although some individuals do see what they perceive to be the spirit of a deceased ancestor, the Biblical evidence which has been presented here makes it clear that these apparitions are no more than manifestations of Satan's minions who intend to control mankind and lead them astray.

Furthermore, the Bible is clear in its position that once a person has died it is impossible for him or her to return to communicate with the living for whatever reason. In this regard Romans 6:23 which states that all men die and that death is the wages of sin implies that death is finite and an inevitable consequence of the fallen nature of mankind. The only incident in the Scriptures which has been the source of dogmatic controversy, is the incident in which Samuel's spirit appears to Saul as recorded in 1 Samuel 28. The explanations which have been put forward have made it clear that the apparition, whom Saul perceived, was only as a result of the special working of God's power, and by His permission for His purposes. As the Bible clearly admonishes, those who dapple in necromancy or spiritism commit what is considered to be spiritual prostitution.

Furthermore, the analysis of the Bible's perspective on ancestor worship, necessitated a closer look at the abode of the dead. As a result, the scriptural references to Hades and Sheol were explored at length and conclusively shown that Hades and Sheol are references to the common grave of mankind where all souls are destined to go once they have died a physical death. The Bible outlines the final destination of the righteous souls to be heaven. Therefore, the analogy of Lazarus and the rich man does not constitute proof that the living are able to communicate with the dead or exert an influence on the destiny of the dead. Therefore, the Bible makes it very clear that the rich man was not granted permission to communicate with his living family members to warn them to mend their ways and ultimately avoid a similar fate.

Also, the analysis found that the Scriptures seem to indicate that the righteous who die are immediately reunited with Christ (cf. Luke 23:43, Philippians 1:23). At the resurrection those who have died will be changed and resurrected with a spiritual body to allow them to enter into a fuller state of fellowship with God. The notion of the immortality of the soul is a major precept of the ancestor cult. However, the New Testament's promise of a resurrection refers to the resurrection of the whole body. The notion of the soul existing in an intermediate state or a deep sleep which is fundamental to the ancestral rites is contradictory to the teachings of the New Testament.

The living are not able to effect a change for the salvation of the dead. The salvation of mankind is based on Christ's ransom sacrifice on the cross and therefore sacrifices which are made for the dead are meaningless. The notion of vicarious baptism which

has been suggested by some scholars does not have sufficient evidence in exegetical or hermeneutical terms to render it credible or viable.

Thus, from the analysis of the Bible's perspective it became clear that the penultimate destination of each individual after death is determined by his or her actions during this lifetime. Consequently, each person is accountable to God for his own actions which means that the notion that the actions of a deceased person can be minimised by the actions of the living does not hold water. In other words, the central premise which underpins the theology of ancestor rituals is fundamentally flawed and not supported by the Bible.

A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF ANCESTOR WORSHIP

The analysis of the phenomenon of ancestor worship and its articulation with the Bible has proven conclusively that ancestor worship is essentially a form of idolatry in spite of the justifications employed by the traditional religions. 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, this reasoning is flawed because the Catholic doctrine of communion of saints itself has been shown to be unscriptural.

Furthermore, the research has shown that the differences in the worldviews of traditional religions and Christianity particularly in terms of their stance on sin and salvation have proven conclusively that the traditional religions are not aligned with the Bible. The reason for this comparative analysis was to point out that if the underlying premises of ancestor worship are unfounded and not supported by the Bible, then the practices themselves are not acceptable to God. As discussed, this is of crucial importance when interpreting ancestor rituals from a Christian perspective because it is directly related to the salvation and redemption embodied in Christ. The study has shown that the mediatory role which African theologians have ascribed to the ancestors relegates the redemption of Christ to insignificance and appears to make his role redundant. This in itself puts traditional religion in direct opposition to Christianity in which the redemptive salvation of Christ is pivotal.

Some churches have attempted to follow a process of inculturation in an attempt to integrate the traditional religious practices (of ancestor worship) with the church. The research has shown that inculturation in itself is inappropriate. The problem with inculturation as mentioned here is that it generally leads to syncretism and ultimate religious pluralism. Furthermore, uncritical rejection of 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 take cognisance 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 therefore shown that the only appropriate model to address these issues is contextualization which penultimately leads to transformation.

Finally, the research has shown why contextualization is the most appropriate mission principle to be used in these contexts. This is because ancestor worship serves both a religious and social function. Therefore, the Gospel must be contextualised and inappropriate elements must be transformed while taking cognisance of the socio-cultural needs of the people involved. A Westernised colonialist approach which has little regard for the socio-cultural ramifications of conversion to Christianity for an individual in a traditionally animistic society would be inappropriate and would not best serve the ministry or protect the ministry from religious pluralism.

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 makes contextualization the preferred model to address this dilemma because it takes cognisance of both elements. However, it is vital to keep in mind that although the rituals play a significant social role in the socio-ethical dimension of these communities, it is indisputable that the religious undertones in these rituals make the social element inseparable from the religious elements. The essential contention of this thesis is that the rituals are inherently religious irrespective of the functions they serve in the cultural life of the community. Although the Gospel must address the socio-cultural needs of communities, an alternative must be sought to address these needs as in the Korean Protestant Church's response to the traditional funeral services.

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KEY TERMS

Accommodation	Dead, The	Shamanism
Afterlife	Death	Shintoism
Ancestor	Idolatry	Spiritism
Ancestor Christology	Inculturation	Syncretism
Animism	Mediator	Veneration
Confucianism	Rituals	Worship
Contextualisation	Sacrifice	
Cult	Saints	

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SUMMARY

Ancestor Worship and the Challenges it poses to the Christian Mission and Ministry

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Ancestor worship is conceived by some to be an outdated primitive custom with no relevance to modern society. However, this study shows that ancestor worship is still alive and well in numerous cultures and countries around the globe and that it is still practised in different forms today.

This study focuses on the phenomenon of ancestor worship in Africa, Japan and Korea and specifically deals with the challenges it has posed to Christian missionaries in these contexts. Furthermore, this study examines the strategies which the Roman Catholic Church, the Protestant Church and Independent Churches have adopted to deal with this problem and the apparent mismatch with Christian theology. Therefore, the analysis of the phenomenon of ancestor worship is situated in the socio-cultural and religious paradigms of each of these countries and is examined in theological, missiological and Biblical terms.

Most notably, the thesis attempts to determine whether or not ancestor worship can be considered to be a purely social and cultural phenomenon which carries certain ethical responsibilities in these cultures and whether or not it is congruent with Christian theology. This study has attempted to prove that in spite of the socio-cultural dimensions of ancestor worship and its rituals (with their ensuing ethical responsibilities in the cosmologies of these nations) it is still essentially worship. It is contended that ancestor worship is fundamentally a form of idolatry and contrary to the teachings of the Bible and is therefore does not articulate with Christian theology. The fundamental premise underlying the study is the ultimate authority of the Bible as the inspired word of God.

This is a qualitative study which attempts to explore the phenomenon and rituals of ancestor worship on numerous levels. In each case the theological contributions of scholars in the field are evaluated and explored and ultimately benchmarked against the Biblical evidence. In the African context it is necessary therefore to look at African Christology and the attempts of scholars to contextualise the gospel in African terms.

As such the continuity and discontinuity between traditional religion and the Bible is explored and the dangers of syncretism are addressed. The ultimate goal was to suggest a suitable approach for the Church to deal with the challenges which ancestor worship poses in these specific contexts. The study will motivate and argue for contextualisation as an appropriate mission principle in this regard. This takes into consideration the social responsibility which missionaries have towards the people to whom they introduce the gospel. The reason is that the close bond which exists between identity, culture and religion is acknowledged. If the religion or cultural practises are rejected because it does not comply with the Gospel's requirements, then missionaries need to be sensitive to the void which they may create in the identity of the people and take appropriate steps to ameliorate the problem and avoid syncretism.